

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Sonata No. 20 in G major, Op. 49, No. 2 6:34

- 1 I Allegro, ma non troppo 3:31
 2 II Tempo di Menuetto 3:03

Recorded in Berlin in January 1940

Matrix: CR796-2 and 797-1

First issued on German Columbia LW39

**Sonata No. 21 in C major, Op. 53
‘Waldstein’ 18:41**

- 3 I Allegro con brio 7:18
 4 II Introduzione. Adagio molto – attacca 3:10
 5 III Rondo. Allegretto moderato – Prestissimo 8:13

Recorded in Berlin on 11th August 1938

Matrix: CRX75-2, 76-1, 77-1, 78-2 and 79-2

First issued on English Columbia LX781/783

**Sonata No. 23 in F minor, Op. 57
‘Appassionata’ 21:46**

- 6 I Allegro assai 8:22
 7 II Andante con moto 6:41
 8 III Allegro, ma non troppo 6:43

Recorded in New York City on 27th February 1939

Matrix: XCOW24535-1, 24536-2, 24537-2,

24538-2, 24539-1, 24540-2

First issued on US Columbia 69570-D/69572-D

Sonata No. 28 in A major, Op. 101 15:58

- 9 I Etwas lebhaft und mit der
innigsten Empfindung 4:07

10 II Lebhaft, marschmäßig 4:12

11 III Langsam und sehnsuchtsvoll 2:19

- 12 IV Geschwind, doch nicht zu sehr
und mit Entschlossenheit 5:20

Recorded in New York City on 24th February 1939

Matrix: WXCO24531/24534

First issued on US Columbia 70336-D/70337-D

Sonata No. 30 in E major, Op. 109 15:48

13 I Vivace, ma non troppo 3:36

14 II Prestissimo 1:59

15 III Gesangvoll, mit innigster Empfindung 10:13

Recorded in Berlin in Spring 1939

Matrix: CRX139-1, 140-2, 141-1, 142-1

First issued on German Columbia LWX347/348

**BEETHOVEN****Piano Sonatas****No. 20****No. 21 ‘Waldstein’****No. 23 ‘Appassionata’****No. 28****No. 30****Walter Giesecking**

Historical Recordings 1938-1940

Special thanks to Michael Gray and Donald Manildi

Walter Giesekeing (1895-1956)

BEETHOVEN: Sonatas Nos. 20, 21 'Waldstein', 23 'Appassionata', 28 and 30

Giesekeing's father was a distinguished German doctor with a keen interest in entomology who travelled in France and Italy. As a result, his son Walter was born in 1895 in the French city of Lyon, and spent the first sixteen years of his life in southern France and Italy. Although the young Giesekeing played the piano from the age of four, he had no proper tuition until 1911, when his family moved to Hanover. There, at the age of sixteen, he became a pupil of Karl Leimer at the Hanover Conservatory, studying for three years, after which he had no further tuition. At the age of twenty Giesekeing performed the complete Beethoven piano sonatas in six recitals. However, World War I interrupted the beginnings of his career, and it was not until 1920, when he was already 25, that Giesekeing made his début in Berlin at the first of seven recitals in the city that season. Although he played music by Debussy and Ravel, composers with whom he would be associated throughout his life, Giesekeing was hailed as 'the new Anton Rubinstein', a title which would hardly have been applied to the Giesekeing of the 1950s by which time he was acknowledged as one of the finest interpreters of the French impressionists.

Giesekeing made his London début in 1923, his American début in 1926 and appeared in Paris for the first time in 1928. During the 1930s he spent much of his time touring Europe, the United States and South America. Although he was in America in 1939, he decided to return to Germany at the outbreak of World War II. After the War he played in Australia, Japan and South America, but was not able to return to the United States until 1953 owing to his war-time allegiances. In 1955 he embarked on a ten-month tour of America and in the autumn of 1956 undertook a series of continuing recording sessions for EMI in London, where he died at the end of the year.

Before the Second World War Giesekeing's repertoire was a good deal wider than it became later. He played concertos by Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov, piano sonatas by Scriabin, works by

Schumann, Beethoven, Mozart and Bach, and championed contemporary composers such as Busoni, Hindemith, Korngold, Krenek, Poulenc, Pfitzner, Schoenberg and Stravinsky, many of whom dedicated works to him. Giesekeing became known for his wide palette of tone and dynamics.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s the only complete available versions of Beethoven's *Sonatas* on disc were those by Artur Schnabel and Wilhelm Kempff. While these two pianists searched the structural and psychological depths of meaning in Beethoven's works, Giesekeing was an altogether different pianist who, far from skimming the surface, nevertheless wanted to convey the excitement and drama of these masterpieces. Giesekeing's recordings of Beethoven breathe fresh air into works, that even today, are more often than not heard in performances directly or indirectly influenced by Schnabel's approach.

The overall impression of these five recordings of Beethoven's *Piano Sonatas* by Giesekeing is one of powerful energy. With the exception of the small scale *Sonata in G major, Op. 49, No. 2*, all these performances are brimming with a febrile, vigorous force. That shorter work, and the recording of *Op. 109*, seem only to have been issued in Germany where they were recorded, as no doubt with the Second World War looming, relations with the Berlin branch of Columbia would have been broken.

The opening of the *Waldstein Sonata* immediately makes one sit up and listen, as much by the tempo Giesekeing chooses as by the incisive rhythm and wide range of dynamics. The reviewer for *Gramophone* magazine was bowled over and addressed all of the pianist's attributes – 'Giesekeing gives a performance of superb quality, which is distinguished by an amazing range of tone-colour, a never-failing sensitiveness to the demands of the music, and tremendously vital rhythm. He makes one, as it were, see the shape and sweep of the phrases, and what a

rare pleasure this is!' He ended by saying, 'This, we feel at almost every point, is what Beethoven meant. Praise could hardly go further: and a full measure of it must be extended to the admirable recording.'

During the first few months of 1939, at the end of his American season, Giesekeing made a series of recordings for Columbia in New York. In February he gave two performances of Rachmaninov's *Piano Concerto No. 3 in D minor, Op. 30*, with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra and John Barbirolli at Carnegie Hall and the following month gave a recital at New York's Town Hall which included works by Scarlatti, Schumann and Debussy. Recordings of works by Bach were made in April 1939 (Naxos 8.111353) but at the end of February he recorded two piano sonatas by Beethoven – *Op. 57 in F minor, the Appassionata*, and *Op. 101 in A major*. Only four

months later a review appeared of *Op. 57* in the American press informing readers that 'Here we have a superb recording that conveys the most subtle nuances as well as emotional vigour. Once more Giesekeing gives a remarkable reading of a great work, a reading that is enhanced by his amazing command of tonal colour.'

Praise for the more elusive *Sonata Op. 101* was given by that expert on pianists Harold Schonberg who flatly stated that 'Giesekeing's album was well worth waiting for, for it is one of the finest interpretations and recordings I have ever heard.' He concluded, 'Giesekeing pays scrupulous attention to details, and the work emerges with a balance and clarity that could not be improved upon.'

© 2011 Jonathan Summers