

by Laura Toffetti and Tobias Bonz, present six symphonies surviving in transcription by Christoph Graupner, *Hofkapellmeister* to the court of Hesse-Darmstadt. Most likely conceived for the 'Grand Concerts' of the Berlin Royal Chapel, these are buoyant, vital constructions, invariably in a fast-slow-fast arrangement. Janitsch's northern *galant* was clearly of considerable interest to Graupner and his employers, and this disc's title encapsulates the spirit of the project; these are 'Darmstadt' performances, exploring Graupner's possible usage of his collected materials. Bonz's liner notes provide extensive numerical details of both Janitsch and Graupner's orchestral forces, before somewhat portentously extolling the primacy of rhetoric in Janitsch's music, adding that 'it is to make this linguistic content even more precise that Laura Toffetti has orchestrated the top voice ... among the violins, the flute and the oboe'. Graupner's enthusiasm for wind colour is well known (his orchestral suites in particular draw upon a considerable instrumentarium) and such varied flavours are not unwelcome in Janitsch's melodically propelled textures. This doubling is sensitively handled, particularly by the flautist Stefanie Schacht.

It is primarily in the slow movements that the contrapuntal mastery of the quartets is approached, though this need not be considered negatively; rather, it is a tribute to Janitsch's craftsmanship that his cultivated compact, introverted invention can successfully be applied beyond seemingly obvious constraints of scale and circumstance. As Tobias Schwinger comments in the notes, 'the connoisseur music lover of the art of Janitsch quatuor will recognize here in particular "their" Janitsch'. Occasionally, characterization is delivered at the expense of ultimate poise and stability, and certain more exuberant movements might have enjoyed being run into the buffers, rather than given the polite slowing treatment consistently applied here. Nonetheless, this is agreeable music-making which brings to our attention the southward dissemination of the Berlin style.

Websites

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Magnificent landscapes: new Beethoven recordings and the musical sublime

A new level of precision in historically informed Beethoven performance was reached in 1997. That year Malcolm Bilson and six of his former students at Cornell University (Tom Beghin, David Breitman, Ursula Dutschler, Zvi Meniker, Bart van Oort and Andrew Willis) released a ten-CD set on Claves containing the complete Beethoven piano sonatas. This was the first recorded attempt to perform each of the Beethoven sonatas on an instrument that was as close as possible to that which Beethoven and his contemporaries would have used. No fewer than nine fortepianos were deployed, ranging from a five-octave Anton Walter 1795 copy (Paul McNulty, 1996) to a copy of a 6½-octave Conrad Graf, c.1824 (Rodney Regier, 1995). The results of this marathon recording project are often exhilarating and revelatory, perhaps especially Bilson's performance of the 'Moonlight' Sonata, op.27 no.2, in which he leaves the dampers of his Walter copy fortepiano raised for the entire first movement, and unleashes the full resonance of its bass in the Presto agitato finale.

Such attention to instrumentation is ultimately, of course, a means to an end: for best results, the performer needs to deploy the period instruments' resources in the service of period aesthetics. Regarding these aesthetics, an anonymous reviewer for the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* in 1824 noted that Beethoven's last sonatas led one through a 'magnificent landscape, through forests, meadows, valleys and rocky gorges, with glimpses presenting the most ravishing vistas', yet 'the most captivating moments of calm could be followed by rapidly changing features next to one another ... causing one to hesitate along the way'. With this landscape metaphor, the writer invokes the idea of the sublime: that which inspires a sense of almost incomprehensible awe in the beholder. On recordings like the Bilson set, the pianists use their pianos' registration, articulation and resonance characteristics to help open up the sublime scenes and more placid panoramas that these early listeners 'saw'.

Today this approach—precise attention to instrumentation—is becoming more common. One example is a recent recording of Beethoven's complete violin sonatas with violinist Elizabeth Wallfisch and fortepianist David Breitman on **Ludwig van Beethoven: Sonatas for violin**

