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HENSCHEL QUARTETT

After a sold out concert at London's Wigmore Hall, Paul Cutts in "The Strad" wrote "The Henschel Quartet's concert was a highlight of my concert-going year. The Henschel's Beethoven op.59 no.3 in C major was delivered with a brio and confidence that senior quartets rarely muster, it was as close to perfection as to be beyond reproach. Magical." Likewise the FAZ newspaper described the quartet's most recent appearance at the Rheingau Music Festival as "a great moment of chamber music."

In 1994 the Henschel siblings, Christoph, Markus and Monika, had the great fortune to find the ideal cello partner in Mathias Beyer-Karlshøj. In their intensive years of study with Felix Andrievsky, Thorleif Thedeen, Sergiu Celibidache, the Amadeus Quartet and later with members of the Alban Berg and La Salle Quartets the young artists were confronted with the highest international standards. In 1995 the Henschel Quartet were prize-winners of no less than five prizes at International String Quartet competitions in Evian, Banff and Salzburg for the best interpretation of works ranging from Mozart up to contemporary composers. In 1996 they won the first prize and gold medal at the coveted Osaka International String Competition. Highly acclaimed debut concerts in many of Europe's prestigious concert halls helped to firmly establish the Henschel Quartet as one of today's leading string quartets. Constant critical acclaim has led to an impressive international career.

The 2006-07 season included their third BBC Proms appearance, concerts in the Wigmore Hall London, the Tivoli Copenhagen, the Alte Oper Frankfurt, the Prinzregententheater in Munich, the Philharmonie Essen, the Meran Festival and the Europalia Festival at Boxar in Bruxelles. Following their residency at the Tanglewood Festival the Henschel Quartet toured the USA in April 2007, including a master class at the Boston Conservatory. The Quartet will undertake its eleventh concert tour of Japan in November 2007, which will include a masterclass at Japan's famous Geidai University. Japanese audiences recently saw the Henschel Quartet in a nationwide broadcast of a one-hour NHK TV portrait.

In addition to performances as a quartet, they also appear regularly with other musicians. Amongst those who have performed with the Henschel Quartet are members of the Amadeus Quartet, the Cherubini Quartet, Radovan Vladkowsch, Sharon Kam, Till Fellner, Anna Gourari, Julie Kaufmann and Magdalena Kozena. Each summer the Henschel Quartet presents its own festival in Germany under the title "Trilogy" when it is joined by quartet colleagues. The Henschel Quartet and the well-know visual artist J. K. Park will collaborate on the exciting new project combing art & music "Kammer.Chamber.Camera" – combing the visual and audible aspects of their respective fields.

The Henschel Quartet's most recent recording of Beethoven String Quartet's op 18/6 & op 127 continues to receive critical acclaim from the international press. The Quartet's discography includes Respighi's "Il Tramonto" and selected pieces by Schulhoff with the mezzo-soprano Magdalena Kozena on the Deutsche Grammophon label (Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik). The Ginastera production was released to great critical acclaim in Gramophone. The release of Mendelssohn's Complete String Quartets on the Arte Nova/SonyBMG label was nominated for the MIDEM Awards in Cannes 2006 as well as receiving the accolade of "Recording of the Year" 2005 by Michael Cookson on International Music Web. It was ranked No.1 in the Top 10 classical CDs on the HMV Charts in Japan in 2006 and 2007.

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HENSCHEL QUARTETT

Review Quotes

“The Henschel Quartet’s concert was a highlight of my concert-going year. The Henschel’s Beethoven op. 59 no. 3 in C major was delivered with a brio and confidence that senior quartets rarely muster; it was as close to perfection as to be beyond reproach. Magical.”

Paul Cutts, *The Strad*

“The Henschel Quartet was charming, with great density of tone, emphatic sharing of abrupt accents and tender retreats.”

Reinhard Schulz, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*

“Beethoven’s String Quartet No. 13 in B-flat major was played with masterful security, winged and bright where required, and with tense, muted tone in many passages.”

Guido Holze, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*

“The Henschel Quartet...has become a household name on the international string scene, with a highly acclaimed discography...and regular concerts around the world.”

Uwe Friedrich, *The Strad*

“...an impressive technique of impeccable string playing...clean, crisp, precise musicianship.”

