

NAXOS

BEETHOVEN

2 CDs

Diabelli Variations

**Edmund Battersby,
Piano and Fortepiano**



**LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN:
“DIABELLI” VARIATIONS
(1819-23)**

Edmund Battersby, Pianist

CD 1: “Graf Piano” (Fortepiano)

1	Theme: Vivace	0:52
2	Variation 1: Alla Marcia, maestoso	1:23
3	Variation 2: Poco allegro	0:48
4	Variation 3: L'istesso tempo	1:17
5	Variation 4: Un poco più vivace	1:04
6	Variation 5: Allegro vivace	0:57
7	Variation 6: Allegro ma non troppo e serio	1:36
8	Variation 7: Un poco più allegro	1:03
9	Variation 8: Poco vivace	1:33
10	Variation 9: Allegro pesante e risoluto	1:37
11	Variation 10: Presto	0:36
12	Variation 11: Allegretto	1:04
13	Variation 12: Un poco più mosso	1:00
14	Variation 13: Vivace	1:11
15	Variation 14: Grave e maestoso	3:30
16	Variation 15: Presto scherzando	0:38
17	Variation 16: Allegro / Variation 17: Attacca	1:56
18	Variation 18: Poco moderato	1:35
19	Variation 19: Presto	0:54
20	Variation 20: Andante	2:21
21	Variation 21: Allegro con brio	1:14
22	Variation 22: Allegro molto	0:52
23	Variation 23: Allegro assai	0:55
24	Variation 24: Fughetta – Andante	3:02
25	Variation 25: Allegro	0:51
26	Variation 26: [Piacevole]	1:14
27	Variation 27: Vivace	1:00
28	Variation 28: Allegro	0:56
29	Variation 29: Adagio ma non troppo	1:30
30	Variation 30: Andante, sempre cantabile	1:35
31	Variation 31: Largo, molto espressivo	4:24
32	Variation 32: Fuga – Allegro	3:07
33	Variation 33: Tempo di Menuetto, moderato	4:12

**LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN:
“DIABELLI” VARIATIONS
(1819-23)**

Edmund Battersby, Pianist

CD 2: “Modern” Piano (Steinway)

1	Theme: Vivace	0:53
2	Variation 1: Alla Marcia, maestoso	1:22
3	Variation 2: Poco allegro	0:49
4	Variation 3: L'istesso tempo	1:17
5	Variation 4: Un poco più vivace	1:04
6	Variation 5: Allegro vivace	0:53
7	Variation 6: Allegro ma non troppo e serio	1:33
8	Variation 7: Un poco più allegro	1:03
9	Variation 8: Poco vivace	1:33
10	Variation 9: Allegro pesante e risoluto	1:37
11	Variation 10: Presto	0:35
12	Variation 11: Allegretto	1:04
13	Variation 12: Un poco più mosso	0:56
14	Variation 13: Vivace	1:06
15	Variation 14: Grave e maestoso	3:25
16	Variation 15: Presto scherzando	0:36
17	Variation 16: Allegro / Variation 17: Attacca	1:56
18	Variation 18: Poco moderato	1:30
19	Variation 19: Presto	0:53
20	Variation 20: Andante	2:13
21	Variation 21: Allegro con brio	1:11
22	Variation 22: Allegro molto	0:50
23	Variation 23: Allegro assai	0:57
24	Variation 24: Fughetta – Andante	2:57
25	Variation 25: Allegro	0:51
26	Variation 26: [Piacevole]	1:17
27	Variation 27: Vivace	0:59
28	Variation 28: Allegro	0:57
29	Variation 29: Adagio ma non troppo	1:27
30	Variation 30: Andante, sempre cantabile	1:33
31	Variation 31: Largo, molto espressivo	4:14
32	Variation 32: Fuga – Allegro	3:12
33	Variation 33: Tempo di Menuetto, moderato	4:01

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Diabelli Variations, Op. 120

Around 1819, the music-publisher and composer Anton Diabelli invited several composers to contribute one variation to a collection based on his own waltz theme. Beethoven initially refused. Instead, he began sketching his own collection of variations based on Diabelli's waltz. Not completed until 1823, the *Thirty-Three Variations on a Waltz by Diabelli, Op. 120*, would become Beethoven's last large-scale composition for solo piano.

