

**BEETHOVEN:** *Trios 4+5; Variations, op 44*  
Xyrión Trio—Naxos 557723—72 minutes

What a way to begin a cycle of Beethoven trios. There is a wonderful sense of “three-ness” in these perfectly-matched musicians. Pianist Nina Tichman, violinist Ida Bieler, and cellist Maria Kliegel recorded this first volume of trios in 2004.

They begin their cycle with the *Ghost* Trio, and their take on it is quite Shakespearian (this reading of II makes me think of Hamlet encountering his father’s ghost, though Keith Anderson’s notes mention that Beethoven included the main theme in a sketch for an opera on the subject of Macbeth). These musicians incorporate a sense of “play” in the dramatic sense as well as “play” as in the act of having fun.

The Opus 44 Variations are not Beethoven’s greatest set, partly because of the limits presented by the theme. But it is interesting to hear how much Beethoven is able to do with so little, and also interesting to hear how much the musicians are able to do with the piece, especially in the last two variations.

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