

Walton - String Quartets – 1922; A minor

Doric Quartet (Alex Redington, Jonathan Stone vns Somin Tandree va John Myerscough vc)

Chandos CHAN10661 (62') [Buy now \(http://www.amazon.co.uk/Walton-String-Quartet-Minor/dp/B004LHOZW2/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1299237498&sr=1-1\)](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Walton-String-Quartet-Minor/dp/B004LHOZW2/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1299237498&sr=1-1)

Exhilaratingly, dedicated performances from a talented young string quartet

The coupling's been done before – both the Gabrieli (Chandos, 10/91) and the Emperor (Black Box, 8/01) hit upon the same idea – but the Doric are the first to offer Walton's extraordinarily ambitious String Quartet of 1919-22 without the cuts made by the composer following the work's first two performances during the summer of 1923 by the McCullagh Quartet in London and (a month later) at the inaugural ISCM Festival in Salzburg. Osbert Sitwell was in attendance for the latter event and recalled how the cellist inadvertently got her spike caught in the controls of the trap-door and disappeared into the stage: "The audience rocked. And even she 'came up smiling'...Poor things."

Following the public premiere, that same year, of the first version of *Façade*, Walton promptly withdrew the piece and later, in a 1963 interview, described it as "full of undigested Bartók and Schoenberg". There are three linked movements: once past the somewhat turgid opening *Moderato*, both the central *Scherzo* and extended concluding Fugue (which pays unabashed homage to Beethoven's *Grosse Fuge*) are never less than gripping in their prodigal energy levels, modernist daring and contrapuntal ingenuity – at least, that's what comes over in this blazingly committed and triumphantly assured rendering by the Doric Quartet.

Their account of the mature A minor Quartet (1944-47) is more impressive still, displaying an exquisite blend, rhythmic acuity and razor-sharp precision that even put me in mind of the Hollywood Quartet's matchless world premiere recording on Testament (3/95). I was particularly smitten with the Dorics' glowing treatment of the rapturous slow movement (surely one of Walton's most deeply personal inspirations), which they survey with a beguiling, almost conversational flow yet no loss of intimacy or piercing ardour.

As for production values, I'm able to report that Jonathan Cooper's sound and balance are beyond reproach. Anthony Burton supplies a characteristically lucid booklet essay. Make no mistake, this is a terrific disc in every way, a worthy follow-up to this ensemble's exemplary anthology of the three Korngold quartets (Chandos, 11/10).

Andrew Achenbach



http://www.amazon.co.uk/Walton-String-Quartet-Minor/dp/B004LHOZW2/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1299237498&sr=1-1