



MOZART

String Quartet No. 15

MENDELSSOHN

String Quartet No. 2

Chiaroscuro Quartet

Aparté AP 092 58:06 mins

BBC Music Direct

£14.99

The combination of gut strings, little vibrato and a slight rhythmic hesitancy in the accompanying chords gives the opening of Mozart's String Quartet No. 15, K421 an otherworldly feel, appropriate to the *sotto voce* marking. It makes the contrast four bars later very striking as the sudden loud dynamic pierces the air. This performance doesn't attempt to sound gratuitously beautiful, but digs into the tragic substance of the music, and the players aren't afraid to bring flexibility to the pulse, so there's always an urgency of momentum. The following *Andante* has the rhythmic poise to set off the shocking chordal interruptions later in the movement, and the Minuet is violent in its outer sections and teasing in the Scotch snaps in the trio. Sometimes I could do with more of the first violin in the balance, especially in the macabre dance variations in the finale, but the overall concept is fresh and disturbing.

There's more warmth in the Mendelssohn, with greater use of vibrato and no shortage of drama, although for sheer weight of sound in the passionate, driven outer movements the recent Tetzlaff Quartet recording (on modern instruments; reviewed March 2015) packs more of a punch. The Chiaroscuro Quartet do pace the music well though, and the slow movement with its faster central section has a coherent structure and use of instrumental colour. And the delightful 'Intermezzo', also with an *allegro* interlude, displays the poise which is one of this group's strongest suits. *Martin Cotton*

PERFORMANCE

★★★★

RECORDING

★★★★

To order CDs call **BBC Music Direct**