

QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

“Exemplary technique and intonational purity.”

– *The Strad*





Quartetto di Cremona
2023-2024 Biography
Cristiano Gualco, violin; Paolo Andreoli, violin
Simone Gramaglia, viola; Giovanni Scaglione, cello

Winner of the 2019 Franco Buitoni Award, Quartetto di Cremona is among the world's preeminent string quartets, noted for its lustrous sound, refined musicianship, and stylistic versatility. According to *The Strad*, Its Lincoln Center debut in 2022 “was distinguished by splendid balance, abundant colour and a relaxed mastery of all the musical elements.” The quartet was established in 2000 at the Accademia Walter Stauffer in Cremona, Italy. Now in its 23rd season, Quartetto di Cremona has toured extensively in Europe, the United States, South America, and Asia; appeared at leading festivals; and performed regularly on radio and television broadcasts, including RAI, BBC, Westdeutscher Rundfunk, and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Quartetto di Cremona's extensive repertoire encompasses key masterworks from Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert; essential late-nineteenth and twentieth-century literature; and contemporary works by Golijov, Lacheman, Fabio Vacchi, Silvia Colasanti, Nimrod Borenstein and Kalevi Aho. They are also known for their performances of work by Italian composers, including Verdi, Respighi and Boccherini.

In the 2023-2024 season, Quartetto di Cremona makes its Carnegie Hall debut in New York as part of a five-city U.S. tour that includes Santa Monica, Kansas City, Philadelphia and New Haven. In February and March, the quartet returns to the U.S. for performances with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center in New York, and in College Station, TX, Boise and Albuquerque. This season's European highlights include a tour in Denmark, performances in the Netherlands and Belgium, a Wigmore Hall appearance in May 2024, an Asian tour and concerts at prestigious venues across Italy. The quartet plans to release their recording of Bach's *The Art of the Fugue* in 2024.

Their most recent recording is *Italian Postcards* (debut on Avie Records, 2020), featuring music inspired by Italy and written by non-Italian composers, including the world premiere recording of *Cieli d'Italia* by Nimrod Borenstein. Previous recordings include an all-Schubert disc with cellist Eckart Runge (Audite, 2019) and a box set of the complete Beethoven quartet cycle (Audite, 2018), including a quintet with Lawrence Dutton, violist of the Emerson String Quartet; several of the seven individual discs in this set received widespread and immediate recognition upon their release in prior years, including a five-star rating in *BBC Music Magazine*, International

Classical Music Awards, the Supersonic Award from the German magazine *Pizzicato* and the Echo Klassik 2017 prize.

Quartetto di Cremona leads a renowned string program, currently in its tenth year, for professional and advanced string quartets at the Accademia Walter Stauffer, now part of the Stauffer String Center, opened in 2021. The quartet also conducts masterclasses while on tour throughout Europe and the United States. Awarded the Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship in 2005, Quartetto di Cremona also received the prestigious Franco Buitoni Award in 2019 in recognition of its contribution to promoting and encouraging chamber music in Italy and throughout the world. The quartet is supported by the Kulturfond Peter Eckes which provides the musicians with three superb instruments: violin Paolo Antonio Testore, viola Gioachino Torazzi, cello Dom Nicola Amati. Cristiano Gualco plays his own violin Nicola Amati (Cremona, 1640). In 2015, the musicians were awarded honorary citizenship by the city of Cremona.

“The Cremona’s performance was distinguished by splendid balance, abundant colour and a relaxed mastery of all the musical elements.”

– *The Strad*

“It’s a rare blend: breadth of sound and capriciousness combined with perfect tuning and ensemble has the players sounding absolutely of one voice... Nothing less than life-affirming.”

– *Gramophone*

“The Cremona Quartet completes its Beethoven series with a fine coupling, combining exemplary technique and intonational purity with an interpretive acuity that strips away 19th-century rhetoric while avoiding the pitfalls of sounding merely ‘historically informed’.”

– *The Strad*

“Quartetto di Cremona’s magnificent survey of Beethoven’s Complete String Quartets moves securely and unquestionably into mastery... such warm playing; such perfection on a silver disc; what a glory this is.”

– *The Herald*

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Quartetto di Cremona

Critical Acclaim



“The Quartetto di Cremona exude phenomenal energy and momentum.”

BBC Music Magazine

“It’s a rare blend: breadth of sound and capriciousness combined with perfect tuning and ensemble has the players sounding absolutely of one voice... Nothing less than life-affirming.”

Gramophone

“Internationally renowned for their extremely mature and lyrical sound.”

The Strad

“From him and the four gentlemen of Cremona, it was a first-rate evening, bordering on the transcendent.”

New Criterion

“The quartet are magnificent, with playing of such spirit, precision and understanding...it is the individual voices of these players that are so beautiful as well as they way they interact so naturally.”

The Classical Reviewer

“My goodness, here is something special. The group sound reminds me in some ways of that of the great Quartetto Italiano.”

The Herald Scotland

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The Herald

“This is the most exciting new disc of string quartet playing that I have come across for a long time... Altogether a revelation.”

Michael Tanner, BBC Music Magazine

A Debut 20 Years in the Making

The Quartetto di Cremona comes to the Chamber Music Society this February

By Nicky Swett



© Nikolaj Lund

The Quartetto di Cremona (l-r): Paolo Andreoli, Cristiano Gualco, Simone Gramaglia, and Giovanni Scaglione

In advance of the Quartetto di Cremona's Chamber Music Society concert, founding violist Simone Gramaglia reflects on two decades of repertoire and relationships.

How did the four of you start playing together?

SIMONE GRAMAGLIA, *violinist of the Quartetto di Cremona*: Violinist Cristiano Gualco and I studied at the same conservatory growing up in Genoa and met again in Cremona at the Stauffer Academy. In 2000, during the interval of a chamber orchestra concert, Cristiano

asked if I would like to play in a quartet and I said yes because of our great friendship. Since we were studying in Cremona, we gave our quartet the name Quartetto di Cremona. It was an homage to the town, to Stradivarius, and to the great violin tradition. At the end of 2001, the second violinist and cellist left and so during Christmas, we were the Duo di Cremona. Then we decided to ask violinist Paolo Andreoli and cellist Giovanni Scaglione, who actually lived in Genoa, so it's funny — we are the Quartetto di Cremona, but we are all from Genoa.



