

Gramophone Review

Boccherini Quintets for Guitar and String Quartet

Authentic Boccherini offers musical delights, though short on excitement

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Author: William Yeoman

Given that there are only two other complete recordings of Boccherini's guitar quintets available, and those having been around for some years, this new set (of which these are the first two volumes) is welcome indeed – all the more so for being an entirely Spanish production.

Boccherini was a prolific composer of music in a distinctive Rococo style that relies less on thematic development than on melodic decoration and textural elaboration. Of the 12 guitar quintets, arranged by Boccherini from his own works for the Marquis de Benavent, a keen amateur guitarist, only nine survive. The arrangements derive from various sources: string quartets and quintets, and a piano quintet.

Guitarist Joan Carles Martínez founded the Almodis Chamber Ensemble in 1995; its previous release 'L'entorn de Vivaldi' features Baroque music arranged for guitar quintet. So there's a definite interest in historically informed performance and it's evident here in the rather dry string tone and minimal vibrato, the resulting sound approaching Europa Galante and Real Cámara's period-instrument performances. Like other ensembles before it, the Almodis make use of castanets in the famous Fandango from No 4; unlike other ensembles, it also uses them in the Polacca of the Quintet No 2 in G, which may raise a few eyebrows yet works wonderfully. But how does the newcomer shape up musically?

The Almodis are not short on musicality, and their delineation of Boccherini's ornamental style is clear and attractive; but the broad tempi emphasise the composer's Rococo elegance while robbing the more lively movements of excitement. Still, there's much here to enjoy: the nuances of Boccherini's style are savoured to the full and the overall sense of ensemble is excellent. Recorded sound, too, is good, and the packaging is extremely attractive, let down only by the woeful English translations of the texts. I look forward to the third and final volume.

AllMusic Review - Rating: 4*/5*

Luigi Boccherini: Quintets Per a guitarra i Quartet de corda en Re Major,

G.448 & G.449

Review by Blair Sanderson

Surviving only in secondhand copies, Luigi Boccherini's Quintets for guitar and strings raise a few questions of his intentions. Clearly adapted from other pieces for string quintet, string quartet, and piano quintet, there is no question of the Guitar Quintets' origins, nor of Boccherini's purpose in arranging them for the enjoyment of the Marqués de Benavent. But the possibility of errors in the aforementioned copies and changes wrought by later editors make performance a matter of investigative scholarship. The historically informed Almodis Chamber Ensemble -- guitarist Juan Carles Martínez, violinists David Morata and Ferran de la Varga, violist Andrea Mameli, and cellist Iñaki Etxepare -- has resolved the debated points in Boccherini's Quintets, and prepared a series of CDs devoted to authentic performances of them, of which this is the first. The ensemble's research admits the use of castanets in the Fandango movement of the Quintet No. 4 in D major, G. 448 -- perhaps a gratuitous addition, but attested adequately enough in documents to satisfy Almodis. If discovered, would the original manuscript show otherwise? Possibly, but this seems to be the kind of novelty Boccherini would have relished, and listeners may find the effect charming, along with the group's light, spirited playing that makes both Quintets agreeable diversions.