

GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

EXPLORING BEETHOVEN

David Thresher works his way through a number of recent Beethoven albums, including rarely heard works and arrangements



Young Beethoven: pianist Leonardo Miucci is joined by Meret Lüthi, Sonoko Asabuki and Alexandre Foster

Composer anniversaries offer an opportunity for reacquaintance, rediscovery, reappraisal and a host of other musical activities. This often works well when the composer is not of the first rank, and the major works can be dusted off to show how skilful, influential or otherwise important he or she was. When the composer is one of the great luminaries of the art, however, musicians, concert-givers and recording companies often face a quandary. The double Mahler celebration of a decade ago is a case in point. When virtually the entirety of the output forms the backbone of the concert repertoire, the only option is simply to do more of it. All the same, wonderful though the experience of a Mahler symphony or song-cycle is, it's not as if you ever have to wait long for the next one to come around.

Beethoven doesn't quite fall into the same category. Of course, orchestras are falling over themselves to offer symphony cycles; likewise pianists and violinists of the sonatas and concertos. There are wall-to-wall *Fidelios* and *Missae solennes* during this anniversary year. *Gramophone* has already considered not one but three 'complete editions' of varying completeness (2/20). But all these

indisputable masterpieces come with baggage: there's a capacious hinterland to the great works and at times such as this musicians are entitled to feel emboldened to dust off the pieces that see the light of day less often, to throw the repertoire into relief.

Ah, repertoire – that word again. Nobody would dispute that the symphonies and concertos, the big choral and vocal works, the sonatas and string quartets are indispensable facets of 'the repertoire', presented to us over and over again on disc and in concert. Cellists, too, have reason to be thankful to Beethoven for providing the cornerstone of their Classical/Romantic repertoire.

Robin Michael is the latest to take on the five sonatas and the variations, which handily fit on a pair of discs. Michael's instrument is a modern reproduction of a Goffriller of 1695, over which he wields a pair of period-appropriate bows; Daniel Tong plays a Paul McNulty copy of a Walter fortepiano from around 1805. Michael draws a rich, throaty sound from his instrument, matched when Beethoven's writing is at its knottiest by the baritone registers of Tong's keyboard. But the lighter tone of the variations is especially suited to this piano;

interleaved between the sonatas, the variations break up the weightier pieces ideally.

While string players are amply served by Beethoven, wind players have less to get their teeth into. There is, of course, the wonderful, youthful Septet, and there's the *Gassenbauer* Trio for clarinet, cello and piano that's often co-opted by standard piano trios. They make an ideal pairing and a disc by the **Berkeley Ensemble** follows only a few months after a similar one by Éric Le Sage and friends (*Alpha*, A/18, albeit with a trio arrangement of the Septet). Only a couple of moments of odd intonation above the staff detract from the pleasure of this tried-and-tested wind-and-strings coupling.

Flautists have it even harder. A disc from **Duo FlautoPiano** contains only one piece composed for this combination, and even that is buried in the 'WoO Anhang' section of the catalogue. Elsewhere are arrangements – most strikingly of the Horn Sonata – and a Duo for two flutes from 1792 that twitters away briefly and forgettably. Only an arrangement (by Theodor Boehm) of the *Adagio* of the First Symphony sticks in the mind, and there's a good reason for that.

All of the First Symphony was arranged by Hummel for flute, violin, cello and piano and it works rather well in a performance by **Uwe Grodd** and the **Gould Piano Trio**. Less persuasive is Hummel's take on the *Eroica*, a work whose size and weight bursts at the seams of this polite chamber group. Revolutions can be contained only by continents and trying to squeeze one into your salon is never going to happen. Not that these players don't lavish all their considerable skill upon it all the same.

Hummel also composed a *Grande Sonate* for mandolin and piano that turns up on a disc by **Julien Martineau** and his pianist **Vanessa Benelli Mosell**. The context is a series of four little movements by Beethoven for this combination, which are strangely affecting in their own way. Along with tributes to Beethoven by Fritz Kreisler and Corentin Apparailly (*b1995*), there is also an arrangement of the *Allegretto* of the Seventh Symphony that builds to a surprisingly momentous climax. The disc closes with an arrangement of Walter Murphy's *A Fifth of Beethoven*, drumkit and all – to be honest, the only moment during my listening that raised a chuckle of pleasure rather than a smile of appreciation.

The **Fine Arts Quartet** offer 'Fugues and Rarities', ranging from early versions of

Op 18 No 1 and the first movement of Op 131 – all elements instantly recognisable but caught at a point before Beethoven had marshalled his material into the indelible classic forms as we know them. Attempts at fugues both early and late (and a transcription of one from Handel's *Solomon*) trace the rocky road to the *Grosse Fuge*, with which the disc closes.

