

Franz SCHUBERT (1797-1828) - MusicWeb Review

Complete String Quartets

Diogenes Quartet (Stefan Kirpal (violin), Gundula Kirpal (violin), Julia Barthel (viola, CDs 1-2), Alba González I Becerra (viola), Stephen Ristau (cello)
rec. Himmelfahrtskirche, München-Sendling, Germany, 2012-2015

BRILLIANT CLASSICS 94468 [7 CDs: 470:38]

We seem to be living in a something of a golden age for excellent string quartets, and the German-based Diogenes Quartet are no exception. Their playing is precise but with flexibility and sensitivity to this wonderful music. They are helped by the splendid acoustic of the Church of the Ascension in München-Sendling, where the recordings were made. One of the joys of the recording is how each of the four strands is so clear and yet so well-blended.

One of the problems with Schubert is that the overwhelming genius of the later quartets tends to outshine the many excellences of the earlier ones, many of which receive few public performances. Earlier quartets were largely products of Schubert's precocious teenage years – and the signs of what would be to come are clearly present.

A strength of this set is its completeness. It was compiled from previously issued performances which (rightly) have received excellent reviews. The fine Melos Quartet set from 1973 on 6 discs, now available as a DG Collectors Edition (DG 463 – 151-2), contains none of the shorter pieces found here. The various dances are delightful – but when is Schubert not? A few of the extras, such as the Overture D470, are a little speculative. Schubert produced it in both orchestral and chamber form, and only a short central section for string quartet is extant. What we have here is a reconstruction from the orchestral parts. But the urge for completeness brings so many bonuses. We know well String Quartet No 12, D703, from 1820, the single movement we know as Quartettsatz. This is played splendidly here. But then we have the remaining fragment, less than four minutes, of what would have been the andante second movement: lovely music tantalisingly cut off.

Another bonus is that the late works are interspersed with the earlier, throughout the set. We are able to hear on each disc something of the development in Schubert's work, and when, as here, there is nothing perfunctory, when there are fresh insights in every piece, then there are so many moments of bliss.

For me, a good test of quality is the long D887 quartet of 1826. When I first heard this recording, I was conscious that the playing was a touch more deliberate, and a

little less fleet, that the comparator I was using, which was from the Lindsay Quartet's set of Late Quartets (CD RSB 403). But I quickly put comparisons aside. Each way has its own felicities, each draws attention to different aspects of this masterpiece. It is good to be reminded that great music does not have one right interpretation. Great music is just so, because it is an inexhaustible resource of insights. Listening to this, I heard aspects and was touched in ways I had not been before.

For less than £20, this is an extraordinary bargain. There is nothing cheap about either the production values (an excellent and informative booklet), the recording, or the quality of the performances. This belongs with the very best.

Michael Wilkinson

Contents

CD1 [63.16]

String Quartet in D D 94 [21.03]

Andante in C D3 (Fragment completed Christian Starke) [4.15]

String Quartet in A minor D804 'Rosamunde' [37.53]

CD 2 [59.26]

Overture in B flat. (Fragment completed Christian Starke) D470 [6.19]

String Quartet in B Flat D112 [31.38]

String Quartet in A minor D.804 'Rosamunde' [37.53]

CD 3 [74.20]

String Quartet in G minor/ B flat D18 [17.10]

5 Menuets & 5 German Dances D 89 [18.01]

String Quartet in B flat D68 [18.02]

5 Menuets and 5 German Dances D 89 (two later versions) [8.50]

CD 4 [71.04]

String Quartet in D minor D810 'Death and the Maiden' [44.50]

String Quartet in D D74 [24.20]

Minuet in D D86 [1.48]

CD5 [71.09]

String Quartet in C D46 [23.17]

Overture in C minor D8a [9.06]

String Quartet in E flat D87 [25.33]

String Quartet in C minor D703 [13.06]

CD 6 [67.00]

String Quartet in C D32 [19.58]

