

Wilhelm Backhaus

Beethoven Piano Sonatas 18-22



BACKHAUS

Beethoven Edition



The two little Sonatas, for many of us our first steps in Beethoven, are given with charm and simplicity. The recording of all these is good.

A.R. The Gramophone, October 1953 (Reviewing LXT2780, *except concerning Sonata No. 19 & 20*)

In the C major, Backhaus is frequently allowed to "play through the piano (the two sides were listened to consecutively at exactly the same level of dynamics, on the same set, and in the same room). Colour-range is good, but the atmosphere is studio-like, and the total effect resembles Beethoven's instrument much nearer than Backhaus's. The second movement opened with warmer tone, but I was out of sympathy with the playing here.

There is one triumph for Backhaus on this side—his magnificent handling of the Rondo with its almost magical (certainly fairy-story) quality of mysteriousness. From this the pianist builds up a castle-like structure. The recording engineers were kind (at last) to his opening but allowed unlikable thinness to creep in as he warmed up his interpretation.

H.F. The Gramophone, June 1951 (Reviewing LXT2532, *except concerning Sonata No. 21, "Waldstein"*)

Transfer notes

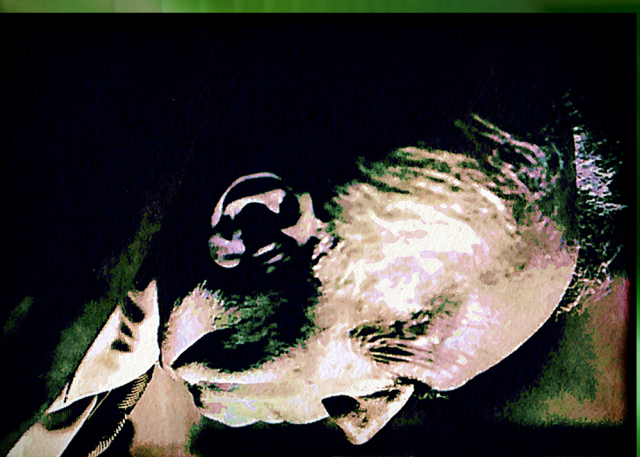
Of the two contemporary reviews quoted here, the second, of the *Waldstein*, perhaps puts its finger on a significant point regarding a good number of the mono Beethoven sonata recordings made by Backhaus for Decca between 1950 and 1954 and represented in this series - and their often less-than-glowing reception at the time. It also suggests to me that their remakes later in the same decade and through the 1960s were for reasons more varied than simply the advent of stereo.

Put simply, I believe that the Decca production team in Geneva were struggling badly with new technology, particularly in the earlier of the recordings, and all too frequently either made basic errors or were let down by the new-fangled tape equipment at their disposal.

Never in this era have I seen pitch change as much as is heard in the original recording of Sonata No. 19. It begins more or less in tune, though with some wavering through the first of the two movements. But the second, across just three minutes, sinks an entire semitone, leaving the piano tuned to 422Hz rather than 440Hz. It's astonishing that a player as sensitive to pitch as Backhaus could have approved this.

The acoustic was often desperately lacking in sympathy, something I've aimed to ameliorate. But I've also had to tackle peak distortion, wayward electrical tones, high background hiss, and poor overall tone. I can only wonder at how much more favourable some of the reviews might have been had the performances been properly recorded in the first place. Critical assessment of performances can too often be badly skewed by inadequate recordings, where crucial aspects of those performances are lost. Backhaus deserved better - I hope this series rectifies this. **A.R.**

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Volume 5

Piano Sonatas 18-22

No. 18 in E flat major, Op. 31, No. 3
No. 19 in G minor, Op. 49, No. 1
No. 20 in G major, Op. 49, No. 2
No. 21 in G major, Op. 53
"Waldstein"
No. 22 in F major, Op. 54

Decca Studio Recordings
1950 - 1954

Backhaus Beethoven Edition Volume 5

BEETHOVEN Sonata No. 18 in E flat major, Op. 31, No. 3

- 1 1st mvt. - Allegro (6:17)
- 2 2nd mvt. - Scherzo - Allegretto vivace (3:43)
- 3 3rd mvt. - Menuetto - Moderato e grazioso (3:57)
- 4 4th mvt. - Presto con fuoco (4:54)

BEETHOVEN Sonata No. 19 in G minor, Op. 49, No. 1

- 5 1st mvt. - Andante (3:29)
- 6 2nd mvt. - Rondo - Allegro (3:25)

BEETHOVEN Sonata No. 20 in G major, Op. 49, No. 2

- 7 1st mvt. - Allegro, ma non troppo (4:10)
- 8 2nd mvt. - Tempo di menuetto (3:18)

BEETHOVEN Sonata No. 21 in C major, Op. 53 "Waldstein"

- 9 1st mvt. - Allegro con brio (8:38)
- 10 2nd mvt. - Introduzione - Adagio molto (3:12)
- 11 3rd mvt. - Rondo - Allegretto moderato - Prestissimo (9:43)

BEETHOVEN Sonata No. 22 in F major, Op. 54

- 12 1st mvt. - In tempo d'un menuetto (4:53)
- 13 2nd mvt. - Allegretto - Più allegro (4:50)

Wilhelm Backhaus piano

XR remastering by **Andrew Rose**

Cover artwork based on a photograph of
Wilhelm Backhaus

Sonata No. 18
Recorded May 1954
Issued as Decca LXT 2950

Sonata No. 19
Recorded November 1952
Issued as Decca LXT 2780

Sonata No. 20
Recorded January 1953
Issued as Decca LXT 2780

Sonata No. 21
Recorded July 1950
Issued as Decca LXT 2532

Sonata No. 22
Recorded April 1952
Issued as Decca LXT 2931

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

Total duration: **64:29**

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