Andrew Palmer, *www.harrogatoday.co.uk*

“...a quartet whose quality and substance is at the pinnacle of contemporary musical life.”

Rainer Lepuschitz, *Publicum*

“The aristocratic playing of the Henschels is so sparkling, exhilarating and consistently expertly performed throughout...their interpretations are masterly illustrations of humane, old world music making.”

Michael Cookson, *Music Web International*

“Polished interaction, uninhibited virtuosity, temperament and intelligent musicianship are hallmarks of their playing.”

Focus Magazine





BEETHOVEN

String Quartets: in B flat, Op. 18/6; in E flat, Op. 127

Henschel Quartet

Arte Nova 82876 63996 2 62:55 mins

BBC Music Direct £7.99 inc. p&p

The Henschel have obviously thought deeply about these great works. While the Takács Quartet, for instance, in their otherwise admirable recording for Decca, launches the late Quartet Op. 127 with all guns blazing, the Henschel take due account of the fact that each reprise of the imperious opening chords occurs in a progressively brighter key and more forceful sonority. The slow movement is impressive, too, with a deeply-felt account of the radiant E major variation that is its poignant heart.

In the scherzo Beethoven interjects short passages in which the prevailing triple metre switches to two beats. Like almost every other ensemble, the Henschel keep the beat constant, thereby disregarding the new tempo marking – *Allegro*, as opposed to the underlying *Scherzando vivace*. As far as I know, only the Endellion Quartet in their recent Warner recording correctly interpret the duple-metre passages as being slower. But it's a small point, and the performance as a whole is eminently satisfying.

No less accomplished is Op. 18 No. 6, with the players again not afraid of using portamento for expressive effect. In the slow movement they produce an admirable change of tone-colour, as the music turns mysteriously to the minor; and unlike many of their rivals, they sensibly keep the scherzo's syncopated accents within its overall *piano* dynamic. I've recently been returning with great pleasure to the

Amadeus Quartet's deeply moving 1960s Beethoven recordings. They seem hard to beat, but as a single-disc alternative this newcomer is warmly recommended. *Misha Donat*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
SOUND ★★★★★

BENCHMARK RECORDING
 Amadeus Quartet DG 463 1432



BRAHMS

Viola Sonatas in F minor & E flat; Trio in A minor

Lawrence Power (viola), Tim Hugh (cello), Simon Crawford-Phillips (piano)
 Hyperion CDA 67584 65:29 mins

BBC Music Direct £12.99 inc. p&p

Was it pity for viola players that induced Brahms to arrange his

two Clarinet Sonatas and Clarinet Trio for the Cinderella of the string section? Or was it genuine artistic necessity? It's hard to say. The viola can offer something special rather than just different – especially in the First Sonata and the Trio. The exquisitely slow dying fall of the slow movement melody of Sonata No. 1 becomes more confidential on the viola. And in many parts of the Trio the viola's instrumental dialogue with the cello is strikingly effective: as the two instruments often converse on the same material, the closeness in tone makes exchanges subtler, more nuanced. The end of the Trio's first movement, with viola and cello semiquavers intertwining quietly, has a smoky mysterious quality the clarinet version misses. But it does make the music more sombre, muted, far less liquid and agile in effect – disappointing in parts of the First Sonata and almost throughout the Second. And there



30 October 2006

Monika Henschel: interview

Time Out meets Monika Henschel of the Henschel Quartet, the German youngsters currently leading a chamber music revolution

The Henschels – Monika, Christoph and Markus – are assembling on Sunday morning. No, not on the principle that the family that prays together stays together, more that siblings who play together win acclaim in chamber music and prizes for recordings. Sunday finds the Henschel Quartet (the fourth is a non-family member, cellist Mathias Beyer-Karshø) giving a Wigmore coffee – or sherry, if preferred – concert in the middle of their latest English tour, sandwiched between Nottingham and Ripon. The German ensemble is happy to return to one of the first international halls to book them years ago, while the English provinces remind them of the network of music clubs that helped make their name. 'We made our career through Britain and Japan, not straight away in Germany,' explains Monika, 'through the cities with music societies and circles.'

