

Gubaidulina

New

String Quartets – No. 1; No. 2; No. 3;
No. 4. Reflections on the theme B-A-C-H.

Stamic Quartet (Jindřich Pazdera, Josef Kekula,
violins; Jan Pěruška, viola; Petr Hejný, cello).

Supraphon SU4078-2 (full price, 1 hour 3 minutes).

Website www.supraphon.com. Producer Michal
Macourek. Engineer Jan Lžičář. Dates June and
August 2011.

Comparisons:

String Quartets Nos. 1-3:

Danish Qt (CPO) 999 064-2 (1992)

String Quartet No. 4:

Kronos Qt (Nonesuch) 7559-79310-2 (1994)



This disc is
an essential
investment for
any admirer of
Gubaidulina. It
has only one

near 'rival', the excellent recording by the
Danish Quartet of the first three quartets
and the String Trio. In addition, the Kronos
Quartet has previously recorded the Fourth
Quartet, as part of one of its characteristically
eccentric mixed programmes.

The first thing to say is that the members
of the Stamic Quartet clearly love this music,
and they play every note with the kind of
rapt intensity that only a profound knowledge
of the music's inner structure can bring.
Listen, for example, to the way they shape
the first three minutes or so of Quartet
No. 1. In those few mysterious gestures, built
from a very narrow range of musical material,
they hint at the discovery to come of an
entire world. The same is true of the opening
of Quartet No. 2, in which the detail of
every attack – which is the actual material
from which the work starts – is not only
audible but so clearly understood as music,
not as mere gesture (a more common
misperception of Gubaidulina's work than
one might think).

Comparison of the first three quartets with the Danish Quartet's recording reveals two world-class ensembles with broadly similar approaches. The Czech players are slightly faster in all three works, and I would say that they prefer overall a slightly higher dynamic level and a more integrated overall sound. The Danes are a little more restrained, with the result that contrasting material is sometimes given a stronger profile: this is particularly noticeable in the Third Quartet.

The magnificent String Quartet No. 4, with its dramatic use of tape, 'shadowing' the live performers, and the remarkable sound produced by bouncing rubber balls on the strings of the instruments, is given a stunning performance. In fact, it clearly outclasses that by the work's dedicatees, the Kronos. It is vibrant and passionate where the Kronos's version is by comparison cool and understated, and the recorded sound is much warmer than Nonesuch's.

The *Reflections on the theme B-A-C-H*, written for the Brentano Quartet in 2002, take off from Bach's unfinished fugue at the end of *The Art of Fugue*, and I use the words 'take off' advisedly: this is music in a state of constant aspiration, an apparently eternal ascent to the ether that makes it hard to believe that it is only just over seven minutes in duration. The Stamic Quartet once again turns in a performance of sublime intensity. Very highly recommended. *Ivan Moody*
