



Great Pianists • Schnabel

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BEETHOVEN

Piano Works Vol. 2

Sonatas Nos. 4-6
and 19-20

Artur Schnabel

Historical Recordings 1932 - 1935

Great Pianists: Artur Schnabel: BEETHOVEN: Piano Works Vol. 2

Piano Sonatas Nos. 4-6 and 19-20

In the half century since his death Artur Schnabel has emerged as something of an icon of modern music. As a composer of atonal music and performer of classical repertoire, he occupies an unusual place among twentieth-century pianists. He was fond of recounting that his teacher Theodore Leschetzky (1830-1915) would often remind him 'You will never be a pianist. You are a musician.' The instrument was always secondary to the music, despite his having been a child prodigy. He was born in Lipnik, a village on the Austrian-Polish border, and at the age of seven moved with his family to Vienna to receive his musical training. His serious nature was soon apparent to Leschetzky, who never required Schnabel to learn the popular recital pieces of the era. His education complete, in 1898 Schnabel left Vienna for Berlin, pursuing a career there as soloist and chamber musician, composer, and teacher. He and his wife, the soprano Therese Behr, each maintained teaching studios in a large apartment that became an important meeting place for the leading musicians of the era. Through the 1930s he and his family moved between England and Trezzano, in Italy, where he taught a summer course. Finally, in 1939, they settled in the United States, where Schnabel continued to perform and to teach until his death in 1951.

Schnabel recorded the sonatas on this disc between November 1932 and November 1935. His life had in this time changed dramatically. After 35 years, his career in Germany ended when the Nazis came to power in 1933. Forced to leave the country, he spent much of his time in Great Britain. There he performed frequently and continued to produce Beethoven Society records. In Manchester, the University published his *Reflections on Music (Betrachtungen über Musik)* and awarded him an honorary doctorate. Simon and Schuster published his edition of the Beethoven sonatas and he performed them in Paris in 1934.

The five sonatas on this disc date mostly from 1796-97. Beethoven was by this time a rising star in Vienna's musical life. His abilities as a pianist and especially as an improviser brought him students and performance opportunities. In February 1796 he embarked on a concert tour that brought him to Prague, Berlin, Dresden and Leipzig, earning him new audiences and a tidy profit. In Berlin he performed several times for the King of Prussia, who rewarded him with a gold snuffbox. Towards the end of the year he set out again, this time for Pressburg (now Bratislava). The year 1797 was quieter but saw the publication of his *Opp. 5 to 8* and the *Variations WoO 71*.

Although the sonatas of *Op. 49* have been numbered 19 and 20, Beethoven had probably completed them by the winter of 1797-98, if not earlier. He later used the main theme of the second movement of *Sonata No. 20* in his *Septet*. There is a nice symmetry between the *Op. 49* sonatas, with one in G minor, the other in G major, each one in two movements, the opening movement in sonata form followed by a rondo. Stylistically, they are close to C.P.E. Bach or Haydn. Although not lacking in musical interest, they are relatively easy to play. Beethoven may have intended them for his students and it was his brother Kaspar who had them published in January 1805. Schnabel's balanced interpretation succeeded both on record and in performance. After a 1936 performance of the second of the pair, the *New York Times* reported that he "played the unpretentious G major sonata with the lightness and charm that its unashamed sentiment required." His recordings, dating from two early sessions, capture the same light touch.

Beethoven himself referred to *Sonata No. 4 in E flat, Op. 7*, as the 'Grande,' and for good reason. It is rich in thematic material and the largest sonata prior to the 'Hammerklavier', composed some 22 years later. Carl Czerny claimed Beethoven composed *Sonata*

No. 4 while in “a passionate state of mind.” The Viennese firm Artaria published it in 1797 with a dedication to the Countess Babette von Keglewics (later the Princess Odescalchi), then one of Beethoven’s students and sometimes linked romantically to him. For Schnabel, it was the slow movements that so often offered the greatest insights, and here it is the *Largo* movement, in the key of C major. Clearly, he saw it as the focal point of the work, and the result is, as the critic Harris Goldsmith wrote, “magnificently regal and profound.”

Beethoven began the three sonatas of *Op. 10* in 1796 and Joseph Eder published them in 1798. Beethoven dedicated the set to the Countess Anna Margarete von Browne, the wife of Count Johann Georg von Browne, a patron to whom he had the same year dedicated the *String Trios, Op. 9*. Here Beethoven chooses a three-movement form. In the first of the *Op. 10* sonatas he frames the expansive *Adagio molto* middle movement, in A flat major, with bright movements in C minor (with the finale closing on C major). In the second, outer F major movements frame a lighter *Allegretto* in F minor. In each sonata it is the finale that provides the greatest technical challenge.

