



Ludwig van Beethoven: Complete Works for Piano Trio - Vol. 2

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[Fanfare](#) (Paul Orgel - 2016.08.01)

The G-Major Piano Trio is one of Beethoven's "early comedies," to use Donald Francis Tovey's wonderful phrase, yet it's not until the work's fourth movement that the Swiss Piano Trio lets loose with enough energy and suggestion of comic timing to characterize the music fully. In the earlier movements, their rhythms could often be more "sprung," dynamic contrasts seem underplayed, and the sense of interplay between the three instruments is too restrained. Were it not for the speed and commitment shown in the finale, I'd guess that the Swiss players base their interpretation on the outmoded notion that that early Beethoven should sound "Classically restrained" and predominantly gentle.

The group credits Menachem Pressler, among others, with having given them "artistic impulses," but a quick listen to the Beaux Arts Trio's recordings of this work reveals the benefits of sharper articulation, crisper delineation of rhythm, and lovelier "singing" tone—I'm thinking of the violin in the op. 1/2 slow movement—while maintaining the style's basic elegance. Violinist Angela Golubeva plays with a deft bow, and but her tone is small, and in some lyrical moments rather unlovely.

In the fast outer movements of the "Ghost" Trio, the Swiss players sound fully engaged and play with admirable drive and dynamism, but their slightly faster than usual tempo for the Largo assai ed espressivo deprives the slow movement of its initial stillness and mystery. As in two other notable slow movements that share its key of D Minor, the Largo e mesto of the Piano Sonata, op. 10/3, and the Adagio con molto sentimento d'affetto of the Cello Sonata, op. 102/2, I believe that Beethoven challenges performers here to take the slowest possible tempo that can be sustained.

The Swiss Piano Trio is one of a number of successful European piano trios with widespread concert engagements, high level teaching appointments, summer festival residencies, and a connection with a fine label (Audite). This is the second volume in a projected complete Beethoven trio cycle, and though the playing is polished and technically competent, there are so many better competing recordings of these pieces that I can't recommend it. The recorded sound is excellent; the booklet notes are pedantic.