Are you looking forward to returning to New York in February?

SG: In New York, the atmosphere and the love for music is incredible, and you can play things that you wouldn't play in other places. We are going to debut at Lincoln Center playing Prokofiev's First Quartet and Schoenberg's First Quartet. We played the Schoenberg a couple years ago, and it's a string quartet that we really love. Sometimes promoters, when you say "Schoenberg," they say "thank you very much, next." But in New York, it's no problem.

What makes the Schoenberg quartet on your program challenging for players and for listeners?

SG: There is this intensity, this presence of a lot of elements all together. At the

beginning, all four parts seem to be very important—they have the same dynamic. But if you play all four parts with the same importance, you won't understand anything.

When you look at the score, it's complex, but it's so beautiful. You immediately feel these unique themes that are so emotional, so sweet, and they are not difficult to understand. Even if you don't know classical music very well, you can get this music, because it's simple in a way. It's a journey: there is passion, there is sadness, there is desperation, there is happiness. And when we arrive at the finale, something happens, I don't want to say what—it's unbelievable.

You immediately feel these unique themes that are so emotional, so sweet, and they are not difficult to understand.

Why did you decide to program Prokofiev's B minor Quartet?

SG: We have to thank the Emerson Quartet when we play this Prokofiev. It's one of my favorite pieces, I listened to it since I was a kid, and the best recording of this piece is the Emerson one. I asked my colleagues to play it many times and after 20 years, we finally decided to learn it. It's fantastic: the dialogue between the voices is so well balanced. The way Prokofiev uses the harmony—it's another world. He brings your ear to expect something, but then he suddenly changes, and you are surprised by the elegant harmonic solutions that he finds.



© Nikolaj Lund

You'll also be performing Weber's Clarinet Quintet with David Shifrin. Have you collaborated with him before?

SG: We performed the Weber quintet recently with David in Houston on tour. We really were astonished by his playing. I discussed it with my colleagues after the concert—it was probably one of the first times that we had no difficulties mixing our sound with a wind player. Weber, he's a great composer in many ways; this quintet is so well written, such natural music, that it wasn't that difficult to play it beautifully. Though, in the last movement, there are so many recitatives. We are Italian, so we are used to opera, but recitatives are not always easy to play together. Yet David is so flexible, so musical, and so clear in what he does, that it is very easy to follow him. We really look forward to playing with him again in February at Lincoln Center.

What do you do outside of quartet playing together or individually?

SG: Paolo is a certified, professional cook. He also loves driving cars. He is

the main driver when we travel—he brings us to concert appointments on time, if not early, because he likes to go fast. Giovanni is a fantastic jazz pianist. He can improvise anything on the piano. During the pandemic, Cristiano became an astrophotographer. NASA published one of his photographs in a blog! I've got a passion for golf, so when we are on tour, often I try to see if there is some place where I can go and play. Together, we love food, we love to find the best restaurants wherever we are. I have to say that even after 22 years, we are happy to spend time together, we are always happy to travel together, and we talk a lot.

Cellist, writer, and music researcher Nicky Swett is a program annotator and editorial contributor for the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center.

The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center presents the Quartetto di Cremona at Alice Tully Hall on February 1. For more information, visit ChamberMusicSociety.org.

QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

the Strad

April 20, 2022

Cremona Quartet, David Shifrin (clarinet)

By Dennis Rooney



Founded in 2000, the Cremona Quartet displayed outstanding tonal refinement in its local debut, sponsored by the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. The programme presented two quartets composed in 1930 and 1904–5 respectively, interspersed by Weber's Clarinet Quintet with David Shifrin.

The first of Prokofiev's two string quartets dates from close to the end of his decade-long Paris residence, and was commissioned by Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, doyenne of American patrons of new chamber works in the mid-20th century. The first performance was by the Brosa Quartet in the Coolidge Auditorium in Washington DC's Library

of Congress in 1931. Each of the quartet's three movements is replete with lyricism, alternating with scherzando elements and an exceptionally contemplative, expressive finale.

The Cremona's performance was distinguished by splendid balance, abundant colour and a relaxed mastery of all the musical elements. In Weber's quintet (completed in 1815) the dedicatee Heinrich Baermann was very much the star turn; but Shifrin's clarinet was supported with sympathy, even when the string textures became merely accompanimental.

Schoenberg's First Quartet op.7 was always beautifully played, with understanding and sympathy. No matter how dense the texture, no hint of effort entered into the performance. Nearly a quarter-century of existence ensured a constant focus on expression and the ceaseless evolution of the musical materials. Shifrin rejoined the quartet for the Adagio from Mozart's Clarinet Quintet K581, where equal partnership prevailed.

QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

ClassicalSource

February 1, 2022

David Shifrin & Quartetto di Cremona at Alice Tully Hall – Prokofiev, Weber & Schoenberg

By Susan Stempleski



Under the auspices of the Chamber Music Society (CMS) of Lincoln Center, the Quartetto di Cremona made its Lincoln Center debut. Violinists and viola-player performed while standing, with the cellist seated on a box that brought him up to their eye level.

The evening opened with a stunning performance of Prokofiev's somber First String Quartet. Propelled by Cristiano Gualco's powerful lead, the players delivered an intense and aching melancholic account. The deep, plush sound of Simone Gramaglia's viola and his ardent playing constantly impressed, with Giovanni Scaglione's cello providing a solid foundation and producing soaring lines of his own, especially in the sweeping melodies of the highly affecting slow Finale. The

playing was marked by admirable unanimity and blend.

In Weber's overtly virtuosic and sparkling Clarinet Quintet, David Shifrin (also standing) delivered a performance that was as much fun as it was dazzling. He produced a warm, eloquent sound in the lyrical moments and made the more bravura passages appear completely effortless. He was superb as he emphasized dramatic elements, shaping the clarinet line with an elegant vocal quality that floated gracefully over the always radiant strings. But it was his pianissimo rendering of the ascending line at the end of the second movement Fantasia that made the performance irresistible.

