



BEETHOVEN

DELPHIAN

WORKS FOR PIANO

PETER HILL & BENJAMIN FRITH

FOUR HANDS

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770–1827)

WORKS FOR PIANO FOUR HANDS

PETER HILL & BENJAMIN FRITH

Thanks to Shirley Harris, Charlotte Hill, Caroline Rae, Heidi Rolfe, Adam and Inja Stanovic and Antony Thomlinson.


This recording is dedicated to the memory of Peter Cropper, violinist and inspired Beethoven interpreter.

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Sonata in D, Op. 6

- 1 Allegro molto [2:47]
- 2 Rondo: Moderato [3:09]

Eight Variations on a Theme by Count von Waldstein, WoO 67

- 3 Thema [0:35]
- 4 Variation I [0:29]
- 5 Variation II [0:33]
- 6 Variation III [0:35]
- 7 Variation IV [0:26]
- 8 Variation V [0:34]
- 9 Variation VI [0:30]
- 10 Variation VII [0:49]
- 11 Variation VIII [4:14]

Three Marches, Op. 45

- 12 I. Allegro ma non troppo [4:32]
- 13 II. Vivace [4:48]
- 14 III. Vivace [5:13]

Six Variations on 'Ich denke dein', WoO 74

- 15 Lied: Ich denke dein [0:36]
- 16 Variation I [0:35]
- 17 Variation II [0:32]
- 18 Variation III [0:37]
- 19 Variation IV [0:32]
- 20 Variation V [0:36]
- 21 Variation VI [1:14]

- 22 **Grosse Fuge, Op. 134** [14:44]

Total playing time [48:50]

Notes on the music

Beethoven's output for piano duet – four hands on one piano – may be small, but this takes nothing away from the quality, interest and variety of the works he did compose. Together they show Beethoven's creative development in microcosm. Two of the works are from the early 1790s, and two others (from Beethoven's middle period) date from 1803, the year of the 'Eroica' Symphony. By contrast, Beethoven's extraordinary arrangement of the *Grosse Fuge*, which comes from 1826, the last summer of his life, seems destined 'for a later age', as Beethoven once said of his music.

Beethoven seems to have turned to the medium of piano duet only if there was a specific person or purpose in mind. The exception is the **Sonata in D, Op. 6**, which though published in 1797 may well be considerably earlier. It was very possibly written for use in teaching: certainly, we may assume it was for private enjoyment or study, and its lack of pretension is reflected in the modest two-movement dimensions – though it is worth bearing in mind that several of Beethoven's piano sonatas are in two movements, with two of the greatest, Op. 90 and Op. 111, following the same fast-slow order as here. The duet Sonata's opening Allegro molto could be used as a textbook example of how to write a classical first movement. What counts, of course, is that it is brilliantly done, with the cut-and-thrust of ideas immaculately engineered; it is brilliant,

too, as chamber music, in the exchanges between the pianists that culminate (at the ends of the exposition and recapitulation) in arpeggios that ripple between and across the four hands. The music calls to mind a contemporary account of the young Beethoven as pianist:

The greatness of this amiable, light-hearted man, as a virtuoso, may in my opinion be safely estimated from his almost inexhaustible wealth of ideas, the altogether characteristic style of expression in his playing, and the great execution which he displays ... Yet he is extremely modest and free from all pretension.

In the Rondo (marked 'Moderato') the second pianist is more an accompanist to the graceful melody in the soprano register. The movement has an operatic feel that looks forward to the slow movements of many of Beethoven's early piano sonatas, the second section, in minor tonality, having something of their sombre grandeur.

The **Eight Variations on a Theme by Count von Waldstein** were composed when Beethoven was 21, in 1792, probably shortly before leaving Bonn for his second visit to Vienna, with the aim of taking lessons with Haydn. Beethoven's departure was marked by a message from the count that was to be famously prophetic: 'The *genius* of Mozart still mourns and weeps the death of its pupil. It has found a refuge in the inexhaustible Haydn, but no occupation; through him it desires once more to find a union with someone. Through

your unceasing diligence, receive Mozart's spirit from the hands of Haydn.' Only eight years older than Beethoven, the count was as much a friend as a patron. Later he was to be the dedicatee of one of Beethoven's most beautiful and ambitious middle-period piano sonatas, the C major Op. 53 (1804). Waldstein was an accomplished musician and may well have played these Variations with Beethoven; if so, one imagines that he would have taken the lower part given the bravura virtuosity required of the *primo* in the sixth.

