



Quatuor Bennewitz

/// Dvořák CD release ///



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Magnificent Dvořák Played by the Bennewitz Quartet

by Martin Jemelka

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The still youthful **Bennewitz Quartet**, now consisting of Jakub Fišer, Štěpán Ježek, Jiří Pinkas a Štěpán Doležal, has been active on concert stages for close to twenty years. It is more often abroad than in the Czech Republic which, unfortunately, has been customary in the life of Czech quartet ensembles now for generations . If a Czech listener looks for commercial recordings of this ensemble, they can reach as far back as the recital with the clarinetist Ludmila Peterková (Supraphon 2011), or to recordings published by foreign companies, be it their Smetana CD (Coviello Classics 2009), or their Janáček CD with Bartók's String Quartet No. 4 (Coviello Classics 2007). The very first Dvořák recording by the Bennewitz Quartet (Hänssler Classics 98.641, 2012) received deserved attention: this double album contained a recording of Dvořák's both vocal and instrumental *Cypresses* B. 11 & 152 (1865/1887), accompanied by six modern adaptations of the *Cypresses* not arranged by the composer himself.

After two years, the instrumental *Cypresses* are now followed by a new studio recording, this time containing Dvořák's String Quartets in E flat major (1879) and G major (1896). Although they are separated by as many as a hundred compositions by Dvořák and seventeen creative years, what links them is their sensual sound quality and strongly

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emotional message, particularly when compared to the more objective Brahms- or Beethoven-like Quartets in D minor and C major (No. 9 & 11), or perhaps to the minimalistic American Quartet in F flat major and the modernistic Quartet in A flat major (1896) which completed Dvořák's quartet oeuvre. Quartets No. 10 and 13 are not often combined on the same music recording, so already the mere sight of the CD cover made me relish their dramaturgically interesting connection. Its qualities are emphasized by the rather definite tonal qualities and the exemplary accompanying text whose succinct lucidity and informative value is superior to many contemporary Czech productions. Naturally, what is the most valuable is the recording itself, contributing much to the contemporary interest in Dvořák's quartet oeuvre, whether we have in mind the recently completed comprehensive project of the Zemlinsky Quartet (Praga Digitals), or the still ongoing project of the German Vogler Quartet (CPO).

While with the Smetana project, Bennewitz' heirs attracted attention with their unbridled interpretational youth, their Dvořák flows in measured tempi, breathes with very finely nuanced dynamics, and captivates the listener with many details in middle voices and counter voices. In both quartets, the Bennewitz Quartet rightly accentuates their symphonic ambitions, lyrical drive, and melancholy elegiac halts. There are not many recordings which lavish the first movement of the Slavonic Quartet with such a broad tempo (11:28) and fine details, as if you are browsing through an old photographic album, afraid of turning its leaves because they might crumble in your hands because of their age. However, Dvořák's score definitely does not crumble in the hands of the Bennewitz Quartet: they play with delicate agogic nuances in the quartet's middle movements, too, before eventually performing a genial stomping dance in the finale which belongs to Dvořák's so-called Slavonic Period.

The recording of the composer's final quartet is magnificent, with its luscious sound and very finely nuanced dynamics, covered with a melancholy veil in the colors of Indian summer. In particular, the second movement and the second theme of the first movement, which are almost caressed by the musicians, testify to the maturity of this quartet ensemble which, in contrast to the unrestrained Haas Quartet (Supraphon 2010), has not compromised its lyrical approach and remained true to it in a composition as complex and instrumentally ambitious as this Dvořák masterpiece. Perhaps only the Prague String Quartet (Deutsche Grammophon/Supraphon 1973) or the Panocha Quartet (Supraphon 1984) have similarly managed to balance all the shades of the String Quartet No. 13 in G major,

not to mention the recent recording by the Zemlinsky Quartet, almost old-fashioned in its agogics (Praga Digitals 2012), or maybe the virtuoso performance of the Artemis Quartet (Virgin Classics 2003). The listener can only look forward to future Dvořák recordings by the Bennewitz Quartet, or at least immediately listen to this recording once again.

<http://www.casopisharmonie.cz/recenze/skvostny-dvorak-bennewitzova-kvarteta-breznovy-tip-harmonie.html>

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