After intermission came Schoenberg's epic Quartet No.1, composed in a single



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45-minute span in the hyper-expressive style of the composer's early period and received a passionate, vivid and highly virtuosic performance, gleaming even in its most chilling passages. The intricately structured score, with echoes of medieval pageantry, courtly dances, and even folk tunes, sometimes gives the impression of meandering, as passages of bustling activity are followed by much

more hesitant stretches, but this rapturous performance managed to be admirably tight, capturing the work's assurance as well as its ambiguity. For an encore, Shifrin returned and the players delivered a weightless and bittersweet rendition of the Larghetto from Mozart's Quintet, K581, a gentle ending to an evening full of splendid music-making.

QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

The New Criterion

March 2022

New York Chronicle

By Jay Nordlinger

I have a smidgeon of space left for the Quartetto di Cremona—which deserves more than a smidgeon of space. This string quartet from Italy was formed in 2000. “Cremona” is a proud name for string players—the home of Antonio Stradivari, Giuseppe Guarneri, and other immortal luthiers. The Quartetto di Cremona appeared in Alice Tully Hall under the auspices of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center.

They began with a rarely heard work of Prokofiev (known for various genres of music, but not chamber music): the String Quartet No. 1 in B minor. The Cremonese players showed themselves a sensible and adept group. They did nothing false, demonstrating only honest musicianship.

For their next piece, they called on a ringer: David Shifrin, the veteran American clarinetist. He joined them for the quintet of Carl Maria von

Weber, that great friend of clarinetists. Shifrin has been wowing audiences for—could it be?—fifty years. He can still do it. As I have argued in these pages for many years, he is one of the outstanding instrumentalists—outstanding musicians—of our time.

On the second half of the concert, the Cremonese played a single work: the Quartet No. 1 in D minor by Schoenberg. It takes a special ensemble to play this long, brainy, and soulful work. Otherwise, ensembles should leave it alone. The Quartetto di Cremona did the work justice.

For their encore, they called back Shifrin to the stage. Their selection: the Larghetto from the Mozart quintet. Shifrin played in impossibly long and beautiful breaths. From him and the four gentlemen of Cremona, it was a first-rate evening, bordering on the transcendent.

QUARTETTO DI CREMONA



December 2, 2020

Classical Album Reviews: “Italian Postcards”

By Jonathan Blumhofer



The Quartetto di Cremona’s (QDC) new album, *Italian Postcards*, is nothing if not overflowing with Mediterranean

personality: that aspect of their playing is impossible to miss.

The group’s account of Hugo Wolf’s *Italian Serenade*, for instance, which opens the disc, is as warmly engaging and playfully sensuous as one might want. The QDC tackles the music’s unpredictable chromatic turns with *brio*, their lissome ensemble is bracing, and the carefree energy of their reading palpable.

Similar direction and purpose marks the QDC’s performance of Nimrod Borenstein’s *Cieli d’Italia*. A seven-minute homage to the Italian sky, it’s a packed essay: brimming with rhythmic and melodic layering, atmospheric figures (like arpeggios and swift scalar runs), and subtly-developed gestures, the score sounds a bit like a 21st-century update of the Wolf. And, with its marriage of familiar and strange sitting so closely side-by-side, maybe it is. At

any rate, the QDC executes it all with brio.

Filling out the recording is Mozart’s String Quartet no. 1 and Tchaikovsky’s *Souvenir de Florence*.

The Mozart, written during the teenaged composer’s visit to Italy, is a largely forgettable work, though the QDC’s performance is lean and directed, with the second movement’s bravura passagework standing out for its precise realization.

Tchaikovsky’s *Souvenir*, on the other hand, is a masterpiece; here the QDC is joined by the Jerusalem Quartet’s violist Ori Kam and the Artemis Quartet’s cellist Eckart Runge.

Interpretively, their reading doesn’t lack for breadth or clarity in the big opening movement. The lovely second sings with winning fluency while the lithe central section of the third dances with balletic vim. The group’s lyrical take on the finale under cuts some of that movement’s natural exuberance, though the coda drives energetically enough.

Throughout the Tchaikovsky – and to a lesser degree in the Wolf – there’s a periodically chilly edge to the ensemble’s tone. Whether it’s an engineering issue or something else is unclear. Either way, that’s the only blemish on this smartly-programmed, stylishly-played disc.



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QUARTETTO DI CREMONA



January 12, 2021

Italian Postcards (CD review)

Music of Wolf, Mozart, Borenstein, and Tchaikovsky. Quartetto di Cremona, with Ori Kam and Eckart Runge. Avie AV2436.

By John J. Puccio

Italy has long been a favorite destination of travelers, vacationers, history buffs, music lovers, composers, and, well, just about everyone. From Lake Como, Venice, Milan, and Verona to the North through Rome and Sicily farther south, the country has offered artists a wealth of material to work with. Such is the case with Hugo Wolf, W.A. Mozart, Nimrod Borenstein, and Pyotr Tchaikovsky, all of whom were inspired by the merits of the country. On the present disc, the Quartetto di Cremona and friends present four selections by the aforementioned composers in as sunny, Italianate performances as you could want.

For those of you unaware, the Quartetto di Cremona is an award-winning Italian string ensemble founded in Cremona, Italy in 2000. Their members are Cristiano Gualco, violin; Paolo Andreoli, violin; Simone Gramaglia, viola; and Giovanni Scaglione, cello. On the Tchaikovsky piece, they are joined by Ori Kam, viola, and Eckart Runge, cello. The quartet has appeared practically everywhere in the world and has recorded well over a dozen record albums.

The program begins with the *Italian Serenade* (1887), a short work (about seven minutes) by the Austrian composer Hugo Wolf (1860-1903). It is a favorite of string quartets worldwide, often played as an encore but here used as a curtain raiser. It works no matter

how people use it. Wolf heard the melody while on holiday, and the Quartetto di Cremona play it with an appropriately sunny zest.

Next up is the *String Quartet No. 1 in G*, K. 80, "Lodi" (1770) by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791). Mozart wrote it at age fourteen while touring in Lodi, Lombardy. You may remember Lodi, California having a similar effect on the young John Fogarty some 200 years later. Something about the name, I suppose. Anyway, it was Mozart's first string quartet, with a finale he composed a few years later. The Cremona Quartet provide a lovely poignancy to the opening *Adagio*, which, unusual for a string quartet, is a slow movement. Then they add their aforementioned zest to the second, *Allegro*, movement and a regal presence to the *Minuetto*. Which is where it should have ended, but Mozart felt the need to be conventional and added a fourth movement, a closing *Allegro*. The Quartetto di Cremona have an uncanny knack for sounding like more than just four players, their sound rich, vibrant, and resplendent.

