

Harpsichord & fortepiano

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BOOK REVIEW

The Beethoven Sonatas and the Creative Experience
 Kenneth Drake
 315pp
 Indiana 1994
 ISBN 0-253-31822-X

First impressions of this book might consign it to the realms of ascetic and high-powered analysis. Such concerns are quickly dispelled however as the titles of each chapter sink into the reader's own imagination; the first few chapters' promised investigations of 'Technique as Touch', 'Tempo and the Pacing of Musical Ideas', 'Dynamic Nuance', 'The Role of Silence' and 'Sound as Color' are enticing and appear to articulate the practical concerns of performing musicians. These initial chapters, not only drawing on examples from the sonatas but also from works by Haydn and Mozart, provide catalysts for thought at the cutting edge of one's own 'hands-on' experience in playing this repertoire. For the non-playing *Liebhaber* the scores are certainly necessary but the insights that author wishes to offer on each point are accessible and, on the whole, expounded clearly.

'THINKING OUT LOUD' ABOUT BEETHOVEN

Through these general deliberations and the subsequent more detailed probings of the sonatas, Drake's concerns are genuine: to provide undogmatic observation and convey his fascination with the tactility of playing the Beethoven works. The volume as a whole does not purvey an unassailable 'Authenticity' but a personal attitude that is unashamedly expressed. Brave attempts to define 'tone-colour', 'Movement as Energized Color' (a chapter looking at the exercise-like choreography inherent in the contours of the 'Waldstein') and speculations about 'The Moment of Creation' in the sonatas op. 28 and op. 31 nos. 2 and 3—to name but three—are admirable and can be provocative. To embrace rather amorphous and unquantifiable angles, when others might clothe insights in blatantly pseudo-scientific language, is not easy and is open to derision. The awkwardness of expressing the

type of 'thinking out loud' and illustrative exploratory thought in this book can seem at times naïve and somewhat earnest in its conspicuouslyness, but it is quite definitely of value. It is not only an exposition of the author's own opinions but also a reconsideration of other commentators from Czerny—obviously of extreme importance—onwards.

It would be inappropriate and uncharitable to pick over every point in a review of this book. Its intentions are laudable but the criticism must lie with the person who is at the point of inner debate at the keyboard, and actively involved with the enunciation of this music. Drake attempts to express (informed by teaching of the sort of joint performance/musicology course now increasing in popularity in the UK?) states of mind we all long to express whilst teaching and discussing. Despite its whistle-stop tour of sonata fragments, whose context could sometimes be shown more clearly, the success of this book rests very much with its ability to stimulate the reorientation of personal perceptions.

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DISC REVIEWS

Bach à la Carte

David Schrader (hpd)
Timing: 77'15
Cedille Records CDR 90000 020

Here is one you will not want to judge by its cover. Picture a round table covered with hotel linen; at the back, a plaster bust of Bach spray-painted gold; in the foreground, a gastronomic nightmare: a plate of pasta and sauce, a bottle of Bordeaux and a glass half filled, a second *entrée* of sauerkraut and sausage, and for dessert, a gussied-up English trifle. Once you get past the silly title and cover, however, this really is a worthwhile recording of Bach.

Schrader is a solid, energetic performer on harpsichord and organ, as his previous Cedille recordings of Bach (organ) and Soler (harpsichord) attest. His playing is vigorous, virtuosic and well articulated. Whilst these characteristics serve Schrader well in the fast movements, one could wish for a more graceful, reflective approach to the slower movements, and a little more give and take overall: Schrader's momentum borders, at times, on the relentless.

The outstanding performance here is the *Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue* in D minor BWV 903. This is *stylus phantasticus* at its best, recorded or live: improvisatory, rhapsodic, with drama and flair. Schrader's rendering of the Recitativ is particularly sensitive and flexible. As I think Bach intended in these pairings, the fugue must follow not only as contrast but also as outgrowth of the fantasy, and Schrader's interpretation strengthens their connection. One can almost feel the counting of beats between the two movements, so as to relate proportionally the second to the first.

In the *Overture in the French Manner* (Partita in B minor) BWV 831 and the English Suite no. 1 in A major BWV 806, Schrader projects well the various dance characteristics, although a few places get a little heavy-footed. Among the outstanding individual movements

are the Gavottes, Passapieds, Gigue and Echo of the *Overture*; and the Prelude, Allemande and Sarabande of the Suite. In the 'Overture' movement of the *Overture*, Schrader takes all the repeats, so consequently it clocks in at 11'36—but the interest never flags.

