

Friday, January 22, 1999

Marital bliss of the musical variety

Violinist, pianist release first CD

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À Deux
Duo Concertante
ATMA Records

In the few short years that they've been together, violinist Nancy Dahn and pianist Timothy Steeves have delighted critics and audiences in Newfoundland and abroad. Given the response these two Memorial University professors have been getting, it's not surprising they would decide to make a recording.

Dahn and Steeves, who call themselves Duo Concertante, released their first CD, *À Deux*, late last year. Its two centerpieces are Beethoven's Kreutzer Sonata in A Major (Op. 47) and Ravel's three-movement Sonata for Violin and Piano. These large-scale works are set off by two short pieces: Stravinsky's *Danse russe*, based on music from *Petrushka*, and Brahms' Scherzo for Violin and Piano in C Minor.

One thing stands out right away.

In an era where brining new or obscure music to the force is often seen as nothing short of civic duty, here is a CD utterly devoid of lesser-known composers. It's a bold move, particularly for a debut recording, but it drives home the depth of mastery this concertizing couple has achieved since forming in 1996.

À Deux is immaculately presented, a thoroughly engaging experience throughout.

The Beethoven, at over 35 minutes, is obviously the most expansive piece in terms of length and thematic development. From its modest introduction of sustained solo violin, it blossoms into a concerto-like epic, beginning with the spirited first movement in primarily minor tonality ending with a clever tarantella. The second movement is a beautiful theme and variations in which the emerging idea is seamlessly handed back and forth between the two instruments.

Like the Beethoven, the Ravel also offers a chance for both Steeves and Dahn to shine in a variety of musical colors and styles. As fellow professor Paul Rice remarks in his liner notes, the work places considerable demands upon both performers.

In Duo Concertante's hands, sweeping scales, difficult trills and other challenges become effortless and transparent, dissolving magically into a rich, lyrical flow that captivates from beginning to end.

The main charm of this recording arises from its remarkable synchronicity. Steeves and Dahn are like two birds in a flock, swooping and diving in seemingly simultaneous consensus.

Here is a unity of thought one rarely encounters as musicians clamber over each other to carve out solo careers. Both virtuosos in their own right, Steeves and Dahn have chosen to channel their talents into one flawlessly harmonious package.

I look forward to this musical marriage bearing more fruit.