String Quartet in B flat D36 [24.32]

String Quartet in G minor D173 [22.21]

CD7 [64.23]

String Quartet in G D887 [53.38]

Movement for String Quartet in C minor D103 (Fragment completed Christian

Starke) [10.39]

Fanfare Reviews by Jerry Dubins below:

SCHUBERT String Quartets: in D, D 94; in a, D 804, "Rosamunde." *Andante* in C, D 3 • Diogenes Quartet • BRILLIANT 94315 (63:16)

It gives me great pleasure to welcome a long-awaited and long-overdue first installment in a new survey of Schubert's complete string quartets, and if this first volume is representative of what's to come, the future for the remainder of this cycle is bright indeed. In 36:1, I concluded a review of the Munich-based Diogenes Quartet performing a bird's nest of chamber works by Engelbert Humperdinck on CPO, saying that I looked forward to hearing this excellent ensemble in some mainstream chamber music repertoire. Ask and you shall receive.

But for Schubert's last three complete string quartets—the "Rosamunde," D 804 (1824), "Death and the Maiden," D 810 (1826), and the G Major, D 887 (1826)—plus the earlier standalone, "Quartettsatz," D 703 (1820), all of which have, if anything, been over-recorded, the composer's earlier efforts in the medium—at least 11 of them, not counting the dozen or so fragments, unassociated movements, and miscellaneous pieces—have not fared all that well on disc, either in quality of performance or recording. To be sure, over the years, there have been several complete cycles committed to disc—the Vienna String Quartet on Camerata, the Vienna Konzerthaus Quartet on Preiser, the Melos Quartet on Deutsche Grammophon, the Leipzig Quartet on MDG, the Kodály Quartet on Naxos, the Sine Nomine Quartet on Cascavelle, and the Verdi Quartet on Hänssler Classic—but of the ones I've heard (which is by no means all of them), each was flawed either by less than ideal playing or less than ideal recording, or both. Based on my hearing of this new offering from the Diogenes Quartet and Brilliant Classics, I'm optimistic that this cycle will be the one to supersede previous versions.

Lest anyone think that Schubert's early string quartets are immature, unsophisticated works, the String Quartet in D which opens this disc should put any such notion to rest. Not only is this score, dated circa 1814, an extraordinarily accomplished piece of writing, it also illustrates that even as a teenager Schubert's was an already dark and deeply disturbed psyche.

One needn't go any further than the seventh bar to hear the woeful warning, as the key of D, not yet even fully established, is suddenly wrenched out of its orbit by an A# in the second violin, and then, six measures later, by a D#, again in the second violin. What could be more destabilizing of a tonic than to have, first, its dominant undermined, and then itself to be altered? The key signature is almost a sick joke, for another eight bars later we encounter an E# in the first violin, only to be followed two bars after that by an F# in the second violin, which most theory textbooks would cite as some sort of uncouth cross-relation in voice-leading. I guess Schubert didn't know any better; for 39 bars, he throws chromatic brickbats

into the line to subvert the key, not arriving at a full authentic cadence in D Major until the 40th bar. The impression this makes on the listener is analogous to what one might describe as a queasy ear; it's very enigmatic and not a little sinister. And Schubert was 17 when he wrote this, already his seventh string quartet.

I very much like the idea of juxtaposing an early and a late quartet on the same disc. Following an urgent, if not febrile, performance of D 94, the Diogenes Quartet turns its attention to the "Rosamunde," 13th in Schubert's string quartet canon, but not before making a pit stop to give us the lovely *Andante* in C, D 3. This charming four-minute movement has been dated to 1812 and appears to be virtually identical to the C-Major *Andante* for piano entered as D 29 in the Schubert Deutsch Thematic Catalog. Christian Starke's album note indicates that the piece in its quartet version is but a fragment which Schubert may have begun work on for eventual inclusion in a larger work that never materialized. Starke's completion of the movement for string quartet is based on the piano version, which does appear to be complete. With only brief excursions to nearby tonalities, for Schubert, the piece is relatively serene and untroubled.

