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★★★★★ PERFORMANCE

★★★★★ RECORDING

The music of César Franck seems to have gone unaccountably out of fashion, and what a pity that is. How marvellous, then, to encounter his blistering, no-holds-barred Piano Quintet, one of the masterpieces of its genre, scrubbing up bright in the hands of some of the best advocates it could hope for. The Takács Quartet matches the music's mystic fervour and impassioned rhetoric with burnished intensity of tone, through which Marc-André Hamelin's apparently effortless virtuosity dashes and dives with scintillating clarity.

The Debussy String Quartet is an interesting choice of companion piece; the juxtaposition means that perhaps we notice its similarities to the Franck as much, if not more than, its very clear differences. That is also down to the Takács Quartet's playing infusing it with the same finger-singeing white heat it brings to the Franck. Earthy, passionate Debussy? Why ever not? This was a significant part of his own character and just because accepted tradition imagines him as light, impressionistic and floaty, that's no reason always to play him that way. The Takács's degree of drama is quite extreme, yet there's no loss to the wealth of detail. Leader Edward Dusinberre's phrasing has a beautiful, actorly, declamatory quality in the first movement, the pizzicato second movement is full of bounce and pointed motivic connections and the slow movement is exemplary in its inward and reflective nature. And the sound quality is absolutely splendid.

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