

From the American Record Guide  
February 2003

SCHUBERT: Quartet 14  
HENSEL: Quartet in E-flat  
CLARKE: Poem  
Lafayette Quartet—CBC 1149—75 minutes

This Canadian quartet plays beautifully. Their *Death and the Maiden* is dramatic, clean, and well paced; and the recording has a natural sound. All the balances and dynamics sound like they come from the musicians, as they enhance the shades and contours of the music.

The lesser-known Hensel and Clarke quartets stand tall in the company of Schubert. The quality of the Hensel proves that a major obstacle towards the acceptance of women as composers in the male-dominated world of music in the 19th and early 20th centuries had to do with availability and distribution of their music, if Fanny Hensel's family had allowed her to publish music under her own name (she published some very beautiful and popular songs under her brother Felix Mendelssohn's name), I believe that she would be considered one of the finest composers of her time.

Hensel began this quartet in 1829 after the publication of her brother's second quartet and finished it in 1834. It remained unpublished until 1988 and is slowly taking its place in the string quartet literature. This is the third recording of the work (I reviewed the Erato Quartet on CPO in May/June 2000).

On the surface this quartet does resemble her brother's Opus 12 and 13 quartets, but Fanny's treatment of texture is more unconventional, and she is freer with her use of form. I like Hensel's virtuosic viola writing in IV, and I love the way violist Joanne Hood plays it.

Rebecca Clarke's *Poem* is the fourth movement of what she intended, in 1926, to be a full quartet. Though (unlike Hensel) Clarke enjoyed a great deal of publication and encouragement during her lifetime, the *Poem*, which was hidden in the University of California at Berkeley library, had its first performance in 1993.

It has taken a while for women to be accepted as serious and accomplished composers, and excellent recordings like this one (the Lafayette Quartet is, incidentally entirely women) really make a difference.

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