The Variations pursue a less orthodox course than the Sonata. In part this stems from a quirk of Waldstein's theme, which divides the two halves of the melody with a little interjection of four bars in the minor. In the more virtuoso variations (Nos 2 and 6) Beethoven exploits these bars to create a moment of stillness. Elsewhere he finds ways to integrate the contrast, in No. 1 for example dovetailing the minor-key cadences with the return of the melodic triplets. In the later stages Beethoven goes further, dissolving the outline of the variations into shorter sections. The seventh has a cadenza, the eighth (the penultimate variation, conventionally in the minor) gives way to a 'capriccio' that leads into what feels like the finale – an Allegro in 6/8 – except that this is twice interrupted by adagio sections, before the minor-key music fades into silence like the pendulum of a clock running down. In so early a work it seems remarkable to find such imaginative splintering of the form, a hint

of what was to come thirty years later in the last sonatas and quartets, with their fragments of premonition and recall, and their bridging passages of recitative.

The **Three Marches, Op. 45** date from 1803. In contrast to the Funeral March from the 'Eroica' symphony of the same year, they are light-hearted, though still substantial, each having a contrasting Trio section in which Beethoven deploys various military effects: drum beats in the second march, fanfares in the third. The work came about as a result of a commission from a Count von Browne, the circumstances of which were recalled by Ferdinand Ries, who had become a pupil of Beethoven in 1802. Ries was performing some of Beethoven's piano works to von Browne and his guests when he mischievously interpolated a march of his own, without revealing that he and not Beethoven was the composer. The following evening Beethoven himself appeared and was congratulated on his 'admirable and glorious' march, which Ries was compelled to repeat. Beethoven was 'overwhelmed with praise on all sides and his genius lauded'. Fortunately for Ries, Beethoven's indignation turned to laughter: 'You see, my dear Ries, these are the great cognoscenti ... Only give them the name of their favourite; they will need nothing more.'

The **Six Variations on 'Ich denke dein'** were composed in 1799 and inscribed in the music album of two sisters, Therese and Josephine von Brunsvik, who had piano

Notes on the music

lessons with Beethoven. In 1803 another sister, Charlotte, reported that Beethoven had added two further variations (writing, 'Is he not so amiable and adorable?'), which became Nos 3 and 4 in the published score. The Variations benefit from an original theme of exceptional beauty, laid out in the score like a song, with words by Goethe: 'I think of you, where the shimmering sun/Gleams from the sea;/I think of you, when the glittering moon/Is mirrored in streams.' (Ich denke dein, wenn mir der Sonne Schimmer/von Meeren strahlt,/Ich denke dein, wenn sich des Mondes Flimmer/In Quellen malt.) The words give a clue, perhaps, to Beethoven's feelings for Josephine, which he later expressed in a passionate correspondence. The melody is balanced between two six-bar phrases, with a four-bar postlude expressing a sense of heightened emotion. The first two variations gave the sisters an equal chance to shine. In the two added variations a dialogue, with the theme split between the pianists, is followed by a *moto perpetuo* that could have been written by Mendelssohn. After a fifth variation in the minor, the sixth extends the last four bars of the theme into a brilliant coda, brought to a close by a brief recall of the opening bars.

But after this beautiful work, nothing: not even a lucrative offer from the music publisher Anton Diabelli in 1824 could rekindle Beethoven's interest in the piano duet. Two years later, however, circumstances compelled Beethoven to return, reluctantly,

to the medium for an arrangement of the **Grosse Fuge**. The story begins with the first performance of the String Quartet in B flat (Op. 130) given by the quartet led by Ignaz Schuppanzigh on 21 March 1826. Much of the new work was well received, and indeed the audience encored the Presto second movement and the *Danza alla Tedesca*. But the fugal finale divided opinion, and even Beethoven's friends were disconcerted. Beethoven himself was irate: why was the Fugue not repeated? 'Cattle! Asses!'

