

Beethoven – string quartets; Brahms/Schumann – lieder; Carl Rütli, Requiem

The latest classical CD releases, including dangerous Beethoven, emotional Brahms and Schumann and a glorious Rütli requiem

Fiona Maddocks, Nicholas Kenyon and **Stephen Pritchard**
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Beethoven

Early String Quartets, Middle String Quartets Wihan Quartet (Nimbus Alliance NI6105/6109)

These sets complete the Wihan Quartet's outstanding live recordings of complete Beethoven quartets, performed in the convent of St Agnes, Prague in 2007 and 2008. Their incisive, often dangerous playing gives vitality to their virtuosic interpretation and the occasional fluffs and scrambles merely heighten the sense of this being real, risky music-making. Tempi tend to be brisk, with Opus 59 No 3 and the F minor Op 95 especially exciting. This Czech quartet won't replace sets by the Quartetto Italiano, the Borodin, Takacs or Lindsays but they make revelatory stablemates – with the bonus of Beethoven's own rarely heard version of his piano sonata Op 14 No.1. **Fiona Maddocks**

Brahms/Schumann

Lieder/Dichterliebe Simon Keenlyside (baritone), Malcolm Martineau (piano). (Sony Classical 88697566892)

Keenlyside is one of the peerless singer-actors of our generation and here brings a full-blown operatic sensibility to lieder by Brahms, and Schumann's great song-cycle *Dichterliebe*. The sound is so intense, the emotion so palpable that there is a danger of overkill. But as he weaves his way through these carefully chosen pathways of Brahms, he shows he can be both ethereal and powerful. The Schumann cycle is admirably flexible and manages to be heart-stoppingly lyrical as well as forceful, culminating in an overwhelming "Ich grolle nicht". Fine piano playing, but the sound is recessive and unbalanced.

Nicholas Kenyon

Carl Rütli

Requiem Olivia Robinson, soprano; Edward Price, baritone; Janet Watts, organ. The Bach Choir; Southern Sinfonia/David Hill Naxos 8.572317

This release is an event in the choral world: a fine new Requiem to add to the repertoire, with challenging yet accessible lines for double choir, glorious passages for soloists and an accompaniment adaptable to available forces. The Bach Choir sings magnificently here, particularly in the terrific Sanctus, and young soloists Olivia Robinson and Edward Price bring Rütli's lyrical pen to glorious life. No wonder it brought the audience to its feet at its premiere.