



Artur Schnabel BEETHOVEN Bagatelles



Beethoven worked long and hard at his last set of Bagatelles, the set of six Op. 126, and three sketches and a fair copy show just how much they occupied him. He had composed another set, Op. 119, not long before; and incidentally I was interested to come across the other day the letter Peters Verlag wrote to him after he had offered them Op. 119 for publication: "Your pieces are not worth the money and you should consider it beneath your dignity to waste time with such trivia anyone can write". It's hardly surprising that the next set, Op. 126, was sent to Schott.

These six Bagatelles "are probably the best I've written", Beethoven said. On the sketch of the first one he wrote in the margin "Cichus von Kleinigkeiten" and it's clear that he wanted them performed like that, as a cycle, in which form they do indeed achieve their best effect. There were two good recordings of them last year, by Kempff and Maria Donska (hers on a cheap label), and to these the reissue of Schnabel's performance, dating from 1937, is a welcome complement. It shows him at his best, playing with the subtlest melodic delineation, and great tenderness, and achieving exactly the right balance between fantasy and rapt profundity; to those who have delighted in the reissues of Schnabel's recordings over the past few years I imagine I won't need to say more.

Odd Bagatelles and Albumblätter feature prominently among Beethoven's smaller keyboard works, and the celebrated piece in A minor, Für Elise, is just one of them. Recent research has established that the lady's name was actually Therese (Therese Malfatti, daughter of Beethoven's physician); Elise seems to have resulted from a misreading of Beethoven's handwriting. I trust that for discovering this someone, somewhere, has been awarded a Ph.D.

It's good to have available again Schnabel's recording of the first collection of Bagatelles, all seven of them. Yet in contrast to the Opp. 119 and 126 sets the Op. 33 aren't designed to be played consecutively—or so it seems to me—and when pauses between them are as short as here the sequence of keys between the last three does become a bit disturbing. After a fat C major chord at the end of No. 5, No. 6 (D major) leads off with a melody beginning on F sharp, and after this No. 7 plunges one abruptly into A flat. Longer pauses would have been welcome here. Apart from this I have no criticism to make of the transfers from 78s to LP, which are up to the high standard HMV sustained throughout their reissues of Schnabel's Beethoven sonatas.

S.P. - *The Gramophone, March 1966* (review of HMV LP reissue - excerpt)

Transfer notes

These transfers were made not from the original 78s but from later vinyl transfers made by EMI, which proved generally to offer much quieter sides but, by virtue of pre-dating the digital era, little or no heavy-handed sonic intervention in their production of a kind which unfortunately characterises and distorts EMI's current CD issues. The results for the most part speak for themselves, with the majority of sides being clean and clear and largely devoid of the surface noise typical of the original 1930s HMV shellac discs.

EMI appear to have used their 1960s transfers for the Opp. 33 and 126 Bagatelles (the 11 Bagatelles Op. 119 were first issued in 1982 on LP as new transfers) as both of these suffered a degree of flutter which, thanks to new technology, its use pioneered by Pristine Audio in our Beethoven Sonatas series from Schnabel, has finally been largely overcome. Schnabel's Bechstein piano has also responded astonishingly well to 32-bit XR remastering here - as well as has been heard throughout our Schnabel Beethoven series.

The main collections of Bagatelles were all recorded in 1937 and 1938; *Für Elise* however dates from 1932 and sounds both more distant and more noisy than the later recordings. Despite this, Schnabel's tone sings beautifully through the occasional murk, and as one who has played and heard this particular piece more times than I care to remember, his performance is quietly inspirational. **AR**

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Beethoven



Bagatelles

Opp. 31, 119, 126 • Für Elise



Artur Schnabel, piano

Studio recordings, 1932 - 1938

Beethoven Bagatelles

7 Bagatelles, Op 33

- 1 No. 1 in E flat - *Andante grazioso, quasi allegretto* (3:56)
- 2 No. 2 in C - *Scherzo (Allegro) and Trio* (3:08)
- 3 No. 3 in F - *Allegretto* (2:03)
- 4 No. 4 in A - *Andante* (3:03)
- 5 No. 5 in C - *Allegro ma non troppo* (3:21)
- 6 No. 6 in D - *Allegretto quasi Andante* (3:55)
- 7 No. 7 in A flat - *Presto* (2:09)

Recorded 10 November 1938
Issued as HMV DB.3783-6
Matrix Nos. 2EA.7016-22

11 Bagatelles, Op. 119

- 8 No. 1 in G minor - *Allegretto* (2:16)
- 9 No. 2 in C - *Andante con moto* (1:17)
- 10 No. 3 in D - *à l'Allemande* (1:17)
- 11 No. 4 in A - *Andante cantabile* (1:52)
- 12 No. 5 in C minor - *Risoluta* (1:23)
- 13 No. 6 in G - *Andante - Allegretto* (1:43)
- 14 No. 7 in C - *Allegro ma non troppo* (1:09)
- 15 No. 8 in C - *Moderato cantabile* (1:33)

- 16 No. 9 in A minor - *Vivace moderato* (0:45)
 - 17 No. 10 in A - *Allegramente* (0:21)
 - 18 No. 11 in B flat - *Andante ma non troppo* (2:11)
- Recorded 10 November 1938
Issued in 1982 as HMV LP HLM 7339
Matrix Nos. 2EA.7024-27

6 Bagatelles, Op. 126

- 19 No. 1 in G - *Andante con moto* (3:01)
- 20 No. 2 in G minor - *Allegro* (3:03)
- 21 No. 3 in E flat - *Andante* (2:37)
- 22 No. 4 in B minor - *Presto* (3:52)
- 23 No. 5 in G - *Quasi allegretto* (1:34)
- 24 No. 6 in E flat - *Presto - Andante amabile e con moto* (5:50)

Recorded 13 January 1937
Issued as HMV DB.3626-28
Matrix Nos. 2EA.4530-35

- 25 Bagatelle in A minor, WoO 59 'Für Elise' (2:42)
- Recorded 9 May 1932
Issued as HMV DB.3376
Matrix No. 2B.3376

Artur Schnabel piano

XR remastering by
Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based
on photographs of
Artur Schnabel

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