

Artur Schnabel

Beethoven Piano Sonatas, Vol. 7

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"Now that the reissue of all the Beethoven sonatas is well under way, I suspect that the glibes people used to make at Schnabel's technique will become a good deal less common. A case could certainly be made for regarding Schnabel's Beethoven records as documents of supreme virtuosity; if the term virtuosity be understood to embrace a blazing intensity of interpretative vision as well as a breathtaking manner of execution. Time and time again I have been struck by this as I listened to Schnabel's playing; it's as though the force of his convictions dictates an altogether exceptional brilliance in his playing.

The 'fluffs' and the rhythmic telescoping that occasionally make us raise our eyebrows are actually almost always the results of attempts at the impossible, attempts to push an idea to the very limits of its logic and even a bit beyond, rather than results of an imperfect control of mind or fingers. You can find several examples of this on these records. The finale of the E-flat Sonata, Op. 31, No. 3, provides one. Beethoven marked it *piu o un poco*, and obviously didn't intend it to go at a gentle amble; but with Schnabel it goes like a train, and although in itself the idea of this is perfectly convincing in the final reckoning clarity of texture and articulation do get sacrificed on the altar of excitement, and this is rather a pity. Yet I don't complain—the performance of the rest of the sonata seems to me quite perfect.

To a lesser extent parts of the *Waldstein* and the *Appassionata* show the same madness (if I dare call it that). Schnabel takes the finale of the *Appassionata* at something a good deal faster than an *allegro ma non troppo* and gives the ubiquitous squiggles a light and almost fantastic touch; but although this again seems quite justifiable, and although the transition from the *allegro* into the *piu o un poco* is very well managed, there are, almost inevitably, places where the details don't have time to make effect. Not so in the first movement, however. This is unfolded with a tremendous sense of majesty and awe; nothing is over-driven and nothing too heavily underlined—the rhythmic detail is scrupulously correct and grandeur and spaciousness are everything; here indeed the music seems to be playing itself.

I was interested to find Schnabel observing Beethoven's pedalling indications in the finale of the *Waldstein*. These are something of a problem, should they—in the one hand—be regarded as a mere adjunct to the huge harmonic spans of the melody at the beginning of this movement, an attempt to make the early nineteenth-century piano convey the unprecedented breadth of this music with the grandest possible sonority?—in which case perhaps one should not observe them too literally when playing on the modern piano—or are they signals for cloudy, Aeolian harp effects? The evidence certainly points to the Aeolian harp, at least by deduction from Beethoven's own practice of indicating the pedalling he wanted in his piano works. Schnabel evidently agrees; or rather, once one has heard how he solves the problem, one is inclined to agree with him...."

SP: *The Grandphone (excerpt), review of EMI LP reviews, March 1964*

Recording and restoration notes

In terms of overall sound quality and the difficulties of restoration, this volume has generally presented fewer problems than most, something the listener should immediately find apparent in the clarity of sound achieved in many of the movements presented here. The usual problems inherent in trying to extract as much musical information as possible do still arise, but overall to a lesser extent, and the piano tone is often more vibrant and extended than in some previous volumes. Naturally, the playing is exquisite! **AR**

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BEETHOVEN

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PIANO SONATAS

VOLUME 7

No. 21 in G MAJOR, Op. 53

"WALDSTEIN"

No. 22 in F MAJOR, Op. 54

No. 23 in F MINOR, Op. 57

"APPASSIONATA"

No. 24 in F SHARP MAJOR, Op. 78

"A THERÈSE"

ARTUR SCHNABEL

RECORDED 1932 - 1934

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BEETHOVEN PIANO SONATAS VOLUME 7 - Nos. 21-24

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Beethoven Piano Sonatas Volume Seven

BEETHOVEN Piano Sonata No. 21 in C major, Op. 53

"Waldstein"

1 1st mvt. - Allegro con brio (10:04)

2 2nd mvt. - Introduzione - Adagio molto (5:09)

3 3rd mvt. - Rondo - Allegretto moderato - Prestissimo (8:57)

Recorded 25 April 1934, issued as HMV DB 2853-55

Matrix Numbers 2B.6160-65

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

4 1st mvt. - In tempo d'un menuetto (4:58)

5 2nd mvt. - Allegretto - Più allegro (5:28)

Recorded 11 April 1933, issued as HMV DB 2651-52

Matrix Numbers 2B.6611-12

BEETHOVEN Piano Sonata No. 23 in F minor, Op. 57

"Appassionata"

6 1st mvt. - Allegro assai (8:59)

7 2nd mvt. - Andante con moto (6:01)

8 3rd mvt. - Allegro ma non troppo - Presto (7:13)

Recorded 11 April 1933, issued as HMV DB 2215-17

Matrix Numbers 2B.6605-10

BEETHOVEN Piano Sonata No. 24 in F sharp major, Op. 78

"A Thérèse"

9 1st mvt. Adagio cantabile Allegro ma non troppo (6:59)

10 2nd mvt. - Allegro vivace (2:39)

Recorded 21 March 1932, issued as HMV DB 1659-60

Matrix Numbers 2B.3222-24

Artur Schnabel piano

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photographs of **Artur Schnabel**

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