

This article originally appeared in Issue 39:5 (May/June 2016) of *Fanfare Magazine*.

Considering the length of the above interview, I am going to keep this review short. In explaining the thinking behind presenting the sonatas on four discs, instead of squeezing them onto the more customary three CDs “with a little trimming and rejigging,” Andrew discloses the guiding principle and philosophy that inform these performances. Elina touches on it, too, in her thoughts about Beethoven’s violin sonatas. And though neither Andrew nor Elina say it using these exact words, I believe what they are expressing is how the pairings of the sonatas—the Fourth and the Fifth, the Seventh and the Eighth, the Ninth and the Tenth—are each other’s Yin and Yang, the one’s Dionysus to the other’s Apollo, the one’s Eusebius to the other’s Florestan.

It wasn’t an accident; Beethoven planned it that way, and Andrew and Elina don the costumes and masks of each character—reflected in the approach to bowing, dynamics, phrasing, keyboard touch, etc.—that reveal in sharp relief the contrasting personalities of those characters, both of which, we are reminded, are present, in conflict and repose, in the one mind and psyche of Beethoven.

In matters of execution, I can’t say that Andrew Smith and Elina Christova surpass well-established benchmark cycles by Heifetz/Bay/Brooks Smith, Menuhin/Kempff, Oistrakh/Oborin, Grumiaux/Haskil, Szeryng/Haebler, Stern/Istomin, Francescatti/Casadesus, and Perlman/Ashkenazy, but mere mention of these long-enduring sets in same sentence as Smith and Christova is testament to this duo’s excellence. Moreover, hearing these sonatas juxtaposed in this way gives us perhaps a new and different perspective on these otherwise familiar works, and lends a special distinction of artistic merit to Smith and Christova’s endeavor. Jerry Dubins