Schrader's playing of the *Italian Concerto* in F major BWV 971, holding first place on the recording, presents what I consider Schrader's strengths and weaknesses on the whole disc. The Concerto moves along at a good, comfortable clip, but not so fast that the tunes and figures are blurred beyond comprehension. In the outer fast movements, however, some of Schrader's articulations on downbeats impede too noticeably the rhythmic drive and forward flow of quavers or semiquavers, as do some of his shifts of manuals. I was disappointed, too, in his rather strict manner for the *Andante*; some of the expressiveness Schrader applied to the *Chromatic Fantasy* would not have been out of place here. The harpsichord used in this recording was built in 1992 by Paul Y Irvin, Glenview, Illinois. An expanded version of a 1638 Ruckers, the instrument has a rich, northern sound well suited to this music and the modified Young temperament is a good choice. Cedille's engineering is flattering, although possibly too close—but most harpsichord recordings are. Schrader's liner notes are models of content and conciseness, given the format.

LEE RIDGWAY

Beethoven: "Gassenhauer" Trio op. 11, Piano trios op. 1 no. 3 and op. posth. 154 (WoO 39)

Meyer (cl); Cohen (fp); Höb Barth (vn);
Coin (vc)
Timing: 60'30
Harmonia Mundi HMC 901475

The Cohen-Höb Barth-Coin trio are already building a fine reputation

for their chamber music recordings, invariably combining a lively interpretation of the music with thorough scholarship. This offering is no exception. Wolfgang Meyer joins Patrick Cohen and Christophe Coin for the op. 11 clarinet trio, paired with an early piano trio (the violinist is Erich Höb Barth) and an *Allegretto* fragment, WoO 39. The C minor trio from op. 1 with which the disc begins dates from 1795. The maturity and boldness of the young Beethoven are clearly demonstrated, showing how far he had already progressed beyond his models in Haydn and Mozart. Haydn, whilst giving his approval to the other two trios in the set, advised Beethoven not to publish no. 3—its sense of drama and the breadth of expression could easily have been unnerving, though it is hard to see Haydn himself feeling threatened by a work of such consummate artistry. The B^b *allegretto* which follows here is not in the same league—it is a genial enough piece, whose brief digressions into other keys barely impinge on the overall mood of quiet contentment, with its gentle dialoguing and long string notes.

The op. 11 trio, sometimes heard in a version for violin, cello and piano, is different again. A reviewer in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* did not think it 'natural' enough, but commented on what he called Beethoven's 'unusual harmonic knowledge'. Strangely, it is not the harmony which now strikes us so much as the virtuosity of the writing. Like the septet op. 20, the slow movement has a superficial resemblance to the Minuet from the piano sonata, op. 49 no. 2. It is a beautiful, deeply-felt piece of writing, played here with appropriate intensity. The finale is a set of variations on an operatic theme by Joseph Wiegels which the publisher Artaria tricked Beethoven into writing, to his evident fury. It is from this that the trio gets the pejorative "street-song" nickname. Czerny reports that Beethoven later regretted not having provided another movement to complete the trio but in fact this set of nine variations makes a fitting conclusion, hinting as it does of greater wonders yet to be heard from the composer in the variation form and, in the last variation,

revealing an already advanced contrapuntal dexterity.

The performances on this recording could scarcely be surpassed: the players are alive to every one of the music's shifts of mood and there is a strong structural control in each work so that these never get out of proportion. The recording is clear and forward. My only worry on this score is the left-right spatial separation which seemed to me to be too great for these instruments: fine for a small room, but I was listening in a larger space in which it sounded very odd.

SÉBASTIEN DÉDIS

Haydn: English and Scottish Songs

Mhairi Lawson (sop); Olga Tverskaya (fp); Rachel Podger (vn); Oleg Kogan (vcl) Timing: 64'07 Opus 111 OPS 30-121

Some of the songs on this disc have already been recorded a couple of times using original instruments, yet the present recording makes a convenient companion to Catherine Bott's performance with Melvyn Tan (and others) on Meridian since they only overlap in a few cases. The songs fall into three groups: Scottish and Welsh folksong arrangements, some with violin and cello accompaniment, and examples from the two books of Canzonets with texts written or selected by Anne Hunter. (Mrs Hunter was the widow of an English surgeon and her relationship with Haydn was a matter of much contemporary speculation.) Her texts are often rather crude to modern sensibilities but they made a great impact when they were written. The piano writing in the songs is varied, but tends towards the elaborate, a fact noted with some concern by the publisher of the first collection (1792), William Napier. Later collections were issued by George Thompson and their popularity is attested by the fact that many other composers, including Beethoven, contributed folksong arrangements to his collections. The Canzonets were published by the firm

established by Dussek when he fled to England after the break-up of his marriage—Dussek apparently had no fears for the complexity of the piano parts and the canzonets contain some of Haydn's most illustrative and effective keyboard writing.