Following the Mozart piece is the only modern work on the agenda, *Cieli d'Italia*, Op. 88 by the British-French-Israeli composer Nimrod Borenstein (b. 1969). Despite being modern, it fits in nicely with the older classical and Romantic material. While its single



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movement is brief (about seven minutes), it manages to catch a lot of varying moods and a good deal of Italian charm. The composer describes it as having an “ethereal beauty and magical peacefulness...with episodes of great despair, courageous protest, and even playfulness.” He wrote it on a commission from the Quartetto di Cremona, who play it, one assumes, with authority.

The final selection on the album is the most substantial in terms of timing, the *String Sextet in D minor*, Op. 70, “Souvenir de Florence” (1890) by the Russian composer Pyotr Tchaikovsky (1840-1893). Tchaikovsky wrote the piece while sketching one of its themes in Florence, Italy. On the present recording, Ori Kam, viola, and Eckart

Runge, cello, sit in with the Cremona Quartet. Together, they produce a sound that comes close to seeming like a small chamber orchestra of strings, which is apt in that the piece works for the most part like a miniature symphony. The performance is wholly delightful, with plenty of emotional impact as well as sheer artistry and elegance.

Producer and engineer Michael Seberich recorded the music at Palazzina Banna, Tenuta Banna, Poirino (Torino) in December 2019. As with so many chamber recordings, this one is recorded somewhat closely. It’s great for clarity, detail, and dynamic impact but spreads out the players across the speakers a bit too wide. No matter, the recording sounds fine, with an especially welcome ambient bloom from venue

QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

Audiophile Audition

March 14, 2021

Italian Postcards – Quartetto di Cremona – AVIE

By Gary Lemco

The Mediterranean sensibility defines this celebration of the ensemble Quartetto di Cremona's 20th anniversary, in which four foreigners to Italy express their colorful and often visceral impressions of the country. The group expressly commissioned French-Israeli composer Nimrod Borenstein's 2019 *Italian Skies* for this release. For the Tchaikovsky sextet, two esteemed instrumentalists join the group: Ori Kam, violist with the Jerusalem Quartet, and Eckart Runge, one of the founding members of the Artemis Quartet.

The program opens with Hugo Wolf's Italian *Serenade in G Major* (1887), the product of three days' inspiration. The concise rondo form peppered with recitativo elements provides a dazzling sense of varied color, especially with the likes of Giovanni Scaglione at the cello part in this rendition. The alternation of bowed and plucked strings in 3/8 eventually cedes to a more passionate section in the minor mode, 6/8. Second violin Paolo Andreoli makes his presence felt before the music gleefully returns to its final announcement of the rondo theme.

Mozart wrote his first string quartet during his initial sojourn into Italy (to the town of Lodi, in particular in a tavern) in March 1770. Mozart admired the city's famed porcelains, and he felt inspired to adopt some of the town's ancient folk melodies. In four movements, its opening, extensive *Adagio* features significant

drone elements under an expressive first violin part, intoned with sweet fervor by Cristiano Gualco. The shifts in duple and triplet figures already reveal a fine level of musical development for a fourteen-year-old composer. The ensuing *Allegro* has an aggressive, pseudo-fugal character, biting and brisk. The third movement – in the original edition the last – presents a *Menuetto* in G Major contrasted with a *Trio* in C Major. The last movement *Rondeau: Allegro* appears to have been added by Mozart later, c. 1775. The Quartetto di Cremona casts this movement in warmly graduated motion, building up the motor power of the work that pauses dramatically to allow a chordal passage that adds to the clever charm of the whole.

Nimrod Borenstein (b. 1969) receives a world premiere in this performance of his *Cieli d'Italia* especially commissioned by this ensemble. The soaring tessitura of the initial impulse, sweetly harmonized and accompanied by plucked strings, evokes the clarity of Italian skies. The playful aspects turn to a more melancholy affect, agitated and featuring some impassioned riffs from the viola (Simone Gramaglia). The strong rhythmic shifts suggest a largesse in a rather compact piece, lasting seven minutes but packed with lyrically attractive and learned effects in a tonal style that maintain our attention.

Tchaikovsky's grand sextet of 1886, his *Souvenir de Florence*, may owe debts to the examples of the form by



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Johannes Brahms, but Tchaikovsky's sense of balanced phrase nods to his beloved Mozart. From start to finish, the expansive writing for six strings swells to a symphonic and rhapsodic series of impassioned gestures, despite its fidelity to sonata form in movement one. The coda of the *Allegro con spirito* virtually melts your CD player!

The Quartetto di Cremona, assisted by Ori Kam and Eckart Runge, deliver a sweeping rendition, fervent even in the intimate innocence of the D Major *Adagio cantabile e con moto* second movement. Each

instrument individually has an opportunity to sing the ardent melody. Two Russian melodies, respectively, inform the latter two movements, an *Allegro moderato* followed by a concluding *Allegro con brio e vivace*. In the third movement, pairs of instruments realize some potent and exotic unison passages. The diversely emotional tenor of the last movement suggests the composer's anxious desire to complete music in a form both alien and attractive to his uniquely honed sensibility. This entire disc comes highly recommended.

QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

theStrad
VOICE OF THE STRING MUSIC WORLD SINCE 1890

March 18, 2019

Quartetto di Cremona wins Franco Buitoni Award 2019

The Italian ensemble receives £25,000 and a specially commissioned glass sculpture



The Italian ensemble Quartetto di Cremona has won the Franco Buitoni Award 2019, receiving £25,000 and a specially commissioned glass sculpture, entitled Suono, made by Venice-based artist Ritsue Mishima. The presentation will take place on 16th April when the quartet is in Milan for a performance at Società del Quartetto.

