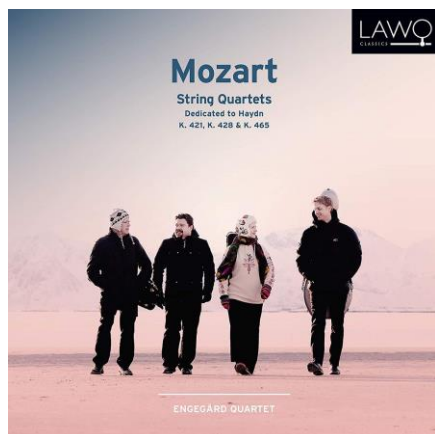


# Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart – Engegård Quartet plays K421, K428 & K465/Dissonance [LAWO Classics]

Reviewed by Tully Potter



The three men and one woman who make up the Norway-based Engegård Quartet are a polyglot lot: only the leader is Norwegian; the second violinist is English-born but Norwegian-raised; the violist is English; and the cellist is Austrian. On disc they have especially impressed me with two splendid accounts of Grieg's G-minor Quartet: the first, from 2007 with different players of the second-violin and cello, is coupled with Haydn's Opus 76/5 and Leif Solberg's B-minor; and the second, from 2015 with the present line-up, is coupled with Sibelius's 'Voces Intimae' and Olav Anton Thommessen's Fourth Quartet.

The Haydn shows that they have a good grasp of Classical form, and it is again evident in these first-rate performances of three of Mozart's 'Haydn' Quartets. They find a nice easy tempo for the Allegro moderato of the D-minor, with one or two touches of *portamento*: they take the exposition repeat and make a well-balanced sound, with just a hint of Nordic gleam. They keep the second movement on a fairly short leash – after all, it is marked Andante – and again take quite an easy tempo for the Minuet, relating the Trio well to its surrounds. The wonderful final variations are not taken too fast and in general this is a fine account.

They immediately hit on the *tempo giusto* for the Allegro non troppo of the E-flat and unfold the Andante con moto pleasingly. Then they suddenly take the Minuet, one of Mozart's most spacious, quite briskly and force the pace a little: the opening chords come across as brusque – and again when they reappear later – and the Trio, where in most performances one can revel in the passing of phrases from one player to another, loses some of its usual poise. They also sacrifice the contrast with the final Allegro vivace, perhaps the most Haydnesque of the two-dozen movements in the set of six, which they play very well.

For the so-called 'Dissonance' Quartet, the Engegård contrives quite a mysterious atmosphere in the opening Adagio which gives the work its nickname, and the tempo for the ensuing Allegro is excellent. The musicians 'sing' the Andante cantabile very agreeably, with a whiff of *portamento* at the start, and keep it ticking over to excellent effect. Then they are rather robust and fast in the Minuet and Trio, in a style which might be better applicable to some of Haydn's examples. The Finale is always a good test: can the players retake their bows after the chords without losing their rhythm slightly? The Engegård personnel manage pretty well but in two cases leave a split-second too much space before the next note. It is a tiny fault but in such a crowded field, such things can make all the difference.

In the main these are lovely performances. I wonder if the one or two slightly overfast tempos were influenced by the desire to fit three Quartets on to the disc. As it happens, all of these works were specialities of the Smetana Quartet, who left us several performances of each without the flaws I have pointed up. Many readers will have their own favourites, the Amadeus Quartet for instance. I hope the Engegårds give us their thoughts on the other seven mature Mozart Quartets, as at their best they have the ability to purvey that unique Mozartean balm. They are heard in the best possible context, as the sound quality, produced by Vegard Landaas and engineered by Thomas Wolden, is superb. The release is nicely presented, too.

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