One's sympathies are with the publisher, Matthias Artaria, who had already paid Beethoven handsomely for the rights to the new string quartet, and now found himself saddled with a work whose finale was unplayable and which few liked. Artaria decided, wisely, that flattery was the best way to broach the subject with Beethoven. 'People on all sides are demanding a piano four-hand version of the Fugue', he wrote in Beethoven's Conversation Book. (There was no truth in this, of course: indeed, the duet sold so slowly that a second edition was not needed until 1964!) Issuing works for orchestra or string quartet in arrangements for piano duet was an important aspect of music publishing in the nineteenth century; normally the arranger was someone with expert understanding of the capabilities of amateur pianists. In this case the job was contracted, at Beethoven's own suggestion, to Anton Halm, a pianist who had played

the 'Archduke' Trio at the concert in March. But Halm's attempt was not to Beethoven's liking: he found it too inclined to smooth out the complexities in favour of pianistic convenience, especially as regards the crossing of voices. Beethoven took over the task himself, spending four months of the summer of 1826 mulling it over before delivering his version to Artaria. It was at this point that Karl Holz, acting on behalf of Artaria, managed to persuade Beethoven to compose a new finale for the Quartet in B flat and to allow the *Grosse Fuge* to be published in a separate edition (as Op. 133). Holz knew Beethoven well since he had been acting as his assistant since the previous year, and as the second violin in Schuppanzigh's quartet he had experienced at first hand the difficulties of the Fugue. He recalled making his approach to Beethoven with trepidation, but to his surprise, although the proposal was initially rejected, Beethoven took only a day to change his mind and give his consent.

Beethoven's capitulation on a matter so fundamental to the integrity of his art has always troubled his biographers. One possible explanation comes from his work transferring the Fugue from string quartet to piano, which he did with obvious care. Revisiting the Fugue in this way may well have caused Beethoven to rethink the possibilities of what he had composed, to conclude that the Fugue could (and perhaps should) stand alone. The wider context is Beethoven's fascination with fugue,

especially in the music since 1815. Among the late works the Cello Sonata in D, Op. 102 No. 2 and three of the last piano sonatas – Op. 101, Op. 106 (the 'Hammerklavier') and Op. 110 – have fugal or partially fugal finales, not to mention the fugues in the Ninth Symphony and the *Missa solemnis*, and the Diabelli Variations, whose climactic variation (No. 32) is a fugue, along with the exquisite (and very Bach-like) *Fughetta* (No. 24).

But in any case fugue was in Beethoven's blood. As boy in Bonn he had learnt to play Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*, and in his early years in Vienna he had on Haydn's recommendation studied counterpoint with Johann Georg Albrechtsberger, a composer and organist (whose playing was admired by Mozart), and a theorist known as the leading authority on fugue. Albrechtsberger was the author of a treatise on composition (which Beethoven would have known) in which he compiled all the possible techniques of fugue – how, for example, the theme or subject can be varied by rhythmic augmentation or diminution or by syncopation, and can be deployed in close imitation or *stretto* – to which he added the caution that 'one can rarely employ all of these together in one fugue'. Did Beethoven see his old teacher's warning as a challenge? And, if so, did he deliberately set out to compose a fugue that was 'grosse' ('great': the title was Beethoven's), a *summa* of all the fugues in his recent music, and a counterpart to Bach's *The Art of Fugue*?

Notes on the music

Certainly, a bird's eye view confirms the *Grosse Fuge's* massive ambition. As it progresses its main ideas go through a series of transformations, passing from a fragmentary introduction through a ferocious double fugue (one with two subjects), a section of sudden and quiet serenity (*Meno mosso e moderato*) in which lyricism is at last established, a *scherzando* which acts as a frame to ever more intense fugal developments, and finally to a rondo-like final section, the music interspersed with brief reminiscences before being brought sharply into focus for the final sprint to the line.

