



Ludwig van Beethoven: Complete Works for Piano Trio - Vol. 3

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My Musicweb International colleague David Barker reviewed Volume 2 of this five-disc series in December 2015 (who knows, maybe even concurrently with the Swiss Trio recording the Variations presented here). If five discs seems a lot of space, it is because they are making their survey into Beethoven's works for piano trio as comprehensive as possible, and including not only the Triple Concerto, but also the Trio, Op. 38, the original arrangement of the Septet, Op. 20. There is a lot going for Volume 3, not least the rather interesting premise that the Swiss Piano Trio (Schweizer Klaviertrio) has used Czerny's *Errinerungen an Beethoven* (Reminiscences of Beethoven, Vienna, 1842) as an inspiration for their interpretations, particularly the chapter "On the correct performance of Beethoven's complete works with piano accompaniment."

Perhaps as an extension of this informed approach, the booklet notes on the works themselves are remarkably detailed. Such attention to detail extends to the performances themselves, all of them caught in a fabulous, perfectly-placed recording.

The Piano Trio, Op. 1/3, in Beethoven's favourite C minor key, is a major four-movement statement which holds in place of a slow movement an "Andante cantabile con variazioni," which actually here is the highlight of the performance. The five variations are expertly characterised, and they are not afraid of internalising. Sighing phrases are deliciously done; the group is not afraid of drama, also. And excellent programming, to boot, in that this prefigures the larger set of Variations to follow (Op. 44). The Menuetto has its more restless moments (deliberately coming across as a touch off-centre), but it has its beauties, also, not least the feather touch of pianist Martin Lucas Staub in the rapid upward-reaching gestures. The finale's strong outbursts of energy are perfectly judged.

Beethoven's Variation sets always hold much interest as well as delight, and Op. 44 is no exception. The E flat major theme is simple and bare-boned, given out in mezzo-staccato and in octaves, primed for exploration, and the succeeding 14 Variations include much eloquence from the present performers, not least from Sébastien Singer's cello. Finally, the Piano Trio No. 6 of 1808, also in E flat. The skeletal Poco sostenuto opening is taken at a very flowing tempo, following Czerny, and enables the Allegro ma non troppo main body of the movement to emerge naturally. The allegro itself holds some lovely sighing gestures, while the second movement Allegretto holds some real grit. The ensuing Allegro ma non troppo is a dream, with a terrific sense of flow; the finale feels perfectly calculated here, from its

baseline tempo through its exploration of the varying terrain. No mere throwaway finale, this movement balances the depth of the first movement. The Swiss Piano trio gives a remarkably satisfying account of this rewarding piece.

A lovely release, one that shows the dynamism of these works. Collectors will doubtless have their favourites in this repertoire, for many it will be the Beaux Arts Trio, although I hold a particular affection for Kempff with Szeryng and Fournier on DG in the two main Trios.