This late work poses numerous interpretive possibilities. Several scholars have attempted to describe the *Diabelli Variations* in terms of a transcendental journey, a testament to Beethoven's spirituality, and how this manifests itself in his late compositional style. The notion of retrospection (and along with that, introspection) is one key to unlocking the magic behind this piece. The Variations, indeed, assume a monumental narrative structure. Much as Dante provided a guide through his *Divine Comedy*, so does Beethoven, but Beethoven's guide(s) turns out not to be the theme, but rather, the musical genres and styles both from the past and the contemporaneous. One can unravel this work by tracing a carefully planned narrative of retrospection, through the use of parody and humour, imitation, and transformation of musical styles. Expressively, this retrospective approach contributes to the deeper meaning behind the work. Further, the work can be viewed in three large sections, each one more outright in its borrowing of musical styles — first, an exploration of the theme, then integration, and finally, reconciliation. The result of referencing and exploring the musical past is a composition unparalleled in its inventiveness and creativity.

From the outset, Diabelli's theme poses an immediate compositional problem: how does one proceed from the relatively simple harmonic scheme and repetitive textures? Suffice it to say Beethoven's solution is one of the most remarkable in musical history. In order to make a secure emotional transition

between the theme and the ensuing variations, Beethoven works in narrative fashion, moving the music gradually away from the theme, and by the end of the work, transforming it into other-worldly magnificence.

To do this, Beethoven leaves the humorous theme at once and begins *his* music with a parodying March marked *Maestoso*. The time signature has changed abruptly from 3/4 to 4/4 and clearly exhibits the composer's disdain for the "common" generator of his preceding creations. Similarly, the second variation parodies the first while restoring the triple metre. The exploration of the theme (the goal of the first large section) begins, like many sets of technical variations, with the appearance of rhythmic diminutions. The difference here is that instead of this taking place within a few variations, the process continues methodically over the first ten. It culminates in two powerful trills in the left hand (Variation X). With the trill (the ultimate diminution), the first part of the journey is complete — exploration gives rise to integration. Interestingly, while the first ten variations explore the theme, the possibilities are far from exhausted. In fact the musical aspects explored earlier become new material for subsequent variations, variations upon variations.

The following section gradually pulls away from the obviousness of the theme, while at the same time integrating methodical references to musical history. The eleventh and twelfth variations are lyrical, even pastoral, in nature. One of the most interesting variation techniques Beethoven employs is contrast. Variation XIII completely reverses the peaceful effects of Variations XI and XII. Sonorous chords, disrupted by energetic silence, pull the music into a new realm. This variation reduces the opening waltz to a smattering of sound forcing its way through silence.

In contrast, Variation XIV is a French Overture topic. Expressively, this is a generic recall of ancient music. As a rule, variations normally look back to their own theme, but here Beethoven interrupts a series of

connected variations with the high style. Further, this variation is couched between the silence of Variation XIII and the *Presto* of Variation XV. Here Beethoven shifts the metre to duple, as if to throw the listener off balance (recalling the metric shift of the first variation). One of the shortest variations in the entire work, this interlude acts as yet another parody.

The next variations, XVI and XVII, are linked, and also look to other musical styles. These two variations function as etudes, a relatively new genre. The technical problem is divided between the hands (first left hand, then right). Variation XVIII can be viewed as an emotional retrenching; compared to the preceding etudes, it represents a moment of respite. The parallel octaves between the hands are a new texture, and resemble Baroque *fortspinnung* in its treatment. Variation XIX also recalls a Baroque idiom, the canon. Its character is playful and outright. By contrast, Variation XX exists in a completely new world. As the end of the second section, it is monumental in its brevity, its texture, and its high degree of dissonance. The simplistic recall of the descending fourth motive, however, is disturbingly mocking. The harmonic complexity amidst the low register creates a seriousness that foreshadows later variations. Integration is complete. But Beethoven has as of yet provided no answers. Rather, he settles (in Variation XX) into a moment of repose before proceeding. Besides its Baroque mood, the twentieth variation distinctly recalls *Op. 111*. The final stage of the work, spiritual reconciliation and transcendence, is the process whereby Beethoven reconciles the musical past with the innocence of the theme. In doing so, he subjects the music to progressive and forward-looking processes. The result is spiritual transcendence, literally, the past links with the future, and the spiritual links with the commonplace.

The third section begins in a world totally separate from the twentieth variation. Variation XXI stridently mocks Variation XX. The humour of the trill is bounced around various registers in a duple metre. This humour is short-lived, however. A slower episode is

interpolated, only to be brazenly interrupted by the earlier material. Essentially, this variation longs for itself.

Variation XXII is the most obvious parody. Beethoven borrows the opening of “*Notte e giorno faticar*” from Leporello’s aria in Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*. It is a testament to Beethoven’s genius that he can incorporate this music into variation form. As a parody variation, this is the only one completely in unison. Its humorous level of discourse illustrates further mockery, while at the same time it nostalgically recalls the descending fourth of the opening of the theme. The occasional use of operatic or symphonic style music will be taken over by choral-like textures by the end of the piece, a style which consumed the composer near the end of his life.