Olga Tverskaya uses an English piano, an original Broadwood restored by David Winston, very like the sort of English instrument that Haydn himself knew and for which he wrote his last piano sonatas. Tverskaya's playing is ardent and natural, drawing marvellous colours from the piano. Rachel Podger and Oleg Kogan join in to good effect in a few numbers. Mhairi Lawson's singing is less consistently satisfying: in some pieces she is imaginative—Sir Watkin's Dream is especially entertaining—but too often she uses an histrionic style verging on the over-cooked. It is regrettable that in *The Mermaid's Song* and some other pieces she allows exaggerated consonants to spoil the music's line and she tries to inject more emotion than the piece can stand. Her accent in the Scottish songs, though presumably authentic, sounds arch where it should be convincing. It reflects perhaps too clearly the artificiality of the time, against which William Napier was trying so hard to guard his music-buying public in 1792.

SÉBASTIEN DÉDIS

J N Hummel: Mandolin concerto and other chamber works

D Frati (mand)/I Soloisti di Fiesole/
Paszkowski; J Levitz (vla); M
Mazzini (fl); S Fiuzzi (fp)
Timing: 76'06
Dynamic CDS 128

The combination of mandolin and piano is potentially fatal: the two sounds are utterly dissimilar and there is a tendency for them to separate like a failed *béarnaise* sauce. It says much for the performers on this disc that they manage to make the op. 37 sonata sound as convincing as they do. The work is

labelled as a 'sonata with accompaniment of mandolin or violin', which is a very outmoded description at this date: like the title 'Grande Sonata' it is perhaps intended as a joke. The tone of the 1823 Graf which Stefano Fiuzzi plays is attractive but probably too warm for the mandolin and the instrument is certainly too late—the piece was written in 1810. The writing for mandolin is idiomatic, using many repeated notes and scale passages, and both instruments are played with skill and sensitivity. The same is true in the mandolin concerto S. 28. This 1799 work also exists in a later version for piano, which is if anything more virtuosic than the original. The orchestral writing is unadventurous throughout, with winds doing little more than double the strings, but there is still much to enjoy in the solo part, including some charming cadenzas.

The E^b sonata for viola and fortepiano op. 5 no. 3, though it betrays its early date in the somewhat lightweight cast of its melodies, is in other ways a surprisingly mature piece for its twenty-year-old composer. It contains bold contrasts of material and the *Adagio cantabile* second movement has clear pre-echoes of an Early Romantic spirit. To my mind this is the highlight of the disc: music that surely boded well for Hummel's future employment as Haydn's successor at Esterháza.

The remaining work offered on this diverse and entertaining recording is a sonata for flute and fortepiano dating from 1810–14. This work has a very striking slow movement in which the flute's sustained notes have a melancholic simplicity. The finale is rumbustious, filled with the sort of fearsome keyboard passage-work for which Hummel is chiefly remembered. Fiuzzi manages all with ease, though at times the flute is obscured by Hummel's busy piano texture. Indeed, the pianist's contribution throughout is what holds this disc together, and if his playing is on occasion over-emphatic it should be remembered that the only way to deal with a separating sauce is to beat it vigorously.

AMY FOSTER

Rameau: Pièces de Clavecin en concerts (1741)

(a) Ketil Haugsand (hpd), Catherine Mackintosh (vn), Laurence Dreyfus (gamba) Timing: 69'22
Simax PSC 1095

(b) Christophe Rousset (hpd), Ryo Terakado (vn), Kaori Uemura (gamba)
Timing: 73'32
Harmonia Mundi HMC 901418

A comparative review of these two discs makes a stimulating study—the style of playing is remarkably different, though both recordings must be considered very stylish. Even the selection of pieces is not quite the same, as the Harmonia Mundi disc with Christophe Rousset has four more tracks through the inclusion of Rameau's solo keyboard versions of several pieces. This seems a good idea, if only to provide Rameau's own alternative readings—it makes interesting listening to hear what he expected a player to do when transcribing the concert pieces for solo keyboard.

