

RETURNING TO MOZART

TULLY POTTER enjoys a set documenting the 2006 Music@Menlo festival



Menlo stars: members of the Orion Quartet

Geographical nincompoops like myself need to know that Menlo is 'located on the San Francisco peninsula'. Its festival was founded in 2003 by the husband-and-wife team of David Finckel and Wu Han, and judging by these 31 performances from 2006, the standard of performance is astounding (**Music@Menlo** 2006; seven discs, www.musicatmenlo.org).

Pride of place must go to the Mozart disc featuring the Orion Quartet. Five of Mozart's arrangements of Bach preludes and fugues (Todd Phillips leading) are followed by a fine Adagio and Fugue K546 (Daniel Phillips leading). Todd leads the E flat major Quartet K428, which takes a few bars to get into tempo but is otherwise superb; and Daniel leads a Classically shaped C major Quintet with Paul Neubauer as guest violist.

My other favourite is Colin Carr's moody reading of Britten's Third Solo Cello Suite, which culminates in a heartrending passacaglia. Brahms's C minor Piano Quartet (Gilbert Kalish, Jennifer Frautschi, Neubauer, Finckel) is on the same exalted plane, the players getting right under the skin of this tormented, stormy music, and Finckel holding the line beautifully in the Largo.

Messiaen's *Quatuor pour la fin du temps*, with Kalish and clarinettist Anthony McGill, is most impressive: Jorja Fleezanis loses her superhuman control on the violin part only fractionally in the final movement; and Carr has a good feeling for the cello movement – he would help his cause by sometimes not starting his vibrato late.

My only real disappointment comes on the same disc. Mozart's Clarinet Quintet (McGill, Fleezanis, Frautschi, Carlamaria Rodriguez, Carr) is too full of unsightly bulges; and at other times the phrasing is perfunctory. We hear so many well-balanced renderings of this work that a festival run-through will not do.

Shostakovich's Cello Sonata is well played by the Wu Han–Finckel duo but I am not wholly convinced by the tempo changes. His Second Trio (Derek Han, Ani Kavafian, Peter Wiley) is better proportioned, even if it lacks the last ounce of rhythmic oomph. Dvořák's 'Dumky' (Wu Han, Kavafian, Finckel) finds moments of magic, especially in the wonderful fourth dumka, and is loved by the audience.

I must mention two more Mozart readings: a sterling G minor Piano Quartet (Wu Han, Kavafian, Rodriguez, Wiley) and a chamber version of the E flat major Piano Concerto K449, played by Jeffrey Kahane with the veteran Joseph Silverstein leading the string quintet and Scott Pingel on double bass. Recording quality is uniformly good.