

Josef Haydn - String Quartets Op.74 (1992)

Written by bluesever

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Stringquartet in C major op.74 No.1

1. *Allegro*
2. *Andantino grazioso*
3. *Minuetto - Trio*
4. *Finale (Vivace)*

Stringquartet in F major op.74 No.2

5. *Allegro spiritoso*
6. *Andante grazioso*
7. *Minuetto - Trio*
8. *Finale (Presto)*

Stringquartet in G minor op.74 No.3 (The Rider)

9. *Allegro*
10. *Largo assai*
11. *Menustto – Trio*
12. *Finale. Allegro con brio*

Kodaly String Quartet

Of Haydn's approximately 70 string quartets, at least 45 are "profound and profoundly different, absolutely flawless" masterpieces (according to Hans Keller, author of the definitive study of Haydn's quartets). In this magnificent (in both senses of the word) body of music, I find that the later a work was composed the more undeniably it deserves the title "masterpiece." Thus, the three quartets of Opus 74, written toward the end of Haydn's prolific career, are among his best.

The Kodaly Quartet took ten years (c. 1989-1998) to record the complete cycle of Haydn

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quartets on the budget-priced Naxos label; their performances, with few exceptions, are as good as any full-price rival. It is here, however, in Op. 74 (and in the companion Op. 71), that the Kodaly's surpass all the competition. In Op. 20 the Mosaïques lead the field; of Op. 33 there are several fine versions; in Op. 50, the Salomons are strong contenders; in Opp. 54 & 55, the Lindsays are exceptionally fine; in Op. 64 I like the Fetstics Quartet. Even in their outstanding Op. 76 recordings, the Kodaly's are not without rivals (e.g. the Tatrai Quartet). If you can afford it buy the entire cycle on Naxos (except Op. 20 - a good performance poorly recorded - and the rather uninspired early quartets of Opp. 1 & 2). Later you can add some of the other insightful interpretations, mentioned above (but get the Mosaïques' Op. 20 now). In Op. 74 the Kodaly are peerless; next to them, the Tatrai Quartet sounds sluggish, and the Salomon Quartet anemic. Listen, for instance, to the spirited but precise Allegro spiritoso first movement of the F Major quartet, or to the 'riding' finale of the G minor. ---Mark Amorose, amazon.com

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