

BEETHOVEN Piano Trios: No. 5 in D, op. 70/1; No. 6 in E \flat , op. 70/2. No. 10 in E \flat , op. 44, "Variations on an Original Theme" • Nina Tichman (pn); Ida Bieler (vn); Maria Kliegel (vc) • NAXOS 8.557723 (71:43)

Having recorded the Beethoven cello sonatas to considerable acclaim, Nina Tichman and Maria Kliegel have turned to the piano trios: they seem to be producing a complete set of these trios for Naxos. Joined by violinist Ida Bieler, they play vigorous, even stomping renditions of the so-called "Ghost" Trio in D, and its mate, the Trio in E \flat . Their robust approach contrasts with that of the Beaux Arts Trio, whose complete trio recordings are readily available on Philips. Yet they are not so heavy-handed as Barenboim, Du Pré, and Zukerman in the "Ghost," nor perhaps so sensitive as Eugene Istomin and partners in various recordings of the trios. I myself would never have come up with the ghost idea to identify the low piano tremolos in the second movement of the "Ghost." They are not creepy enough, or as genuinely strange as some moments in the last quartets. The opening phrases by the strings are eerie in a subdued way, but the statements are always answered optimistically by the clear, rational voice of the piano. This trio of talented women, all based in Europe, plays that movement effectively. They maintain the tension even at their unhurried pace. The drama seems to emerge from within, in the swells of the violin and cello. They make the movement seem more explosive than deep, as it seems elsewhere. They have incidentally reminded me what an interesting work the Trio in E \flat that follows really is. To these well-played pieces, they have added the Variations, op. 44, whose slightly silly theme is varied inimitably by the master. They play the piece briskly, as if they don't want either themselves or us to make too much of it. I find it good fun nonetheless. **Michael Ullman**