Created by Borletti-Buitonni Trust founder Ilaria Borletti Buitoni in honour of her late husband Franco (1934-2016), the Award is

for Italian musicians who promote and encourage chamber music at home and throughout the world. The inaugural Franco Buitoni Award was given two years ago to Marta and György Kurtág in recognition of their lifelong contribution to music.

‘I decided to create this award in memory of my husband who loved music so much and who founded BBT with me in 2002,’ commented Ilaria Borletti Buitoni. ‘Lieder and chamber music were his special passions that he also promoted in the role of director of Amici della Musica in his home town of Perugia. So I wanted to focus on Italy for this second award – with Italian musicians who promote and encourage chamber music in Italy and throughout the world. I very much admire Quartetto di Cremona and all they do. They have developed a wonderful reputation worldwide since 2005 when we awarded them a BBT Fellowship.’

The Quartetto di Cremona’s viola player Simone Gramaglia commented: ‘We are so honoured to receive this recognition thanks to Ilaria’s enlightened sensitivity and vision.’ He continued, ‘We know how much Franco did for music and how he loved it. It will be a special pleasure for us to honour Franco’s passion for chamber music as we continue to promote and encourage it in Italy and throughout the world.’



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April 28, 2019

OUT NOW | Quartetto di Cremona's New CD: 'Schubert String Quintet & Quartet'

Audite Records has announced the release of the Quartetto di Cremona's new album: 'Schubert String Quintet & Death and the Maiden String Quartet'



Audite Records has this month announced the release of the Italian-based Quartetto di Cremona's new album: *Schubert: String Quintet & String Quartet 'Death and the Maiden'*.

Recorded with cellist Eckart Runge, the disc features Schubert's String Quintet in C Major – coupled with Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* String Quartet No. 14 in D Minor.

"I can say that love is what inspired the repertoire on this disc ... our love of Schubert's passion for life, love and art ... and for his very personal way of looking at both illness and death ..." violist Simone Gramaglia has told The Violin Channel.

"These two masterpieces together are an intense summary of Schubert's entire life ... and after almost 20 years of playing together as a quartet it is only now that we felt it was perhaps now the right time for us to record them ..." he has said.

"This music is pure beauty ... it speaks directly from the heart and is a consolation for the soul ... our only hope is that listeners will too take away the love."

QUARTETTO DI CREMONA



October 17, 2019

Quartetto di Cremona celebrates Italian music in debut Houston concert

By Lawrence Elizabeth Knox

Within a country of fine wine, there is a city of violins, and just as the world-class vino from the regions of Piedmont, Veneto and Tuscany are an intrinsic part of Italian culture, so too is the craftsmanship of Amati, Stradivari and Guarneri in the history of Cremona.

The small city in northern Italy was home to the stringed-instrument makers from the mid-16th century to the mid-18th century. Yet, their influence is still felt today, particularly in the work of the preeminent Quartetto di Cremona, which was named for the distinguished city in which the string quartet was founded in 2000.

Now based in Genoa, the ensemble's four musicians - violinist Cristiano Gualco, violinist Paolo Andreoli, violist Simone Gramaglia and cellist Giovanni Scaglione - play antique instruments made by the famous European ateliers, sharing the passionate tradition of their musical forefathers and garnering international recognition along the way.

On Monday, the award-winning quartet will make its Houston debut, performing rarely heard gems by Italian composers Boccherini, Puccini, Verdi and Respighi in a program at the Menil Collection, presented by Da Camera. In a second concert the following evening, the pieces written by the latter two men will be joined instead by the works of Austrian composers Mozart and Wolf.

"For us, it's very nice to play composers who are not from Italy, but who tried to write with an Italian style," said Gualco,

who established the small ensemble while studying at Cremona's Accademia Walter Stauffer, where the group now leads a yearly specialization course for string quartets. "Then, you can compare with the real Italian style of Respighi and Verdi, which are two bigger, more substantial pieces."

Unlike Boccherini, a classical composer who influenced the development of the string quartet, Verdi was known for his operatic compositions. In fact, "String Quartet in E Minor," which he premiered in a private concert for friends in his Naples hotel room in 1873, was his first and only venture into chamber music and was not originally intended for publication.

Born 45 years after Verdi, Puccini was also a famous opera composer, but he wrote "Crisantemi," which translates to Chrysanthemums, in memory of his friend Amadeo di Savoia, a former King of Spain who died in 1890. Interestingly, the beautifully poetic, yet sorrowful melodies in the piece were later reused in his opera "Manon Lescaut," Gualco explained.

In comparison to the others, Respighi was somewhat of a "one-hit wonder," and while primarily known for his trilogy of orchestral tone poems, Gualco is fond of his "String Quartet in D Major" for its sophisticated simplicity.

"If you discuss the character of the piece, it really does sound Italian and the music is very natural," he said. "I must say that in some respect, this quartet is



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even stronger than the Verdi quartet because it has more symphonic quality to it that makes it really big and important, whereas Verdi had more of a dry style. The character is more dramatic and more tragic. The Respighi is just beauty.”

Until recently, the Quartetto di Cremona had the opportunity to play four Stradivari instruments that belonged to the celebrated violinist Niccolò Paganini, who was also from Genoa, as a recipient of the Nippon Music Foundation’s Instrument Loan Project.

“For me, it was really a dream,” Gualco said. “It was something really exceptional to have in my hands, the same violin that Paganini played for so many years in concert. It’s like the background of the instrument came to life every day.”

QUARTETTO DI CREMONA



November 13, 2018

Quartetto di Cremona at the Frick

By John Sobel

Italian string quartet Quartetto di Cremona closed out its North American tour with a sold-out concert at the Frick Collection on 11 November. The invigorating program focused on Italian composers from the 18th century right through to modern times.

Formed in 2000, the quartet has developed a tight, fluid ensemble sound as comfortable with the avant-garde as with Boccherini. They opened with the latter's String Quartet Op. 2 No. 6. The assertive accents, emotional dynamics, and overall good cheer of the first movement; the placid "Largo" with its fluid cello lines; and the stately finale all shone with the warm, woody, almost animal sound of the historic instruments these musicians have the good fortune to play. For the past year they have been loving caretakers of a quartet of Stradivarius instruments once owned by Paganini. It's a fitting match - the Quartetto di Cremona's four musicians are from Genoa, hometown of Paganini, and they are also honorary citizens of their namesake city, Stradivari's hometown.