There has been some dispute as to whether or not Beethoven really intended *prestissimo* for the finale of *Sonata No. 5*. Achieving clarity in the *Presto* of *Sonata No. 6* is nearly as daunting and in neither piece does Schnabel succeed completely. After a 1936 performance of the F major sonata, the critic Olin Downes described Schnabel’s interpretation of the first two movements, and “especially the second [as] Beethoven to the core,” but was disappointed with the finale: “No doubt the finale should go very fast, but not so fast as to interfere with clearness, which was the case last night, when clearness, one of the cardinal attributes of Mr. Schnabel’s playing, was not invariably in evidence.” Goldsmith called Schnabel’s recording of the same movement “erratic and rhythmically messy.” Schnabel was never fond of practising and later in life his technique could not always keep up with his ideas. He was, however, unapologetic about a few missed notes, so long as the spirit conveyed was that which he believed Beethoven intended.

Brian C. Thompson

Mark Obert-Thorn

Mark Obert-Thorn is one of the world's most respected transfer artist/engineers. He has worked for a number of specialist labels, including Pearl, Biddulph, Romophone and Music & Arts. Three of his transfers have been nominated for Gramophone Awards. A pianist by training, his passions are music, history and working on projects. He has found a way to combine all three in the transfer of historical recordings.

Obert-Thorn describes himself as a 'moderate interventionist' rather than a 'purist' or 're-processor,' unlike those who apply significant additions and make major changes to the acoustical qualities of old recordings. His philosophy is that a good transfer should not call attention to itself, but rather allow the performances to be heard with the greatest clarity.

There is no over-reverberant 'cathedral sound' in an Obert-Thorn restoration, nor is there the tinny bass and piercing mid-range of many 'authorised' commercial issues. He works with the cleanest available 78s, and consistently achieves better results than restoration engineers working with the metal parts from the archives of the modern corporate owners of the original recordings. His transfers preserve the original tone of the old recordings, maximising the details in critical upper mid-range and lower frequencies to achieve a musical integrity that is absent from many other commercially released restorations.

The Naxos historical label aims to make available the greatest recordings in the history of recorded music, in the best and truest sound that contemporary technology can provide. To achieve this aim, Naxos has engaged a number of respected restorers who have the dedication, skill and experience to produce restorations that have set new standards in the field of historical recordings.

Producer's Note

Artur Schnabel's pioneering Beethoven Sonata Society recordings were originally issued on 204 78 rpm sides in fifteen volumes, each containing six or seven discs. The first twelve sets contained the 32 sonatas, usually packaged as one early, one middle and one late sonata per album. Variations, bagatelles and sundry short pieces occupied the final three volumes. The sets were released in the UK on His Master's Voice with some volumes also being issued on French Disque Gramophone, German Electrola and (for the "Hammerklavier" Sonata only) Victor in the United States. In this eleven-CD reissue series, the first nine discs will be devoted to the sonatas, presented in their order of composition, while the final two volumes will feature the other works.

Because the original discs rarely turn up in any form other than British pressings, the problem of how to deal with the higher-than-average level of surface crackle inherent in HMV shellac has led previous transfer engineers down one of two paths. One way has been to use heavy computerized processing to keep the noise at a minimum. While this made for a relatively quiet result, many critics felt that the piano's tonal qualities had been sacrificed to an unacceptable degree. Another approach went to the opposite extreme, filtering minimally and even apparently boosting the upper mid-range frequencies in an attempt to add a percussive brilliance to the piano tone. Although this produced a clearer result than the first method, many listeners were put off by the relentless onslaught of surface noise that this approach to filtering and equalization exacerbated.

For the current transfers, I have tried to strike a balance between these two positions. In order to start with the quietest available source material, multiple copies of British, French and American pressings have been assembled, and I have chosen the best sides from each. Computerized declipping (although not denoising) has been employed not only to remove clicks and pops, but also to reduce surface crackle to a minimum without harming the upper frequencies. My approach to filtering has been to stop at the point at which more than just surface hiss was being affected; and my equalization has aimed for a warm, full piano tone which I believe is more representative of the original recordings.

Finally, I have linked the movements of each of the sonatas by retaining the surface noise on the original discs. With recordings of a basically higher noise level such as the present ones, I feel that once the listener has become acclimated to the surface hiss, much of it can be mentally screened out. It is counterproductive to be reminded of it at the start of each new movement, as happens in those editions in which movements are faded in and faded out.

