

guardian.co.uk

Xenakis: String Quartets: Jack Quartet

Andrew Clements

October 22, 2009

Until now, few groups other than the dauntless Arditti Quartet have delivered Xenakis's four demanding works for string quartet with the combination of precision and visceral power this fiercely impacted music demands. But the New York-based Jack Quartet tackle it with such energy and panache that the performance becomes a wholly new, involving experience. The earliest piece here is ST-4/1.080262, for which Xenakis used a computer to calculate the statistical distribution of its pitches. But the standout work is Tetras, composed for the Ardittis in 1983, and emerging here as one of Xenakis's finest achievements, as it welds the four strings into a single, writhing, glissando-haunted super-instrument. Tetora, written for the Ardittis seven years later, is more introverted, more linear in its ideas, while the densely meshing Ergma was written as a tribute to the paintings of Mondrian. The performances of all of them are equally superb.