
Borodin Quartet

Selected Reviews

Hong Kong 80th anniversary celebration - Hong Kong Cultural Centre Concert Hall, 16 and 17 May 2025

"The first of their two concerts in Hong Kong opened with the second string quartet by Borodin, after whom the ensemble are named, and the first quartet by Shostakovich – two works that play to their strengths.

The Borodin quartet, with its hypnotic "Nocturne" movement, is their signature piece, and they have a close association with Shostakovich, who mentored the ensemble's first generation of players...

Overall, the Borodin Quartet's performance was well-mannered, poised, unpretentious and musically thoroughly rewarding. One could feel the Russian flavour to their music-making in their tonal colours and articulation. Their pizzicato playing, in particular, was bold and unrestrained.

The chemistry between the four players was palpable, as was their artistry. Subtle dynamic changes and the interweaving of motifs between the different instruments were executed seamlessly and apparently without effort. No wonder the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung described the quarter as 'a single sixteen-stringed instrument of great virtuosity'."

- Jimmy Shiu, South China Morning Post

Beethoven and Shostakovich, Berliner Konzerthaus, September 2022

"That Sachenko is indeed the man for the job [as leader of the quartet] was forcibly demonstrated by the Borodin's devastating reading of the Shostakovich, its unbroken 40-minute arch sustained with the utmost intensity. Vibrato – or the absence thereof – was perfectly gauged by the four players in the opening Elegy, while their pianissimo entries in the following Serenade emerged inaudibly from the preceding sforzatos. Sachenko's cadenza-like runs in the Intermezzo were judged to perfection and punctuated by perfected calibrated chords from his colleagues. This piece's desolate Epilogue was followed by a seemingly interminable silence." – Carlos María Solare, The Strad

Philharmonie de Paris, String Quartet Biennale, January 2022

"...a darkly majestic Shostakovich Quartet no.2 from the Borodin Quartet." – Mélissa Lesnie, The Strad

US Tour, March 2019

"The quartet's polished unity of ensemble still allows for individual members to take the spotlight. Violist Igor Naidin's tonal warmth and projection and the soaring violin of Ruben Aharonian were memorable in solo moments...While the Borodin is best known for performances of Russian music, particularly the quartets of Dmitri Shostakovich, it is a versatile group and a stylish, technically impeccable reading of Haydn's Quartet No. 6 in D Major displayed its classical bona fides. This was sunny Haydn, played with spirited incisiveness. Aharonian's violin phrased the singing line of the Andante with grace. The bows seemed to bounce off the strings in a robust Allegretto and the players captured the offhand quirky twists in the stately final movement. In a repeated minor-key episode, Balshin's swaying cello figure masterfully blended with his colleagues' more restrained blend."

– Lawrence Budmen, South Florida Classical Review

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Wigmore Hall Shostakovich, Beethoven and Borodin, January 2020

"One could have heard a pin drop on the carpet. ... The sound produced by these players radiates warmth. Cellist Balshin's ability to produce a singing tone with his bow in long tied-over notes (without the aid of vibrato or with minimal vibrato) is a rarity.

The first movement of the Beethoven quartet (*Allegro con brio*) could not have been more 'brio', while in the last movement (*Allegro*) the notes of the fast passages sparkled as pearls.

First violinist Ruben Ahoronian's mastery of the violin served well the beautiful aria-type melody of the second movement (*Adagio affettuoso ed appassionato*) which he delivered passion but also with classical discipline. ... the rests in the score, in particular in this slow movement, because significant and powerful: performers and listeners shared the important function of the rest." – **Agnes Kory, Seen and Heard International**

Martinů and Schulhoff Concertos, Vladimir Jurowski and the London Philharmonic Orchestra, November 2018

"Martinů's concerto was written in Paris, though, and seems a much more relaxed, loosely lyrical affair. The solo quartet certainly has much more expressive freedom than it's ever allowed in Schulhoff's motoric textures, and since the Borodin Quartet were the soloists with Jurowski and the LPO that was probably a good thing – they found real profundity in the way in which the central slow movement builds to a huge climax, a sudden definitive change of mood in a work that otherwise is often hard to pin down" – **Andrew Clements, The Guardian**

"The *Largo* at the centre of the three-movement work, with its keening chromaticism, had an intense, slow tread that allowed the Borodin's famed richness of sound to shine, and the often jazzy finale was played with dizzying panache. More Schulhoff in concert programmes, please!... the Borodin's playing was suave and often full-blooded, and the orchestral playing was vibrant and colourful." – **Von Matthew Rye, bachtrack**

Victoria Concert Hall with the Singapore Symphony Orchestra, October 2018

"A sugar-coated first half would scarcely have prepared one for the bile of Shostakovich's String Quartet No.15, his final embittered work in this medium. The hall was plunged into near darkness, with the players barely visible through dim lights illuminating their scores. This seemed like the only way to experience the work's six continuous slow movements, highlighted by painful pauses, pregnant silences and interjected dissonances. One could hear a pin drop amid this blanket of unnerving stillness and unease, so grippingly negotiated by the quartet." - **Chang Tou Liang, The Straits Times**

Musica Viva Australia Tour, October 2018

"The group's balance sounded impeccable, the texture individual...the night's finest playing came with Beethoven's Op. 130: rational, involving, the players focused on and rapt in their rewarding discourse"

– **Clive O'Connell, The Sydney Morning Herald**

"After 73 years, it does Russian melancholy better than anyone – and this latest incarnation of the legendary group continues in the grand tradition, the famously blended instrumental tone as dark as the four men's matching attire, their ensemble playing as solid as Russian oak...for the chamber music devotee, this was the thing itself, the imposing, vaguely terrifying beast that is the Russian heart and soul laid bare" – **Martin Buzacott, The Australian**