It's the second movement of D 804 that lends its name to Schubert's "Rosamunde" Quartet, the theme coming from the composer's incidental music to Helmina von Chézy's 1823 play, *Rosamunde, Fürstin von Zypern* (Rosamunde, Princess of Cyprus). Schubert's unerring judgment when it came to choosing poets and poems to set to music seems not to have extended to his choice of literary works for his operas or for *Rosamunde*, one of only two forays he made into the field of incidental music, the other being Georg von Hofmann's *Die Zauberharfe*. Of Schubert's few stage works that even saw the inside of a theater, none was a success. *Rosamunde's* first performance on December 20, 1823, seems to have been its last, and the play, though not its playwright vanished from the repertoire. Von Chézy achieved lasting fame for authoring the libretto to Carl Maria von Weber's opera *Euryanthe*.

Dark currents swirl through the A-Minor Quartet's first movement as well, but they're more muted and make themselves felt in a recurring shiver of four sixteenth notes that permeates the lower voices. But in this score, Schubert saves the real night terror for the Minuetto, a movement in which an almost jaunty-sounding, Ländler-like tune waltzes its way around the dance floor warped by a harmony that makes of it something saturnine and evil. This is the Schubert of Viennese *Weltschmerz* and the irresistible allure of the Sirens' song calling us to embrace death. I'm far from alone, or the first, to note the echoes of Schubert in Mahler. If numbers of recordings are a measure of popularity, the "Rosamunde" Quartet places third, barely edged out by the "Quartettsatz," but way outrun by "Death and the Maiden."

Previous "Rosamunde" favorites have been the Alban Berg, Cleveland, and Artis Quartets, but I can honestly say that this new version by the Diogenes Quartet sweeps all others aside. Never have I heard this work played with such purity of tone, attention to detail, and emotional expression. The ensemble is capable of remarkable dynamic range with myriad gradations between the softest and loudest

levels. But more than anything, it's the chiaroscuro effects produced through varying bowing pressures and phrasing that really distinguish this performance as something special. As I said at the beginning, if Volume 1 in this Schubert quartet survey is representative of what's to come, the future for the remainder of this cycle is bright indeed, and I can't wait for the next installment to arrive. Jerry Dubins

This article originally appeared in Issue 36:6 (July/Aug 2013) of *Fanfare Magazine*.

SCHUBERT String Quartets: in g/B^b, D 18; in B^b, D 68. 5 Menuets and 5 German Dances, D 89; 5 Menuets and 5 German Dances, D 89 (later alternate versions) • Diogenes Qrt • BRILLIANT 94463 (74:20)

This is the third volume in the Diogenes Quartet's Schubert cycle, and it gets more interesting as it unfolds. When it's complete, this survey promises to be the most comprehensive compilation of Schubert's works for string quartet on disc, though I do raise a question about that below. Meanwhile, the project is being realized by an ensemble that seems to have a special affinity for the composer's music, and is demonstrating it in beautifully tailored performances, captured in sympathetic recordings by Brilliant Classics' engineers.

The question referred to above is this: Everything that appears on these so-far-released three individual volumes is also included in Brilliant's 69-disc mega-box Schubert edition. However, there is one additional item in that collection, performed by the Diogenes Quartet, the Overture in B^b, D 601, which does not show up on any of these three separate volumes. I'm not sure why or what that means. But that led me to look deeper into the contents of the 69-disc set, and now that I have, I also note that performances of other Schubert quartets in that box are by the Brandis String Quartet. Is this then to be a shared cycle, with the Diogenes Quartet giving us only those works not recorded by the Brandis and vice versa? I'm hoping that's not the case, and that Brilliant Classics will see fit to rerecord those quartets with the Diogenes already recorded by the Brandis.

