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Wilhelm Backhaus

Beethoven Piano Sonatas 30-32

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In his integral recording of Beethoven's piano sonatas, Wilhelm Backhaus completes the canon with an impressive performance of the last sonata, Op. 111, and a performance of Op. 110 so beautiful as to be perhaps the finest thing he has put on record.

There is unlikely to be disagreement that these two sonatas and the Diabelli Variations are the most sublime music composed for the piano. The A flat Sonata moves from a cantabile to a recitative of speaking eloquence, whose infinite sadness is overcome by a fugue; the recitative returns, and then the inverted form of the fugue finally triumphs. Fugue, in late Beethoven, seems to typify the power of the human will. The last sonata opens with what sounds like a fugue subject, and the power of will conquers so that we reach another world altogether again a cantabile, the Arietta con variazioni, but a dissolution of all things earthly into calm, ecstatic, immortal joy.

Backhaus is successful in interpreting for us on two of these planes, the human and the heroic; but I feel that the final one, which leads to the shores of Paradise, eludes him. In Op. 110 he is most exquisitely sensitive to the phrases. His enunciation of the recitative and arroso moves one almost to tears; the fugue is overwhelming in its revelation of human will-power. I found this a most moving and affecting performance and recommend it to all listeners without reservation.

The first movement of Op. 111, again, is a revelation of grandeur, and the Arietta, too, is played with a most beautiful tone that laps the listener in loving kindness - yet it is withal simple and unaffected. It is afterwards, in the variations, when the light should dissolve into one that is not of this world, that chinks of common daylight reappear to disturb us. The sense of mystery is missing. Yet do not think that this is less than a thoughtful and remarkable performance. It is just that it does not leave us — as does Op. 110 — entirely satisfied and hardly wishing to hear better.

A.P. The Gramophone, October 1954 (Reviewing LXT2939, *except opening Sonata No. 31 & 32*)

Transfer notes

Sonata No. 30 was among the earliest recorded in this series and among the few to be released on 78s alongside an LP. Nevertheless it's almost on a par with the two 1953 recordings with regard to technical quality. All three were again less than ideal, with various flaws familiar to this cycle, yet beyond a tendency to upper-frequency fuzziness and some pre- and post-echo they were generally at the higher end of the quality scale when looked at in that context. Perhaps the fact of a 78rpm issue of the first of these three works should serve as a reminder of the somewhat primitive technical origins of Backhaus's first complete cycle - by the time he returned to Beethoven sonatas in the Decca studios a few short years later, recording technology had advanced considerably. A.R.

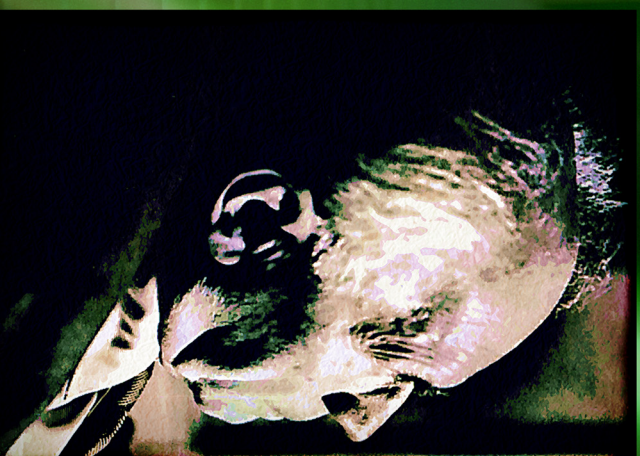
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Volume 8

Piano Sonatas 30-32

No. 30 in E major, Op. 109
No. 31 in A flat major, Op. 110
No. 32 in C minor, Op. 111

Decca Studio Recordings
1950 - 1953

XR remastering by **Andrew Rose**

Cover artwork based on a photograph of
Wilhelm Backhaus

Backhaus Beethoven Edition Volume 8

BEETHOVEN Sonata No. 30 in E major, Op. 109

- 1 1st mvt. - Vivace ma non troppo - Adagio espressivo (2:40)
- 2 2nd mvt. - Prestissimo (2:09)
- 3 3rd mvt. - Andante molto cantabile ed espressivo (12:44)

BEETHOVEN Sonata No. 31 in A flat major, Op. 110

- 4 1st mvt. - Moderato cantabile molto espressivo (5:29)
- 5 2nd mvt. - Allegro molto (2:03)
- 6 3rd mvt. - Adagio ma non troppo - Fuga: Allegro ma non troppo (9:42)

BEETHOVEN Sonata No. 32 in C minor, Op. 111

- 7 1st mvt. - Maestoso - Allegro con brio ed appassionato (8:13)
- 8 2nd mvt. - Arietta: Adagio molto, semplice e cantabile (13:26)

Wilhelm Backhaus piano

Sonata No. 30

Recorded July 1950
Issued as Decca LXT 2535
and on 78s as AX361-62

Sonata No. 31

Recorded November 1953
Issued as Decca LXT 2939

Sonata No. 32

Recorded November 1953
Issued as Decca LXT 2939

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

Total duration: **56:26**

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