The kind of trio represented by the *Pièces de Clavecin en concerts* is quite different from Italian trio sonatas with their two high melodic lines accompanied by cello and keyboard. Rameau's pieces reflect the French fondness for a written-out harpsichord part where the right hand often forms a duet with only one other melody instrument—rather than a figured bass. The harpsichord writing is adventurous as befits a composer who had already produced a large body of solo keyboard music. The gamba has an important rôle too, and Rameau's writing for this instrument is remarkably varied. In all the five suites of the 1741 publication the sonority is rich and colourful, and it has been frequently noted that Rameau was here putting to good use all his experience as an operatic composer: *La Livri* in particular, from the first suite, in a dark C minor and with its constantly flowing harpsichord part, suggests the sound-world of both *Dardanus* and *Hippolyte et Aricie*.

Perhaps the difference of approach in the two performances under consideration can be well summarised by reference to the rondeau *La Timide*. This is one movement that Rousset plays as a solo as well as *en concert*. In both his versions the music has a telling expressiveness and Ryo Terakado plays the violin line with a haunting quality. In the 2^o Rondeau the players essay a sudden boldness, but timidity returns all too suddenly. The *inégalité* becomes almost desperate in the final reprise, partly through being slightly understated. The performance by Haugsand et al is more legato, more even-tempered, and for me at least this becomes a trifle monotonous. The recording here, as elsewhere in this disc, is very forward, the instrumental sound a little unrelenting compared with the more melting quality of the Rousset version. The 2^o Rondeau is given a track-subdivision by Simax (the same applies to the Menuet in the second suite and the Tambourin in the third)—I question if this is really necessary: is anyone likely to want to hear it separately from the rest of the piece? Rousset's solo performance is slightly freer rhythmically but does not have the colourfulness of the trio version: Rameau's assertion that the pieces lose nothing by being performed on harpsichord alone does not seem entirely borne out.

In some of the livelier movements, Mackintosh, Dreyfus and Haugsand sound thoroughly at ease. Catherine Mackintosh has a bright and expressive tone with some very subtle tuning at times, very well in evidence in *La Cupis*, but she is not always well matched by the other players. Haugsand plays a harpsichord he made himself, which has an attractive bass but sounds rather thin in the higher registers. His use of *inégalité* is not entirely convincing—it seems imposed instead of arising naturally out of the expressive demands of the music. In contrast, Rousset understands the music's rhythmic shape perfectly. Listen, for example, to his playing in *La Boucon* or *La La Poplinière*, where he provides a strong forward flow without any loss of sensibility in the short term. Rousset plays an original Hemsch—a lovely instrument with

a warm tone throughout its compass—and the pitch is a fraction lower than Haugsand uses (though both are in the region of 392 Hz).

The booklet notes are excellent in each case, but the writers (Laurence Dreyfus and Sylvie Bouissou) have some difference of opinion concerning the exact meaning of movement titles. Dreyfus, for instance, thinks that *La Cupis* refers to Mme Camargo, the dancer, whereas Bouissou believes it is more appropriate to one of her brothers, François Cupis; and does *La Coulicami* refer to the Persian hero Kouli Khan or is it an example of a kind of French back-slang which really hints at *l'ami cocu* (or cuckold-friend)? These titles, like those of Couperin, will probably provide years of speculation for musicologists.

HOWARD A FENTON

Pièces de Clavecin from the Bauyn Manuscript

Vol. II: Divers Styles dans l'Éloquence
Timing: 71'29 Collins Classics 14212

Vol. III: La Belle Manière du Toucher
Timing: 66'46 Collins Classics 14222
Jane Chapman (hpd)

The second and third instalments in this set of three discs, based on the contents of the Bauyn manuscript, will be familiar to anyone having encountered the first, *Beau Génie*, reviewed in the last issue of *H&F*.

The second disc juxtaposes works by Louis Couperin with those of Froberger, Frescobaldi and four pavannes of anonymous source. The disc opens with a pavanne in F minor by Couperin. This would normally be a *ton de chèvre* or 'goat' key, so called because of the unpleasant 'bleating' intervals resulting from the mean-tone temperament used. A solution frequently used at the time was to set the temperament with the unusable 'wolf' interval transposed few steps, making the key more palatable whilst retaining the distinctive character of this chromatic piece.

Louis Couperin's works were apparently never published during his lifetime, though his works were highly regarded owing to the existence of private manuscript copies, such as the Bauyn compilation. His style is far more experimental and pioneering than many of his contemporaries, owing to his having experienced much foreign music. This absorption of styles he acknowledges in the A minor suite, with the *Prélude à l'imitation de M Froberger*; Johann Jacob Froberger was born in Germany and travelled, studying with Frescobaldi. The latter two are represented in the Bauyn source and here on disc: Froberger with a Toccata and Ricercar, alongside a Capriccio and Fantasia by Frescobaldi.

