

EDITOR'S CHOICE

INTERVIEW

Atrium Quartet
cellist Anna
Gorelova

The Fifth String Quartet is our favourite of Shostakovich's quartets and was actually a favourite of the composer himself. We have developed a long and successful relationship with it: we performed the piece in the Shostakovich Competition in Moscow and again in the London International String Quartet Competition, where we were awarded first prize. So when the record company asked us to put together our dream album it was an easy decision to feature the Fifth Quartet, as it is a work that has made a lot of difference in our lives.

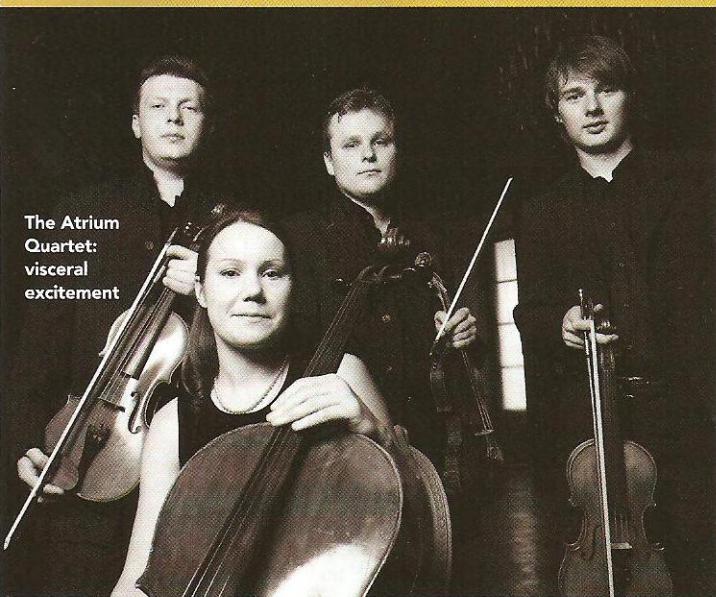
Beethoven and Shostakovich are very important to the string quartet tradition, as each man was the dominant quartet composer during his era. Coupling these works on disc makes a lot of sense, as it gives audiences the opportunity to hear side-by-side two significant composers in the development of the string quartet. There are similarities in the way they composed – in their strong contrasts of mood.

It is always best to try to make the music come alive. When we perform it is very important that our interpretation and musical feeling are conveyed to the audience. In the Shostakovich, for example, we find it helpful to think in colours – in whites or blues or reds. Recordings can be the straightforward type or those that are broadcast from a live concert, but I think in general if you try to alter your playing for the microphone it isn't helpful, as every performance should be a kind of concert.

Our future recording plans do include more works of Shostakovich, as he is a composer for whom we feel a deep connection. But we are also interested in promoting works by contemporary Russian composers – in the past we recorded Yuri Falik's Seventh and Eighth Quartets – and we would like to do more of this.

Interview by
Charlotte Smith

The Atrium Quartet: visceral excitement



The Atrium commit their Shostakovich calling-card to disc – and it still grips

Beethoven • Shostakovich

Beethoven String Quartet No 10, 'Harp', Op 74

Shostakovich String Quartet No 5, Op 92

Atrium Quartet

(Alexey Naumenko, Anton Ilyunin *vnrs*

Dimitri Pitulko *va* Anna Gorelova *vc*)

Zig Zag Territoires © ZZT080702 (60' • DDD)

The Atrium Quartet won first prize in the 2003 London International String Quartet Competition with a gripping account of Shostakovich's Fifth Quartet – along with the Twelfth, the most wide ranging and powerfully wrought of the cycle, though among the least performed. On their disc, unfazed by its demands, the Atrium steer a propulsive course through the *Allegro* – easily the most persuasively argued of Shostakovich's sonata-form movements – and effect a suspenseful transition into the *Andante*, whose otherworldliness is underlined by the sparing but varied use of vibrato. Nor does the finale disappoint – its initial animation and violent culmination leading to a coda whose bittersweet oblivion is unerringly captured.

This is undoubtedly the finest recording of the Fifth Quartet to have appeared during recent years and if that of Beethoven's *Harp* Quartet is not of the same stature, then the smouldering pathos and visceral excitement that the Atrium draw from its slow movement and *Scherzo* respectively suggest that the

Beethoven quartets are territory hardly less ripe for further exploration. The Atrium's Shostakovich, however, is a performance to treasure. Decently recorded, too.

Richard Whitehouse

'Animation and violence leading to a coda whose bittersweet oblivion is unerringly captured'