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"Here we were treated to the classic Borodin tone with its finely calibrated vibrato and timbral intensity, truly taking us to another place... After the interval came Shostakovich's final quartet, his 15th, Op. 144. The Borodin's performance of this work alone is well worth the price of admission." - **Tony Way, Limelight Magazine**

"The six movements all run on without pause, often with one instrument featured solo for long passages, and the dramatic thread was heightened in this performance by the Borodins playing with the lights down, illuminated by lamps on their music stands. The playing and the effect were both spellbinding" - **Steve Moffatt, Wentworth Courier**

CD: Shostakovich Box Set: Complete String Quartets, Piano Quintet (Decca Classics), September 2018

"These are intensely musical and emotionally involving performances. The artillery assault in the Eight Quartet won't rattle your windows, but how refreshing to hear the percussive thuds as actual notes. Everyone knows that work, but there's so much more to explore here. Newcomers should start with the Sixth, a near-perfect blend of wit and melancholy, each section closing with the same bittersweet cadence. Or with No.5, its powerful opening movement the Beethovenian allegro which Shostakovich complained of being unable to write in a symphony. There's little bluster or padding in these quartets, and anyone who's ever doubted this composer's technical abilities should listen and weep. At the peerless mash-up of mournful passacaglia and folk dance in No.10, or at what Shostakovich does with a sinuous 12-note theme in the extraordinary 12th Quartet, its exultant final minutes totally devoid of irony.

No. 14's tender coda glows in the Borodins' hands, making the bleakness of the nihilistic 15th all the more gruelling. The bonuses are essential listening: we get the two early transcriptions plus the surviving opening movement of an aborted quartet in E flat. New to me were extracts from Shostakovich's score to the 1936 film *Girlfriends*, the players joined by Alexei Lubimov and trumpeter Sergei Nakariakov. They're fragments, but brilliant. And Pianist Alexei Volodin is outstanding in the Piano Quintet: witness how well he matches the strings' delicacy in the lovely "Intermezzo". An exceptional release."

– **Graham Rickson, The Arts Desk**

"This cycle has all the authority that the group's musical genealogy would suggest, since we have four musicians who were recruited into the quartet most associated with this music. And what musicians they are. These pieces offer plenty of solo opportunities for each member, not just the leader, and in each case you can hear what fine individual string players these are. More important still, they blend superbly, sounding always as if they are listening to each other. Thus in the angry fugal development of the finale of the briefest quartet, No.7, they produce fast, brilliant and precise playing."

– **Roy Westbrook, Music Web International**

Chamber Music New Zealand Tour, September 2018

"The Borodin Quartet reaffirmed both the pleasure and privilege of experiencing the sublime artistry of one of the world's leading chamber music ensembles...the Borodins held nothing back in their highly-charged performance. They effortlessly conveyed a sense of romantic striving, in both the dramatic to-and-fro of musical argument, and moments in which one sensed rich textures were calling out for fuller orchestral shading." - **William Dart, The New Zealand Herald**

"Rarely have I heard, throughout a varied concert, playing of such subtlety and refinement, and rarely have I heard such superb balances between all four players" - **The Dominion Post**

"The Quartet's restraint gave us a flowing account with beautifully judged flexibility, revealing both the music's variety and the blended homogeneity of the ensemble." - **Elizabeth Kerr, Radio New Zealand**

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Societa dei Concerti Milano, with Alexei Volodin, March 2018

"A splendid interpretation was expressed through the perfect balance of the four string players...After a short interval, Volodin joined the Quartet for an engrossing interpretation of Shostakovich's Quintet in G minor Op. 57"

– **Cesare Guzzardella, Corrierebit**

National Concert Hall Dublin, with Barry Douglas, November 2017

"The famed golden sound of the Borodin String Quartet charmed from the opening double-stops of the Tchaikovsky. If I closed my eyes, it was impossible to tell if the sound was coming from one super instrument or four, so unified was their musical voice. The weaving melodies of the first movement were effortlessly passed from instrument to instrument while the uniform tone was rich and dark – romantic but eschewing any excesses" – **Por Andrew Larkin, Bachtrack**

Friends of Chamber Music Vancouver, US Tour, October 2017

"It would be difficult to find a more beautiful sound to listen to: impeccable in intonation, rich and fully integrated, with wonderfully refined shape to the lines and a special communication in the voicings[...]the feeling that emerged from these performances is that Shostakovich's music is less about sharply dramatic emotional responses and more about the subtle and inexorable unfolding of states of mind (some, of course, very dark and disturbing). It was the engulfing sense of conversational flow, plus the remarkable cultivation of the playing, which distinguished these readings from the more acerbic and pointed efforts of the previous Borodins and from even this group two years ago[...]The articulation was not only enticingly suspended but full of delicacy, not least in the gossamer projection of parts of the finale[...]The underlying meaning of each motive was perfectly distilled as the musical fragments passed between the players; the soliloquies for viola and cello went right to the soul. So grippingly personal – you could hear a pin drop at the end." – **Geoffrey Newman, Vancouver Classical Music**

Friends of Chamber Music Miami, Gusman Concert Hall, February 2017

"The Borodin musicians brought out the originality of Beethoven's harmonic writing and unexpected curving lines. First violin Ruben Aharonian's leadership was the group's tower of strength, his silken tone turning nimble or deeply probing as needed. At times the players' dynamic gradations and stylistic unity were so subtle that they sounded as one instrument. There was a strong sense of formal structure throughout the entire Beethoven performance with the tempos between and within movements related and crafted as one long musical arc. Cellist Vladimir Balshin and violist Igor Naidin captured the folk inflections in the trio of the second movement. Violinists Aharonian and Sergei Lomovsky channelled both the grace and hard-charging eruptions and darker undertones of the Allegro ma non tanto...The players fully channelled the score's myriad beauties, drama and unexpected wit" – **Lawrence Budmen, South Florida Classical Review**

Martinů and Schulhoff Concertos, Vladimir Jurowski and Staatskapelle Dresden, January 2017

"The Moscow Borodin Quartet, which was founded more than seventy years ago...who now contributed their parts perfectly"

– **Friedbert Streller, Musik in Dresden**

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"Borodin Quartet, which in the seventy years of its existence has continued its reputation as a string quartet of world rank despite the changing line-up, led the solo part very homogeneously, with precision and internal balance."

