



Joseph HAYDN (1732-1809)
'The Seven Last Words of Christ'
(String Quartet version op. 51
No. 1-7 Hob XX/1B)
Leipziger Streichquartett
rec. 11-12 July 2008, former farm house,
Marienmünster Abbey. DDD
MDG 9071550-6 (Hybrid-SACD)
760623155067

"A slicker version with slightly greater unison and more polish ..."

I reviewed the Klenke Quartet's *Seven Last Words* (Berlin Classics) for MusicWeb International last year. The latest addition to Haydn's op.51/b comes from their German colleagues of the Leipzig Quartet. It's on an MDG Super Audio recording (in stereo, 5.1 multi channel, and the proprietary MDG 2+2+2 configuration which attempts to offer three dimensional sound reproduction). In the review then I said: 'The Klenke Quartet might not 'indulge' *per se*...'. I take that back now: Compared to the Leipzig String Quartet they *do* indulge, adding a further 8 to the Leipzigers' 66 minutes. The most notable difference in otherwise surprisingly similar recordings comes in the fifth sonata, 'I thirst'. The Klenkes start contemplative and dark-hued, then gently and calmly pluck along to the first violin's aching melody. The Leipzigers tear into the movement thunderously and then 'pizzicato away' like it's the Largo from 'Winter' in Vivaldi's Four Seasons. I find the former more in line with the text ('*After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said, in fulfillment of the scripture, 'I thirst.'*') but the latter I bob my head to, and snap my fingers. Should I feel guilty?

With slightly greater unison and more polish, the Leipzig Quartet is the slicker account of the two ... until the concluding *Earthquake*. There they let loose and for once pass the Klenkes' more atmospheric live recording in terms of emotional commitment. The sound (not sampled in surround) on the former offers more space between the players and the listeners and more immediacy on the latter. Anyone who already has a modern string quartet version, like the Klenkes' and hasn't use for the SACD format, is probably well enough served to resist this release, which promises to be the first in a (complete?) set of Haydn quartets. Stereophiles will naturally be drawn to and rewarded by the MDG release. Those without a satisfactory *Seven Last Words* by a modern string quartet are encouraged to sample and compare this release with that of the Rosamunde Quartet on ECM.

Jens Laurson