

GRAMOPHONE

THE WORLD'S BEST CLASSICAL MUSIC REVIEWS

Est 1923

MOZART String Quartets, Vol 4 (Armida Quartet)

[View record and artist details](#)

Author: David Threasher

Gramophone caught up with the Armida Quartet's Mozart cycle almost a year ago, with a two-disc set (Vol 3, 4/21) pairing three early quartets by the teenage composer with three from the years of his artistic maturity in Vienna. The fourth volume returns to a single-disc format but again covers the range of Mozart's quartet output, with a trio of works from his first set of six (1772-73) and the *Dissonance* Quartet, the last of the group he dedicated to Haydn in the mid-1780s.



Once again, the Armida are fine guides to the less familiar early works. This is entertainment music pure and simple, in which Mozart took on (and beat) at their own game the quartet composers he encountered on his Italian journeys of 1769-73. The Armida respond to the many moods to be found within, whether it be robust playfulness (K157's first movement), beauty (K159's expansive opening *Andante*), pulsating drive (the same work's G minor *Allegro*) or impishness (K160's closing *Presto*). The recorded sound is generous and enveloping, the attack unanimous and the tone full-bodied, with judicious and sparing vibrato adding colour.

By the time he approached the age of 30, Mozart had become a very different composer, and the works from his final years demonstrate the results of his youthful experience and experimentation, operating on a larger scale both structurally and emotionally. The Armida's approach to the *Dissonance* makes the most of the mysterious chromatic gropings of the slow introduction; if the launch of the main *Allegro* in sunny, untroubled C major initially seems a little lacking in lightness and good humour, the four characters in the conversation soon bring their individual personalities to the fore. The Armida are road-testing the new Urtext edition of these works, and accordingly they are painstakingly faithful to each inflection and marking. This might in other hands lead to playing that is clinical and fussy, but the confidence and accuracy they bring to their performances make this another enticing instalment in their continuing quartet cycle.