– Ingrid Gerk, *Der Neuer Merker*

"The conductor and orchestra were joined by a string quartet. Not just any string Quartet, rather the Borodin Quartet"

– Morgenpost

Wigmore Hall, Shostakovich and Beethoven Cycle, November 2016

"The character was certainly there: the rich, emphatic Russian sound, the deliberate and unambiguous phrasing and a compelling sense of drama that energised the finales of both works." – Gavin Dixon, *The Arts Desk*

Ickinger Frühlings International String Quartet Festival, April 2016

"The quartet created an organic flow as if it was just one instrument with sixteen strings. Without forcing their personal interpretative fire and emotions onto [Shostakovich's string quartet No 11], they let these character pieces speak for themselves, emphasizing their complexity and mournfulness through transparency, [...] precise intonation and a subtle balance of sound. They dynamic differentiation in [Beethoven's op. 127] didn't result in brooding fussiness, their playing created once again a lucid sound of almost vitreous, graceful transparency. It was a play with the classical tradition, perfect, exemplary and on the highest [artistic] level."

– Süddeutsche Zeitung

Wigmore Hall - Shostakovich and Beethoven cycle, April 2016

"The Borodin Quartet has maintained stratospherically high standards for seventy unbroken years. The personnel has changed several times, but the solidity of the group's foundations were made crystal clear this week. Two Shostakovich quartets – the seventh and the eleventh – allowed them to display their almost preternatural ability to synchronise as though they were one single instrument. Both works inhabit a subfusc sound-world in which solos and duets are underpinned by drones; both seem to emerge from a mist, and to disappear back into it when their tale is told. The way the Borodins told those tales was passionately compelling [...] their performance of Rotislav Dubinsky's arrangement of Tchaikovsky's Album for Children was bewitching." – Michael Church, *The Independent*

USA Autumn Tour, October 2015

"[The Borodin Quartet] played with polished professionalism. Ruben Aharonian [Lead] a focused reading that was at times playful, at times longing and always fascinating to hear. In the third movement, the melancholy of cellist Vladimir Balshin and violist Igor Naidin blended beautifully with Aharonian and second violin Sergei Lomovsky, providing superb advocacy for a piece that was one of Tchaikovsky's favorites of all his works. One of the evening's highlights came in [Borodin's Notturmo] when Aharonian and Lomovsky elicited a gorgeous, organ-like sound that befitted the sanctuary setting. The Borodin Quartet's sound is rich, dark and deep, and the playing at a high level of technical competency."

– (Coral Gables Congregational Church, Friends of Chamber Music Miami) Dave Rosenbaum, *Miami Herald*

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"The Borodin performed the familiar melodies of the Notturmo with grace, panache and conviction, and their rhythmic freedom was met by their well-crafted homogeneity of tone [...] one of the greatest performances [of Shostakovich's Eight Quartet]. There were discernible moments of hope through the labyrinth of mental and physical anguish, so properly conveyed in the final Largo. This was music modelled after the composer's heart, realized at a level only few performances attain. From the opening Adagio [of Tchaikovsky Quartet No. 2], the musicians displayed an affinity for the language of late Russian Romanticism, as gorgeous melodies were bound by a tight, visceral rhythmic pulse...a resplendent performance."

- **(The Center for Performing Arts at Menlo-Atherton) Elijah Ho, San Jose Mercury News**

"[In Shostakovich's Eight Quartet] the listener is supposed to be overwhelmed. And that is certainly what happened in this performance. Every movement was structured perfectly and so theatrically conveyed by the performers. One could cut the dark tension with a knife. Tchaikovsky's Second Quartet [showed] the quartet's ability to form a smooth choir of voices, and their comfortable physical language, which unites them into one single, larger body, and [the] highest level of musicianship. The quartet's nuanced sounds and capacity for storytelling and mood-setting could transport any listener from earth to heaven and back to earth again. This group's artistry whets our appetite for more."

- **(The Center for Performing Arts at Menlo-Atherton) Theodora Martin, Peninsula Reviews**

Schleswig Holstein Festival: Tchaikovsky's String Quartettsatz and Quartet No.1 and No.3, August 2015

"The 70-year-old Moscow Borodin Quartet changed line-up is still a jewel. The earthy, enormously full and vividly coloured sound from cellist Vladimir Balshin has not lost any of its special charm. With violinists Ruben Aharonian and Sergey Lomovsky and the violist Igor Naidin, they are unsurprisingly four serious Russians, quite at home with composer Pyotr Tchaikovsky. The orthodox sonorous chorale in the B flat major early work, and above all the broad, rhythmically refined iridescent soundscape of the First String Quartet in D major, were in capable hands. The famous Andante cantabile and the beautiful slow second movement of this First String Quartet, sounded so convincing with the Borodin's decades of experience and yet completely unsentimental. The shimmering finale fitted perfectly with the bright sunflowers on the stage."