The four anonymous pavannes which appear here are presented in the same order as in the Bauyn manuscript; these may well be transcriptions of instrumental works.

Louis Couperin's output is surely the binding element of this second disc and, as Richard Langham Smith points out in his informative CD notes, the suites include several distinctive *pièces de caractère*: *La Piémontaise* and *Menuet de Poitou*, supposedly from the Piedmont and Poitou regions, and the gigue-like *Canaries*, reputedly a dance from the Canary Islands.

The third disc in the series, literally 'The beautiful manner of touching', contains four suites by Chambonnières together with a suite and four allemandes by Henry Dumont and a suite by a composer named Hardel.

Jacques Champion Chambonnières, whose own skill as a player is perhaps alluded to in the title of the disc, was an acknowledged master amongst the French *clavecinistes*. Serving Louis XIII, he influenced a whole generation of younger composers including Louis Couperin and indeed his works form the major part of the Bauyn manuscript. Some of the suites presented here were not published during his life; however, the Chaconne in the F# major suite will strike many listeners' ears as immediately familiar.

Dumont, another disciple, worked at the Chapelle-Royale in

Paris, whereas very little is known about Hardel—not even his Christian name—though as a leading pupil of Chambonnières his works are of exceptional quality and were widely popular in his day.

The double-manual Ruckers harpsichord of 1614, restored and tuned at $a' = 415$ Hz, is convincingly recorded throughout the three-disc set, with interesting choices of registration which add variety and character to lively performances presented by Jane Chapman. A firm recommendation.

STEPHEN PATRICK

**Schubert:
Impromptus
D. 899 & D. 935**

Peter Katin (fp)

Timing: 64'22

Athene ATH CD5

Peter Katin's new recording of Schubert impromptus is fascinating from many points of view, and makes a very interesting comparison with Melvyn Tan's 1988 EMI recording of the same music. Firstly, Katin plays an original Clementi square of 1832 restored by Andrew Lancaster, the sort of instrument that would commonly have been used throughout the 19th century for this kind of music. The lovely singing tone that Katin draws from the piano is enchanting: the instrument has a gentle sound and despite some slight thinness in the topmost notes it is thoroughly appropriate for the delicacy of Schubert's textures. If at times the action sounds troublesome this is perhaps only to be expected, and it is a testament to the restorer that it is generally so even throughout the six-octave compass. The instrument is tuned in equal temperament at $a' = 423$ Hz, this low pitch presumably dictated by the state of the instrument. Katin decided to record the piano in his own studio rather than a large, reverberant acoustic in order to suggest the intimacy of the rooms in which these pianos would most likely have been heard.

The two sets of impromptus—so often heard together—are actually very different in character,

and the comparison between Katin and Tan reveals this difference clearly. The second set is somewhat more virtuosic, requiring a bold and vigorous tone, together with nimble fingerwork, whereas one might say that the earlier group is more poetic—after all, it contains the famous G piece, with its premonition of Chopin nocturnes. Katin is distinctly more at home with the first set, D. 899: this is in part the result of the choice of piano, which sounds rather ill at ease in the pounding octaves of the F minor impromptu (no. 1 from D. 935). The broken-chord figuration in this impromptu and in the G piece already referred to, however, sound utterly convincing: Katin has a superb control over the volume and balance of the texture in these and similar passages. He plays the music with a relaxed grasp of its rhythmic basis and the relationship between this music and song. On occasion, the arpeggiation of left-hand chords becomes a trifle mannered, but there is very little of the 'modern' playing that so often besets players who move from the Steinway to instruments of an earlier age. In particular, he seems to understand the way in which the instrument must dictate the degree of stress that can be applied when Schubert marks, for example, *ff* or *fp*, and he uses the pedal to good effect. He sounds least comfortable in the passages requiring rapid execution—the opening of the E impromptu from the first set is decidedly uneven, though it improves later, which suggests that another take might not have gone amiss.

The recording is close, as the size of Katin's studio presumably determined, and the booklet suggests that one should listen at a relatively low volume. This is a matter for personal preference, and I should say that it scarcely matters: the sound is good at all levels, and partly as the result of some slightly obtrusive background noise—including an obvious page-turn at one point—it is realistic. Peter Katin's Schubert disc is one of a series of early piano recordings from Athene: if this recording is at all representative, it is a record company to continue to listen out for.

DECLAN DEUCHAR