Variation XXIII presents itself as another etude. It compresses the original 32 measures into sixteen. Emotionally, it provides a transition between the humorous world of the Mozart parody and the following *Fughetta*, Variation XXIV, which represents a return to a high, learned level, reminiscent of an a cappella choir. In doing so, this variation signals a more ominous emotional underpinning to the work, one that will become more obvious in the ensuing variations.

Variation XXV restores the feeling of the waltz. The circular left-hand sixteenths (semiquavers) ingratiate the music with elegance and dignity. Literally, Variations XXIV and XXV reclaim the high compositional styles of the Baroque and Classic periods (fugue and minuet) as a means of redefining the clumsiness of the theme.

Variations XXVI to XXVIII function as a unit. The texture thickens between the three, and so does the distancing from the original theme. It is here that Beethoven leaves the world of the theme and physically (aurally) captures a spiritual one. During these three variations, Beethoven challenges the obsessive, repetitive nature of the theme until it nearly implodes. This makes way for the climb into an intense, moving close. By Variation XXIX, the mode is minor, the mood is dramatic and the theme is arioso-like. It is the

beginning of a trilogy of minor variations and the sobbing motive indicates the change in expressive mode. Variation XXX continues the ascent toward apotheosis. Set in a “learned” texture, this music is an imitative, SATB interlude. Variation XXXI is the final minor variation. It is marked *Largo* and uses both an *aria* and a *scilienne* topic simultaneously. The *Largo* is the deepest emotional cavern of the work. It stands completely polarised emotionally from the beginning of the work. Now the music displays solemnity, introspection, and a longing for comfort, at once desperate and serene. Ultimately, this attempt to reconcile musical pasts and present drives the music into a spiritual realm. Beethoven does this by looking back to earlier dance forms as well as forward to the belcanto grace of Chopin’s coloratura writing.

Beethoven has overcome the hopelessness of the three previous variations in the *Fugue*. Again he resorts to the musical complexity of the Baroque to explore musical solutions. The power of this music is partly contained in the fact that the fugal subject contains every element of Diabelli’s original and common theme. A cadenza-like passage bridges the fugue and the final variation: *Tempo di Menuetto moderato*. Here Beethoven adopts a galant, lighter mood to counteract the depth of the fugue. Eventually the *Minuet* disappears into the higher registers of the instrument. This texture is a direct recasting of the ending of Beethoven’s own *Sonata, Op. 111*. The ethereal sounds represent the world of spiritual transcendence—one accomplished by a nostalgic return to Beethoven’s own music.

The penultimate *pianissimo* chord is triumphantly contrasted with the *forte* that ends this sublime piece. Indeed the *Sonata, Op. 111*, does not end as heroically. Perhaps this is indicative of Beethoven’s final say at the piano. It is this author’s contention that Beethoven chooses this ending to recall more strictly Diabelli’s theme. In this final sound of the piece Beethoven grasps Diabelli’s theme and literally shakes every ounce of possibility out of it, where most of us would have seen nothing. The final chord balances out the theme; it originally opened in a different register and with a piano dynamic. Beethoven offsets this tentative, naive quality, with a higher register and a *forte* dynamic. At once the work ends, with a reconciliation between commonplace and transcendental, and between the past and what will become the musical future. It represents creativity and genius of the highest order. The *Diabelli Variations* are, at least on some level, a compendium of musical history, a cyclic, self-referencing, compositional homage to Beethoven’s musical predecessors and successors, which is captivatingly poignant. Spirituality takes many forms in this piece, from the innocence of the beginning to the steadfastly triumphant, to the inherently reflective and psychological, and to the violent and intensely philosophical. It is a rewarding yet difficult journey to experience this work, both for performer and listener, not unlike the life journey itself.

Lia M. Jensen
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

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- Rosen, Charles. *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997.
- Solomon, Maynard. *Late Beethoven: Music, Thought, Imagination*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003.

About the fortepiano used on this recording

Beethoven witnessed the development and flowering of the wooden framed piano. At one time or another he possessed instruments by a number of manufacturers including one acquired in 1825 from the renowned Viennese builder Conrad Graf, a year after that maker had received the imperial court appointment “k.k. Hof Fortepianomacher”. R. J. Regier built the fortepiano used in this recording in 1997; its design is based on 6 1/2 octave (78 notes, C₂ - f₄’’) instruments made by Graf in the 1820s. Surviving Grafs from this period are often remarkable instruments, having the light, shallow touch and acoustic clarity of their predecessors, but also having a dynamic range inconceivable at an earlier time. Fortepianos from Graf’s shop are wooden framed, are played with a Viennese action (or Prellmechanik), and have centrally located foot pedals clearly intended to be used easily and comfortably by the player. These instruments remained central to Viennese musical life long after pianos made with composite wood/iron frames and action mechanisms based on Sebastian Erard’s patent in 1821 for a double-escapement action had become common. Beethoven’s Graf has been restored and is now located in the Beethovenhaus in Bonn.