- **Christian Strehk, Kieler Nachrichten**

"Perfect unity: they proved from the outset accurate intonation and absolute synchronicity with Tchaikovsky's String Quartettsatz in B flat major. In the Adagio sections of Tchaikovsky's early work and of the String Quartet No. 1 in D major the quartet presented soft interplay of subtle nuances, and especially in the Andante of the latter, that disintegrates slowly in individual voices. The flawless harmony was especially evident in the chorale-like beginning. [...] In contrast to finish, the String Quartet No.3 in E Flat Minor, Op. 30: the particularly crippling funeral march of the third movement led the Borodin Quartet sensitively on to the shimmering, transfigured end." - **Wedel-Schulauer Tagblatt**

Rheingau Festival, Schloss Johannisberg: Tchaikovsky's Children's Album and Quartet No.2, August 2015

"... spotless playing, enchanting tone, and a vision where everything is going: be it a phrase, a theme, or an entire movement. ... It is simply beautiful how [Tchaikovsky's] unpretentious and beautiful piece is conveyed in the sold out hall. [...] an ageless, positive contribution to the anniversary." - **Christian Knatz, Wiesbadener Kurier**

"[Children's Album, arranged by Rotislav Dubinsky] ..the four mature musicians occupied themselves with the little horseman and the illness of the doll, encapsulating the whole innocence of the tiny works – and at the same time got everything out of them phenomenally." - **Judith von Sternburg, Frankfurter Rundschau**

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Wigmore Hall, Shostakovich and Beethoven cycle, June 2015

"They have loomed grandly over the chamber-musical scene for decades [...] and attained a refinement of expression, an effortless technique, an interpretative poise, to marvel at. The readings of the two Shostakovich quartets [No.6 and No.3] had a dazzling authority doubtless informed by direct contact with the composer, and by which they moved between his insouciant classicism and emotional twistedness with utmost imperturbability, often, indeed, almost imperceptibly. This kind of double-speak was not without its uses in their Beethoven playing – notably for the F minor, Op 95 ("Serioso") quartet's finale, whose agitated falling-third figure burst forth with a paradoxical quality of classical containment yet tragic desolation."

– Paul Driver, *The Sunday Times*

"It took only a few seconds of Beethoven's so-called 'Harp' Quartet to make clear this quartet is something very special [...] chastely beautiful tone and a quality of intense, inward listening. The quartet captured its [Shostakovich Quartet No.6] bitter-sweet quality, especially in the waltz's middle section. Here Aharonian lofted the sweet musical-box tune ever higher, with a pearly perfection of tone and tuning that held us all spellbound." **-Ivan Hewett , The Telegraph******

"Beethoven's "Harp" Quartet, Op 74 brought out a dense, rich tone. [...] they can take his {Shostakovich's} notes and make them sound more right than almost any other ensemble. The Borodins – with Ruben Aharonian's violin singing impossibly sweetly on top – made the whole thing flow as naturally as speech." **-Erica Jeal, The Guardian******

"The precision, the beautiful tone and the sonorous chording [...] beautifully played. The beauty of the individual contributions, especially that of the leader, was exceptional." **-Tully Potter, ClassicalSource**

Istanbul International Music Festival, Hagia Eirene Museum: Dvorak Piano Quintets, June 2015

"Their choice to play Dvorak [Piano Quintets with Boris Berezovsky] showed the kind of superb blend that develops after years of working, touring and recording together [...] their signature tonal sweetness and unity of breath, phrase, insight and interpretive authority have always been maintained. They match each other in every possible sonic way, yet individual solos still retain exquisite luster – especially that of first violinist Aharonian. That impeccable blend and mellifluous tone was immediately apparent right from the start of the first two movements of the Piano Quintet, Opus 5, where the quartet's exemplary long decrescendos down to the micron level melted in the ear. The intonation was so perfect and the expressive élan so compelling [...] Then they jumped into the jolly romp of the third movement, as if on horses cavorting with quirky syncopations through the forests. In the second quintet [...] The Borodin Quartet with Berezovsky, through unanimity of breath and bow, skilfully blended their seasoned elegance with devotional vigour."

– Alexandra Ivanoff, *Today's Zaman*

The Sage, Gateshead: Shostakovich, Borodin and Beethoven, May 2015

"The opening melody [of Borodin's String Quartet No 2] flowed gracefully between the players, while the scherzo was played with the lightest of touches. The highlight had to be the Notturmo [...] The eloquent song was delivered with heartfelt conviction by violinist Ruben Aharonian and cellist Vladimir Balshin. Violist Igor Naidin provided a magic touch, when in one passage his bow hovered above the strings barely alighting and sounding for all the world like a bumblebee in flight. The finale was taken to an emphatic climax. The composer's spirit radiated from a searing performance of his Eighth String Quartet [...] The opening lament evoked a landscape of utter desolation, while the aggressive second movement had an unremitting drive. Particularly affecting was a serene duet between Aharonian and second violinist Sergei Lomovsky. The quartet ended on a sad note of resignation that drifted into the ether. An immaculate rendition of Beethoven's last string quartet, Opus 131, was followed by an

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encore in the shape of Shostakovich's Elegy for String Quartet – a fitting ending to a memorable concert."

- Gavin Engelbrecht, The Northern Echo

Pollack Hall, Montreal: Shostakovich and Beethoven, May 2015

"...they play Shostakovich better than anyone else. The Borodin played with tremendous intelligence [...] They convey a feeling of force in reserve to be unleashed in the barely audible laser note that ended the first quartet, or the eerie hatchet blows of the next.."

