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Wilhelm Backhaus

Beethoven Piano Sonatas 1-4

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The Backhaus series of Beethoven's Sonatas on long-players continues. Sufficient consideration of the style and achievement of the veteran pianist (he is 70 this year), and of his previous recordings of the Sonatas, has been given in *THE GRAMOPHONE*, already, by M.M. in the issue of September 1952 and by the present writer in those of June and October 1951. The two newly recorded Sonatas need to be discussed—the one an early work from 1795, the other a "middle-period" work from 1802, and perhaps the best of a remarkable trio of Sonatas, of which the third in E flat is an almost equal companion.

The first movement of the early C major is played with a splendid classicism of style, in a manner that would have suited Beethoven's own instrument. The reproduction is lifelike, even though the tone sounds hard in the development section. The same remarks apply to the Scherzo, which is near to the harpsichord in its effects. The Finale is similarly dry in tone, but one observes the careful continuity of thought and of graded weight and colour in tone which proclaims the true Beethoven pianist. The slow movement is made into a much more emotional experience; this is a most moving performance. I have found, despite slight mechanical erraticisms of pitch and surface-hum. The poise is exquisite, not least in the relation of the ornamental to the fundamental passages.

H.F. *The Gramophone*, January 1953 (*excerpt*)

Transfer notes

Wilhelm Backhaus's first Beethoven *Piano Sonata* cycle, recorded between 1950 and 1953, was one of the first for the Long Playing record, and may well have been the first of several contemporary accounts to reach completion. Backhaus was already considered, as the review above points out, a "veteran" pianist, yet later that same decade he started the sonatas all over again, once more for Decca, this time in stereo, a cycle which he almost completed prior to his death in 1969, leaving only the *Hammerklavier* not re-recorded. The existence of the stereo cycle has led to this mono cycle, which a number of listeners consider the better of the two, to be neglected by Decca - outside of Japan and a very limited Italian issue, it has never been reissued by the company. Sonically there's no doubt that the later recordings improved considerably over these early 50s mono versions, but there's much that can now be achieved in improving considerably the sound quality of these recordings, as well as correcting the "slight mechanical erraticisms of pitch and surface-hum" referred to in the review above. In making these historic recordings, from one of the greatest of Beethoven interpreters, available again in fine-sounding 32-bit XR remasters, collectors can at last and with ease determine their own preferences with regard to the Backhaus discography. Finally a note about pitch: The recordings so far analysed suggest some wayward tape speeds, resulting in pianos pitched variously at between A433 and A444, as well as some minor pitch changes during movements within recordings. These have all been corrected to A440. A.R.

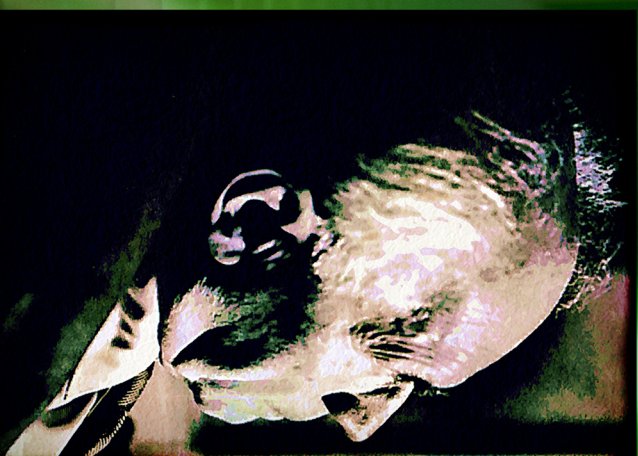
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Volume 1

Piano Sonatas 1-4

No. 1 in F minor, Op. 2 No. 1
No. 2 in A major, Op. 2 No. 2
No. 3 in C major, Op. 2 No. 3
No. 4 in E flat major, Op. 7

Decca Studio Recordings
1952 & 1953

Backhaus Beethoven Edition Volume 1

BEETHOVEN Sonata No. 1 in F minor, Op. 2 No. 1

- 1 1st mvt. - Allegro (3:11)
- 2 2nd mvt. - Adagio (4:30)
- 3 3rd mvt. - Menuetto and Trio - Allegretto (3:00)
- 4 4th mvt. - Prestissimo (3:59)

BEETHOVEN Sonata No. 2 in A major, Op. 2 No. 2

- 5 1st mvt. - Allegro vivace (5:10)
- 6 2nd mvt. - Largo appassionato (5:11)
- 7 3rd mvt. - Scherzo and Trio - Allegretto (2:49)
- 8 4th mvt. - Rondo - Grazioso (6:17)

BEETHOVEN Sonata No. 3 in C major, Op. 2 No. 3

- 9 1st mvt. - Allegro con brio (7:19)
- 10 2nd mvt. - Adagio (6:23)
- 11 3rd mvt. - Scherzo and Trio - Allegro (2:58)
- 12 4th mvt. - Allegro assai (5:22)

BEETHOVEN Sonata No. 4 in E flat major, Op. 7

- 13 1st mvt. - Allegro molto e con brio (6:28)
- 14 2nd mvt. - Largo, con gran espressione (6:49)
- 15 3rd mvt. - Allegro (4:00)
- 16 4th mvt. - Rondo - Poco allegretto e grazioso (6:01)

Wilhelm Backhaus piano

XR remastering by **Andrew Rose**

Cover artwork based on a photograph of
Wilhelm Backhaus

Sonata Nos. 1, 2, 4

Recorded November 1953
Issued as Decca LXT 2902, 2920, 2809

Sonata No. 3

Recorded May 1952
Issued as Decca LXT 2747

Recording producer: **Victor Olof**
Recorded at **Victoria Hall, Geneva**

Total duration: **79:27**

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