

Maybe the first movement lacks the last degree of tension in its more dramatic moments, but the *Allegro calmo* indication is taken to heart in a spacious opening and fade-away close. There's certainly no lack of bite in the central *Vivace*, which is played with visceral intensity. And the expansive progress of the concluding *Chacony* – Britten's tribute to Purcell – confirms this as one of the most successful recordings of the work on disc.

The rest of the disc features juvenilia and student works, of which only the *Three Divertimenti* from 1936 have had any general exposure. We also have the *D major Quartet* written in 1931 (and revised by the composer late in life) and the first recording of a delightful *Miniature Suite* composed when Britten was just 15 and paying debt to his Classical and Romantic models from Haydn to Elgar (the opening movement, 'Novelette', is an unmistakable rip-off of the 'W.N.' portrait of the *Enigma Variations*). The Emperor's playing throughout these works is vivid and resourceful, and the Potten Hall recording has the balance and depth to project it all faithfully.

MATTHEW RYE

**DEBUSSY** Suite for cello and orchestra (arr. Beamish) **RAVEL** Deux mélodies hébraïques (arr. Tognetti)

**PROKOFIEV** Concertino for cello and orchestra op.132 (arr. Blok)

**BLOCH** From Jewish Life (arr. Palmer)

**Steven Isserlis (cello) Tapiola Sinfonietta/Gábor Takács-Nagy**  
BIS SACD-1782



The ancestry of the four orchestrations is detailed in the disc's booklet notes, though the work masquerading under the name of Debussy is highly questionable. At the age of 19 he composed a Suite for cello and orchestra, but only the *Intermezzo* survived, in a version for cello and piano. From this the British composer Sally Beamish has taken many liberties in arriving at a performing score in five movements. From the orchestral texture it could well be Lalo, but to my ears it is hardly Debussy.

Richard Tognetti and Steven Isserlis take liberties, too, with Ravel; Kabalevsky's much-used orchestration of Prokofiev's

incomplete *Concertino* is replaced by a more transparent backdrop from Vladimir Blok; and for the Bloch, Christopher Palmer introduces an orchestra and changes the order of movements.

All were arranged at Isserlis's behest, so it would be churlish, in such outstanding performances, not to accept such well-intended reconstructions. Indeed, he draws the most gorgeous singing tone from the 1726 Stradivari once played by Zara Nelsova, and in every technical aspect he is immaculate. If at times he lingers with evident affection, he nevertheless shapes the works to perfection. The Tapiola Sinfonietta makes a significant contribution in a well-balanced recorded sound.

DAVID DENTON

**FOERSTER** String Quartets nos.1–5, String Quintet op.3, The Prayer, Erinnerung, Allegro giocoso  
**Stamic Quartet, Jiří Hudec (double bass) Jana Boušková (harp)**  
SUPRAPHON SU 4050-2 (TWO DISCS)



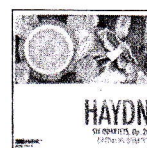
Josef Bohuslav Foerster (1859–1951) was born when musical Romanticism was being revitalised by the gradual emergence of a series of national schools, most crucially in Bohemia. By the end of his long life the musical world had changed beyond recognition and was poised to receive another shot in the arm from the postwar avant-garde. Foerster's first three quartets of 1888, 1893 and 1907 respectively are saturated by the combined influences of Smetana and Dvořák. Incredibly, although his own creative voice had well and truly emerged by the time he composed his Fourth (1944) and Fifth (1951) quartets, there is little here to suggest any awareness of the tonal meltdown of half a century before, let alone that Schoenberg, Bartók, Stravinsky or even Janáček had ever existed.

This is therefore a cycle that possesses an unusual degree of stylistic cohesion and the players of the Stamic Quartet rightly imbue the Fifth Quartet with the same qualities of tonal warmth, lyrical charm and gentle ecstasy that work so well for the First, composed over 60 years beforehand. In their highly sensitive hands, every phrase of this music rings true through a combination of tip-top intonation and emotional

imperativeness that effortlessly holds the attention. Even where, as in the sublime opening movement of the Fourth Quartet, the music's overtly lyrical impulse can lead to sense of structural diffuseness, the Stamic players beguile the ears with an exultant quality that makes each musical event feel like a vital inevitability. The engineering combines warmth, atmosphere and internal detail to perfection.

JULIAN HAYLOCK

**HAYDN** String Quartets op.20 nos.1–6  
**Daedalus Quartet**  
BRIDGE 9326A/B (TWO DISCS)



Haydn's op.20 quartets come from a period when he was developing a more dramatic approach to the medium, and the

American-based Daedalus Quartet reflects this in faithfully observing his dynamic markings, but without the exaggerations that are becoming too prevalent. If the players show a degree of urgency in the outer movements of no.1, their tempos throughout have an organic quality that allows the music to grow and flow in long and naturally shaped phrases, a fact that makes the opening *Moderato* of no.2 so engaging. They also seek every opportunity to bring out the humour in the music – the bustling outer movements of no.3 are particularly attractive in this respect.

But the slow movements are less than totally riveting, particularly that of no.3, where the players' otherwise immaculate intonation is sometimes questionable. By way of compensation, the sprightly cross-rhythms in the short *zingarese* minuet of no.4 and their stately approach to the same movement in no.5 are perfectly judged.

In no.6 they pull all their attributes together, with the unhurried slow movement sounding charming and the final fugue flitting around the players with that same immaculate balance they exhibit throughout the set.

Such unaffected and well-played readings, recorded in an intimate ambience, should demand attention, but they enter a crowded market, with the much-recommended Mosaïques Quartet (*Astrée Naïve*) probing a little deeper below the music's surface and introducing a more imaginative expressive freedom.

DAVID DENTON