



Beethoven

'A Beethoven Odyssey, Vol 3'

Piano Sonatas - No 2, Op 2 No 2; No 17, 'Tempest', Op 31 No 2; No 26, 'Les adieux', Op 81a

James Brawn *pf*

MSR Classics © MS1467 (71' • DDD)



The British pianist James Brawn is recording his way through the

32 Beethoven piano sonatas out of chronological order, which gives listeners a chance to hear the composer at different periods in his development in the genre. What unites the performances is Brawn's authoritative sense of shape and sonority. So far, his playing has been the epitome of lucidity, elegance and drama. There's every reason to expect that his complete set of the sonatas will be a triumphant achievement.

So is there any reason to read further in this review of 'A Beethoven Odyssey, Vol 3'? Perhaps to glean some of the distinctive qualities Brawn brings to each sonata. The earliest here is the Sonata No 2 (Op 2 No 2), an example of Beethoven as card-carrying classicist with narrative surprises up his sleeve. Brawn emphasises the moments of tension and repose without exaggeration, finding equal portions of spark, nobility and darkness en route.

Although some pianists hurl themselves into the explosive passages in the Sonata No 17 (Op 31 No 2, the *Tempest*) at the expense of the hushed episodes, Brawn achieves a superb balance between contrasting materials. Even at full tilt, he never pushes his sound over the edge into brittleness, no easy feat in this sonata.

Brawn's ability to illuminate the myriad atmospheres and moods in Beethoven's music is nowhere more apparent than in the Sonata No 26 (Op 81a, *Les adieux*). The mysterious and wistful passages in the first two movements receive as much expressive consideration as the finale's joyous outbursts, which Brawn takes for an exhilarating ride.

Donald Rosenberg

Beethoven

'Autumn Passion: Beethoven Retrospective - Three Great Sonatas Encore'

Piano Sonatas - No 8, 'Pathétique', Op 13; No 14, 'Moonlight', Op 27 No 2; No 23, 'Appassionata', Op 57; No 26, 'Les adieux', Op 81a - II; III

Roberto McCausland Dieppa *pf*

Scruffy Records © O20567658 (68' • DDD)



More than a few things may strike you as odd even before you hear a note of Roberto

McCausland Dieppa's new recording.

The title, 'Autumn Passion: Beethoven Retrospective', appears to have nothing to do with the 'three great sonatas' the pianist performs here. Actually, it's three and two-thirds, since he plays the last two movements of the *Les adieux* Sonata as 'encores' and omits the first, even though it could have fitted easily on the disc.

The pianist's bio inside states that 'Dieppa interprets standard repertoire with unequalled uniqueness in style and with incessant energy'. These claims happen to be true but they're not always to the music's advantage. While there are impressive moments when the pianist shows a firm command of the sonatas' varied challenges, he too often applies his uniqueness and energy in ways that shed more light on McCausland Dieppa than on Beethoven.

Yes, the *Appassionata* calls for great intensity of expression, but it would help if the performance also had more contrast of dynamics and nuance, minus so much incessant aggression. Similarly, the *Pathétique* goes by without sufficient gradations or flexibility of phrasing, sounding glib and reckless. The first two movements of the *Moonlight* Sonata are more settled, with fine unfolding of the famous triplet motion in the first and a lovely lilting quality in the second. Then the pianist takes off on a wild flight in a finale that is more blurry than exciting.

The two movements of *Les adieux* are tossed with little mystery or buoyancy. Incessant they are. Donald Rosenberg

Brickman

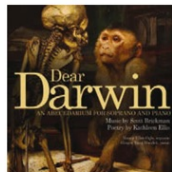
Dear Darwin^a. International: Bridge: Peace^b.

Mayday Rose^b

^aNancy Ellen Ogle *sop* ^aGinger Yang Hwalek *pf*

^bScott Brickman *elec*

Ravello © RR7888 (58' • DDD)



Many evolutions are at the core of this recording of music by Scott Brickman. The disc's title, 'Dear Darwin', refers to the song-cycle set to poems by Kathleen Ellis paying tribute to Charles Darwin, whose *On the Origin of Species* laid the groundwork for generations of discussion and debate. In

26 short songs, the cycle conjures subjects that fascinated Darwin, such as human relations and nature. The piece is dubbed 'an abecedarium for soprano and piano', meaning the song titles travel through the English alphabet, starting with 'A is for Apple' and ending with 'Zygote'. It's a clever conceit, and Ellis's verses provide much amusement amid serious consideration of the topics.

Brickman's music for the songs has roots in serial writing, without adhering to the rules or veering too far into uncharted harmonic territory. The vocal lines can be jagged or lyrical, as befits the subject, and the piano part often takes the lead, establishes atmosphere or adds subtle splashes of expressive colour. There are moments when the music is a bit dour for the emotions being expressed but the songs have enough contrasts of mood and metre to keep the ear intrigued. The cycle receives sensitive shadings from soprano Nancy Ellen Ogle and pianist Ginger Yang Hwalek.

Surrounding the songs are electroacoustic pieces that couldn't inhabit more different sound worlds - *Mayday Rose* (2006) and *International: Bridge: Peace* (2003). The latter is especially striking in its collage-like use of biblical texts in many languages.

Donald Rosenberg

Chesky

Rap Symphony^a. Street Beats. Central Park Dances

^aMike Two, ^aLeber rappers

Orchestra of the 21st Century

Chesky © JD364 (45' • DDD)



Urged on by sentiments such as 'Kill the Philharmonic' and 'New York is burning',

David Chesky's 20-minute *Rap Symphony*, which presents what the composer calls 'a world of depth transitioning into an image-based superficial culture', is a powerful demonstration of orchestral virtuosity from a composer whose roots lie in an analogue time when the Schwan and *Gramophone* record catalogues were every classical music lover's bibles. After a dark, haunted opening of Sibelian dimensions, Chesky lays down a laid-back, jazz-like pulse over which strings, winds and percussion combine in a series of miraculously transparent ensemble and solo riffs; it's an absorbing dialogue that always seems to be leading to something momentous but keeps getting sidetracked in a series of colourful if narcissistic poses and attitudes.