

# CHAMBER

The **FLORESTAN QUARTET** approach the **BORODIN**'s benchmark brilliance with Dvořák; the **BELCEA** deliver supremely accomplished Bartók; plus **QUATUOR DANEL** break new ground with Weinberg

## Intuitive Weinberg

ERIK LEVI *applauds the Quatuor Danel's recital disc*



### WEINBERG

String Quartets, Vol. 1: Nos 4 & 16

Quatuor Danel

CPO 777 313-2 65:23 mins

BBC Music Direct £8.99

The first volume in Quatuor Danel's series of Mieczysław Weinberg's complete string quartets gets off to a particularly auspicious start with two finely contrasted works, neither of which has previously been available on CD. Although the underlying anxiety that characterises the Fourth Quartet of 1945 may suggest a similarly war-scarred landscape to that of Shostakovich's Third, there is considerable evidence of Weinberg's

individuality in the narrative plan of the work, not least in the emotionally equivocal conclusion to the Finale. Dating from 1981, the 16th is dedicated to the memory of his sister Ester who perished during the German occupation of Warsaw. It's cast in a more abrasive musical language, hinting at Jewish cantillation in the outer movements.

Having previously recorded a highly praised Shostakovich cycle, it's hardly surprising that the Quatuor Danel demonstrate such an instinctive understanding of Weinberg's idiom, not to mention an impressive capacity to extract the maximum degree of tonal and dynamic variety from the music. With the added advantage of warmly balanced recording and authoritative booklet notes from David Fanning, this release warrants a strong recommendation.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
SOUND ★★★★★



QUATUOR DANEL: tonal and dramatic variety in Weinberg



### BARTÓK

String Quartets Nos 1-6

Belcea Quartet

EMI 394 4002 156:16 mins (2 discs)

BBC Music Direct £12.99

The playing in these endlessly fascinating and rewarding pieces is supremely accomplished. The clarity and precision of such passages as the scurrying *prestissimo* coda of the middle movement of the Second Quartet, or the even faster trio of the *Scherzo* in No. 5, have to be heard to be believed. Distinguished Bartók cycles in recent years include those by the Alban Berg (EMI), Emerson (DG) and the Takács Quartets – but none more vividly conveys the music's visceral excitement. Of course, there's much more to Bartók than an

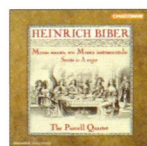
agglomeration of percussive effects, and the Belcea nail their expressive colours firmly to the mast at the very start of the First Quartet, where the drooping melodic intervals are played with unshamed use of portamento. Most other players use a similar expressive slide here, too, though the Takács present the passage more plainly, without sacrificing anything of its inherent warmth.

At the other end of the scale, it's possible to feel the Belcea Quartet do not always make the important distinction between Bartók's *f* and *ff* markings: the progressively more intense 'leaping' second subject in the first movement of No. 5, for instance, strikes me as a touch too aggressive throughout. And it's a pity the haunting final bars of No. 6, with the cello offering a fragmentary pizzicato reminiscence of the work's 'motto' theme, aren't more delicate. But even those who already have the fine Takács recording may want to acquire this one, too. *Misha Donat*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
SOUND ★★★★★

### BENCHMARK RECORDING

Takács Decca 455 2972 £29.99



### BIBER

Mensa Sonora seu musica instrumentalis; Violin Sonata in A Jane Rogers (viola); Purcell Quartet Chandos CHAN 0748 59:13 mins

BBC Music Direct £12.99

Biber's *Mensa Sonora*, dedicated in 1680 to Max Gandolph, Archbishop of Salzburg, to whom he had been appointed vice-Kapellmeister, is a six-part anthology conforming by-and-large with a mixed pattern of suite and chamber sonata. It is scored for a small ensemble of violins, viola and basso continuo, one to a part in

this recording by the Purcell Quartet which also includes a warmly expressive Violin Sonata in A major performed stylishly by soloist Catherine Mackintosh.

A rewarding dimension of *Mensa Sonora* is to be found in its inner part-writing, sustained in the present performances by a second violin and viola rather than the two violas sometimes preferred. The Purcell Quartet bring Biber's often highly sophisticated writing to life with grace and vigour. Many of the pieces are dance-orientated and, as with the three captivating Balletti of the Second Suite in F major, call us urgently to the dance floor. Comparably appealing are the chaconnes of the Third (A minor) and Sixth (G minor) Suites and the Allmandas of the First (D major) and Fourth (B flat) Suites all of which strike a deeper note. The recorded sound is excellent. *Nicholas Anderson*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
SOUND ★★★★★

SELECT