- Lev Bratishenko, Montreal Gazette

Shostakovich Complete String Quartet Cycle: Friends of Chamber Music, Vancouver Playhouse. May 2015

"...their coordination and voicings are quite superb. The two violinists have both strength and purity in their playing, but it is the viola and cello that give great warmth to the overall tonal fabric, with notable eloquence and feeling too. It is perhaps the warmth and thoughtfulness of the current group that makes their interpretations seem smoother and more refined than their predecessors. I found this to be a rare experience: witnessing an ensemble so devoted to the music of their compatriot, and so evidently selfless, sensitive and sure in their presentation of it. Unlike many recent ensembles, they made little attempt at virtuosity for its own sake, yet each quartet emerged as a wonderfully strong and balanced jewel, speaking its message directly and profoundly. This was truly a 'journey of a lifetime'. The spirit of Shostakovich was everywhere, his defiance, his tenderness, his sardonic wit, all the little complexities that made up his expression. Nowhere did the Borodin Quartet intervene in the presentation of the story. This was scrupulously prepared but absolutely selfless playing, almost from a different age."

- Geoffrey Newman, Seen & Heard International and Vancouver Classical Music

"This is a wonderful ensemble, playing at the top of its game." - David Gordon Duke, The Vancouver Sun

Wigmore Hall, Shostakovich and Beethoven cycle, April 2015

"Fierce and formidable. The Russian masters of chamber music marked their 70th anniversary with a formidable start to their Shostakovich and Beethoven cycles. The playing was rich-toned and dramatic, in ways that seemed authentically Russian, and the technique was formidable [...] the playing in the Shostakovich half of the programme sounded vernacular [...] The Borodins' technical mastery was striking" - Martin Kettle, The Guardian****

CD: Shostakovich String Quartets 1, 8 & 14 Decca Classics, March 2015

"Has the Borodin Quartet inherited a musical style through its DNA? There have been many changes to the membership of the Quartet since it was founded 70 years ago, but its close association with Shostakovich in the early years still casts a glow of authenticity. This first disc in a new complete cycle of Shostakovich's works for string quartet exudes authority. The playing of the current four members has a molten intensity, a restraint that never seeks quick or easy effects. It seems fitting that the performances of such an august group should take the long view." - Richard Fairman, Financial Times****

"What I like most about this recording, besides the quartet's gorgeously rich sound, is the straight-up sincerity of the playing. The First Quartet is full-bodied and lyrical; the work's tuneful simplicity isn't loaded with innuendo. The 14th Quartet is frank and impassioned. The Eighth opens with grainy solemnity and the movements unfold with moving candour. Nothing is overstated or hysterical, and there's no chance of the gaudy romp that this work can become [...] the sobriety is hugely dignified."

- Kate Molleson, The Guardian****

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"The naivety of Quartet no. 1 gives way to the autobiographical, despairing no. 8, the Borodins reaching right down into the depths of its bitter universal torment before offering some relief with the whimsy and warmth of no. 14. Prepare to be profoundly stirred."

- **Stephen Pritchard, The Observer**

Chamber Music New Zealand Tour, October 2014

"The rightness of the Borodin's playing, the glorious sheen and polish is a testament to the unrivalled quality of Russian string playing. [...] Myaskovsky String Quartet No 13 was beautifully played. [...] Shostakovich's Eleventh Quartet received a performance that sucked the air from the auditorium. This was music making at its most intense and personal. It was a privilege to be present."

- **John Button, The Dominion Post**

"One was instantly captured by the clear, clean elegance of Ruben Aharonian's violin Beethoven's Opus 130 String Quartet revealed the Russians as master musical navigators. The shifting textures and styles of the first movement came off brilliantly, but these men earned our utter confidence early on, from their first beautifully turned Adagio phrases. Each movement was expertly characterised."

- **(Auckland Town Hall) William Dart, The New Zealand Herald**

"The Borodin Quartet's exceptional ensemble playing and intonation. [...] there was absolute clarity throughout [Shostakovich's Eleventh String Quartet] [...] The Borodin Quartet again showed exceptional attention to detail throughout [Beethoven Op. 130], particularly to harmony and balance, dynamic contrasts and phrasing, never losing their concentration for a second. Music making does not get better than that. [...] the Nocturne from Borodin's Second String Quartet was magically played. The perfect encore to this perfect concert." - **(Auckland Town Hall) Takeshi Ito, Stuff Nation**

"The playing is silky, smooth in the melodic lines [...] consistent and omogeneous sound [...] wonderful precision, lots of control [...] the counterpoint is seamless." - **(Michael Fowler Centre, Wellington) Elizabeth Kerr, Radio New Zealand Concert**

Musica Viva Tour Australia, September/October 2014

"Borodin Quartet show they are the Russian grand masters on latest Musica Viva tour [...] these four Russian grand masters of their craft bring something fresh to the table when they perform something as popular and familiar as Schubert's Death and the Maiden quartet, or one of Beethoven's landmark works. [...] the famous sweet and refined Borodin sound and performance style, which has all the class and sophistication of a well-maintained Bentley, has stayed true to the original. [...] They play and breathe as one [Aharonian's] sweet singing tone was a highlight of the closing work of the evening [Schubert Death and the Maiden] [...] A feature of this performance was Balshin's beautiful tone and subtle phrasing. [In] Shostakovich's 11th quartet [...] there is a chill beauty here and you could have heard a pin drop in this performance."

