

The Sun

First-Rate Dueling Duos

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New on the market are two recordings by two different duos, and both of these recordings are first-rate. They can be recommended not only without reservation but with hosannas.

The first CD gives us **David Chan** and **Rafael Figueroa**. Who are they? Mr. Chan is the concertmaster of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, and Mr. Figueroa is its principal cellist. They are therefore two of the most important musicians in New York. On a given night, you're apt to leave the Metropolitan Opera House thinking more of a Figueroa solo than of the soprano's aria.

And in May 2006, Messrs. Chan and Figueroa teamed for a concert in Weill Recital Hall. It was a huge success. And this new CD—a studio recording from Elysium—preserves much of the material from that concert.

The repertoire for violin-and-cello duo is not vast, but it contains some fine specimens. (The brothers Renaud and Gautier Capuçon have been exploring it.) Do we miss the presence of a third party—of a piano or a viola? No, not when the composer is especially skillful.

And Ravel and Kodály are. They wrote probably the two major pieces in the repertoire, and they are the two major pieces on the Chan/Figueroa disc. Ravel is the earlier composer: His dates are 1875 to 1937, and Kodály's 1882 to 1967. But Kodály's is the earlier piece: He wrote his Duo in 1914, whereas Ravel wrote his Sonata in 1922. The former piece influenced the latter.

And it is a marvelous piece, the Ravel Sonata. It is both brilliantly constructed and enjoyable musically. In other words, it's Ravel. And our musicians give it a worthy treatment.

They are extremely complementary, playing as one. (I'm sorry for the cliché, but it's true.) We spot a key tonal fact in the first movement: They alternate between a lushness and a sparseness, or even a rawness. Their Ravel is not a scratchfest—but neither is it too rich.

The second movement (*Tres vif*) is properly tense, keeping you on the edge of your seat. The next movement—the slow movement—gives us some typically beautiful playing by Mr. Figueroa. And Mr. Chan is no slouch in the department either.

When the last movement comes around, it is again edge-of-your seat time. The music is jaunty and sharply etched, but it is never crude. These are two exceptionally musical fellows.

And their technical adeptness can be taken for granted—not just in the recording studio (where anyone can be made to sound like Faganini or Rostropovich) but live and in the flesh.

Like its successor, the Kodály Duo is an excellent piece, and Messrs. Chan and Figueroa attack it with what you might call elegant savagery. Throughout the first movement, they are impassioned, thoughtful, and incisive. They employ both delicacy and guts, just as Kodály does.

In the middle movement—*Adagio*—Mr. Figueroa plays a sad, simple tune, beautifully and unaffectedly. This movement has a lulling, rocking quality. But you can't quite get to sleep: There is an underlying disquiet.

And in the closing movement, our guys are playful, precise, and arresting—exciting, in fast. Really, this is playing of a very, very high order.

And they end their disc as they ended their Weill Recital Hall affair: with a Handel passacaglia arranged by Johan Halvorsen, a Norwegian violinist and composer (1864-1935). The players are full of soul and resolution. The passacaglia marches along inevitably, and upliftingly.

Don't think you have an interest in music for violin and cello alone? Let this CD convince you otherwise.