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The Strad SELECTION-MAI 2006

CHAUSSON Piano Quartet in A major op.30
FAURÉ Piano Quartet no.1 in C minor op.15

Schumann Quartet Aeon AECD 0540

If Fauré's First Piano Quartet marked the dawn of a new age in French chamber music in the 1870s, Chausson's quartet of 1897 was undoubtedly the culmination of the Romantic era. This later work was conceived in symphonic

proportions both in duration and content: the scoring is dense and weighty and its spread of dynamics and musical intent owe a debt to Wagnerian influences.

In the right hands it is a score of both power and sensual beauty, attributes that the Schumann Quartet supplies in abundance. It also requires a sense of fun, something introduced by Christian Favre's perky piano opening, while Tedi Papavrami's wide and warm vibrato sends the violin line effortlessly above his colleagues. The quartet's performance of this first movement overall is marked by the most subtle and appropriate use of rubatos, while the players take the quiet passages with a degree of wistfulness. The repose of the second movement brings to the fore the elegance of Christoph Schiller and François Guye's viola and cello, and whether in the scores big rhetorical gestures or in the third movement's simplicity there is perfect unanimity of purpose. Technically the challenge comes in the fast and dramatic finale, and we find everything ideally in place with intonation impeccable and the phrasing shaped in long flowing lines.

The players bring a very similar approach to Fauré's elegant writing, and though theirs is different from the more lightweight performances the work usually receives, I find such an outgoing reading totally refreshing. Again the playing is immaculate, capturing the music's ebb and flow with complete naturalness.

The ideally balanced recording complements an outstanding release. **DAVID DENTON**