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Wilhelm Backhaus

Beethoven Piano Sonatas 27-29

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This makes three LP recordings of the *Hammerklavier* in just over a year—surely an *embarras de richesses*, particularly when the previous version on the market is so excellent as Friedrich Gulda's? I am entirely with A.R., who reviewed that version in the January 1952 issue of this magazine, in finding his performance a marvel of sensibility, full of affectionate imagination; the slight immaturity suggested by his first tempi (e.g. in the first movement) and lack of tension in the final sprawling fugue is not enough seriously to affect his achievement; and he was given an admirably faithful recording. Precisely why Decca should wish to set up in opposition to itself with a new version by Backhaus is far from clear. Certainly his is a more famous name, and as an older man of wide experience and reputation he is more mature: he treats the first movement with greater breadth (though he is occasionally wayward in rhythm), and in the immense slow movement he underlines its organic growth by the flexibility of his treatment. But his reading has to contend with a recording which is lacking in clarity and depth and which shows a minimum dynamic range (notably in the second movement)—this in a composer in whose works dynamic contrast is a vital factor. Alone of these three recordings, incidentally, this one does not divide up the *Adagio* between the two sides, for which relief much thanks.

L.S. The Gramophone, April 1953 (Reviewing LXT2771, *except concerning Sonata No. 29*)

Transfer notes

Listening to these three recordings it's not difficult to distinguish the sonata recorded in 1954 from those recorded two years previously. The overall tone of Sonata 27 has a richer quality than I've been able to bring out in Sonatas 28 and 29, and in its original review in The Gramophone (not quoted here) the reviewer ends with an observation that: "The whole of this disc is very well recorded", something of a contrast to the criticism directed at the *Hammerklavier* recording.

The latter sounds, to modern ears, especially flat and boxy, with a very limited lower extension which appears almost to hollow out the sound of the piano. The result is indeed a recording which suggested a much poorer performance than Backhaus actually gives as it minimises the impact of both the dynamic range of his playing and the subtleties therein.

In all three sonatas in this volume I've been able to enact a dramatic transformation in the sound of the piano, despite almost constantly having to fight against multiple shortcomings in the original recordings, something that has been a constant throughout this series. Pichwisc, apart from a sag during the first movement of Sonata 28, these were generally fine. But in the recovery of piano tone I've had to lift a lot of tape "shash" into the realms of audibility - and then try to suppress this whilst retaining the piano. By and large this has been a successful mission, but at times one may still be reminded of the vintage of these recordings. A.R.

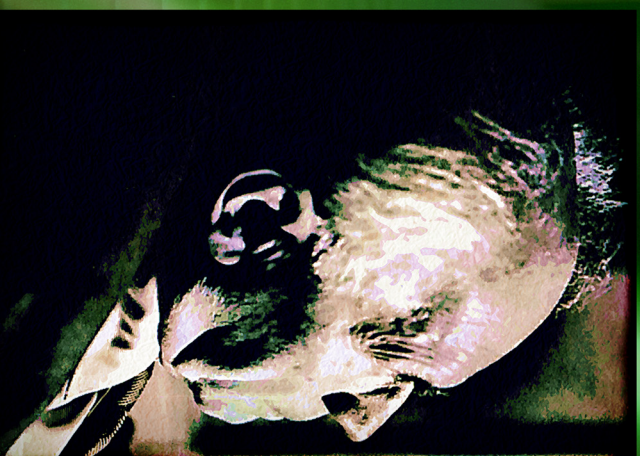
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Volume 7

Piano Sonatas 27-29

No. 27 in E minor, Op. 90
No. 28 in A major, Op. 101
No. 29 in B flat major, Op. 106
"Hammerklavier"

Decca Studio Recordings
1952 - 1954

XR remastering by **Andrew Rose**

Cover artwork based on a photograph of
Wilhelm Backhaus

Backhaus Beethoven Edition Volume 7

BEETHOVEN Sonata No. 27 in E minor, Op. 90

- 1 1st mvt - Mit Lebhaftigkeit und durchaus mit Empfindung und Ausdruck (4:49)
- 2 2nd mvt - Nicht zu geschwind und sehr singbar vorgetragen (7:18)

BEETHOVEN Sonata No. 28 in A major, Op. 101

- 3 1st mvt - Etwas lebhaft, und mit der innigsten Empfindung (3:07)
- 4 2nd mvt - Lebhaft. Marschmäßig (4:40)
- 5 3rd mvt - Langsam und sehnsuchtsvoll (2:16)
- 6 4th mvt - Geschwind, doch nicht zu sehr und mit Entschlossenheit (7:24)

BEETHOVEN Sonata No. 29 in B flat major, Op. 106 "Hammerklavier"

- 7 1st mvt. - Allegro (11:35)
- 8 2nd mvt. - Scherzo - Assai vivace (2:41)
- 9 3rd mvt. - Adagio sostenuto (16:23)
- 10 4th mvt. - Largo - Allegro risoluto (10:48)

Wilhelm Backhaus piano

Sonata No. 27
Recorded January 1954
Issued as Decca LXT 2902

Sonata No. 28
Recorded April 1952
Issued as Decca LXT 2715

Sonata No. 29
Recorded April 1952
Issued as Decca LXT 2777

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

Total duration: **71:01**

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