



Ludwig van Beethoven: Complete Works for Piano Trio - Vol. 5

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It's mighty considerate of the Swiss Piano Trio to collect Beethoven's crummiest trios on one convenient disc—perfect for ignoring—when it could have spread the rubble across all five volumes of its thorough integrale. To give Beethoven his due, though, if the early 1791 trio in E-flat were by Haydn, we'd marvel and its unprecedented pianistic brilliance, frequent independence of parts, and unconventional macrostructure of three fast movements in a row. We can also admire how Beethoven limns Schubert's sweetly naive cantabile in the short, stand-alone Allegretto of 1812. I doubt anyone loves the frivolous Kakadu Variations, though it's come my way for review three times in as many years—if by any other composer, we'd never hear it.

The big work here, the Triple Concerto, runs for dead last place, tied neck-in-neck with the Second Piano Concerto as Beethoven's worst concerto; but it is a bold and radical experiment, largely unreplicated by other composers—except the gorgeous slow movement of Tchaikovsky's neglected Second Piano Concerto. And the Triple Concerto's dominant cello grants us a glimpse into the cello concerto Beethoven never wrote. The trio is accompanied here by a puny chamber orchestra, 24- weak, thrusting the soloists far forward in the sonic picture while orchestral details get crammed into a backdrop that seems sometimes imagined rather than heard.

The Swiss Trio captures the spirit of every work: plaintive and tender in the Allegretto, insouciant and athletic in the early trio, and brawny but playful in the Triple Concerto. I particularly enjoy violinist Angela Golubeva's warm, unhurried vibrato. These players make the strongest possible case for what might be called "Beethoven's Greatest Misses for Trio". Previous volumes won praise in these pages (J/A 2015, S/O 2016, J/F 2018). Sound is close and detailed.

BEETHOVEN: *Triple Concerto; Kakadu Variations; Early Trio; Allegretto*
 Swiss Piano Trio, Zurich Chamber Orchestra
 Audite 97.696—73 minutes

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