Even Germany, a country that Kultur-hungry Brits regard as paradise, has financial problems. But Monika, a delightful and cheerful violist – yes, they have viola jokes in Germany too, she giggles – sees a glass half-full. The decline of an older chamber music public means there's 'room for the new'. And this apparently most staid of musical forms is undergoing a vibrant renaissance. The German director of a documentary film on chamber music's new popularity is accompanying the Henschels to the Wigmore. 'Even people with no classical background have a feeling that something's happening. We've had our portraits in German magazines.' The Henschel Quartet takes youth seriously. __ 'We have a trust fund to encourage the young. We go to kindergartens to talk and play.' The foursome are ambassadors for SOS Children's Villages, an organisation for abandoned children and orphans working in 132 countries: 'For ten years we've helped them with 1 per cent of our income.' The Henschels were brought up in an inescapably musical atmosphere. Father was a string-player in the Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestra, mother played piano and harpsichord. The famous Sergiu Celibidache, the conductor's conductor, lived with the family for two years. When he moved on, 'Uncle Sergiu' asked the family to go with him.

The various Henschel households are now in Munich. As Monika points out, family ensembles are not that unusual – she reels off names from Belgium, Germany and America. The quartet doesn't share Uncle Sergiu's dislike of the recording process. 'We have a very good production team we trust,' says Monika, who's aware that chamber music, a precise form, combined with recording's all-hearing ear, imposes restrictions so that 'your style might simply not develop... We listen to records from over ten years ago and say we wouldn't be playing like that nowadays.' Sunday finds them performing Szymanowski, the second quartet and Brahms in C minor, 'written close to Munich,' says Monika. One of the advantages playing in a chamber group has over being a soloist, says Monika, is that you don't have to travel on your own. 'And you always have someone to listen to you, to question what you do.' She pauses. 'Which of course you might not always like.' But so far the family remains harmonious.

Martin Hoyle



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Süddeutsche Zeitung

26 June 2006

No Fear

Chamber music with no intensive interplay, forget it. That's what the long-since internationally renowned Henschel Quartet thought, too, and proceeded to install a chamber music committee at the Seligenstadt Monastery near Frankfurt. This year, the Kuss Quartet was invited.

It was two evenings this time; on the first, the Henschels played Beethoven's *Op. 18/1* and the Kuss Quartet offered Schumann's *A-Minor Quartet Op. 41/1*. The Henschel Quartet was charming, with great density of tone, emphatic sharing of abrupt accents and tender retreats. Beethoven's first quartet "six-pack" is indeed a treasure-trove of such energetic exercise, but here, the composer is much more advanced than are other works of the period, and in a spirit of creative affront, it perhaps surpasses even Schumann's *A-Minor Quartet*, originating forty years later.

In Mozart's resolute, thematically closely worked quartet, we met only some of the players; in the Shostakovich *Octet Op. 11*, everybody was onstage. These two movements by the nineteen-year-old composer are a bold throw of the dice, bursting with vitality; one felt the crackling tension with which this piece was created. So, one need have no fear for chamber music.

Reinhard Schulz



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22 June 2006

Shattering Trumpet Blasts

The outdoor concerts of the Strings Festival are the high point of the summer in the area. With the the Henschel Quartet, the three-day Festival has moreover had an outstanding *ensemble in residence*, loyal from the outset, since 1997.

For each Festival the Henschels invite another chamber music ensemble with whom three ambitious programs are fashioned. William Coleman started out with a most fitting contribution to the Mozart year. For after all, the *Quintet in C-Minor, KV 406*, is a version of the *Serenade for Eight Winds, KV 388*, created by Mozart himself, and hence eminently suited to this outdoor performance.

Coleman and Monika Henschel lent the middle voices a distinct profile in which fluent yet brilliantly contrasted execution often rightly presaged the young Beethoven. Especially finely differentiated, tender and without academic striving, the imitative minuet sounded, in part, canonically shaped.

