

Wilhelm Backhaus

Beethoven Piano Sonatas 14-17

It is disagreeable to write about artists of distinction as if they were candidates at a competitive festival but it would be ingenious not to make a comparison between Gieseking's and Backhaus's playing of the "Moonlight" Sonata. I have spoken elsewhere in this issue of the moving interpretation Gieseking gives of the Adagio. Backhaus takes a much more matter-of-fact view, is wayward over the rhythm, and makes a very decided ritardando before the recapitulation. I find here a serious meditation devoid of poetic impulse, a lack which shows in the treatment of the accompanimental triplets. There is rather a heavy stress on the first beats of the Allegretto and, in the second section, the quaver figure sounds jerky (Gieseking plays it smoothly, using no emphasis).

The last movement, needless to say, is played in the grand manner and is undeniably exciting, but without the fine nuances of phrasing and articulation Gieseking gives us. The recording stands up pretty well to the pianist's assault on the last movement and is rather fuller in tone than Gieseking's in the preceding movement, although never more than adequate.

A.R. The Gramophone, October 1953 (Reviewing LXT 2780, *excerpt covering Sonata No. 14*)

His "Pastoral" Sonata can be compared with that of Denis Matthews on Columbia 33SX1021, reviewed by L.S. last month (a review I am entirely at one with). In I Matthews is smooth, reflective and sober; he observes the repeat. Backhaus, without repeat, is rougher; on the last page he disregards the pianissimo. In the first section of II Matthews is far steadier and more sensitive than Backhaus, but he smooths down the discords too much. In the section marked I's tesso tempo Backhaus suddenly achieves that sparkling elegance which is a mark of his playing at its best here Matthews conveys the impression of alertness but with unsuitable timidity. In III the English pianist is too tame, slightly too slow. And his lack of power in IV is all too apparent; how exciting Backhaus is as he works towards the climax.

A.R. The Gramophone, June 1954 (Reviewing LXT2903, *excerpt covering Sonata No. 15*)

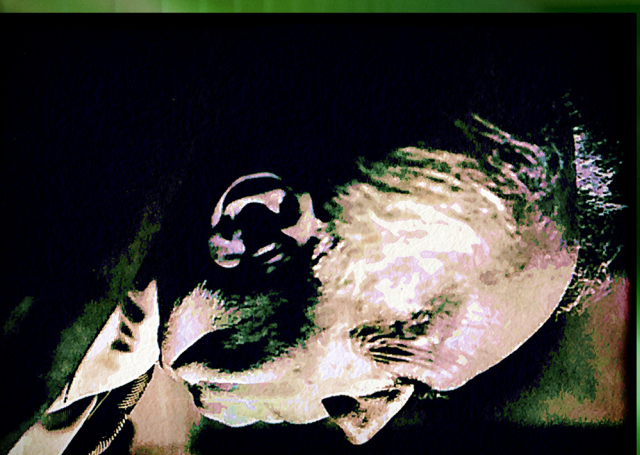
Transfer notes

Generally speaking these recordings provided reasonably straightforward work for the remastering engineer, especially coming, as this volume has, a good number of sonatas into the series, with many carefully-chosen settings now determined for the series, restoration techniques suitable for the material worked out, and only minor variations to be found. The *Moonlight* offers slightly higher background hiss - this seems to be a characteristic of this work in a number of recordings, possible as a result of the works intrinsically wide dynamic range. **A.R.**

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Beethoven Edition



Volume 4

Piano Sonatas 14-17

- No. 14 in G sharp minor, Op. 27 No. 2
"Moonlight"
- No. 15 in D major, Op. 28
"Pastorale"
- No. 16 in G major, Op. 31 No. 1
- No. 17 in D minor, Op. 31 No. 2
"The Tempest"

Decca Studio Recordings
1952 - 1953

Backhaus Beethoven Edition Volume 4

BEETHOVEN Sonata No. 14 in C sharp minor, Op. 27 No. 2 "Moonlight"

- 1 1st mvt. - Adagio sostenuto (5:18)
- 2 2nd mvt. - Allegretto (2:24)
- 3 3rd mvt. - Presto agitato (7:28)

BEETHOVEN Sonata No. 15 in D major, Op. 28 "Pastorale"

- 4 1st mvt. - Allegro (6:43)
- 5 2nd mvt. - Andante (6:02)
- 6 3rd mvt. - Scherzo - Allegro vivace (2:12)
- 7 4th mvt. - Rondo - Allegro non troppo (4:27)

BEETHOVEN Sonata No. 16 in G major, Op. 31, No. 1

- 8 1st mvt. - Allegro vivace (4:53)
- 9 2nd mvt. - Adagio grazioso (8:26)
- 10 3rd mvt. - Rondo - Allegretto - Presto (6:05)

BEETHOVEN Sonata No. 10 in G minor, Op. 31, No. 2 "The Tempest"

- 11 1st mvt. - Largo - Allegro (8:26)
- 12 2nd mvt. - Adagio (6:48)
- 13 3rd mvt. - Allegretto (6:15)

Wilhelm Backhaus piano

XR remastering by **Andrew Rose**

Cover artwork based on a photograph of
Wilhelm Backhaus

Sonata No. 14

Recorded October 1952
Issued as Decca LXT 2780

Sonata No. 15

Recorded November 1953
Issued as Decca LXT 2903

Sonata No. 16

Recorded November 1953
Issued as Decca LXT 2950

Sonata No. 17

Recorded May 1952
Issued as Decca LXT 2747

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

Total duration: **75:27**

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