

GRAMOPHONE

March 2008



Beethoven

Piano Trios, Op 1 — No 1; No 3

Peabody Trio (Violaine Melançon *vn*

Natasha Brofsky *vc* Seth Knopp *pf*)

Artek AR0038-2 (64' DDD)

The distance from the three piano trios that Beethoven called Op 1 to his pieces 135 or so numbers later is vast. But even within those first catalogued creations, the musical world shifts mightily. As the Peabody Trio demonstrate to exceptional effect on their newest recording, the Op 1 Trios in E flat, No 1, and the C minor, No 3, reveal how lickety-spit the composer developed from Classical champion to titanic artist of the future.

That is not to say that Beethoven was ever an imitator of past masters, especially Haydn. Instead, as can be heard in No 1, the German composer honoured traditional forms and harmonic gestures while instilling them with fresh twists. This trio is charming, tender and jaunty, with little of the emotional turbulence Beethoven was soon to divulge. By the time he arrived at No 3, he was ready to

stoke the expressive fires to almost fierce dramatic degree. Virtually everything is unsettled, brooding or at least affecting in ways that the previous two trios are not. Clouds gather often in this forward-looking score, which has hints of more striking things to come.

The Peabody take the varied pulses of these two works and instil them with the requisite artistic blood. In the early trio, violinist Violaine Melançon, cellist Natasha Brofsky and pianist Seth Knopp provide the panoply of sparkling sonorities and lightness of touch that the music implies. Their interplay is close and seamless.

The ensemble heighten the intensity level in No 3, in keeping with the more vehement nature of the material. Yet the musicians never sacrifice clarity or nuance amid the urgency. The performance is bold, flexible and vibrant, assuring Beethoven that the innovations are noted even as the music's overall impact receives consummate consideration.

Donald Rosenberg

B E S E N **A** R T S

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