



Ludwig van Beethoven: Complete String Trios Op. 3, 8 & 9

aud 23.430

EAN: 4022143234308



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[American Record Guide](#) (Althouse - 01.03.2016)

Beethoven's five works for string trio were all written before his Op. 18 Quartets, so many commentators have seen them as preparatory works for the great quartets to follow. Such a judgement, though, doesn't do justice to the charm and freshness of these pieces. No one will argue these works to be superior to mature Beethoven (Op. 59 and later); but Thayer, for one, favored the Op. 9 Trios over the Op. 18 Quartets. Furthermore the five works are not cast in the same mold. The first two (Opp. 3 & 8) have six movements and are similar to a divertimento (Op. 8 is titled Serenade), while the last three from Op. 9 are shorter works in the standard four-movement format that would characterize most of the later quartets. One can see why Beethoven (and others) have preferred the added flexibility of a fourth instrument, but these trios show a surprising richness and variety of texture and expressive qualities. In other words you may dismiss them if you prefer later Beethoven, but don't dismiss them because they're one instrument short of a quartet. Better yet: don't dismiss them at all.

The Thibaud Trio, named for the legendary French violinist, was founded in 1994, though violinist Burkhard Maiss is the only original player still with the group. His colleagues are violist Hannah Strijbos and cellist Bogdan Jianu. An earlier Thibaud Trio (different violist) recorded the Op. 9 trios more than a decade ago (J/F 2005). These performances are very fast in the quicker movements (and faster than the earlier Op. 9) with wonderfully nimble passagework from violinist Maiss. Slow movements are nice as well, with no sense of impatience. Their extroverted playing is tempered by lovely soft playing, e.g. in the minuet to Op. 9:2. A delightful release, then, worthy to join earlier recommended recordings by the Leopold and Grumiaux Trios.