- **(City Recital Hall, Melbourne) Steve Moffatt, Daily Telegraph Australia**

"In their stage manner, formal bows and dutiful concert decorum, the Borodin Quartet make dourness an artform. But in their smooth, perfectly balanced sound, impeccable intonation, and nigh-perfect moulding of the shape of each phrase and utterance, they are peerless. [...] This was to be an exposition of the work [Beethoven String Quartet Opus 18, No 1 in F major] that highlighted perfect clarity, balance and a tone of unblemished creamy smoothness – one that respected balance of form and phrase over emotional urgency. [...] Shostakovich's String Quartet No, 11 in F minor, opus 122 was bleak and spare yet utterly compelling. [...] Only an ensemble with such supreme control of fine tonal variation could sustain its quiet expanses so breathlessly. [...] Schubert's Death and the Maiden Quartet [...] surging emotional intensity was again held in check in favour of glorious smoothness and transparency of

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sound and expressive balance in a state of glowing equilibrium. The powerful gestures of the first movement had ideally pointed emphasis, though within a carefully defined scale. Nothing in the slow movement was under- or overdone, except for the translucent beauty of texture. The deathly tarantella-style finale was breathlessly swift and precise."

- **(City Recital Hall, Melbourne) Peter McCallum, The Sydney Morning Herald**

"The quartet's amazing control and veiled tones was a pleasure to listen to. [...] The standard of blend from the individual players was exquisite. We were spoilt for future experiences by hearing quartet players moving so perfectly as an homogenous whole. This exemplary level of ensemble skill is not always heard in string quartet concerts."

- **(City Recital Hall, Melbourne) Paul Nolan, Sydney Arts Guide**

"This great quartet balanced tradition and innovation in vibrant performances of Shostakovich, Tchaikovsky and Beethoven. [...] Life is wonderful; life is dark and sorrowful; what is life? This was the emotional journey of the first concert of the Borodin Quartet's Australian tour. After opening with Beethoven's cheerful op. 18 no. 1, we were taken to the darkest parts of the human soul with Shostakovich's Eighth Quartet. The concert concluded with Tchaikovsky's Second Quartet, a work which seems to me to convey uncertainty, ambivalence, even insecurity. The highlight was surely the Shostakovich, his most celebrated quartet, renowned for its dark and sometimes graphic portrayal of the horrors of war, ending in a lament which dies into absolute silence. The musicians clearly know this work intimately, and they conveyed the menacing drones, the savagery and the final emotional emptiness with great understanding and superb technique. I have heard more bellicose and hard-edged readings of this work, but never more convincing. In terms of tone, the Borodin quartet seems to agree with Mozart, who wrote: 'Music, even in the most terrible situations, must never offend the ear, but must please the listener'. The choice of lighter, early Beethoven as an overture was a good one. Here it became clear that, like everybody else, Russians change with the times. The sound is more transparent and less dominated by the first violin than in the great quartets of the past — a welcome change, but there were still some discreet old-fashioned portamenti. An admittedly conservative programme, it was magnificently performed for an appreciative full house by a superb group who cherish their long tradition but are not ruled by it." - **(Conservatorium Theatre, Brisbane) Michael O'Loghlin, Sinfini Music**

"There can be no greater experience in chamber music than the Borodin Quartet playing Shostakovich's String Quartet No 8, still a jaw-dropper five decades on from when the quartet first played it for the composer himself. [...] With the quartet's new generation of members all schooled in the original grand tradition, there is no bold new interpretation, no onstage salesmanship, nothing at all in fact to excite the wheel-reinventing recent graduate of an arts marketing course. No, consider it well. This is the thing itself, unaccommodated Shostakovich.

It's the authority that makes the impression. Time stands still, we are standing there confronting the ruins of man's inhumanity to man, the performance so focused, so perfectly balanced within the ensemble, the tone so immaculately blended that there is simply no capacity to look away." - **(Conservatorium Theatre, Brisbane) Martin Buuzacott, The Australian**

"The four musicians play as one extraordinary instrument [...] absolute clarity of sound [...] Precision underpinned every bar [...] the Borodin Quartet knows how to master any acoustic they might encounter. [...] Shostakovich's String Quartet No.8 in C Minor was the highlight of the evening. The sustained notes of the cello created a hypnotic sound curtain against which the other instruments conversed, exchanging thematic material. [...] Ruben Aharonian's remarkable precision."

- **(Llewellyn Hall, Canberra) Jennifer Gall, The Canberra Times**

"There is something about the sound they produce that still recalls the group that introduced so many people to the Shostakovich quartets through their recordings fifty years ago. Their sound is remarkably cohesive and well-balanced without sacrificing the individuality of the players. It's playing of great refinement and maturity. [in Shostakovich's Quartet No.11] the precisely focused sound of the Borodin Quartet put the music into sharp relief [...] The clarity was remarkable."

- **(Adelaide Town Hall) Stephen Whittington, The Adelaide Advertiser**

Borodin Quartet

Selected Reviews

Beethovenfeste Bonn Residency, September 2014

"The experience the ensemble has with Shostakovich's music was audible in their performance of op. 138 in B minor [...] The performance was exceptional." - **Kölnische Rundschau**

"The interpretation [of Igor Raykhelson's quartet] was immaculate [...] the Borodin Quartet found the fitting expression for each movement." - **General-Anzeiger**

"Here we have not four individual players, but a single sixteen-stringed instrument of great virtuosity"
- **Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Gerhard Rohde, October 2013**

Perelman Theater Kimmel Center Philadelphia: Shostakovich & Beethoven, April 2013

"The Borodin musicians are Russian royalty [...] This ensemble has, in its collective experience, accompanied virtually the entire span of the Shostakovich quartets from their inception to the present. So they are not in this sense "discovering" Shostakovich, as the West still is. He is **already** a classic for them, and listening to their Andante of the Fifth [...] I found myself thinking suddenly, "Why, this is as beautiful as Schubert!" Certainly that is one experience one does not have every day with Shostakovich. A part of the Borodin's achievement is its fully integrated sound, although each of its musicians (particularly first violinist Ruben Aharanian and cellist Vladimir Balshin) stands out as an extraordinary artist.[...] The Borodin gave it a tightly focused performance that brought the audience to its feet. Let's not wait 15 years to invite them back again."