The Quartet in G Minor/B^b Major, D 18, appears to be Schubert's earliest attempt to compose a formal four-movement string quartet. It dates to somewhere between 1810 and 1811, when the wunderkind would have been no older than 14; and to hear it is to realize that Schubert was one sick puppy long before syphilis addled his brain. I've maintained in previous reviews that something happened to Schubert as a young child, some traumatic event that severely damaged him psychologically and disturbed him emotionally for the rest of his short life. Evidence of it manifests itself very early on in his music, and it comes to the surface in this quartet in ways so scary and demonic that had I been the boy's father, I'd have sought out a priest to perform an exorcism.

For starters, the key of the piece is said to be "mixed." It begins with an *Andante* introduction in what appears to be C Minor, but this is quickly dispelled by F#s and C#s in the harmony. After a cadential A-Major chord, the key signature changes from three flats to one flat, and we now seem to be in D Minor. But continually written-in accidental E^bs turn the mode towards the Phrygian, finally confirmed

with a full cadence on a Neapolitan E^b Major (♭II) chord in bar 36, and then three measures later a cadence on a D-Major chord, the presumptive dominant to the G-Minor-ish key of the *Presto vivace*, which begins in bar 40. Was Schubert so untrained in music theory at this age that he simply didn't know what he was doing? Or is this already symptomatic of the bipolar personalities that would erupt in sudden rants and rages following the sweetest strains of seraphic melody? I'd argue for the latter. Just listen to the *Presto*. Such ferocity and angst; it's the dictionary definition of *Sturm und Drang*. The harmonic changes and modulations come so fast and furiously that one feels cast adrift in a roiling sea. Then, as suddenly as the storm began, it's over, and we move on to a Menuet as charming and innocent as many of Schubert's Viennese dances. The quiet, almost sedate mood continues in the *Andante*. The wild child has been given his dose of Ritalin, but its effect is short-lived, as the concluding hyperactive *Presto* makes clear. Again, the key becomes indeterminate for many measures, vacillating between B^b Major and G Minor. The quartet finally ends in a confident B^b Major, which in itself is unusual and perhaps further reason to conclude that the young Schubert was either not yet thoroughly schooled in textbook theory or that he was a troubled rebel at 14; for a work whose first movement is in G Minor would be expected to end, according to formal etiquette of the day, on the same tonic note on which it began, in this case, either in the key of G Major or G Minor.

The Quartet in B^b Major, D 68, was composed in 1813 and is counted as No. 5 in Schubert's canon of string quartets. It has only two movements, both *Allegros*, the first longer than the second, strongly suggesting that these are either the outer movements of a full four-movement quartet to which the two inner movements are lost, or that Schubert didn't get around to writing them, establishing early on the composer's lifelong pattern of abandoning projects midstream. Formally, the first movement is not as unruly as the corresponding movement in D 18; Schubert has learned, for now, the rules of proper behavior, but there are still angry outbursts and harmonic twists in what is otherwise relatively upbeat, dance-like music. The second *Allegro* is fairly lightweight and, in my opinion, a little trite. Among Schubert's early string quartets, I find this one the least interesting. Nothing about it strikes me as particularly distinctive or memorable.

Schubert's output of dances—menuets, waltzes, German dances (aka *Ländler*), ecossaises, and polonaises—is quite staggering, numbering around 500 and almost equaling his output of songs; yet, it's probably the least explored and least familiar aspect of his art. Most of these brief pieces were likely written—many possibly extemporized—for Schubert's circle of friends and performed at intimate musical soirées. One of the most distinguishing features of these pieces—it's a fingerprint, really, in all of Schubert's music—is the sense of innocence suddenly lost: the sweet, chaste melodic line undone by a melancholy, poignant, and sometimes bitter turn of phrase or souring shift in the underlying harmony. When it happens in these little dances, which are otherwise supposed to be lighthearted and gay, it's all the more disquieting.