The Shostakovich *String Quartet No. 3 in F-Major, Op. 73* followed as a composition of equally high rank. Its fresh, playful yet densely motified idiom was exactly gauged by the Henschels. With clean staccatos in finest *pianissimo*, they enforced precise listening in the second movement, where the sarcasm turns reductive, as well as in the grotesque march, which wittily ascribes shattering trumpets and brass figures, here acquiring great rhythmic power. The serious, introspective *Adagio*, a very fragile figure, was as impressive as the final static, paralyzing conclusion. Another colossus, Beethoven's *String Quartet No. 13 in B-flat Major*, was played with masterful surety, winged and bright where required, and with tense, muted tone in many passages.

Guido Holze



The Henschel Quartet are making a considerable impact in the music world with consistently impressive performances, often sparkling and exhilarating with considerable empathic insights.

The quartet from Sindelfingen in Germany is notable in that three of the players are siblings: the brothers Christoph and Markus Henschel are violinists and sister Monika Henschel-Schwind the violist are joined by cellist Matthias Beyer-Karlshøj. As one of the leading new-generation quartets the Henschels together with the British-based ensemble the Belcea and the Skampa from Czechoslovakia are leading the way, superbly maintaining exceptionally high standards of performance. Following on the heels of their acclaimed complete Mendelssohn quartets on Arte Nova Classics 82876 64009 2 the Henschel have now turned their attention to two of Beethoven's quartets; one from the composer's first creative period and the other from his later years.

String Quartet in B flat major, Op. 18, No.6 (1798-1800)

The B flat major quartet contains one of the most tragic pages found in the entire Op. 18. The cheerful opening movement *allegro con brio* with its appealing and light-footed first subject is given a joyous and often exhilarating performance with spontaneity and refinement. In the *allegro ma non troppo* movement the ensemble produce seemingly effortless playing of raptly sustained serenity. The *scherzo* with its effective syncopations and whimsical *trio* is interpreted with considerable affection, wit and infectious playing. Beethoven entitled the concluding movement 'La Melinchnia (*melancholy*)' and insisted that it be played, "with the greatest of delicacy." Many writers have commented on the brief anguished slow passage at the start of the final movement as the real beginnings of Romanticism in music. Here it is performed with appropriate tenderness and subtlety. The quicker music that follows rejects sorrow and embarks on a more convivial mood that the accomplished Henschels interpret with a controlled vitality.

In this B flat major string quartet it is hard to look outside the recording from Quatuor Mosaïques (performed on period instruments). They are peerless in these Op. 18 scores (Naïve E 8899). Using modern instruments an alternative to the excellent Henschels is contained in the complete Op. 18 from the Italian Quartet, recorded in Switzerland between 1972-75 and presented in a three disc boxed set on Philips 464 071-2.

String Quartet in E flat major, Op. 127 (1822, 1824-25)

The E flat major quartet, Op. 127 opens with a slow six-bar introduction which is played by the Henschels in a manner more tentative than majestic. In the succeeding *allegro* the astutely chosen tempi provide a serene and pastoral mood. From this idyllic state we pass into the spirituality and mysticism of the *adagio*. The movement which is one of the longest in any Beethoven quartet uses a theme followed by six variations and is one of the most sublime and contemplative slow movements the composer ever wrote. A prominent *pizzicato* passage towards the end of the *adagio* leads into the *scherzo*. The Henschels prove to be understanding interpreters in the slow movement with a measured approach that repudiates sentimentality and displays superb control. The third movement *scherzo* is also one of the longest Beethoven wrote. The Henschels provide a suitably agitated and nervous mood, although slightly more vitality would have been preferred. The *allegro finale* provides occasional respite from the unrest of the *scherzo*. This largely cheerful and frequently robust movement is offset by excursions into warm and gentle lyricism. In the *allegro* all the players share this rewarding music as a well balanced team, although I would have appreciated a touch more weight and intensity.

This fine account of Op. 127 is well worth adding to any collection and will provide considerable pleasure. Surely it can be only a matter of time before the Henschel find their way on to one of the big name labels. The reputation of the Henschel continues to go from strength to strength and their playing serves Beethoven admirably with this superb release.

Michael Cookson, 2005



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THE AGE

Melbourne

12.05.04

Last year, the Henschels visited Melbourne for the first time and they were among the first musicians to play at the BMW Edge space in Federation Square.

The top lines are handled by siblings: Violinist brothers Christopher and Markus Henschel and their violist sister Monika, who was unable to join the tour last year. The outsider, cellist Matthias Beyer-Karlshoj, has been part of the ensemble for 10 years. It's a well-knit group with an even spread across the instruments.