Then there is a sequence of three piano quartets from Beethoven's teenage years in Bonn. The composer's character is yet to be revealed; you notice scraps of themes in the process of forming but never quite becoming what they might in the hands of the mature master barely a decade later. The **Klaviertrio Hannover** present them alongside a transcription of the piano-and-wind Quintet, Op 16 – music that is unmistakably Beethovenian for all its reliance on a Mozartian model. An Italian foursome led by the pianist **Leonardo Miucci** offer the quartets for the first time on period instruments. Both are finely done, and only the choice of instruments or the added repertoire might sway your choice. If, indeed, these accomplished if anonymous works of a 15-year-old are how you wish to continue your Beethoven celebrations this year. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Beethoven Cpte Wks for Vc & Pf
Robin Michael, Daniel Tong
Resonus **M** RES10254



Beethoven Septet, 'Gassenhauer' Trio
Berkeley Ensemble
Resonus **F** RES10255



Beethoven Wks for Fl & Pf
Duo FlautoPiano
MDG **F** MDG903 2135-6



Beethoven Syms (arr Hummel)
Uwe Grodd; Gould Piano Trio
Naxos **B** 8 574039



Beethoven Wks for Mandolin & Pf
Martineau, Benelli Mosell
Naïve **F** V7083



Beethoven Fugues & Rarities
Fine Arts Quartet
Naxos **B** 8 574051



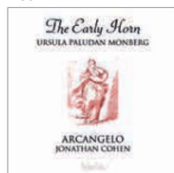
Beethoven Pf Qts. Pf Qt, Op 16a
Klaviertrio Hannover
Genuin **F** GEN19673



Beethoven Pf Qts
Lüthi, Asabuki, Foster, Miucci
Dynamic **F** CDS7854

'The Early Horn'

Anonymous Concertos – in E flat, Wenster/Lund 4; in E, Wenster/Lund 6 **CH Graun** Concerto, Wenster/Lund 7. Trio, Wenster/Lund 8 **Haydn** Divertimento a 3, HobIV:5 **L Mozart** Sinfonia da camera **WA Mozart** Horn Quintet, K407 **Telemann** Concerto a 3, TWV42:F14 **Ursula Paludan Monberg** *h/n*
Arcangelo / Jonathan Cohen
Hyperion **F** CDA68289 (79' • DDD)



Ursula Paludan Monberg, born in 1982 in Aalborg, Denmark, is already

the doyenne of the natural horn, having occupied principal chairs with The English Concert, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Arcangelo and others. A veteran of B minor Masses (including the *Gramophone* Award-nominated one by this ensemble – 11/14), she now makes her solo debut recording with a selection of pieces from the mid- and late 18th century.

Monberg is demonstrably a master of the instrument. Even with the later invention of valves, the horn remains notoriously difficult to play, so with just a mouthpiece and bell connected by several feet of brass tubing, to make anything approaching an expressive sound is an achievement. Fair enough that the recorder takes the lead in a concerto by Telemann; but the blend with oboe d'amore in an anonymous concerto in E and another in D by one of the Graun family shows why combinations of horn with the larger oboes became such a favourite of Bach, Haydn and others. Chromaticism is achieved by hand, squeezing and pinching notes from the bell. Tone quality is obviously never going to be even and it is fascinating to hear how this was seen by these composers not as a limitation but as a challenge. If the tuning becomes a little gamey higher up, that's a quirk of the instrument, not the player.

The star is predictably Mozart's Horn Quintet, which closes the disc. The extra twist here is that the edition used is by JA André, who was the prime mover behind so many first printed editions of Mozart's music after the composer's death. Apparently the work was best known in an arrangement for string quintet, and this is the first printing to restore the horn part, albeit with a few minor cuts and some of the difficult lower notes transposed up an octave. It's well worth waiting for at the end of the disc, the athleticism of its closing Rondo echoing the *Sinfonia da camera* by Mozart's father with which the programme opens. If the quintet towers above the rest

of the music here, it's nevertheless fascinating to hear what was expected of the horn players of the time. **David Thresher**

'Richard Strauss and the Viennese Trumpet'

Beethoven Variations on 'God save the King', WoO78 (arr Jones) **Bruckner** Ave Maria III **Fux** Sonata, K347 (arr Jones) **Mahler** Urlicht **Schubert** Sonatina, K408 (arr Freeman-Attwood) **R Strauss/Oehler** Trumpet Sonata 'after Richard Strauss' **Webern** Piece in G (arr Freeman-Attwood) **Zemlinsky** Lied der Jungfrau, Op 13 No 3
Jonathan Freeman-Attwood *tp* **Chiyan Wong** *pf*
Linn **F** CKD621 (61' • DDD)



In James Blish's story *A Work of Art*, scientists in an art-starved future use

the music of Richard Strauss to recreate the composer's personality. Duly reincarnated, he's put to work writing new masterpieces: only to find that, being made of nothing else, he's unable to do anything except recycle his old ideas and mannerisms. It's fun to imagine the sort of music the synthetic Strauss might have created: presumably something very like this trumpet sonata 'after Strauss', created with enormous skill by Thomas Oehler and *Gramophone's* own Jonathan Freeman-Attwood.

It's almost entirely assembled from existing works by Strauss, and spotting which ones could make an entertaining party game. Stretches of the Violin Sonata dominate the first movement, there's a cheeky glimpse of Zerbinaetta in the finale, and a slice of *Zarathustra* serving as a lush slow movement. Taken in the right spirit, it's rather good, and an extensive booklet-note tells the story of how two intelligent and imaginative musicians set about solving this fascinating 'what if'. Needless to say, it's played with supple, shining lyricism and considerable verve by Freeman-Attwood and pianist Chiyan Wong.

The rest of the disc is good value too: all transcriptions of works by Viennese masters, of which Beethoven's Variations on 'God save the King' get the most extensive – not to say mischievous – makeover. A 'sonata' assembled from pieces by Fux is sprightly and stylish, there's a rapt account of Mahler's 'Urlicht', and the pair play Schubert's G minor Sonatina with a playful sense of Schubertian style. It all adds up to a very appealing recital; a perfect gift for the trumpet player in your life or indeed any Straussian who isn't overly concerned with authenticity. **Richard Bratby**