



## Wherever the divining rod resonates

With Volume 4 of its **complete recording of the Mozart string quartets**, the Armida Quartet is coming into earshot of the finishing line for its most exceptional recording project to date – exceptional for the reason that while making it, each of the four musicians has meticulously analysed his or her individual part in the autograph manuscript and compared it with previous printed editions. In this way, a new urtext edition in four volumes has come into being alongside the recording, in collaboration with the manuscript expert Wolf-Dieter Seiffert. The Armida Quartet's CD edition will be completed in the coming April with the concluding Volume 5.



### Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

#### Quartet No. 4 C Major K157

- [1] I. Allegro
- [2] II. Andante
- [3] III. Presto

#### Quartet No. 6 B flat Major K159

- [4] I. Andante
- [5] II. Allegro
- [6] III. Rondo. Allegro grazioso

#### Quartet No. 7 E flat Major K160

- [7] I. Allegro
- [8] II. Un poco adagio
- [9] III. Presto

#### Quartet No. 19 C Major K465

- [10] I. Adagio – Allegro
- [11] II. Andante cantabile
- [12] III. Menuetto. Allegretto – Trio
- [13] IV. Allegro molto

**Armida Quartet | CAvi Music 4260085532056 | Release: November 19, 2021**

If any proof had still been needed that Mozart and his works continue to hold an unbroken fascination for the younger generation of string quartets even in the 21st century, the Armida Quartet is providing it – and very comprehensively at that: in addition to the ongoing complete recording and the above-mentioned accompanying Henle Edition project, Johanna Staemmler and Martin Funda (violins), Teresa Schwamm (viola) and Peter Philipp Staemmler (cello) have also instigated a Berlin **concert series, “Mozart Exploded”**, in which the composer's works enter into a dialogue with contemporary musical styles and other art forms in sometimes unusual locations. And a few weeks ago, the Armida Quartet, which in mid-October gave the **world premiere of the work “Madame ma bonne sœur” by contemporary Australian composer Brett Dean at the Oxford Lieder Festival**, were the **artistic directors of the festival Festspielherbst Mecklenburg-Vorpommern** on the Baltic Sea island of Rügen, where they performed not just the work by Dean but, of course, Mozart as well.

Why, several years ago, did these four musicians latch onto Mozart? *“When we went through our repertoire with a divining rod, we had the feeling that we sense a very strong resonance with Mozart. You stay where it vibrates. We are totally drawn to Mozart, and for us, a big space opens up in which we discover and find*

*a great deal and can progress the most musically.*” The reactions of critics, newspapers and audiences to “Armida Mozart” so far have been effusive, with one superlative following the other: *“This is the way the state of the (Moz)-art sounds,” Fono Forum* said of Volume 2, while the daily *Tagesspiegel*, writing about Volume 3, stated that the quartet had *“subjected this classic repertoire to live cell therapy”* with its exploration of original sources.

The newly issued **Volume 4** of the complete recording includes the famous “Dissonance” quartet (KV 465) combined with the three “Milan” or “Italian” quartets (**KV 157, KV 159, KV 160**) that were written some 12 years before it. Reflecting on the latter group of works, Alfred Einstein wrote: *“Foreshadowings of the 'great' quartets are found everywhere in these quartets by the seventeen-year-old Mozart; nor are they mere foreshadowings – is spring only a foreshadowing of summer?”* And the Armida Quartet meticulously prepared the ground ahead of the recordings, as the editor of the urtext edition and head of the Henle publishing house, Wolf-Dieter Seiffert, stresses: *“The edition with the earliest quartets by Mozart is based exclusively on his handwritten scores as sources, which are often ambiguously notated (for example, with regard to the exact length of slurs, the placement of dynamics etc.). Here, the Henle urtext edition was able to profit from the practical experience of the musicians from the Armida Quartet in many important points of detail. In addition, the four provided extremely useful performance tips for the digital edition that has just come out on the Henle Library App – fingerings and bowings that can be switched on and off as desired by the user.”* The compelling musical result of this painstaking, detailed work on the scores is now being revealed in the fourth part of the complete recording.

In the case of the “Dissonance” quartet, KV 465, the question of sources is more complex, partly because this is a work by the 29-year-old Mozart, now well-established as a master. A comparison of Mozart's manuscript with the engraved parts of the first Artaria edition from September 1785 would very much seem to suggest that between these two main sources there was another **undocumented phase of revision, which the Armida Quartet has tried to trace bar for bar**. Particularly striking were the numerous additions of dynamics missing in the autograph or the tempo indications that frequently differ from those in the handwritten score. These are discrepancies that the Armida Quartet has been able to resolve and clarify for practical use according to the principles of best musicological practice. Above all, however, this procedure brings nuances to light that modify the interpretation even of such a well-known work. This applies, for example, to the different performance indications for the same passage in the exposition and recapitulation, which have sometimes been overlooked (ignored?) up to now, but which, according to Johanna Staemmler, are crucial: these are *“differences that Mozart wanted to have”*. And the Armida Quartet makes them audible for us. Divining rods work after all!

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