As if to underline the *Grosse Fuge's* connectedness with the rest of the Op. 130 Quartet Beethoven begins with a transition. Its starting point is G (the upper note of the final chord of the previous movement, the *Cavatina*), modulating by logical steps through the tonalities of C and F to B flat, the home key. The purpose of this 'Overtura', as Beethoven called it, is to preview the Fugue's thematic and structural ideas. We hear first the basic theme in long notes, *fortissimo*, then in a quick, dancing 6/8 rhythm, then as a desolate reflection. Here Beethoven starts the process of reimagining the sonority as he transfers the music from string quartet to piano, the long note in the bass on the cello replaced by the Fs an octave and two octaves lower. This deepening and strengthening of the bass line is a feature of the piano version – Beethoven's Broadwood piano extended to six

octaves, in the bass going down to the C an octave below the C string of the cello. Later, in the fire and fury of the double fugue that follows, and in the later fugal developments, Beethoven made far-reaching interventions in adapting the music to the piano: where possible he keeps the subjects at their original register, but the counterpoints are swapped freely between voices, transposed or at times even rewritten.

The final fragment of the Overtura is the basic theme in a whispered, skeletal version. Hearing it in this form, unaccompanied, focuses the attention on the balance between rising and falling semitones, a symmetry that holds the potential for a clash of opposing directions that Beethoven will pursue later. For the present what matters most is the silences between notes, and the sounding of each note on the second or fourth beat of the bar: when the double fugue erupts each of the notes is a jabbed syncopation, creating a massive rhythmic disturbance with the Fugue's other subject, which is marked by wild leaps and a relentless dotted rhythm.

The exposition of the Fugue is relatively orthodox, allowing both subjects to be heard in all four voices; but a fifth entry of the 'leaping' subject has a momentary distortion, a chromaticism at once magnified in the bass (underlined in the piano version by added octaves). The progressive undermining of the leaping subject is exacerbated by rhythmic

assaults. The first of these is a counterpoint in triplets, against which the subject fights back (a version orchestrated in thirds), then is heard in *stretto*, and finally is shaken to bits as all the voices coalesce on to the dotted rhythm, with a cadence (in D minor) that gives the listener an obvious landmark. The second half of the double fugue sees fresh rhythmic attacks, one of them in the form of a new and quicker counterpoint. A final transformation of both subjects acts as a sort of recapitulation, with the leaping subject in triplets, while its counterpart, the basic theme, appears in a compressed and tautened syncopation. The climactic event is the combining of the leaping subject with its own inversion (in the bass).

This mirror-image puts down a marker for future developments. For now, however, the double fugue simply slams to a halt. Out of the shock of its final detonation there floats one of those mysteriously ethereal passages – *Meno mosso e moderato* – that characterise Beethoven's late music (the Arietta of the last piano sonata, for example). Here the melody is taken from the third fragment of the Overtura, now in a shimmering, high-lying texture. The sense of a fugue is not entirely lost, however, as the basic theme (in the bass) steals in, complete with answer and even a momentary *stretto*, with the feel of a separate process at work. Only towards the end of the section does the mood hint at menace, with an unexpected crescendo, and the melody

in unison, except for the bass, stubbornly and dissonantly out of step.

The ensuing *Allegro molto e con brio* darts forward, the opening bars *fortissimo*, reminding us of its source in the Overtura: light, elegant, sprinkled with trills, but too quick to feel comfortable. Sure enough, this *scherzando* is swiftly ambushed by the next huge arc of development, a fugue in A flat, fiercely implacable where the earlier double fugue was furiously wild. Against the basic theme in long notes, powerfully accented, Beethoven begins exploring mirror-images, with two countersubjects, each comprising three notes, split from the subject, one pushing upwards, the other (in a quicker rhythm) descending. The argument condenses into exasperated trills, before a counterpoint of triplets injects new impetus. A huge octave G flat in the bass opens a sense of a wider tonal progression – B^b–A^b–G^b– and the logical step down to F triggers a new wave of *stretto*, the subject further compressed. With a momentary lightening of the texture the 'leaping' subject from the double fugue is reintroduced, and in a colossal build-up all these elements merge in *stretto*. The outcome, the dénouement of a huge trajectory of transformations, is the combining of the basic theme with its inversion, accompanied – in a bizarre four-voice 'quodlibet' – by the melody from the *Meno mosso e moderato* (now *forte*) and by the bass line sawing away at a rudimentary

Notes on the music

version of the 'leaping' subject. A parallel example, which Beethoven would have known, is the penultimate minor-key fugue from the *Well-Tempered Clavier* (B flat minor, Book II). But where Bach's sounding of the subject simultaneously with its inversion crowns a long and inevitable process, with Beethoven it is more like a dead end, despite the music's jubilation.