and fortepiano (Nimbus N16245, issued 2012, 104'), in which Breitman performs on copies of three period pianos dating from 1792 (Anton Walther), 1805 (Walther & Sohn) and 1814 (Streicher). To extend the landscape metaphor: Breitman and Wallfisch take the listener on tour through a magnificent museum (rather than a landscape), in which we can savour the tones of specific pianos, together with a period violin. Wallfisch approaches the repertory with the techniques of the Baroque violinist, which are nonetheless apt: she uses vibrato to warm long notes, rather than as an intrinsic component of tone colour; her bowing style, too, is highly articulate, nicely complimented by the fortepiano; this helps the duo to realize the 'speaking'/dialogic nature of Beethoven's sonata style in these works. What is missing here—although feasible on the instruments that they choose—is the dynamic contrast, surprising *sforzandi* and subtle shaping through rubato and portamentos that is appropriate for the early 19th century, and for Beethoven in particular. That said, Wallfisch's great talent lies in showing off the expressive qualities of the period violin and Beethoven's writing for it; one hears this, for example, when the violin takes over the theme in the Adagio molto espressivo slow movement of the 'Spring' Sonata, op.24.

In the case of another recent recording of the complete Beethoven violin sonatas, the attention to period performance practices and aesthetics is achieved, but without such attention to choosing exactly the right instrument: **Ludwig van Beethoven: Complete violin sonatas, vols.1–4** (Accent ACC24211–24214, issued 2009–11, 244'). Hiro Kurosaki is accompanied by Linda Nicholson, who plays a Viennese piano of Johann Fritz, c.1812. As Nicholson points out in her liner notes, these Viennese pianos *in general* are revelatory when used for these sonatas: 'The hammers are covered in leather rather than felt, resulting in a very clear, brilliant sound: this means that details in the bass which often sound "muddy" on a modern instrument can be heard clearly and incisively'. This is especially important, for example, in the development section of the first movement of the 'Kreutzer' Sonata, where Beethoven makes much use of the lower register, and in rapid passages.

These performers' use of fortepiano and 1800s violin brings to the fore the equal partnership that is so central to these sonatas. This is immediately apparent from their sensitive dialogue at the opening of the 'Kreutzer' Sonata, which also reveals the well-matched tone colour of gut strings and the registrally differentiated stringing of the Viennese fortepiano. Kurosaki's articulation in faster passages nicely matches that of the fortepiano, the bow

coming naturally off the string. The Presto of the Sonata in E \flat for Piano with Violin (as Beethoven termed it), op.12 no.3, reveals the main difference of their approach as compared to Wallfisch and Breitman: the articulation is the same but the range and intensity of dynamic contrasts, and the exciting use of *sforzandi* in particular, gives the Kurosaki/Nicholson recording a particular pungency and a sense of excitement that helps one to appreciate how contemporaries experienced these works. A reviewer for the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* of 5 June 1799 wrote the following regarding op.12: '[they are] quite peculiar [and] overladen with strange difficulties ... It is undeniable that Herr Beethoven goes his own way; but what a tiresome and bizarre way it is.' Something of the shock (but not horror) that this listener experienced can be heard, for example, in Kurosaki and Nicholson's rendition of the striking rhetorical unison opening of op.12 no.1, and even more so in the third variation of the second movement of this work, with its wild and rapid dynamic shifts.

Kurosaki plays a violin by Franz Geissenhof (Vienna, 1801) for the entire set. This is a completely historically defensible choice; further precision is neither necessary nor feasible: the late 18th-century violinist's equipment was in a state of transition, making it impossible to make a precise link between a particular instrument set-up, bow and performance technique, and a given Beethoven sonata. Owen Jander makes a rather-too-concrete association between the so-called 'Viotti bow', French Violin School technique and the 'Kreutzer' Sonata, op.47, in his 'The "Kreutzer" Sonata as dialogue', *Early Music*, xvi/1 (1988), pp.36–99. The nuanced bowing practices deployed by Kurosaki are apt. The use of bow articulation to vary repeats in the variations in the second movement of the 'Kreutzer', for example, is in keeping with what we know of the 'piquant' playing style of Beethoven's Viennese violinists, performers such as Ignaz Schuppanzigh and Franz Clement. This varied bow technique is complimented by other appropriate 'unwritten' touches in their reading of the 'Kreutzer' first movement, which is representative of their approach: brief cadenzas; rubato; the rolling of chords; ornamental use of vibrato; and improvised ornaments (in the recapitulation of the exposition, and before the retransition).