Currently teaching at the National Academy, the Henschels played to their strengths last Thursday, beginning with a bracing account of Wolf's Italian Serenade. Once again, they did some proselytising for Mendelssohn. Having recorded all the composer's quartets, on this night they played the last in F minor, brimming with uncharacteristic passion and sadness from Mendelssohn at the loss of his sister.

The Henschels also aired Matthias Pintscher's 1992 Quartet No. 4, *Ritratto di Gesualdo*. A substantial soundscape making plenty of modernist gestures, this product from one of Germany's brightest young sparks could have stopped about eight minutes before its actual final bar without causing much sense of loss in this listener. As a portrait of the homicidal Renaissance prince, the work was impenetrable, but was treated with impressive dedication by its painstaking exponents.

Clive O'Connell



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Henschel Quartet, Ripon Cathedral

Andrew Palmer, www.harrogatetoday.co.uk

10 November 2006

GERMANS are well-known for their precision, whether it be in the field of engineering or the arts. Last Monday evening four musicians gave a recital in Ripon Cathedral demonstrating an impressive technique of impeccable string playing. The stunning Henschel Quartet – a German family affair (brothers Christoph and Markus, along with elder sister Monika Henschel, and cellist Mathias Beyer-Karlshoj) – performed works by Françaix, Mozart, Stravinsky and Brahms in a gripping display of some of the best string quartet repertoire.

The intimacy between the players and their communicative looks towards each other ensured accurate playing. Those gathered felt they could have been eavesdropping on the family Henschel at home, as, under the two standard lamps on the stage, the appreciative audience listened and watched the ease in which these masters in their field performed. This will go down as one of the highlights of the Cathedral Concert Society's recital series this season; the crisp playing captivated the audience.

During the silences the magic continued, not a sound could be heard, so riveting and spellbinding was the performance. The lightness and pizzicato in the opening of Françaix's String Quartet in G minor showed unforced freshness and vitality, while at the same time not losing any expressiveness. Enchanting was the word of the night as the quartet moved on to Mozart's String Quartet in D minor. After the interval the audience was treated to Stravinsky's interesting and short Three Pieces for String Quartet in which the Henschels gave a finely carved and thoughtful performance radiating delight and brilliance. The final work was Brahms' String Quartet in C minor and the spell, which the Henschels cast over their audience at the beginning, continued its hold.

Immaculate technique, clean, crisp, precise musicianship oozed from the players as they continued the lyrical flow and virtuosity. Even the delicate movements from all four of the pieces highlighted unanimity in the phrasing. The way the soloists passed their musical themes from the resonant cello to the viola and then to the violins was exquisite. For me, and I am sure for everyone present, this was quite simply glorious chamber music at its finest.



The Henschel Quartet Finds A Balance Between Old And New Values Rainer Lepuschitz, Publicum

1 June 2006

The famous conductor, Sergiu Celibidache who died in 1996, was one of [the Henschel Quartet's] patrons and loved listening to the young musicians rehearsing. They studied under the legendary Amadeus Quartet, and later with musicians from the Alban Berg Quartet, the LaSalle Quartet and the Melos Quartet. The three siblings Christoph, Markus and Monika Henschel, together with Mathias Beyer- Karlshøj, have carried on the great tradition of twentieth century quartet playing, building on the skills and musicianship of distinguished musicians. Coupled with their own inspiration and continuous striving for further development in interpretation, the result is a quartet whose quality and substance is at the pinnacle of contemporary musical life. Innsbruck is honoured that the Henschel Quartet from Germany has included an appearance at the Konservatoriumssaal in its concert schedule this year, alongside performances at such prestigious venues as the Wigmore Hall in London, the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the Liederhalle in Stuttgart, the Schubert Festival in Feldkirch, the Munich Philharmonic and well-known concert halls in Japan. The choice of programme for the Henschel's Innsbruck chamber concert, which includes quartets by Mozart and Janacek and the Schubert quintet (together with the cellist Sebastian Hess), tells us much about the history and development of the ensemble. In an interview, Monika Henschel-Schwind reveals how close Schubert has grown to her heart and to the hearts of her fellow musicians through their work with the Amadeus Quartet. "Vienna, Viennese blood, rings from every note, and must pulsate during performances of Schubert's music." Moreover Schubert, together with the three classical "Greats," Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven, belong to those composers "who through their music and their style of quartet composition have been guiding lights for us" says Monika Henschel-Schwind.

