

# GRAMOPHONE

## USA CANADA SOUNDS OF AMERICA

RECORDINGS & EVENTS *A special eight-page section for readers in the US and Canada*

### Beethoven

Complete Violin Sonatas

Duo Concertante

(Nancy Dahn *vi* Timothy Steeves *vc*)

Marquis © ③ MAR81517 (3h 38' • DDD)



Violinist Nancy Dahn and pianist Timothy Steeves do Atlantic Canada proud in their

splendid new set of Beethoven's complete violin sonatas. Professors at the Memorial University of Newfoundland in the renowned seafood city of St John's, the married team take their Duo Concertante name from Beethoven's inscription over his *Kreutzer* Sonata, 'in stilo molto concertante'. The lasting impression they make, however, is of deeply integrated performances that flow naturally as if the music were being created on the spot.

Both Dahn and Steeves speak from within; they listen to where Beethoven is going and align themselves instantaneously to his direction. They can be engagingly rustic and emotionally sweet, as in the last movement of Op 12 No 3, or breathe fiery dialogues into easily clichéd heavyweights such as Op 23 along unconventionally lithe lines; their handling of the same sonata's curious *Andante scherzoso* middle movement is delectable and the concluding *Allegro molto* thrilling. Without sacrificing power or speed, they mine Beethoven's lyrical vein throughout, even in the *Kreutzer*. Dahn and Steeves both have a way with a turn and a trill, based on thoughtful study and practical experience, which they use as expressive devices to liberate the music's ebb and flow. The opening bars of the final sonata, Op 96, are a miracle of such knowledge and poetry.

The recording at the Glenn Gould Studio in Toronto, which was intentionally balanced to favour the violin, catches the velvet sounds and luminous colours of Dahn's 1983 Sergio Peresson and Steeves's 1968 New York Steinway D in an effortless audiophile display.

Laurence Vittes

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### GRAMOPHONE *talks to...*

## Nancy Dahn

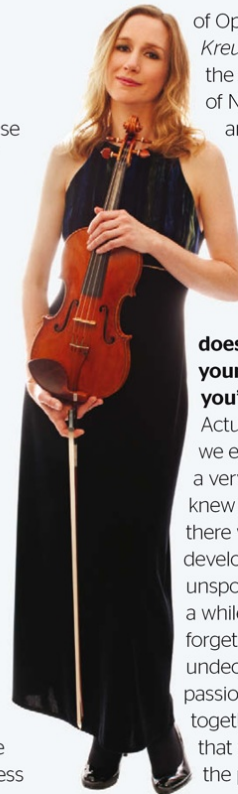
Duo Concertante's violinist tells of a meeting of minds in the *Kreutzer*

### Some say that the early Op 12 sonatas are unnatural and ungratifying for violinists...

They are awkward in places (for me at least!) and it's partly because Beethoven uses the low register so often; you need to work more in order to project over a modern piano. Also, after the first two sonatas there seems to be a change in the way he uses both instruments. Op 12 No 3 is a real game-changer in terms of virtuosity – the piano part is like his concerto-writing and Beethoven also started rethinking the role of the violin, making it a truly equal and virtuosic partner. It becomes more 'violinistic' too.

### Is it a clear journey or progression from the early sonatas to the late ones?

It is a journey but I wouldn't say it's a linear one. There's a quantum leap from the highly charged *Kreutzer* Sonata and the profound simplicity and tenderness



of Op 96. But then No 7 and the *Kreutzer* both seem to grow from the passion, fury and temperament of No 4. Even Sonatas Nos 1, 2 and 3 are all very different in terms of temperament and approach, as if Beethoven were figuring out how to best write for violin and piano.

### Knowing the subtext of the *Kreutzer* Sonata, does it lend something extra to your performance given that you're husband and wife?

Actually this was the first piece we ever played together! It was a very intense time because we knew we loved playing together but there were also romantic feelings developing which were totally unspoken, even suppressed, for quite a while. I don't think we will ever forget the intensity of that time. That undeclared but incredibly strong passion we felt in that first year together is a kind of emotional layer that will forever be embedded in the piece for us.

### Berenson

'Lumen - Chamber Works'

String Quartets - No 1; No 3. Transpersonal. *jnana* - 8; 10; 13; 18. Late 20th Century Stomp. Emotional Idiot. Prose Surrealism. Very soon mankind will no longer be a useless passion (Broadway melody of 1996). Rainer Maria Rilke. *Ricercar* (for Sven Nykvist). ...was near the black plague... A little boy opened a window 3. ...searchingeverywhere... Dithyramb. Treaty of dancing rabbit creek. 'I. Respectable People. Stars 1. The Adytum. Tickled to Death. Ingrid Thulin. through this stillness. Ysaijiro Ozu. Spooky action at a distance

JACK Quartet and friends

Dream Play © ② (156' • DDD)



Philadelphia-based composer/pianist Adam Berenson's self-produced

double-CD set surrounds his provocative new String Quartet No 3 with 25 tracks taken from 17 previous discs before concluding with his more conventional String Quartet No 1 from