When it comes to the *Five Menuets and Five German Dances*, supplemented by

alternate later versions of two of them, I must admit that I encountered a bit of confusion with respect to the titling and tracking of the pieces under the single Deutsch number 89. After a little research, I discovered that in the most recent iteration of the Deutsch catalog the *Five Menuets and the Five German Dances* are listed together under D 89, while the same Five German Dances are also listed immediately following under D 90. I honestly don't know whether the German dances have been separated out from D 89 and given their own D 90 number, or if, vice versa, they originally had their own D 90 number and are now considered married to D 89. In any event, since the current album treats them as a single entity under D 89, that's how I've designated them in my above headnote. I mention this only because you may have a recording in your collection that labels these German dances as D 90, and if so, you may think those on this CD labeled D 89 are different pieces. They're not.

The five menuets altogether have six trios. The First, Third, and Fifth Menuets have two trios apiece (there's your six), while the Second and Fourth Menuets are trio-less. The five German dances altogether they have seven trios. The First, Second, and Fifth German Dances have two trios each, the Third German Dance has one trio, and the Fourth "little piggy" has none. Alternate versions are additionally given for the two trios of the Third Menuet and for the second trio of the Fifth German Dance. The dances comprising these two sets may be the only such pieces out of the hundreds Schubert wrote that he scored for string quartet; most of them are for piano.

The Diogenes Quartet continues to perform to the exceptionally high standards it set in the first two volumes of this series, and with this third volume, the ensemble further reinforces my feeling that this is shaping up to be the most impressive and most important Schubert string quartet cycle on disc. Jerry Dubins

This article originally appeared in Issue 38:6 (July/Aug 2015) of *Fanfare Magazine*.

SCHUBERT String Quartets: No. 14 in d, D 810, "Death and the Maiden"; No. 6 in D, D 74. Minuet in D, D 86 • Diogenes Qrt • BRILLIANT 94464 (71:04)

It has taken the Diogenes Quartet four volumes in its ongoing Schubert string quartet cycle to finally get to the "big" one, the composer's best-known, most popular, and most often recorded quartet, "Death and the Maiden." I've been following this cycle since its inception and have consistently accorded it the highest marks possible, not only for the truly splendid playing of this Munich-based ensemble, but for the intelligent programming and for Brilliant Classics' superb recordings.

So far in this cycle, the Diogenes Quartet has given us the numbered quartets 7 and 13, "Rosamunde," on Volume 1; 8 and 11 on Volume 2; 1 and 5 on Volume 3; and now 14 and 6 on the present Volume 4. Each of those CDs was further supplemented by one or more short pieces scored for string quartet. If I were writing this review on a Thursday, I could paraphrase the nursery rhyme, *Monday's Child*, by saying the Diogenes Quartet has far to go. Yet to be released are seven more numbered quartets (2, 3, 4, 9, 10, 12 "Quartettsatz", and 15); some part of an

unnumbered String Quartet in C Minor, D 103; and at least half a dozen miscellaneous pieces.

At a rate of two quartets per disc, filled out by one or more of the miscellaneous movements and fragments, I estimate it should take the Diogenes another four discs to complete the survey. More than likely, when it's done, Brilliant Classics, as is its practice, will put out the completed cycle in one of its specially priced boxed sets. But I wouldn't suggest waiting two or three years for that to happen; these performances are simply too good to delay purchasing them now.

So familiar is Schubert's "Death and the Maiden" Quartet bound to be that I doubt there's anything I could say about it that you don't already know. Surely, it's one of the most iconic works in the chamber music repertoire, composed in 1824, a year before Beethoven embarked on his final expedition into the string quartet domain. Not to be crude or vulgar about it, but the "Maiden" has been mounted so many times she's like an old, worn-out prostitute who responds to her latest visitor with jaded indifference. Can any newcomer shake her from her world-weariness and reignite the flame, or will he just be another John? There are so many versions—too many, really—of this quartet to be had that it's impossible to say that the Diogenes's performance of it is better than X, Y, or Z.

