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What a superb performance of the Berg! These four musicians are outstanding—their individual skill and their communication with each other are the kind that creates magic. Delirious, dusky, sensuous tones caress you; and their fortes have strength like they're using bridge cables for strings. The piece is about as far as late romantic drama goes before it becomes completely emotionally unhinged; consonance is stretched and distorted, but never destroyed. Even before serialism, Berg was the most humane of the Second Viennese School.

To hear the strange opening of Beethoven's C-Sharp minor come out of the abrupt ending to the Berg is very disconcerting. It took me a good 30 seconds before I was even sure they were playing in any key, let alone the stated one. There is one recurring problem, though: they try to make the initial sounding of nearly every note too expressive, and the result is that wah-wah effect—probably the worst example of it I've heard from string players yet. It sounds like someone is sitting behind the mixing board, messing with the volume constantly. II and III aren't as bad, since the notes move faster, and there's less time to play that way. Some intonation weakness comes through in IV. It's a shame the Beethoven isn't better—the phrasing is so overdone, it lurches out of control, like someone learning to drive a stick shift. The Berg is definitely worth it, though. Excellent sonics; notes in English and German.

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GEN 13261
American Record Guide
5/9/2013