

GRAMOPHONE

THE WORLD'S BEST CLASSICAL MUSIC REVIEWS

DEBUSSY String Quartet FRANCK Piano Quintet

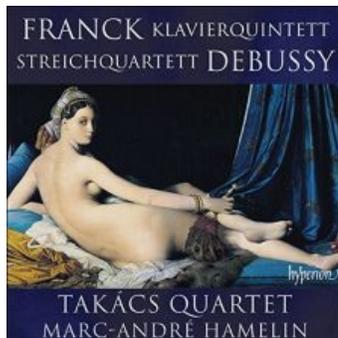
Author: Patrick Rucker

When the seasoned artistry of the Takács Quartet blends with the thoughtful brilliance of Marc-André Hamelin, a rare alchemy occurs. Their fruitful collaboration on record goes back to a 2009 Schumann Quintet (11/09), with a Shostakovich Quintet released last year (5/15). Their new recording of Franck's Piano Quintet, one of the glories of the 19th-century French chamber repertory, stands comparison with some of the best, including Curzon/Vienna Philharmonic, Richter/Borodin and Cortot/International (formerly EMI).

The Quartet casts down the gauntlet with an implacably assertive opening statement in the Franck, setting the stage for an Orpheus-and-the-Furies-style dialogue with the piano. It's a compelling approach to a movement that, on occasion, can become an uncertain, diffuse prologue to the main event of the *Lento* and *Allegro non troppo*. But what begins as a dialogue between strings and piano soon becomes a discourse among five musicians, urgently argued with lacerating intensity. The cohesion brought to this emotional caldron, one feels, could only be the result of complete unity of purpose shared by five musical minds.

Embarking on the slow movement brings almost visceral relief, even knowing that the lyric narrative about to unfold is one of the saddest in the literature. Delicacy and finesse produce colours and textures as vividly beautiful as they are emotionally impactful. But as much as we might like to linger in this sensual melancholy, in less than no time we're swept up on to the magic-carpet ride of the finale, where kinetic exhilaration fuels the kaleidoscopic flight over varied terrain. I'm not sure I've had another experience of this work that imparts its affective essence so authentically while keeping its architectural ingenuity and grace always in view.

To Debussy's luminous and under-appreciated String Quartet of 1893 the Takács bring all their intelligence, skill, taste and virtuosity. While every measure of this performance affords pleasure, the pizzicato shower of the scherzo and the touching tenderness of the *Andantino* are special treats. Very highly recommended.



DEBUSSY String Quartet FRANCK Piano Quintet

DEBUSSY String Quartet FRANCK Piano Quintet

String Quartet

Quintet for Piano and Strings