- **Robert Zaller, Broad Street Review Music & Opera**

Rozsa Centre, University of Calgary, March 2013

"Compared to young North American quartets, whose playing often tends to sound the way high definition TV looks, the Borodin Quartet presents a very different tonal palate and approach to the making of music. Fundamentally, they do not play to the maximum dynamic at every opportunity; rather, they cultivate every possible shading of the sound in the medium soft to very soft range, something that encourages the listener to come to the music. The first half of the program was devoted to the middle of the three Razumovsky quartets by Beethoven [...] This is music that shows off what the Borodin quartet does best, the subtle harmonic shifts and textures beautifully rendered, with melody everywhere. This is, I suspect, the result of a group that has lived long with this music and has taken the trouble to penetrate its secrets. This was a deeply satisfying performance of this beautiful, inward music, giving ample testimony to why the Borodin Quartet continues to occupy the top rungs of the string quartet world." - **Calgary Herald**

Borodin Quartet

Selected Reviews

Toronto Walter Hall: Tchaikovsky, Glinka & Borodin, July 2012

"[...] once the bows touched their instruments, the musical glow was pure gold. The Moscow-based Borodin Quartet, the oldest string quartet in existence, is one of the world's finest as well as being the authority on Russian chamber music. [...] Most notable in the performances by violinists Ruben Aharonian and Sergei Lomosky, violist Igor Naidin and cellist Vladimir Balshin was how they managed to carefully meld control, balance and expression. There wasn't a hint of exaggerated effect in any note of this Romantic music, yet every emotional nuance was present and accounted for. Also impressive was the seamlessness with which the four players shared musical ideas, allowing a motif to slide from instrument to instrument almost telepathically. [...] Although none of the original members of the quartet is around anymore, its gradual renewal means that, through the process of younger players working with older ones, the original ideas on interpretation have, hopefully, filtered down to the present day. Is this how Dmitri Shostakovich heard them play 60 years ago? If so, it explains how the founding members could have

inspired so much wonderful work from his pen. Most remarkable was the oneness and the inner fire of each interpretation — something that can only be achieved through years of performing, travelling and rehearsing together every day. It's well worth catching these four serious artists and their Russian musical gems while they're here." – **John Terauds, Musical Toronto**

Chamberfest Ottawa / Brahms & Tchaikovsky II, July 2012

"Once again I was awestruck by their extraordinary technical standards and their even higher musicality. How an ensemble can lend a Tchaikovskian feeling to Brahms without straying from the notes just as Brahms wrote them is a wonder. It was hardly surprising that their rendition of the Tchaikovsky Second Quartet was beyond praise."

– **Richard Todd, The Ottawa Citizen**

Music and Beyond Festival / Brahms & Tchaikovsky II, July 2012

"Brahms requires a great deal of weight in the sound and very often this translates into an excess of turbulence, sometimes even turgidity. Not so with the Borodins; in their interpretation every line was clear at every moment and yet, paradoxically, you could often close your eyes and have the impression that you were hearing a single instrument, so perfect was their ensemble playing."

– **The Ottawa Citizen**

Toronto Summer Music Festival / Borodin/Rachmaninov/Tchaikovsky, July 2012

"Impressive was the seamlessness with which the four players shared musical ideas, allowing a motif to slide from instrument to instrument almost telepathically (...) Most remarkable was the oneness and the inner fire of each interpretation."

– **Musical Toronto**

Haydn String Quartets op33/1-6 CD, ONYX4069, May 2011

"The latest incarnation of the Borodin Quartet offer them in readings that are remarkable for their consistency of tone and security of technique. They rattle off the fast movements with elan, and serve slow movements well with their rapt concentration..."

– **Gramophone**

Borodin Quartet

Selected Reviews

"This hugely enjoyable set confirms my impression that the current line-up of the Borodin Quartet is the best ever....'Fine playing, fine style, fine recording' my notes say about the very first movement, and so it goes on...What I like most about the set is the way it makes Haydn's invention leap off the page." - **The Strad 'Recommends'**

"What is most impressive is the Borodin's sensitivity to the Haydnesque features that lend the music its special character, most notably its wit, in the sense of both humour and imagination." - **International Record Review**

"There is so much that is satisfying in their playing" - **BBC Radio 3**

"The slower passages...are tremendous" - **Norman Lebrecht, La Scena Musicale*****

"Neglected unfairly in favour of Haydn's symphonies, these are entertaining works, and the Borodins do manage to tone down their muscular style so as not to lose sight of Haydn's humour. There are laugh-aloud moments here - the baffling 'is it over yet' close of the 2nd, composed to tease audiences into applauding in the wrong place, is disconcerting and fascinating, as you find yourself counting the beats in order to avoid being wrong-footed. The end, when it does arrive, is strangely inconclusive. These are big-boned, loveable performances, with rhythms so clearly defined and sharply pointed that there's never any suggestion of heaviness." - **The Arts Desk**

Wigmore Hall: Beethoven, Shostakovich & Schnittke, December 2010

"Best chamber moment. The Borodin Quartet proved that decades of experience really count in their performance of Beethoven, Shostakovich and Schnittke at Wigmore Hall." - **Top 10 Classical music moments of 2010, The Telegraph**

Alice Tully Hall: Brahms & Tchaikovsky, May 2010

"[...] throughout the concert, the Borodin players were extremely mature, measured, and musical. Their sound was neither too plump nor too thin. They showed an exceptional rhythmic sense, knowing how to wait on the music, and on one another. In technique, [...] Where Brahms asks for singing, they sang. They sang well as individuals and as a group. The first violinist, Ruben Aharonian, played with great confidence, a confidence well earned. And I will make a specific comment about the last movement: It was a model of strength in lyricism, and of resoluteness [...] What could be better than real musicians playing real music?"

