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# Wilhelm Backhaus

## Beethoven Piano Sonatas 5-9

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The classical, precise, authoritative Backhaus is presented here with uncommonly lifelike quality. He has his minor errataisms, but they are no more than a part of the person who is presenting a great master for our full attention. Backhaus's own intense conviction of the composer's mastery fully overcomes any doubts one might have about the music. In truth, not one of these three sonatas is of great magnitude—that in G major (Op. 79), Beethoven himself entitled "sonate facile ou sonatine". The other two are early works from before the turn of the century.

I have never understood the ways—so different—in which performers treat repeat marks in gramophone recordings, though I am not unaware of the exigencies of the stop-watch. It would appear logical to perform either all or none of the composer's own repeating instructions. I can see no justification for repeating the exposition in a first movement and not the remainder. In these recordings, the repeat marks are treated with a gallant air, used when and how the performer wishes, like a pair of gloves on the way to an evening party.

The dry tone that Backhaus naturally produces was a disadvantage, I felt, in the second movement of Op. 10, No. 2: the first was excellent. The presto was very exact and amusing—perhaps a little too good-tempered. No. 1 of the same opus is treated with restraint, in a narrative rather than a dramatic style. The *adagio* motto is superb—worth all the rest of this performance put together! I like the brittle, guttary effect Backhaus creates for the opening movement of Op. 79; it has a kind of peasant air about it. The *andante* is taken well under walking pace, and I could bear the vivace finale more headlong.

From this disc I had slight trouble with blast, which remained even if one turned the dynamics down. Backhaus's percussive style need not lead to this fault.

H.F. The *Gramophone*, October 1951 (Reviewing LX72603, *Sonata*, Nov 5, 6, 23)

### Transfer notes

Gramophone's reviewer in 1951 notes some blasting on louder passages on his LP copy, and likewise I had to deal with shortcomings of the recording which I firmly ascribe to the early tape system in use - which was much improved by November 1953 for the later three recordings in this volume. Whether or not the reviewer was hearing disc blasting, there was often a tendency towards a mushy kind of tape hiss to surround the upper frequencies of louder notes and chords, and I've spent a lot of time removing or taming these. Elsewhere, pitch has once again been surprisingly variable, both in terms of overall tuning, and in clear issues with both tape machines and editing, all of which can now be remedied. Sound quality was generally good - my aim here, which I feel has been achieved, has been to clarify the piano tone whilst reducing background noise and hiss. **A.R.**

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## Volume 2

### Piano Sonatas 5-9

No. 5 in C minor, Op. 10 No. 1  
No. 6 in F major, Op. 10 No. 2  
No. 7 in D major, Op. 10, No. 3  
No. 8 in C minor, Op. 13, "Pathétique"  
No. 9 in E major, Op. 14, No. 1

Decca Studio Recordings  
1951 & 1953

**Backhaus Beethoven Edition Volume 2****BEETHOVEN Sonata No. 5 in C minor, Op. 10 No. 1**

- 1 1st mvt. - Allegro molto e con brio (4:15)
- 2 2nd mvt. - Adagio molto (6:19)
- 3 3rd mvt. - Prestissimo (3:27)

**BEETHOVEN Sonata No. 6 in F major, Op. 10 No. 2**

- 4 1st mvt. - Allegro (4:19)
- 5 2nd mvt. - Allegretto (3:33)
- 6 3rd mvt. - Presto (2:24)

**BEETHOVEN Sonata No. 7 in D major, Op. 10, No. 3**

- 7 1st mvt. - Presto (5:04)
- 8 2nd mvt. - Largo e mesto (6:55)
- 9 3rd mvt. - Menuetto - Allegro (2:44)
- 10 4th mvt. - Rondo - Allegro (4:19)

**BEETHOVEN Sonata No. 8 in C minor, Op. 13, "Pathétique"**

- 11 1st mvt. - Grave - Allegro di molto e con brio (6:22)
- 12 2nd mvt. - Adagio cantabile (5:01)
- 13 3rd mvt. - Rondo - Allegro (4:35)

**BEETHOVEN Sonata No. 9 in E major, Op. 14 No. 1**

- 14 1st mvt. - Allegro (4:21)
- 15 2nd mvt. - Allegretto (3:09)
- 16 3rd mvt. - Rondo - Allegro comodo (3:21)

**Wilhelm Backhaus piano**XR remastering by **Andrew Rose**Cover artwork based on a photograph of  
**Wilhelm Backhaus****Sonata Nos. 5, 6**  
Recorded March 1951  
Issued as Decca LXT 2603**Sonata Nos. 7, 8, 9**  
Recorded November 1953  
Issued as Decca LXT 2809, 2903, 2903Recording producer: **Victor Olof**  
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