Rob Loomis, RPT provided the tuning and technical services. The fortepiano was tuned at A430 c.p.s. in ‘Tuner’s Guide No. 3’ temperament [from Owen H. Jorgensen, *Tuning* p.442]. This was chosen because it was not jarringly different from equal temperament, but retains some of the coloration that well temperaments bestow.

Edmund Battersby



Edmund Battersby has long been known as a player who seeks out the real challenges of the piano repertory. His idea of recording Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations* on both modern and period instruments was formulated over many years and represents his great interest in subjecting this and other great works for piano to a kind of dialectical process of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Battersby's original thesis was to prove that perhaps this great work was less abstract and more instrumental than originally perceived, based on interpretive puzzles which often seemed solved by the "right" instrument. Yet in the process of producing this CD, his performance on the Graf replica (the same maker as that of Beethoven's last piano) unveiled new insights for enhanced possibilities on the modern piano. Goethe's dictum, referring to his colour theory "one cannot perceive colours one has not seen", is borrowed as a parallel in music.

American born and trained, Edmund Battersby has played with major orchestras in the United States, Mexico and South America. He made his recital débuts in London's Wigmore Hall and Alice Tully Hall in New York, and has appeared at major music festivals. He has been featured with groups such as the Tokyo, Orion, and Vermeer String Quartets and has performed numerous times at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. Earlier in his career he championed many new works of the ensemble repertory which are now classics, performing and recording the works of Crumb, Rochberg, Bolcom and others under the direction of the composers.

Battersby has recorded on the modern piano the complete *Songs without Words* of Mendelssohn, Granados' *Goyescas* (Grammy short-listed), Rachmaninov's *Preludes* and *Etudes-tableaux*, and *Klavierstücke* of Schubert. On the Graf piano he made the first recording of Schumann's *Kreisleriana* and Chopin's *Ballades*, *Nocturnes* and *Waltzes*. Also on period pianos are his performances of Mozart and Beethoven's *Quintets for Piano and Winds*. For Naxos he has recorded the complete violin and piano chamber music of Dvořák with Qian Zhou.

Edmund Battersby is a member of the artist-faculty of Indiana University, Bloomington, and has often been invited to give master-classes nationally and internationally, most recently at the Royal Irish Academy of Music and the Dublin Master Classes, as well as the University of Leipzig as part of EuroArts Festival.

Photograph: Edith Wroblewski

Ludwig van Beethoven's initial response to publisher/composer Anton Diabelli's request for a single variation on his waltz theme (to be published with those of 49 other composers), was an emphatic "No". He called the theme "a cobbler's patch", but later reconsidered and supplied Diabelli with not one, but thirty-three variations, his largest and most enigmatic composition for piano. In the spirit of the time, Beethoven subjected Diabelli's theme to an evolutionary process. Following that same spirit, Edmund Battersby has scrutinized the work anew, through his exploration of the virtues and limitations of two instruments – the modern Steinway and a replica instrument of the most prominent piano-maker in Vienna of Beethoven's time, Konrad Graf.

Ludwig van
BEETHOVEN
(1770-1827)

Thirty-Three Variations on a Theme of Diabelli, Op. 120

CD 1 (Fortepiano Replica)	51:47	CD 2 (Modern Piano)	50:44
1 Theme: Vivace	0:52	1 Theme: Vivace	0:53
2-33 Variations 1-33	50:55	2-33 Variations 1-33	49:51

Edmund Battersby, Piano and Fortepiano

A full track list can be found on pages 2 and 3 of the booklet

Recorded at the Performing Arts Centre, The Country Day School, King City, Ontario, Canada,
from August 24th to 29th, 2003.

Instruments: CD 1 - Fortepiano: A 1997 replica of a Conrad Graf piano from 1825, from the shop of
R.J. Regier (Freeport, Maine), courtesy of Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y.

CD 2 - Steinway "D" piano, 1976, Steinway & Sons, N.Y.

Special thanks to consultants Jennifer Stucker, Herbert Colcord, William Monroe,
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Producers: Bonnie Silver & Norbert Kraft • Engineer: Norbert Kraft • Editor: Bonnie Silver

Fortepiano Technician: Rob Loomis • Booklet notes: Lia M. Jensen

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Playing Time
1:42:31



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