

BEETHOVEN *Rondos*, Woo 48, 49; op. 51. *Andante favori*, Woo 57. *Rage Over the Lost Penny*, op. 129. *Polonaise*, op. 89. *Fantasie*, op. 77. *Bagatelles*, opp. 33, 119, 126. **Pieces for Orphica** • Tobias Koch (fp) • CAVI 8553321 (3 CDs: 171:02)

A joint production of Cavi, BR Klassik, and Deutsches Museum, this remarkable compendium is a strong candidate for year-end *Fanfare* honors, and seems to this listener an indispensable acquisition for any serious library of recorded music. These superbly recorded discs, presented in a handsome fold-over package (comprehensive notes in the first fold) purport to include all of Beethoven's individual ("free-standing"?) solo piano pieces, the works aside from the sonatas, variations, and dances. I can't for the life of me understand why the dances were eschewed, but let me return to that far from disqualifying matter later on. With respect to fortepianist Koch, you will see his visage in the booklet but otherwise we are referred to his web site for information: tobiaskoch.eu.

Even that web site does not tell us as much about the artist as we might wish to know. He is clearly a formidable and thoughtful musician, with total keyboard command. In one or two of the larger pieces one might wish to know how [fill in the name of your pianist] might have performed, but repeated listening has convinced me that Koch rises to every challenge in his lengthy traversal here. I happened to have at hand a lively rendition of op. 129 by Evgeny Kissin (a Carnegie Hall encore) and, as performed on a Graf fortepiano dating from 1827/28, even Kissin is left in the dust by Koch's playing.

The instruments are stars of this show. Four pieces are played on a tangent piano dating from 1790 made by C. F. Schmahl of Regensburg, and six more on a fortepiano dating from 1805 to 1810 (Vienna), Michael Rosenberger the builder. These two instruments have no pedals but sound splendid. The compositions are relatively early, dating from 1795 to 1803. The Graf fortepiano (Viennese as well), is a marvelous five-pedal unit with one of those pedals providing the smashing "Turkish Music" effects on op. 129. The beloved *Andante favori* and magnificent Fantasy in B Major, op. 77, are among the other four works played on this instrument, with op. 77 concluding the first CD to marvelous effect. The group played on the Rosenberger instrument concludes with the G-Major Rondo, op. 51/2 which, in Koch's beautiful interpretation, is another musical highlight of this set.

The second CD contains all of the bagatelles, performed on another Viennese instrument (three pedal), a "Patent Pianoforte" from the shop of Nannette

Streicher and Son, 1827. Thus, the compositions predate by as much as three decades the date of the pianoforte, but the last of the bagatelles is from 1826, and many are close to that date. Some of these pieces, particularly op. 126, are pretty large scaled and benefit from this modern-sounding instrument; the performer has a chance to exploit the "Patent's" considerable resources. Seventy-seven minutes are more bagatelles than I can comfortably hear at a sitting, but the generous tracking (34) enables one to listen to as much or as little as one wishes. I find, consistently, that when I begin the first CD, I listen straight through to the end, that glorious Fantasy, which concludes 78 minutes later!

The third CD is in the nature of an encore disc featuring a table-top instrument called the orphica. The instrument heard here dates from after 1800, some years after the invention of the device, c. 1795. A portable fortepiano using gut or metal strings, the orphica was made only in Vienna and few survive. The two Beethoven selections take less than 10 minutes; a few other very short pieces are also performed to enable us to hear the unique and lovely timbre of the instrument. It has a rather sopranoish sound that I find appealing, in a four-octave range.

One wonders, however, why the decision was made to omit Beethoven's dances.

They would have added to the appeal of the set and fit nicely on the mostly unused third CD. The Graf pianoforte would seem to be an ideal instrument.

Perhaps time and funding ran out. In any event, I am more than grateful for what we have. That includes splendid photographs of the five instruments with detailed specifications, dates, et al. Superb notes by Beate Angelika Kraus, in German and English, discuss the music, primarily but also performance on such instruments as these and greatly enhance listening pleasure. We are also given recording venues by instrument and composition. Sonically, this set is all of a piece—no great acoustic variation from one recording locale to another. The instrumental photos are in the four-leaf foldover slip which contains CDs and booklet (most securely). To my dismay, I find that three months' handling has resulted in a bit of wear and tear to the foldover glossy stock paper. I have made repairs and will handle with greater care.

You should acquire this remarkable release and handle with all suitable care as well. It is a treasure, nothing less! **James Forrest**

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