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Wilhelm Backhaus

Beethoven Piano Concerto 1, Diabelli Variations

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Having completed the whole cycle of Beethoven's piano sonatas Backhaus will now, I imagine, and hope, add the finest of the remaining keyboard works.

His performance of the "Diabelli" variations is a magnificent achievement: and it says a great deal for Katchen's much more youthful art that his own performance stands up so well to it and may even be considered, in the final variation (and the wonderful modulation that leads up to it) more spiritually radiant. But Katchen, naturally, does not command the grand manner of Backhaus, which is of the master's time (and not of to-day; nor can one expect of him the maturity born of a lifelong experience. Comparisons, therefore, would be, as is said, odious.

There is an astonishingly youthful vigour in Backhaus' playing, a tremendous sense of enjoyment in the formidable task of bringing the great work to life, and a moving sensitivity in those variations that call for it, particularly in the lovely Chopinesque Variation (No. 31). I must also single out the superbly clear and vital playing of the following fugal variation. The piano tone is on a level with the best we have had in the Backhaus series.

A.R. The Gramophone, April 1955 (Reviewing LXT5016, *Diabelli Variations*)

...It's a dashing, metesome performance, well poised, I had forgotten how lively and companionable a pianist Backhaus could be (I'm not a fan of his readings of the last three concertos), and the performance reminded me that he used to be an admitted Mozart pianist. The florid runs and the sense of shape are particularly good. I only didn't care for the extensive meno mosso which Backhaus declares before the Adagio in the coda of the last movement—it overweighs the music...

W.S.M. The Gramophone, November 1959 (Reviewing BR3001, *Piano Concerto No. 1*, excerpt)

Transfer notes

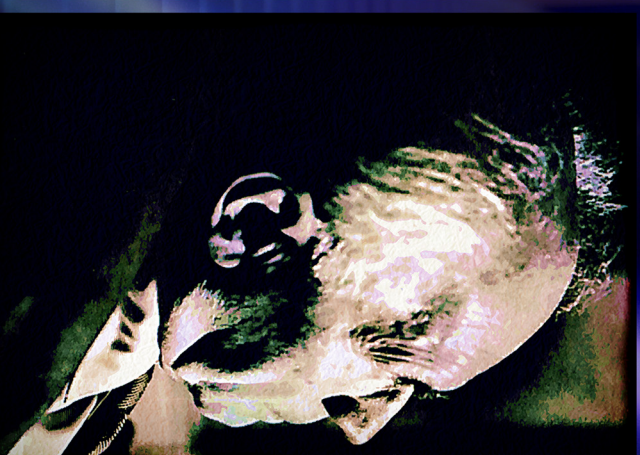
Tonally the *Piano Concerto* recording was good, if somewhat hissy, and this restoration has concentrated mainly on reducing the latter as well as correcting some quite significant pitch anomalies at edit points throughout the recording. These caused jumps in the pitch of the recording were edits from different takes had been made or up to a quarter-semitone at a time, helping make some edits sound particularly clunky. The recording was also rather sharp, more so than the *Diabelli Variations*, which managed a far more even and consistent A=445Hz. Here my efforts were concentrated on lifting the veil on a somewhat thin and boxy-sounding instrument, coupled with the removal or suppression of a large number of extraneous clicking noises which appeared to emanate from the keyboard itself. A.R.

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BACKHAUS

Beethoven Edition



Volume 9

Piano Concerto No. 1

Diabelli Variations

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra
Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt
Wilhelm Backhaus, piano

Decca Studio Recordings
1954 & 1958

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