In the present volume, the two Op. 49 sonatas were transferred from French "Disque Gramophone" pressings, while the remainder came from British HMV shellacs.

Mark Obert-Thorn

Artur Schnabel: BEETHOVEN: Piano Works, Vol. 2

- Sonata No. 19 in G minor, Op. 49 No. 1** 7:09
- ① Andante 4:11
② Rondo: Allegro 2:58
- Recorded 19th November, 1932 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3
Matrices: 2B 4530-1 and 2B 4531-4
First issued as HMV DB 1956 in Society Volume 3
- Sonata No. 20 in G major, Op. 49 No. 2** 7:25
- ③ Allegro ma non troppo 4:27
④ Tempo di minuetto 2:58
- Recorded 12th April, 1933 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3
Matrices: 2B 6622-1 and 6623-1
First issued as HMV DB 2214 in Society Volume 5
- Sonata No. 4 in E flat major, Op. 7** 27:34
- ⑤ Allegro molto e con brio 7:27
⑥ Largo con gran espressione 9:12
⑦ Allegro 4:51
⑧ Rondo: Poco allegretto e grazioso 6:05
- Recorded 11th November, 1935 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3
Matrices: 2EA 2514-1, 2415-5, 2416-1, 2417-1, 2418-1, 2419-1 and 2420-1
First issued as HMV DB 3151 - 3154 in Society Volume 11
- Sonata No. 5 in C minor, Op. 10, No. 1** 16:28
- ⑨ Allegro molto e con brio 4:42
⑩ Adagio molto 8:01
⑪ Finale: Prestissimo 3:44
- Recorded 6th November, 1935 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3
Matrices: 2EA 2506-2A, 2507-1A, 2508-1 and 2509-2A
First issued as HMV DB 3343 and 3344 in Society Volume 12
- Sonata No. 6 in F major, Op. 10, No. 2** 11:10
- ⑫ Allegro 5:05
⑬ Allegretto 3:58
⑭ Presto 2:07
- Recorded 10th April, 1933 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3
Matrices: 2B 6397-1, 6398-1, 6400-1 and 6401-1
First issued as HMV DB 3254 and 3255 in Society Volume 6

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Complete Beethoven Sonata Society Recordings Vol. 2

**Playing
Time
69:47**
Artur Schnabel (1882-1951)

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|----------------|---|--------------|
| 1 - 2 | Sonata No. 19 in G minor, Op. 49 No. 1 | 7:09 |
| | Recorded 19th November, 1932 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3
Matrices: 2B 4530-1 and 2B 4531-4
First issued as HMV DB 1956 in Society Volume 3 | |
| 3 - 4 | Sonata No. 20 in G major, Op. 49 No. 2 | 7:25 |
| | Recorded 12th April, 1933 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3
Matrices: 2B 6622-1 and 6623-1
First issued as HMV DB 2214 in Society Volume 5 | |
| 5 - 8 | Sonata No. 4 in E flat major, Op. 7 | 27:34 |
| | Recorded 11th November, 1935 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3
Matrices: 2EA 2514-1, 2415-5, 2416-1, 2417-1, 2418-1, 2419-1 and 2420-1
First issued as HMV DB 3151 - 3154 in Society Volume 11 | |
| 9 - 11 | Sonata No. 5 in C minor, Op. 10, No. 1 | 16:28 |
| | Recorded 6th November, 1935 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3
Matrices: 2EA 2506-2A, 2507-1A, 2508-1 and 2509-2A
First issued as HMV DB 3343 and 3344 in Society Volume 12 | |
| 12 - 14 | Sonata No. 6 in F major, Op. 10, No. 2 | 11:10 |
| | Recorded 10th April, 1933 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3
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At first reluctant to make recordings, by the 1930s the great pianist Artur Schnabel fully accepted the new technology. His recordings of Beethoven's piano music include all the numbered sonatas, originally issued on subscription by the Beethoven Sonata Society. This, the second volume of the Beethoven Piano Sonatas series, presents five of the early Sonatas, still in the sound world of Haydn but rich with Beethoven's characteristic musical fingerprints that were to become abundant in his later compositions. In keeping with this, Schnabel's legendary performances remain stylistically in tune with the late eighteenth century while at the same time looking forward to the romanticism and self-expression of the nineteenth century, a testimony to the originality and profound musicality of his interpretations.

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Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn

A complete tracklist can be found on the last page of the booklet

www.naxos.com

Cover Photograph: Artur Schnabel (Private Collection)



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