Beethoven-lite, but enjoyable nevertheless
**Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)**

Sonata for piano and flute in B-flat major, WoO
Anhang 4 [22:33]
Adagio (2nd movement from Piano Concerto No 1 Op.
15 (publ. 1871) [9:08]
Serenade for flute, violin and viola Op. 25
(1801, Arr. for flute & piano, publ. 1802) [23:52]
Duo for two flutes WoO 26 [6:00]
Sonata for piano and horn Op. 17
(publ. 1801, arr. publ. after 1830) [13:56]
Duo FlautoPiano
Helen Dabringhaus (flute)
Fil Liotis (piano)
rec. 2018, Konzerthaus der Abtei Marienmünster,
MDG 903 2135-6 SACD [75:29]
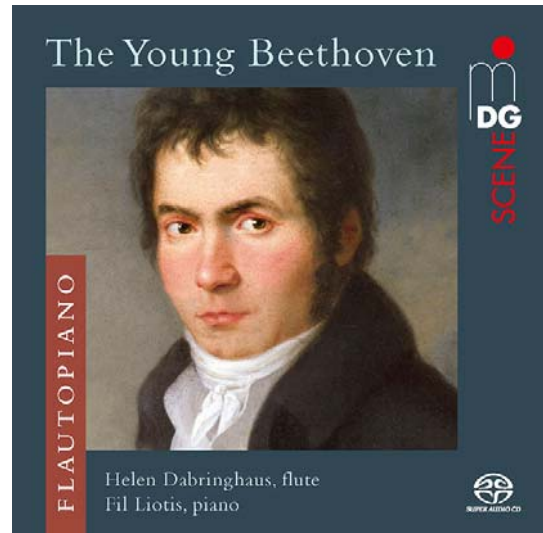
Much as Mozart notoriously noted his dislike for the flute, Beethoven similarly considered it had little to offer as a solo instrument. This would of course have been a different flute to the ones we see today, these being the result of the work of Theobald Boehm (1794-1881), whose mechanism brought it more into prominence and equality with other wind instruments.

There are only two works originally written for flute in this programme, the *Duo*, and the *Serenade in D major*. The *Sonata for piano and flute in B-flat major* has a publishing history that only dates back to 1906 and the manuscript source is dubious, but there remains the possibility that it might be a product of Beethoven's early years in Bonn. Whatever the provenance, it is a delightful work in four movements with plenty of inventiveness in both parts, including facile melodies and the occasional harmonic surprise. Mozart would have to be cited as an influence, and the aria-like *Largo* third movement does have something of the operatic about it.

Theobald Boehm made the arrangement of the *Adagio* from Beethoven's *Piano Concerto No 1 Op. 15*, and it's a bit of an oddity in this programme. The flute part takes on and embellishes the piano part of the original, and beyond the familiar opening there are more than enough points in which you would hardly recognise the original.

The *Serenade* in its arrangement for flute and piano is more interesting, the violin and viola parts transformed into a distinctive and idiomatic writing for piano. A bass line is added here and there and there is some filling-in of harmonies, but there is a feel of transparency in the whole thing which is directly attributable to the original string parts. Such an arrangement is indicative of the work's popularity, being a move designed to ensure even further gain for the publisher. Mozart is once again the great example in this form, and Beethoven follows his predecessor's lightness of mood and entertaining bravura. There are six movements, and there is more than enough contrast to keep the ball rolling for its substantial duration.

The *Duo* is a piece I've played many times in the past, and while it gets a very nice performance here it feels odd to hear the same player on both parts – something about which non-players need not be bothered. This is another light and pleasant piece, a '*jeu d'esprit*' as Joachim Draheim describes it in his booklet note – highly inventive and entertaining.

The final *Sonata for piano and horn Op. 17* was written for performance by Beethoven and the Czech horn virtuoso Johann Wenzel Stich. It has been arranged for cello, a version approved by the composer, and also for clarinet, violin and viola as well as flute. There are as you would expect several adaptations to suit the range of the flute, but the charm and essential directness of the piece is kept fairly intact, and the sheer energy of a composer relishing the virtuoso possibilities of both instruments is clear.

This is a very well recorded release, with plenty of spaciousness in both its stereo and SACD mixes. The content is largely supplementary rather than essential Beethoven listening, but enjoyable nevertheless. Helen Dabringhaus has a well-centred but fairly gentle tone which suits the period of the music very well indeed. Pianist Fil Liotis creates a great deal of colour and interest in the accompaniments, and if you are up for some up-beat chamber music then this is a nice place to be.

Dominy Clements