The way back begins with a neat escape, a disarmingly simple modulation over rumbling trills. The *scherzando* resumes, exactly as before, this time allowed to develop, but then checked by sudden swerves into remoteness. In the first and weirdest of these the basic theme reaches up to its final note only to deflect downwards. Then a flashback, a sort of Overture in reverse, with a bar of the double fugue, *fortissimo*, and two bars, *pianissimo*, of the *Meno mosso*. A two-fold process seems to be at work: the reminiscences absorb the previous stark contrasts so that they seem transfigured, while the *scherzando* acquires a greater solidity and purpose. Suddenly, at last, we are on firm foundations, the theme in long notes (as at the beginning) but now in B flat, triumphantly extended. One last dream-like deflection, and then the trills, alternately rising and falling, laughing the music forward to its resounding resolution.

Beethoven's dictum, 'Art demands of us that we shall not stand still', the ideal by which he lived his life, took him in the *Grosse Fuge* far beyond what his listeners could absorb. Their dismay has clung to the Fugue's reputation; and inevitably one thinks of a twentieth-century parallel, the anger of Stravinsky's public at the premiere in 1913 that still reverberates whenever one hears *The Rite of Spring*. In both works the first audiences were confronted with an appalling and unprecedented violence. In Beethoven's case one suspects that it was not only the dissonances of harmony and rhythm that troubled his listeners as the feeling of bewilderment, of not being able to make sense of the music. In a way, Artaria was not wrong: there *was* a need (if not a demand) for a study version for piano. But just as with Stravinsky's piano version of the *Rite*, the translation of the *Grosse Fuge* to the piano is far beyond any amateur pianist. Once Beethoven had rejected Anton Halm's easy-to-play arrangement he was embarked on a different course, something much more ambitious and important. Like Stravinsky with the *Rite*, what Beethoven created for the *Grosse Fuge* transcended the immediate purpose. Instead he reimagined a masterpiece in another medium, different from the original, but equally valid because equally characteristic of its creator.

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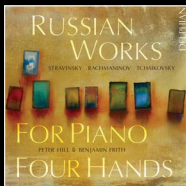
Biographies

Benjamin Frith and Peter Hill have worked together as a duo since 1986. Their discography includes Messiaen's *Visions de l'Amen* and works by Stravinsky: the Concerto for Two Pianos, Sonata for Two Pianos and *The Rite of Spring*, arranged for piano duet by the composer; their most recent CD, for Delphian, of *Russian Works for Piano Four Hands* (DCD34191) contains music by Rachmaninov and Tchaikovsky, and Stravinsky's arrangement of *Petrushka*.

Benjamin Frith has given recitals throughout Europe, North America and the Far East, and as soloist with many of the world's finest orchestras, under conductors such as Sir Mark Elder, Zubin Mehta and Antoni Wit. His solo career was launched by competition successes as first prizewinner in the Rubinstein and Busoni piano competitions. His extensive discography includes a Mendelssohn cycle that received the *Penguin CD Guide Rosette Award*. He topped the classical charts with his recordings of John Field's concertos, while his version of Schumann's *Davidsbundlertänze* was the top recommendation on BBC Radio 3's 'Building a Library'. He is the pianist with the Gould Piano Trio, with whom he has recorded all the major works for piano trio by Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Brahms and Dvořák, as well as music by Ireland, Stanford, Bax, Messiaen and James MacMillan.

