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cd choice

DAVID FINCKEL & WU HAN
Beethoven: Complete Works For Piano
And Cello (ArtistLed Cat No: 19801-2)

The American cellist David Finckel and his Taiwanese-born pianist wife Wu Han return to the Wigmore Hall this month. Their latest CD has Beethoven's five sonatas and three sets of variations – everything the aurally-challenged composer wrote for their combination of instruments. The double-disc is self-produced on their own label ArtistLed and available only by e-mail from their web-site (www.artistled.com). They have successfully cut out the record-company middlemen.

Their playing is spirited and passionate. At the height of the slow movements they are lovers longing for fulfilment. In the tumult of the fast movements, they are argumentative

spouses battling for the last word. They play the two cello sonatas included in *Op. 5* with youthful bounce, slightly faster than Beethoven intended. The third sonata, known as *Op. 69*, shares the fated heroism of the *Fifth Symphony* which Beethoven was working on at the same time (1808).

Finckel, who is also the cellist for the Emerson Quartet, plays with most colour here. He leaps from determination to compassion to tally-ho bravado in the variety of his emotions. Wu Han adds her ha'penny worth no less forcefully when she can.

In the two late sonatas of *Op. 102*, composed in the otherwise barren year of 1815, their moods are more tortured. Human fallibility shows through the stuttered entries in the *allegro vivace* of the first. They feel dolour nowhere more keenly than in the funereal slow movement of the second, the

fugue finale of which is a terrific chase along the staves, leading to triumphant capture in the last bar.

Two of the three sets of variations are based on themes from Mozart's *Magic Flute*; the third muses on the famous tune from Handel's *Judas Maccabaeus*, better known as the hymn 'Thine Be The Glory'.

There's an innocence pervading the Finckels' exuberant exploration of Beethoven's inventiveness. Here they are newly weds discussing the decor. Marriage never sounded so perfect.

RICK JONES

David Finckel and Wu Han play Beethoven's Cello Sonata in D Op. 102/2 plus cello sonatas by Schnittke and Grieg, Fri 16 Oct, Wigmore Hall, Wigmore Street, W1 (0171-935 2141).