A leap to the late 20th century took us to Lorenzo Ferrero's Tempo di Quartetto. Its contemplative first movement is layered with slightly unexpected harmonies, contrasting whole tone and semitone lines, and melodic quirks. The musicians attacked the salty, rhythmic "Allegro," a kind of angry waltz, with utter conviction. They made the third movement, designated "Slow Rock," a

romantic ride tilted with occasional blue notes.

Equally appealing was the "Italian Serenade" of Hugo Wolf, the lone non-Italian composer on the program. A countryside romp opening with fast triplets, it has moments of peril and stormy weather that resolve into a delicate dance of pizzicatos and syncopations. The varied colorations the musicians drew from their instruments benefited from the excellent acoustics of the mansion-museum's Music Room.

So did Fabio Vacchi's "Movimento di Quartetto," an avant-garde late-20th-century work that recalled abstract expressionism (a style of art you won't find on this museum's walls). Muted, misty dissonant chords erupted into explosive tutti outbursts, the musicians wielding their skill and conviction in an expression of great artistry.

They devoted the second half to music by composers best known for opera. Puccini's 1890 "Crisantemi" came across as romantically Italian with moments of Beethovenian angst. It served as an appetizer for Verdi's rich 1903 Quartet in E minor. The musicians gave the piece's melodic first movement, with its fugue-like passages, operatic momentum. They went on to infuse the ballet-like second with lush feeling, their instruments sounding especially beautiful in rhythmic unison passages.

Through years of playing together the Quartetto di Cremona has developed the feel of a single voice, and remarkably so. But individual parts shine too, as with



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the charming cello melody in the trio section of the Verdi's fiery third movement. More fireworks followed in the "Scherzo Fuga" finale. The audience had the musicians back for two encores. The Quartetto di Cremona has a busy concert schedule. They are in Europe for the remainder of this year. I hope they cross the Atlantic again soon. You can

find several of the works on this concert program on their album Italian Journey. They have also recorded a complete Beethoven cycle. The Frick Collection presents many fine artists in its long-running concert series. This was my first visit to the Music Room at the Frick. It won't be my last.

QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

ConcertoNet.com

November 12, 2018

Italian Chambers

By Harry Rolnick

“To copy the truth can be a good thing, but to invent the truth is much much better.”

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)

If God (or this writer) had to select the most appropriate music for a crispy cloudless Manhattan autumn afternoon, with pigeons cooing and dogs jumping and babies smiling, well...it would have to be Luigi Boccherini's *C Major Quartet*. So miracle of miracles, that was *exactly* how the young deft lyrical Quartetto di Cremona started their recital this afternoon at the Frick Museum.

Not that I had heard that particular work previously. But every single work of Boccherini has that lithe ease, that balance of color and shade, of Iberian pictorialism (most of his creative life was in Spain) and Italian song.

In fact, some years ago, rather than visiting Lucca for the churches of the Puccini family, this writer made a beeline to the house where Boccherini was born. Puccini came second.

Yes, this was lightweight stuff, but to the Quartetto di Cremona, it was lifted up like a Raphael angel. True, the Quartet resides now in Genoa. But all four of them play Stradivariuses—and Cremona, with its unique forests, was where Stradivarius and his student made their great fiddles.

The Quartetto di Cremona is not a Quartetto Italiano, which was at

the top of the Western European chamber music pantheon until a few years ago. But the Quartetto di Cremona, created 18 years ago, is equally diverse (their complete Beethoven quartets was given rave reviews), has the same splendid technical prowess. And, perhaps because of their choices yesterday, their personalities are penetrate into all their music.

The choices were 100 percent Italian (save for Hugo Wolf, whose *Italian Serenade* makes him an honorary citizen). While loath to say this, the satisfaction of all this music eschewed the depth and heavyweight quartet-playing of a Brahms or Beethoven. Yet in each work, the four players (three of them standing) showed the joy of lyricism at its finest.

Yes, that Boccherini *C Major Quartet* was a short three movements, but each movement was special. The opening *Allegro spiritoso* could have been pleasant minor Mozart, save for some unexpected Spanish slashing of the fiddles at unexpected moments. The final *Minuet* was gossamer-thin, stopping just when it was starting.

A bijou, a glistening bijou.

Two contemporary short works followed. The 68-year-old Lorenzo Ferrero wrote a three-movement *Tempi di Quartetto*, the first movement dedicated to the memory of publisher-editor David



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Huntley. It was slow, yet never doleful. The melody was engaging, the performance a tribute to simple inspiration. The following *Allegro* had the rollicking six-eight meter of a square dance. A complicated square dance played with simple joy. Finally *Slow Rock* did not sound like any "rock" I ever heard. And while not minimalist, the modulations were definitely Philip Glass.

Far more moody was 70-year-old Fabio Vacchi, whose *Movimento di quartetto* was the only sheerly emotional work on the program, varying from funereal to riotous, with a complicated structure, yet always accessible measures.

The most familiar work on this first half was Hugo Wolf's *Italian Serenade*. Its popularity is perhaps due to quasi-schmaltzy tunes played with excess retards, coming unhappily close to Tchaikovsky's similar work.

The Quartetto di Cremona didn't fall for that. Perhaps because they *are* Italian, perhaps because they are as much products of German-Austrian music as Italian, their was literal rather than light. Not that I was nonplussed by its relatively serious performance. In fact, where one usually feels like dancing, this time I realized just how wonderfully lyrical was Hugo Wolf, a post-Schubert melodist.

That first half was unexpected and for the most part, showed four players with lovely colors. No excesses. (in fact the only solo legerdemain was First Violinist Cristiano Gualco's solos in the final work, Verdi's *Quartet*), simply splendid playing.

The second half started with Giacomo

Puccini's *Chrysanthemums*, which he wrote in one night. While Puccini wrote more than operas (his religious music is very touching, giving due credit to his three generations of church composers), not even the Quartetto di Cremona could make this more than a short sentimental bagatelle. Never, though, saccharine. The Cremona artists played it with more aplomb than it deserved.

The last work was Verdi's only string quartet. He wrote it because he was bored. (His *Aida* premiere was postponed, and he was stuck in a hotel room with nothing to do.) Verdi never took it seriously, didn't want it to be published, but modestly allowed a few friends to play it.