Janacek, however, suits "our extremely expressive natures." The Henschel quartet is never afraid to run the full gambit of expression, even when playing music where recent aesthetic trends have been towards authentic historical practice and sound. For example, with Mozart "it has become fashionable to reflect our knowledge of historical practice in performances" says Monika... "This trend has had a formative influence on our work too." The quartet is constantly looking for new interpretations and experiences. They also welcome contact with other quartet ensembles. For many years the Henschels have been meeting up with other quartets to make music together at the String Festival in Kloster Seligenstadt and, from this year, also at the Nymphenburg Summer Festival in



Munich. „We are happy to be influenced by others and also to pass on our own ideas.“

One thing that is important to the four musicians at all of these new encounters, is to preserve their own identity and individual style. For Monika Henschel-Schwind and her fellow musicians have taken away an important message from their studies with great musicians “When you play, what is most important is the spirit and the message. Only then can the aesthetic sense emerge. Monika remembers a key phrase: „the aesthetics may change but the message remains the same“.

The Henschels have managed to maintain the balance between trying to develop and yet retain the character of the ensemble for nearly fifteen years now. What is it like spending so much time together, rehearsing, performing and going on tour? “It’s like being in a marriage of four people” says Monika. The members of the quartet invest a lot of time and effort in growing together musically and personally. Diversity and change are also beneficial. So the ensemble is always looking for ways to extend their repertoire and satisfy their enthusiasms. At the moment the four musicians find themselves in a Trojahn fever. To mark the reopening of the Anna-Amalia library in Weimar, which burned down a few years ago and has now been restored, the work “Lettera amorosa” by Manfred Trojahn was given its first performance. A noble task for the German ensemble who, as a result of this commission, became aware of Trojahn’s other chamber music and is now planning to record his string quartet. Other important recent developments in their repertory have included works from Bartok, Schönberg and Schulhoff. Diversity has also brought excursions into other musical areas. Members of the Henschel quartet play with the young Munich Philharmonic orchestra allowing them the opportunity to give their younger colleagues the benefit of their instrumental experience.

Their aim is not only to delight people but also to help others who live in difficult circumstances was realised in their involvement with the SOS Kinderdorf. They give a percentage of their fees to this charity.

“We also visit the childrens’ villages to make music with the children” says Monika Henschel-Schwind. Their appearance in Innsbruck has a special meaning for them – being able to play in the homeland of the founder of the children’s village movement, Hermann Gmeiner. The four members of the Henschel quartet were this year appointed classical music ambassadors to the SOS Kinderdorf. Thus the work that the ensemble has been doing for so many years in support of the SOS Kinderdorf initiative will be continued now on a more official footing.



Mendelssohn Box: Recording Of The Year

Michael Cookson, Music Web International

1 January 2006

The aristocratic playing of the Henschels is so sparkling, exhilarating and consistently expertly performed throughout the complete String Quartets that this super budget priced Arte Nova set is now my premier recommendation of all the available sets in this terrifically competitive market. The talented Henschels clearly have a special affinity for these scores and their interpretations are masterly illustrations of humane, old world music making. The set is a considerable achievement!

The Focus Magazine Cd Choice: Early & Mature Beethoven

Focus Magazine 34/2005

1 September 2005

In their early 30s the Henschel Quartet is firmly established on the International music scene as one of the best String Quartets of its generation. Polished interaction, uninhibited virtuosity, temperament and intelligent musicianship are hallmarks of there playing. Their latest CD presents two Beethoven quartets an early and mature work – opus 18 & opus 127 both performed with irresistible charm.

The Gramophone Editor's Choice

Duncan Druce, The Gramophone

1 July 2005

The Henschel Quartet's Mendelssohn set, now complete, is a fine achievement and an extraordinary bargain. I'm impressed by the intense involvement that makes the outer movements of No 3, for example, sound not merely brilliant but truly joyful.

