Whilst neither of the works on this disc is a world premiere, both will represent unknown territory to most people (as they certainly did to the present reviewer). Sergei Taneyev and Anton Arensky – born in, respectively, 1856 and 1861 – belonged to an in-between generation of Russian music, neither old enough to be coeval with Tchaikovsky, nor young enough to be colleagues of Rachmaninov and Scriabin. Arensky did take lessons from Rimsky-Korsakov (who spoke of him latterly with undisguised contempt) but owed much more to Tchaikovsky’s example. His variations on Tchaikovsky’s song Christ Had A Garden once enjoyed considerable celebrity as a Beecham-style lollipop. His Piano Quintet dates from 1900, and it owes its biggest stylistic debt to Schumann, whom it evokes in its coursing ebullience and tendency to repetitive rhythms. At times Mendelssohn and Dvořák are intimated too. Charm and good humour prevail, even the slower sections being pensive rather than conspicuously sad. Not the most profound, original, or exotic achievement, then, but a...
Welcome adjunct to the slender corpus of worthwhile pieces for this instrumental combination. It will inspire renewed sorrow that Arensky died (from tuberculosis aggravated by booze) when only 44 years of age. Taneyev's 1911 quintet shares with the Arensky a four-movement structure, yet there the resemblance ends. It plays for three-quarters of an hour, its first movement alone lasting nearly 20 minutes, almost as long as the Arensky in its entirety. Forget all the reference-book caricatures of Taneyev as dry, boring theorist. He takes listeners on one hell of a wild ride through mountainous, often desolate landscapes haunted by Wagner, Franck, Reger (whose idiom is implied in Taneyev's ostinato-laden penultimate movement) and occasionally Strauss (Elektra had burst on the world just two years earlier). Such a rugged score would impress even via indifferent playing, but the Australian performers captured here flamboyantly cope with everything Taneyev throws at them. They blend superb technical knowhow with white-knuckled fervour. The frequently tumultuous piano figuration never overwhelms the strings, as in lesser hands it could easily do. In fact, at a few moments the piano seems slightly recessed: a venial flaw. For evidence that – whatever most concert promoters may imagine – valuable Russian chamber music did not begin and end with Shostakovich's string quartets, look no further than this excellent CD.

Whilst neither of the works on this disc is a world premiere, both will represent unknown territory to most people (as they certainly did to the present reviewer). Sergei Taneyev and Anton Arensky – born in, respectively, 1856 and 1861 – belonged to an in-between generation of Russian music, neither old enough to be coeval with Tchaikovsky, nor young enough to be colleagues of Rachmaninov and Scriabin. Arensky did take lessons from Rimsky-Korsakov (who spoke of him latterly with undisguised contempt) but owed much more to Tchaikovsky's example. His variations on Tchaikovsky's song Christ Had A Garden once enjoyed considerable celebrity as a Beecham-style lollipop. His Piano Quintet dates from 1900, and it owes its biggest stylistic debt to Schumann, whom it evokes in its coursing ebullience and tendency to repetitive rhythms. At times Mendelssohn and Dvořák are intimated too. Charm and good humour prevail, even the slower sections being pensive rather than conspicuously sad. Not the most profound, original, or exotic achievement, then, but a welcome adjunct to the slender corpus of...
worthwhile pieces for this instrumental combination. It will inspire renewed
sorrow that Arensky died (from tuberculosis aggravated by booze) when
only 44 years of age.

Tanev’s 1911 quintet shares with the Arensky a four-movement
structure, yet there the resemblance ends. It plays for threequarters of an
hour, its first movement alone lasting nearly 20 minutes, almost as long as
the Arensky in its entirety. Forget all the reference-book caricatures of
Tanev as dry, boring theorist. He takes listeners on one hell of a wild
ride through mountainous, often desolate landscapes haunted by Wagner,
Franck, Reger (whose idiom is implied in Tanev’s ostinato-laden
penultimate movement) and occasionally Strauss (Elektra had burst on
the world just two years earlier).

Such a rugged score would impress even via indifferent playing, but the
Australian performers captured here flamboyantly cope with everything
Tanev throws at them. They blend superb technical knowhow with
white-knuckled fervour. The frequently tumultuous piano figuration never
overwhelms the strings, as in lesser hands it could easily do. In fact, at a
few moments the piano seems slightly recessed: a venial flaw.

For evidence that – whatever most concert promoters may imagine –
valuable Russian chamber music did not begin and end with
Shostakovich’s string quartets, look no further than this excellent CD.