Peter Hill records regularly for Delphian, with a Bach cycle in progress which has so far seen the release of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, *The French Suites* and the *Goldberg Variations* (respectively DCD34101/126, DCD34166 and DCD34200), and a world premiere recording of Messiaen's *La Fauvette Passerinette* alongside works by Stockhausen, Murail, George Benjamin, Takemitsu and others (DCD34141). His earlier cycles of Messiaen and of Berg, Schoenberg and Webern have received superlative acclaim, both sets featuring in *1001 Classical Recordings You Must Hear Before You Die*. His books include *Stravinsky: The Rite of Spring* (Cambridge Music Handbooks) and four on Messiaen, among them a groundbreaking biography (*Messiaen*, Yale University Press) which was awarded the Dumesnil Prize by the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Paris. He gives recitals, lectures and masterclasses around the world, holds an honorary professorship at Sheffield University and is a Fellow of the Royal Northern College of Music.

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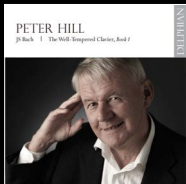


Russian Works for Piano Four Hands

Peter Hill & Benjamin Frith
DCD34191

Sergei Rachmaninov, last of the great Romantic composers, and Igor Stravinsky, whose early scores for Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes revolutionised the musical world, had a shared fascination for the traditional music of their homeland. Rachmaninov's early masterpiece, the *Six morceaux*, Op. 11, already exhibits the sweep and grandeur of his maturity, while Stravinsky's arrangement of *Petrushka* reveals this glittering ballet anew in a tour de force of pianistic virtuosity. Tchaikovsky's hauntingly exquisite transcriptions of Russian folksongs, meanwhile, include two melodies later used by Stravinsky in *The Firebird* and *Petrushka*. Peter Hill and Benjamin Frith together explore every facet of the art of the piano duet in performances of truly exceptional power, delicacy and authority.

'strangely hypnotic ... a gripping account' — Sunday Times, September 2017

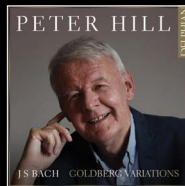


J.S. Bach: The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book One

Peter Hill *piano*
DCD34126 (2 discs)

A recognised authority in twentieth-century and contemporary music, Peter Hill turns for the first time on disc to another of his lifelong preoccupations: the music of J.S. Bach. In two new 2CD sets marking his new recording relationship with Delphian, Hill brings his customary scholarly acumen and crystalline musical intelligence to bear on the two books of preludes and fugues that comprise Bach's immortal '48' – music of 'unsurpassed inventiveness'.

'Bach's music tests the pianist in many ways, but one of the most telling is that it asks how much or how little the performer should exert ego. Hill gets the balance just about right in an intimate account ... that nevertheless oozes authority' — Sunday Times, June 2013

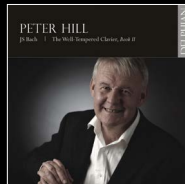


J.S. Bach: Goldberg Variations

Peter Hill *piano*
DCD34200

In the *Goldberg Variations* Bach answered a modest request – reputedly from an aristocratic patron who wanted music that was 'soft and somewhat lively' as a distraction from insomnia – with a work of immense scale and ambition, a great musical journey that traverses a dazzling kaleidoscope of musical styles. The music's wit and virtuosity is matched by the exquisite contrapuntal tracery of the canons that form the work's backbone, and by the tragic grandeur of the minor-key variations, which contain some of the most poignant music Bach ever wrote; the homecoming, as Bach ends by returning to the opening Aria, is one of the most moving passages in all music. Peter Hill here continues his acclaimed series of Bach recordings with a searchingly imaginative performance, capturing the music's zest and its depth of feeling in a reading that is as profoundly poetic as it is beautifully coloured.