I've heard recordings of the piece that are faster, more intense, and more emotionally gripping than this one; the Hagen String Quartet, for example, can set your teeth on edge and your hair on fire. The Diogenes's approach strikes me as rather similar to that by the Quatuor Debussy, reviewed in 38:2, about which I said that the reading of "Death and the Maiden" was not taken as fast or with the grim tenacity evidenced by other ensembles; rather, the Quatuor Debussy takes a smoother, more lyrical approach, rounding out the jagged edges and, to some degree, the histrionics and hysteria. While not lacking in drive, the Diogenes Quartet, likewise, seems to find its equilibrium in the moments of lyrical calm, few though they may be in the fevered ranting of the first movement. But the approach works especially well for the ensemble in the reflectively played variations movement from which the quartet takes its name.

If this were a one-off of Schubert's "Death and the Maiden" Quartet, instead of part of a complete cycle, I'd say, as I have above, that there are way too many versions of this work in the catalog for this one to distinguish itself as better than a dozen or more others, which is not to say that it's not very good; it is. But for me, the strength of this release lies in its being part of a complete survey of Schubert's music for string quartet which has already distinguished itself overall as probably the best there is. Personally, I prefer it to the Verdi Quartet's effort.

The String Quartet in D Major, D 74 (No. 6), was composed by the 16-year-old Schubert in 1813 and may be grouped together with four other early quartets he wrote in rapid succession in that same year—Nos. 3, 4, 5, and 10. Though in the conventional four movements, D 74 is rather unusual in that its first movement, with three themes and no development section, takes the form of a sonatina or, as program note author Christian Starke would have it, an overture.

On the first page of the first violin part, Schubert wrote, "On the occasion of my

father's name day." The piece begins amiably enough in a kind of bouncy, bucolic vein, suggesting nothing of the rebellious teenager challenging parental authority. But the picture of a happy, harmonious household is soon shattered. If the quartet was a name-day gift to his father, all one can say is that the adolescent Schubert had serious daddy issues, for the movement, characteristically of the composer's music, soon turns dark, even menacing, as it repeatedly undermines its tonal center with chromatic progressions and ominous-sounding chords.

Even more nonconforming is the *Andante*, which, the liner note describes as "beginning with a rather nondescript theme," following which "phrase lengths then become irregular and chromatic chords and sequences seem to have no notion of where they are leading..." We are told that at the end of this movement the Diogenes Quartet plays a variant that appears only in the first violin's autograph score.

The Minuetto also begins innocently enough, not unlike any number of Schubert's dances, but beginning in bar 12 of the second strain, what happens is truly shiver- and shudder-inducing. It's really hard to describe in words the effect of the harmonic shifting and jolting the music goes through until it finds its way back to D Major before the Trio section begins. Hard as it is to imagine the ear of a 16-year-old hearing such twisted harmonies, it's even harder to imagine the twisted mind of the 16-year-old that conceived them. The more Schubert I listen to, the more convinced I am that he was already profoundly insane at a very young age, but unlike Schumann, he didn't live long enough to be committed to an asylum.

Schumann's insanity, however, does not manifest itself in his music—at least I don't think so—but Schubert's does without question. Will you go mad listening to it? Probably not, but it's so seductive and beguiling you'll go mad *for* it.

The Minuet in D Major, D 86, that closes the disc is a little gem that plays for all of 1:18. Practically nothing is known of this piece—whether it was a discarded minuet movement from another quartet or originally a number in one of Schubert's collections of dances. There's not much to it, but the Diogenes Quartet includes it in the interest of completeness and not to be outdone, perhaps, by the Verdi Quartet, which also includes it in its survey of Schubert's music for string quartet. I love the Diogenes's Schubert cycle more and more with each new release and can't wait for Volume 5 to arrive. Meanwhile, don't hesitate to acquire this one. All of the high standards of execution, ensemble coordination, tonal bloom, and insightful interpretation noted and praised in previous volumes are upheld here.

Jerry Dubins

This article originally appeared in Issue 39:2 (Nov/Dec 2015) of *Fanfare Magazine*.