Above all, these performers' renditions of this well-known repertory are new and exciting: the period techniques and instruments are a means to an end, where that end seems to be to surprise the listener with the striking 'vistas'. The contours of these vistas are shaped, for example, by startling dynamic changes, pronounced *sforzando*

accents, and marked attention to registral interchange. The choice of Gustav Klimt for the cover design for each of the four volumes of the CD set is thus appropriate: the duo brings out the sublime and modernist aspects of these works, the features that struck both Beethoven and Klimt's contemporaries with awe.

Other recent period-instrument recordings of Beethoven's chamber music include a release of the lesser-known Quintet, op.16, with Penelope Crawford (fortepiano) and Cambini Winds on **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Quintet, K452; Ludwig van Beethoven: Quintet, Op.16** (Musica Omnia MO0501, issued 2013, 49'). Crawford's lyricism comes to the fore in the slow movement, and Cambini Winds' use of period instruments allow one to appreciate fully the way Beethoven uses the heterogeneous timbres of piano and winds to advantage, especially in the very Mozartian dialogue between fortepiano and winds that emerges in the jovial rondo finale. Indeed the ensemble's pairing of op.16 with Mozart's Quintet K452, also in E \flat , facilitates comparisons between these two related works.

Crawford brings out the capacity for lyricism of an 1835 Conrad Graf instrument in her recording of the three last piano sonatas on **'Magnificent landscapes': Beethoven's last piano sonatas Op.109, 110, 111** (Musica Omnia MO0308, rec 2010, 64'). This is especially evident in her reading of the Sonata in E major, op.109. Beautiful song is central to the aesthetics of these late works: further examples include the first movement of the Sonata in A \flat major, op.110, and the second movement of Sonata in C minor, op.111. While the aesthetics of the beautiful are well represented in this recording, one does not hear so much of the sublime, implied by the title of the CD and its cover, the awe-inspiring Bavarian mountain range painted by Beethoven's near-contemporary Caspar David Friedrich. For the musical sublime, and for the whimsical, quirky 'ornamental' style, another important aesthetic category of the time, one can turn back to Bilson and his students, especially Tom Beghin's memorable rendition of op.111.

Thanks to E. T. A. Hoffmann's 1810 review of Beethoven's Fifth for the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, the composer became known as the primary exponent of what we might term the 'symphonic sublime'. In terms of recent recordings that help the modern listener to appreciate the realms of the unconquerable, incommensurable and unfathomable implied in this term, one can turn immediately to Frans Brüggen and the Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century's recording of **Ludwig van Beethoven: The symphonies**

(Glossa GCDSA921116, rec 2011, 357'). Brüggen was one of the first to perform Beethoven's symphonies with period instruments; the ensemble originally performed mainly earlier 18th-century repertory. In this set, Brüggen shows a particular penchant for seeking out and magnifying the composer's drastic and dissonant turns, bizarre harmonies, sudden shifts and large-scale rhythm disjunctions—effects that shocked his contemporaries and gave critics like Hoffmann ample cause to invoke the sublime. But there is no lack of beauty and sensuality in these recordings either: one need listen no further than the recapitulation of the first movement of the 'Eroica' to hear the wonderful warmth with which the opening theme is 'completed' by the horn, after some startlingly brutal dissonant jolts.

Tafelmusik, conducted by Bruno Weil, also approach this repertory from the point of view of an ensemble formed on Baroque fare, in **Ludwig van Beethoven: Symphony No.3 'Eroica', Symphony No.4 'Italian'** (Tafelmusik TMK1019CD, rec 2012, 78'); they cling more closely to the aesthetics of Baroque performance practice, with a light and lucid style. *Gramophone* claims that 'Weil and players convince us that Beethoven can sound as radical in the 21st century as he must have done in the 19th'. This recording suggests, rather, how Beethoven might have sounded in the 18th century. For a startling and striking window on how Beethoven's symphonies often did sound to 19th-century ears, we can turn not to an orchestral performance, but to one on fortepiano: Ashley Wass playing Liszt's transcription of Beethoven's 'Pastoral' Symphony on **Beethoven/Liszt: Symphony No.6 Pastoral** (Orchid Classics ORC100024, rec 2011, 52'). Unfortunately the otherwise inspired and unusual choice of this version of the work, and Wass's attention to Liszt's score, is obscured by his choice of period instrument: had he chosen an Erard of the kind used by Liszt in the 1830s and '40s, rather than the reduced compass and disturbingly jangly Girikowsky that he plays, one might hear more of Beethoven's sublime and less of the fortepiano's action.

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