- **Jay Nordlinger, New York chronicle**

Borodin/Stravinsky/Myaskovsky CD, ONYX4051, April 2010

"Borodin's String Quartet No.1 has been overshadowed by the ultra-tuneful No.2, which is indeed a lyrical masterpiece. It's predecessor is not quite that; then again, the Borodin Quartet's state-of-the-art performance of No.1 here shows that this is a winsome, engaging, far-too-neglected work with some really lovely moments, like the frosted glass sounds that open the Scherzo movement's trio section. Myaskovsky's Quartet No.13 too, is a warmly engaging creation, brimming with rich invention. And as played here in pungent, live-wire style, Stravinsky's one-movement Concertino sounds like the mini masterpiece it is."

- **Classic FM Magazine *******

Borodin Quartet

Selected Reviews

"With a new cellist in place, the ensemble continues to play with a romantic warmth that has made them pre-eminent among string quartets. Such heat is vital for their namesake's First Quartet – ambling at times but delicious. After neo-classical asperity (Stravinsky's Concertino), the CD reaches Myaskovsky's Thirteenth. Some of its harmonies and demeanour seem antique in a work composed in 1949. But it's music of substance, packed with activity and colour, and the Borodins do it full justice." – **The Times** *****

City Recital Hall Sydney, February 2010

"Phrasing and ensemble were near faultless while control over dynamics, timbre and balance was by far the best I've heard in this brutally exposed acoustic. There was no doubting the lively musical intellect at work, the attention to detail, and that magical depth of sound quality that so few ensembles currently possess." – **The Australian**

"The Borodin Quartet's inscrutable intonation and balance captured this comic-tragic quality to perfection. Each phrase is shaped to bring out its musical essence, yet nothing is ever exaggerated and Shostakovich's double-sided message emerges with beauty and unvarnished clarity." – **Sydney Morning Herald**

Wigmore Hall Recital, January 2010

"The Borodin Quartet at the Wigmore Hall was in a class of its own playing Shostakovich and Schnittke. Restraint and clarity might be virtues, but they don't take you far without sensuous appeal. This the Borodin Quartet offered in abundance, especially in the "Renaissance" moments in the Schnittke, which had a rapt beauty." – **The Telegraph**

"Watching them in this quartet was a little like scrutinising Shostakovich's own face for tell-tale signs of disquiet. Many colours were deployed here in traversing the wastelands of his soul but none more telling than the soft, still voice of consolation heard high in the cello in the approach to the glowing postlude. The final sunset that the Borodins conjured here was possessed of an almost supernatural radiance." – **The Independent**

"Most wondrously of all, and even in the bleak 'musical suicide note' of the Eighth, the Borodin Quartet plays with uncommonly rich, even tone and consoling warmth. For sheer musical presence, it has few equals." – **The Sunday Telegraph**

"In the dark despair of the Quartet No. 8, the players never resorted to steely tone or slashing intensity. Everything had a deep and understated gravity, as though they were exploring the most private corners of the human soul – appropriately so, if Shostakovich was really contemplating suicide in this music, as some claim. The Borodin's performance ascended to its summit not with dogged persistence but a magisterial command of the intellectual strength needed for the journey – the result, no doubt, of six decades of experience." – **Financial Times**

Borodin Quartet

Selected Reviews

92nd Street Y New York, Shostakovich, Stravinsky & Borodin, January 2009

"But if the Borodin Quartet that played at the 92nd Street Y on Tuesday evening was not the same group that played for Shostakovich, it closed its program with a stunning performance of that composer's Third Quartet (Op. 73). This work, from 1946, begins with a bouncy innocence and darkens with each movement, descending to mournful desolation in the penultimate Adagio and becoming an enveloping elegy in the finale. The quartet's sound reflected this journey, beginning with a relatively light tone and moving through stages of astringency and intensity. The group began with the Quartet No. 1 in A by its namesake, a graceful score without the kind of baggage that Shostakovich brought to his work, but also without the depth. It didn't matter: by giving it a lush sound, occasional touches of portamento and lavishing attention on its dynamics, particularly in the winding lines of its slow finale, the players made the work hard to resist. Between the Borodin and Shostakovich quartets, Stravinsky's brief Concertino made an almost perfect palate cleanser. Its acerbic opening prefigures that quality in Shostakovich's music, although in Stravinsky it seems more a rhetorical stance than deeply felt expressivity. And in no time it melts into a stretch of rich late Romanticism before Stravinsky remembers himself and ends on a slightly sour chord."

- Allan Kozinn, New York Times

Israel Festival Jerusalem Theater: Borodin, Miaskovsky & Shostakovich, June 2007

"Borodin, better known for his theatrical, folk-music-inspired opera "Prince Igor" in his "Quartet Nr. 2," turned out to be more introverted and lyrical than expected, agreeably yet not conventionally Romantic, and not demonstratively Russian in style; so too with Miaskovsky's "Quartet Nr. 13." One felt definitely enriched by this welcome opportunity to become acquainted with these works. The program's highlight, though, was Shostakovich's "Quartet Nr. 8." The rendition of this magical work was nothing less than overwhelming. The degree of intensity, maturity and sensitivity achieved by these outstanding musicians was profoundly gripping, and created a rarely encountered musical experience".

- Ury Eppstein, The Jerusalem Post