'an honesty and intelligence that earns [Hill] his place at the top of the table'
— BBC Music Magazine, May 2018



J.S. Bach: The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book Two

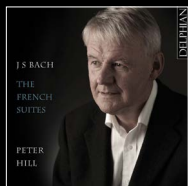
Peter Hill *piano*
DCD34101 (2 discs)

'warmth, clarity and insight'
— Classical Music Magazine, March 2013, EDITOR'S CHOICE

'exceptional readings, scholarly yet living ... For all the compositional rigour, Hill makes these Preludes and Fugues sing and dance, and also brings out their unshakeable foundations of faith'
— HiFi Critic, March 2012

'Note his use of varied pianistic colours – here muted, there radiant, sonorous then shimmering. And [he] unfolds contrapuntal lines with clarity, displaying an eloquent understanding of the music's underlying structure'
— BBC Music Magazine, May 2012, *****

Also available on Delphian



J.S. Bach: The French Suites

Peter Hill *piano*

DCD34166 (2 discs)

The French Suites have a special place among Bach's keyboard works. Besides containing music as profound and poetic as any he wrote, their textures have a transparency and sparkle that reflect a move towards the galant style fashionable among Bach's contemporaries. In this, the third instalment of Peter Hill's acclaimed Bach series, Hill has chosen to follow the suites with his own completion of Mozart's Suite in C, K399. With Bach and Handel as his models, this work epitomises Mozart's fascination with Baroque music. Hill's celebrated return to the studio with Delphian four years ago continues to reap rich artistic rewards; here in Bach his abundant energy and passion are deeply informed by a lifetime of scholarship.

'there's a confiding wisdom sustaining [Hill's] latest Bachian foray. Trademark unshowy integrity, too, articulated through a silky translucent tone and captured in an agreeably intimate recording.' — BBC Music Magazine, February 2016

La Fauvette Passerinette: a Messiaen premiere, with birds, landscapes & homages

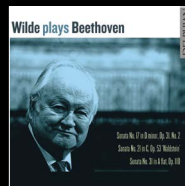
Peter Hill *piano*

DCD34141

In 2012, leading pianist and Messiaen scholar Peter Hill made a remarkable discovery among the composer's papers: several pages of tightly written manuscript from 1961, constituting a near-complete and hitherto unknown work for piano. Hill was able to fill in some missing dynamics and articulations by consulting Messiaen's birdsong notebooks, and here sets this glittering addition to Messiaen's piano output in the context both of the composer's own earlier work and of music by the many younger composers on whom Messiaen was a profound influence – from Stockhausen and Takemitsu to George Benjamin, who like Hill himself worked closely with the composer.

'A new Messiaen work may be the focus here, but this would be an outstanding recital even without that enticement ... Hill's poetry and sense of colour are stronger than ever' — BBC Music Magazine, October 2014, INSTRUMENTAL CHOICE

Shortlisted at the 2015 Gramophone Awards



Wilde plays Beethoven

Peter Hill *piano*

DCD34090

Three sonatas outlining a progression from the despair of No 17 in D minor, Op. 31 No 2 – written at the same time as the start of the famous 'Heiligenstadt Testament', when Beethoven's realisation that his deafness was complete and permanent led him to contemplate suicide – via his courageous fightback, brilliantly expressed in the irrepressible optimism of the 'Waldstein', Op. 53, towards the lofty spiritual aspirations of No 31 in A flat, Op. 110.

'Wilde brings maturity to his treatment of the "Sonata No. 17 in D minor": the melancholy fatalism of the adagio is alleviated by his thoughtful touch. And there's a brilliant momentum to the opening allegro of the ['Waldstein'], which is replaced by the almost completely static Adagio Molto, which hangs like a sea-mist through which the concluding Rondo is approached. Superb' — The Independent, March 2011, FIVE STARS



Oxana Shevchenko: winner of the 2010 Scottish International Piano Competition

Oxana Shevchenko

DCD34061

On 19 September 2010, a rapt audience in Glasgow's City Halls witnessed the 23-year-old Kazakhstani pianist emerge decisively on the international stage. She had already won the International Music Critics' Prize at the 2009 Ferruccio Busoni International Piano Competition, and now carried away first prize with unanimous approval from a distinguished international jury. Including works by Shostakovich, Mozart, Liszt and Ravel, this recital, recorded just three days after her triumph in the concerto final, reveals her extraordinary command of structure, rhythmic dynamism and sheer pianistic exuberance.

'a shrewdly chosen and enjoyably varied programme with playing at an exalted level ... it is a rare gift to convey on disc also the sheer joy of performing' — Gramophone, April 2011, EDITOR'S CHOICE