The Quartetto di Cremona had no problems with the first two movements, nor did we. It simply was comfortable.

The third *Prestissimo* showed exactly how much power this ensemble has. They let it explode like a *perpetuum mobile*.

But the finale was a tribute to Verdi himself. Offhand, I can recall only two of his fugues: one from *Falstaff*, the other the eight-part *Sanctus* from the *Requiem*.

The last movement here was a fugue/scherzo and the most exciting music of the afternoon. Granted, all the work of the Quartetto di Cremona was splendid, but for those who think of Verdi as an operatic melodist, this finale showed a man—and a quartet—as masters of their craft. And for our sakes on this hallowed Fall afternoon, maestros of their art.

QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

theStrad
VOICE OF THE STRING MUSIC WORLD SINCE 1890

January 2018

Cremona Quartet: Beethoven String Quartets, vol. VIII

By Julian Haylock



The Cremona Quartet completes its Beethoven series with a fine coupling, combining exemplary technique and intonational purity with an interpretive acuity that strips away 19th-century rhetoric while avoiding the pitfalls of sounding merely ‘historically informed’. In the early D major Quartet the players convey an affectionate sense of playfulness with a deft cantabile touch and subtly inflected vibrato that ensure phrases tingle with vitality. The composer’s penchant for sudden dynamic change is signalled appropriately yet is never allowed to interrupt the musical flow. If the general tendency in op.18 no.3 is to emphasise the music’s earthy Haydn inheritance, the Cremona tends

more towards Mozartian grace with captivating results.

Whereas in op.18 no.3 tempos are generally on the relaxed side, in the ‘Harp’ Quartet – most notably in the opening movement and scherzo – the Cremona keeps things moving. The scherzo, with its stabbing Sturm und Drang sforzandos, even suggests a hint of breathlessness as the music hurtles along with a seemingly unstoppable surge. Other ensembles may have infused the theme-and-variations finale with more overt warmth and charm, although in context the Cremona’s refusal to gild the lily feels entirely authentic and appropriate.



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VOICE OF THE STRING MUSIC WORLD SINCE 1890

January 18, 2018

Sol Gabetta and Cremona Quartet among winners of International Classical Music Awards



Sol Gabetta's recording of the Elgar and Martinů cello concertos and the final two instalments in the Cremona Quartet's complete Beethoven series have picked up awards in the concerto and chamber music categories respectively of the International Classical Music Awards (ICMA).

The ICMA's, now in their eighth edition, are voted on by a jury of 17 editors of European classical music magazines and websites.

The Cremona Quartet's recording was reviewed in The Strad as 'combining exemplary technique and intonational purity with an interpretive acuity that strips away 19th-century rhetoric while avoiding the pitfalls of sounding merely "historically informed".'

Gabetta's 'exhilarating Martinů and melancholy Elgar concertos' – as reviewed in The Strad – were recorded live with the Berlin Philharmonic under Krzysztof Urbanski and Simon Rattle respectively.



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QUARTETTO DI CREMONA



May 17, 2018

A Record-setting Display of Antonio Stradivari Instruments at the Library

By David Plylar



Library of Congress photographer Shawn Miller captured this stunning shot of *ten* Stradivari instruments—and the Quartetto di Cremona—during a special “Strad Shoot” in the glorious Great Hall of the Library of Congress Thomas Jefferson Building.

The occasion was an exciting prelude to a May 11 concert by Italy’s esteemed Quartetto di Cremona, co-presented by the Library and the Embassy of Italy and Italian Cultural Institute Washington DC. As the Quartetto performs regularly on four beautiful instruments made by

Antonio Stradivari—the “Paganini Quartet”—this concert offered a unique opportunity to bring them together with the Library’s six priceless Strads, for a record-setting display of the great maker’s art.

LC instrument curator Carol Lynn Ward Bamford noted that the afternoon united not only ten of these remarkable instruments under one roof, but also three of his violas, an impressive showing from a slim number of only 12 still in existence.



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Arrayed on the table are instruments from the Library's collection of rare Cremonese bowed string instruments: in the front row, from left to right: the "Castelbarco" violin (1699); the "Ward" violin (1700); and the "Betts" violin from Antonio Stradivari's "Golden Period" (1704). In the second row, the "Tuscan-Medici" viola (1690) on loan to the Library from the Tuscan Corporation and the "Cassavetti" viola (1727). At the back is the "Castelbarco" cello (1697). These instruments, donated to the Library in 1935 and 1936 by Gertrude Clarke Whittall, are pristine and superbly maintained, in peak playing condition. Each year since 1936, they have been heard in the Library's Antonio Stradivari Memorial Concert—to our knowledge, the longest-running commemoration by an institution—and visiting musicians often have the enviable pleasure of playing them in performance.

The Quartetto di Cremona members are holding the "Paganini Quartet" instruments once owned by the virtuoso violinist Nicolò (as he spelled it) Paganini, and currently made available to the ensemble by the Nippon Music Foundation.

Simone Gramaglia is at the left front, with the Stradivari 1731 Viola "Paganini," and Giovanni Scaglione is at the left rear, with the Stradivari 1736 Cello "Paganini." At the right front, Cristiano Gualco holds the Stradivari 1727 Violin "Paganini," and Paolo Andreoli, at the right rear, holds the Stradivari 1680 Violin "Paganini".

The artists were delighted to be able to try out the Library's instruments briefly before rehearsing for their 8 pm concert. Hearing these magnificent instruments in the equally magnificent environment of the Great Hall was a memorable moment for the small group of Library and Embassy staff taking photographs—and three members of the U.S. Capitol Police providing discreet security.

To open the concert that evening, Music Division Chief Susan Vita welcomed the audience with the Ambassador of Italy to the U.S., Armando Varricchio. For the Ambassador, the concert and the Library's special Stradivari photo op were "an amazing tribute to Italian music and creativity and to the strong cultural bond with the U.S." The Quartetto di Cremona played works by two Italian masters who rarely ventured in the realm of chamber music, Giacomo Puccini's *Crisantemi* (Chrysanthemums) and Giuseppe Verdi's Quartet in E minor, as well as Ludwig van Beethoven's transcendental String Quartet in A minor, op. 132.

