

BEETHOVEN: Piano Sonata “Appassionata”; CARL CZERNY: La Ricordanza; SCHUBERT: Sonata in c – Jin Ju, p. – MDG 947 1698-6

Marvelous coupling, well thought out, and played to the hilt.

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BEETHOVEN: Piano Sonata in f, Op. 57, “Appassionata”; CARL CZERNY: La Ricordanza, Op. 33; SCHUBERT: Sonata in c, D 958 – Jin Ju, piano – MDG multichannel SACD (2+2+2) 947 1698-6, 68:20 [Distr. by E1] **.**

Beethoven’s *Appassionata Sonata* marks the culmination of his “middle” period, Napoleonic grandeur in every bar, and certainly not a hint of the esoteric or mysterious, or even dyslexic meanderings that much of his late piano music traverses. This is sonata form big and bold, stretched to the breaking point, and heroic in every sense of the word. There is never any doubt once the piece begins that we are in for one wild ride, and the thing rarely lets up, even the brief respite of the *Andante* second movement not enough to dull the exhilarating feeling of an open air ride in a fast car through the county.

Czerny’s variations on a theme by Rode, “*La Ricordanza*”, didn’t have much of a life until Vladimir Horowitz popularized it, and now it’s become almost an encore staple; actually it’s more than that—the blazing chromatics of the piece and the exemplary manner in which the oft times academic Czerny handles the theme makes this one of his best-loved pieces. Actually, come to think of it, maybe the *only* loved piece. No matter—it’s a barn-burner of huge entertainment value.

Schubert’s *C-minor Sonata* is the first of his last three, pianistic standards each nowadays. It is easily his most Beethovenian sonata and shares with that composer a largeness of structure and demonstrable, forceful darkness that wants to be heroic but can’t quite manage it. The couplings on this disc are particularly apt here, for the Schubert in fact sounds a bit like Beethoven with Czerny’s chromaticism thrown in for good measure.

My one other encounter with young Chinese pianist Jin Ju was on her Schumann album for MD&G. There I thought the sound a little opaque in the middle register of the instrument, and interpretatively she is middle-of-the-road. These are valid comments here as well, though her Beethoven is a real stunner, the last movement coda as exciting—or more—than any I have heard on disc. She has a vigorous and unabashedly masculine approach to the piece that fits it perfectly. You might think that the Schubert requires the same touch, but it doesn’t; the heroics, such as they are, are more subdued, and Ju finds just the right combination of elegance and strength to sell the performance. The Czerny? Well, it just *is*, and her reading is a swift combination of technical acumen and real showmanship. This is a fine album, superb music, well-coordinated, and sounds terrific. —Steven Ritter