SCHUBERT String Quartets: in C, D 46; in E^b, D 87; in c, D 703, "Quartettsatz"; in C, D 32; in B^b, D 36; in g, D 173. Overture in c, D 8a • Diogenes Qrt • BRILLIANT 94466 (2 CDs: 139:09)

Here is the awaited Volume 5 in the Diogenes Quartet's traversal of Schubert's string quartets, and this time it's a two-disc set, filled out with a number of the composer's earliest efforts in the medium, which led me to suspect that this would

be the wrap-up of this outstanding survey. As I checked off each quartet the Diogenes has thus far given us against the list of Schubert's complete output of string quartets, I found one surprising omission: The ensemble has yet to give us its recording of the composer's last completed quartet, the No. 15 in G Major, D 887. So, I expect to receive one final volume containing that work, plus two or three remaining miscellaneous fragments.

Without question, this has been not only the most comprehensive essaying of Schubert's string quartets I'm aware of but the most consistent in terms of top-notch execution, simply gorgeous playing, and interpretive intelligence when it comes to following the composer's evolution over the 15 years, from 1811 to 1826, that separate his earliest attempts at string quartet writing from his last.

Four of the seven quartets in this set fall into Schubert's early, though not strictly his earliest, period of quartet writing activity. The two years from 1811 through 1813 saw the production of the Overture for String Quartet in C Minor, D 8a (1811); the String Quartet in D Major, D 32 (1812), which was published as No. 2; the String Quartet in B^b Major, D 36, (1812–1813), which was published as No. 3; and the String Quartet in C Major, D 46 (1813), which was published as No. 4. With the exception of the single-movement Overture, each of these other three quartets is a full four-movement work in traditional Classical form.

While the form may adhere to conventional standards, the content surprises. The slow introduction to the C-Major Quartet, D 46, for example, already exhibits Schubert's ear for very strange major-minor-key juxtapositions, while the sprightlier *Allegro* movements are similar in style to the writing one hears in the composer's Symphony No. 1 in D Major of the same year.

The same year, 1813, also seems to have been a turning point in Schubert's production of string quartets, with the String Quartet in E^b Major, D 87 (op. 125/1), we now enter into what may be thought of as the composer's "middle quartet" period. The incomparably sad, songful lyricism is now unmistakably the voice of Schubert.

The G-Minor Quartet, D 173 (published as No. 9), dates from 1815, and illustrates the rapid progress Schubert was making in the form. Formal construction is now tightened, with a new emphasis on counterpoint, all within one of the composer's most intensely tragic/dramatic quartets to date.

The culmination of this phase of Schubert's quartet writing would come five years later in 1820 with the one-movement fragment in C Minor, known as the "Quartettsatz," (No. 12), a movement that possibly shocked its own composer with its nail-biting tension and angst. Whatever his reasons, Schubert left the quartet an unfinished torso, but not before composing 41 bars of an *Andante* before abandoning it. I was mightily impressed by the Wihan Quartet's performance of the "Quartettsatz" in 37:3, but like most ensembles, the Wihan did not include the 41 bars of the second movement that Schubert composed. In its quest for completeness, the Diogenes Quartet does include them, and for as long as they last—three and a half minutes—we are transported by meltingly beautiful music. It would be another four years before Schubert would take up the medium again,

but when he did in 1824, he would produce his final three masterpieces in the genre, No. 13 in A Minor, "Rosamunde;" No. 14 in D Minor, "Death and the Maiden;" and in 1826, No. 15 in G Major, D 887, which, as noted above, we still await to hear from the Diogenes.

I continue to find the level of playing and musicianship in this Schubert cycle to be utterly flawless and absolutely arresting in its beauty. Without the slightest hesitation, I judge this to be *the* cycle of Schubert string quartets to have and to hold. Jerry Dubins

This article originally appeared in Issue 39:6 (July/Aug 2016) of *Fanfare Magazine*.