To honor the connection to Nicolò Paganini, a few fascinating items from the Music Division's huge collection of Paganiniana, also the gift of Gertrude Clarke Whittall, were on display in the Coolidge Auditorium foyer cases. Manuscripts of works by Paganini were on display, as well as iconography—images and playbills—and his "secret red book," documenting tour expenses, travel notes, and his personal pasta recipe.

QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

theStrad

VOICE OF THE STRING MUSIC WORLD SINCE 1890

September 28, 2017

Quartet of Stradivarius instruments once owned by Paganini back in action

Quartetto di Cremona takes on full set of Strads previously played by the Hagen and Tokyo Quartets



In a presentation yesterday at the Museo del Violino in Cremona, the Quartetto di Cremona took on the loan of the 'Paganini Quartet', four instruments by Stradivari previously played by the Paganini and Cleveland Quartets and more recently by the Tokyo and Hagen Quartets.

The instruments were known to be treasured by Paganini in his lifetime

The violins are the 1727 'Comte Cozio di Salabue' and 1680 'Desaint'; the viola, one of just 13 surviving by Stradivari, is the

'Mendelssohn' of 1731, the tone of which so inspired Paganini that he commissioned Berlioz to write *Harold in Italy* for it; and the cello is the 1736 'Ladenburg', thought to be the maker's last.

The instruments were separated after Paganini's death and only reassembled in the 1950s by dealer Emil Herrmann in New York. They were acquired by the Nippon Music Foundation in 1994 and were played by the Tokyo Quartet until it disbanded in 2013, and subsequently by the Hagen Quartet.

Simone Gramaglia, violist of the quartet, noted a particular poignancy to receiving the instruments in the city they were made, as well as further satisfying coincidences: 'Even if the name of our ensemble is "Quartetto di Cremona" we all are from Genova, hometown of Paganini.

'Moreover we are honorary citizens of Cremona, hometown of Stradivari.

'The opportunity then to perform on the "Paganini Quartet" acquires many deep meanings for us. We are thankful to the Nippon Music Foundation to give us what we consider a unique and great privilege in a musician's life.'



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QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

The Herald

July 28, 2016

Quartetto di Cremona, Beethoven Complete String Quartets, Vol VI (Audite)

By Michael Tumelty

With two great performances in their established pattern of coupling one early and one late quartet, the Quartetto di Cremona's magnificent survey of Beethoven's complete String Quartets moves securely and unquestionably into mastery.

The lightness and deftness (always with power in its drive) of their fantastic interpretation of the fifth of the opus 18 quartets represents yet another call for the stature of these 'early' quartets by Beethoven to be reconsidered. Not only did the young composer have technical command at his fingertips, his powers of musical characterisation, as revealed by the Cremona Quartet, are astoundingly inventive, from the acute dynamic contrasts deftly handled throughout, to the riotous cartoon capers and near-Tom and Jerry tail-chasing antics in the finale. Who said that Beethoven had no sense of humour! There was wicked mischief within that gigantic brain. The great B flat Quartet opus 130, with its rollickingly-benign alternative finale, is pure aural and intellectual magic with the flawlessly-judged pacing adopted by the group: the finale is wonderfully cathartic following the gently-aching humanity of the Cavatina: such warm playing; such perfection on a silver disc; what a glory this is.



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QUARTETTO DI CREMONA



September 15, 2016

The Cremona Quartet interpret Beethoven's chamber works

By Michael Tanner

This is the most exciting new disc of string quartet playing that I have come across for a long time. It opens with one of Beethoven's least performed or mentioned works, his Quintet Op. 29, for which Lawrence Dutton of the Emerson Quartet joins the Cremona Quartet. It is not a masterwork, but it goes naturally with the Op. 18 Quartets in its bold and charming way.

What really matters, though, is the stupendous performance of the Quartet No. 15 in A minor, the one late quartet that I have found hardest to fully respond to until now. The Cremonans have an individual style of playing. It comes as no surprise that they were coached by Piero Farulli of the Quartetto Italiano: they seem to have taken his lessons to extremes. Their playing is characterised by strenuous lyricism, the individual players seeming almost to go their own way, as if they were a quartet of singers with strong personalities. They give this strange music a choral quality, which in the great Song of Thanksgiving, that immense slow movement, reaches almost unbearable levels of intensity. The alternating *andante* sections, which I have often felt, like Stravinsky, were like the layers of a five-decker Dagwood sandwich, here are necessary to relieve the tension. The almost mad, desperate finale is annihilating. Altogether a revelation.

QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

GRAMOPHONE

April 2013

'Italian Journey'

Boccherini String Quartet, Op 2 No 6

Respighi String Quartet Puccini Crisantemi

Verdi String Quartet

Cremona Quartet

Klanglogo ℗ KL1400 (71' • DDD)



A quartet for Verdi year with other Italians for company

It is very appealing to be taken on a tour of Italy through Respighi, Puccini, Verdi and Boccherini by way of chamber music, rather than opera. It feels so much more sunny and joyful, though there is still an ineluctable sense that there is as much a singer's line in what the Cremona Quartet are playing as there is a string player's. They have a similar sinuous sound to the Quartetto Italiano, and something of the same Mediterranean temperament that made the Italiano's listeners so devoted during their 35-year lifetime. It's a rare blend: breadth of sound and capriciousness combined with perfect tuning and ensemble (the little-known Respighi Quartet in D has the players sounding absolutely of one voice, especially in the opening movement, which is as graphic an illustration of the Emilia-Romagna countryside as Elgar's is of the English landscape).

Although their sound may bring out all the innate Italianness in these pieces, playing them as naturally as an Italian singer would sing an aria in grand Italian opera, they are still surprisingly light with their vibrato and never push the boundaries of what is appropriate intensity of expression. In fact, there may be many threads that sew this disc together, but the most striking is that at all times, whatever the tempo, texture, voicing or general disposition, you never lose the feeling that you are being sung, not played, to. Whether or not this is due to the age-old notion that the Italians are a garrulous bunch, listening to this recording making the music sound so immediate (particularly beautifully concentrated in the Verdi quartet) is nothing less than life-affirming. **Caroline Gill**



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