

tour of the USA and was now back in the familiar landscape of his beloved Bohemia. Working from his country home in Vysoká, he completed the quartet in just four weeks, putting the final touches on it on Christmas Day. The piece exudes contentment, and its buoyant spirit is clearly evident in this new Analekta recording featuring the Cecilia String Quartet.

Named for the patron saint of music, the Toronto-based ensemble formed when all four members were studying at the University of Toronto. The quartet won the Felix Galimir Chamber Music Award in 2005, went on to win first prize at the Banff International Quartet Competition in 2010 and has since made appearances both in Europe and North America. This is the Cecilia's first recording in a series of four to be recorded for Analekta, and it's a gem! From the quartet's sprightly opening measures, the ensemble achieves a wonderful sense of balance throughout the finely interwoven counterpoint. The intonation is clear and precise, and there is none of the muddiness which can sometimes occur in string performance. The languorous lines of the Adagio result in a wonderful sound, while the Finale is treated with an arresting energy, the changes in mood and tempo adeptly handled.

An added bonus on this disc is the set of *Cypresses Op.152*. These expressions of young love initially began as songs, but were later adapted for string quartet. Together, they contain a bevy of contrasting moods, from yearning and tender to anguished and defiant. The Cecilia Quartet does them all justice, playing with an assured elegance, as it does the set of *Two Waltzes Op.54* which rounds out this most satisfying recording.

—Richard Haskell

Concert Note: This year's Felix Galimir Prize will be presented to Trio Danzka in a concert at Walter Hall on Sunday May 13 at 3pm. Trio Danzka will perform Beethoven's "Ghost" trio and Schumann's *Piano Trio No.1 in D Minor*.

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Strings Attached

TERRY ROBBINS

Toronto's **Windermere String Quartet** was founded in 2005, but has only just released its first CD, **The Golden Age of String Quartets**, on Alison Melville's **Pipistrelle** label (PIP0112). The ensemble bills itself as the Windermere String Quartet "on period instruments" and the players, violinists Rona Goldensher and Elizabeth Loewen Andrews, violist Anthony Rapoport and cellist Laura Jones, all have extensive experience with leading period instrument ensembles.

Their debut CD highlights the period at the heart of their repertoire, with Mozart's *Quartet in C Major K465*, the "Dissonance," Haydn's *Quartet in E-Flat Major Op.33 No.2*, "The Joke," and Beethoven's *Quartet in C Minor Op.18 No.4*.

As you would expect, there is no overtly "romantic" approach to the playing here, but these are terrific interpretations, with fine ensemble playing, great dynamics and expression, excellent choices of tempo, sensitivity in the Mozart, a fine sense of humour in the Haydn and real passion in the Beethoven.

The recordings were made almost two years ago in St. Anne's Anglican Church in Toronto, with the expert team of Norbert Kraft and Bonnie Silver, and the ambience is spacious and reverberant.

Period performances often display a sparseness of vibrato and a softness of attack that can make them sound somewhat flat and lifeless, and lacking in fullness and warmth—or at least, warmth the way we have come to expect it. There is never any danger of that here, though. These are period performances that blend life, spirit and soul with a perfectly-judged sensitivity for contemporary style and practice. It's the perfect marriage, and hopefully we won't have to wait too long for further offspring to accompany this exemplary debut disc.

Two interesting CDs of early Italian string quartets arrived recently, neither of which turned out to be quite what I expected.

Luigi Boccherini (1743–1805) is mostly remembered for his famous Minuet, but along with Haydn he was in at the birth of the string quartet form, writing close to 100 quartets, almost always in groups of six, starting with his Op.2 in 1761. The six **String Quartets Op.8** from 1768 are featured on a budget re-issue CD from the Italian

DYNAMIC label in excellent 1994 performances by the **Quartetto d'archi di Venezia (DM8027)**.

Despite their brevity—the longest quartet is only 14 minutes long—and their limited emotional range, this is in no way merely functional music but true part-writing that is both well-balanced and idiomatic.

Niccolo Paganini wrote only three works in the quartet genre, but despite their being written some 50 years after Boccherini's there is virtually no part-writing; it's almost all first violin solo with string accompaniment. Perhaps surprisingly, this is not because Paganini wanted to display his virtuosic technique: they are, in fact, very much of their time. Paganini was a close friend of Rossini, and the music here—like Rossini's—is essentially melodic, with no attempt at dialogue. The

String Quartets Nos.1–3 are charming and competent, but with no great depth, and receive effortless performances by the **Amati Ensemble String Quartet on Brilliant Classics (94287)**. These quartets live or die on the skills of the first violin, and happily, Dutch violinist Gil Sharon is more than up to the task.

✶ *Strings Attached continues at www.thewholenote.com with Robert Gibbs and Gusztav Fenyo's Complete music for Violin and Piano by Eugene Goossens, Tai Murray's recording of Ysaÿe's solo sonatas, Volume II of the Pacifica Quartet's Soviet Experience and Volume III of Sarasate's Complete Music for Violin and Piano with Tianwa Yang and Markus Hadulla.* ●

