

Karol Szymanowski, Webern – String Quartets (1991)

Written by bluesever

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01. Szymanowski - String quartet no. 1 - I. Lento assai - Allegro moderato [0:07:34.22] 02. Szymanowski - String quartet no. 1 - II. Andantino semplice [0:05:38.53] 03. Szymanowski - String quartet no. 1 - III. Vivace - Scherzando alla Burlesca [0:04:33.50] 04. Szymanowski - String quartet no. 2 - I. Moderato dolce e tranquillo [0:07:54.37] 05. Szymanowski - String quartet no. 2 - II. Vivace, scherzando [0:04:25.13] 06. Szymanowski - String quartet no. 2 - III. Lento [0:05:50.50] 07. Webern - Langsamer Satz [0:09:21.10] Carmina Quartet

This 1991 CD from the Swiss Carmina Quartet is short but sweet. The two quartets by Karol Szymanowski clock in at just over a quarter of an hour, each in three movements. If you like the quartets from Bela Bartok and Leos Janacek, you will be interested in these two works. While I don't consider them front-rank Szymanowski (such as the 1st violin concerto or the Stabat Mater), they are fine works that will be of interest to committed classical music fans.

The two quartets date from two different stylistic periods in Szymanowski's career - the first from 1917 during his post-romantic period and the second from 1927 during his more modernist "slavic" period - but I found them to be more alike than different. The writing is chromatic, built from smaller thematic cells and uses tremolo effects and accented fortissimo passages in ways that are very reminiscent of his Eastern European contemporaries. Szymanowski also uses contrapuntal passages like Bartok does, especially in the fugal finale of the 2nd quartet.

The Carmina Quartet, still active in the same lineup featured here, play with polish and musicality, delivering an outstanding interpretation. The short Webern Langsam, an early formative work, is added to fill out the short Szymanowski pieces. While this work is unrelated to Szymanowski, the Carmina Quartet again plays very well. In fact, maybe the best moment in the entire disc occurs in the second half of the Langsam, when the cello repeats the main theme with a delicate accompaniment provided by the upper strings.

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Sonics are very good as well. A recommended performance. ---jt52, amazon.com

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