



GUITAR DUO EXCELS ON RARE ALL-BEETHOVEN PROGRAM

Period instruments and arrangements lend authenticity

BY TIM PANTING

That Beethoven did not write specifically for the guitar has been and will be a subject of discussion and analysis for many years to come. That he was familiar with the guitar and the guitarists of the day is not in doubt; it simply appears that the plucked “box” we so love did not light his compositional fire. The fascinating booklet notes for this CD describe the guitar in Beethoven’s “milieu,” in Vienna’s exceptional music scene at the dawn of the 19th Century, as an instrument that had reached more than respectable heights through such luminaries as Wenzel Matiegka, Vincenz Schuster, Simon Molitor, and Anton Diabelli all championing its cause through arrangements of the great works of the day.

Guitarists appear to have always been adventurous fellows, on the lookout for new peaks to ascend, and the guitar, while not perhaps having the dynamic range of the piano, could and can in its own way impersonate a full-blown orchestra if desired; all in the comfort of the salon.

That said, there are no attempts at arranging any of Beethoven’s symphonic works here. It’s the piano sonatas and

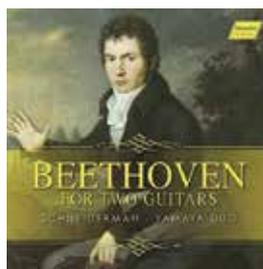
quartets that have lent movements to this project, as has the *Septet, Op. 20*, which provides the opener of the CD with the *Variations, Op. 3* arranged by Vincenz Schuster. The delicate sound-world is made utterly convincing by the obvious technical command of the performers. The call-and-answer phrasing of the variations is exemplified by two musicians in perfect synchronization with each other. John Schneiderman (guitar and terz guitar) and Hideki Yamaya (7-string guitar and guitar-in-D), provide us with a sumptuous recording on their period instruments (both originals and modern copies).

The arrangements are by leading lights of Beethoven’s era, including Ferdinando Carulli, whose *Variations and Rondo Op. 155* is from *Piano Sonata Op. 26*, and who also contributes the *Fantasy Op. 157*, which is, as the notes say, a rather freely arranged amalgamation of three

piano works: *Sonata Op. 2*, *Variations on a Theme of Paisiello, WoO 69*, and *Andante Favori, WoO 57*. At ten-and-a-half minutes, the latter is the longest work on the recording, and the valedictory piece of the CD.

The delights that bubble and simmer in between those include *Four Waltzes*, from *Six Waltzes Anh. 14* (published by Schott a year after Beethoven’s death, undoubtedly capitalizing on the fame of the composer). Arranged by Alexandre Heeser, this curious mix of waltzes by Schubert and unknown sources will be of great interest to the musical detectives out there.

The soft, nail-free (?) sound is beguiling and quickly draws you to the intimate world of two early 19th-century guitars. Those expecting Beethoven’s fireworks may have to accept a more delicate approach to the maestro’s oeuvre. But this is a fine addition to period instrument recordings played by exponents of the highest level. **CG**



**Beethoven
for Two Guitars**
Schneiderman-Yamaya
Duo
Hänssler Classic