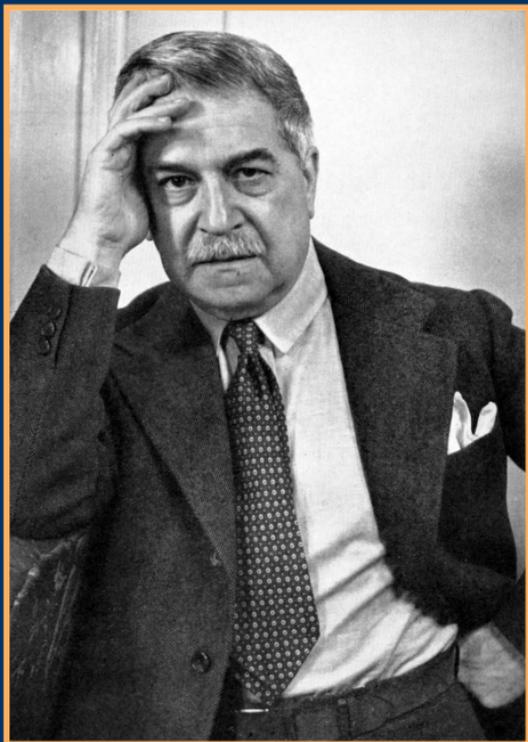




Great Pianists • Schnabel

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BEETHOVEN

Piano Works

Volume 10

**Eroica Variations
Six Variations on
an Original Theme
Bagatelles, Op. 33
Für Elise**

Artur Schnabel

Historical Recordings 1937 - 1938

Great Pianists: Artur Schnabel: BEETHOVEN: Piano Works Vol. 10

Eroica Variations • Six Variations on an Original Theme • Bagatelles, Op. 33 • Für Elise

Artur Schnabel (1882-1951) was born into a bourgeois family at Lipnik, a village on the present Czech-Polish border, but then a part of the Austria. At the age of seven he moved with his family to Vienna to receive his musical training from the renowned piano teacher Theodore Leschetizky (1830-1915). Unlike his classmates, during his studies Schnabel was not required to learn the popular recital pieces of the time. Leschetizky quickly understood the serious temperament that would become Schnabel's trademark. In his recitals he would eschew encores and lighter works, championing the sonatas of Schubert that were then rarely heard, and playing a limited repertoire with which he was fully engaged.

Schnabel's career began in Berlin. He arrived there in 1898, at the age of sixteen, fresh from his studies with Leschetizky. Initially he devoted much of his time to accompanying the soprano Therese Behr, whom he married in 1905, and to performing chamber music. The violinist Carl Flesch was his main performing partner through the early years in Berlin and described their partnership at that time as 'simple and unspoilt, and easily satisfied with modest financial results, but demanding in all artistic questions. The gramophone was canned music for [Schnabel] then, and he refused to play chamber music in large halls.' After the First World War, Schnabel's interests changed. He virtually abandoned chamber music in favour of composition and solo recitals. Beethoven's music assumed an increasingly important place in Schnabel's repertoire. In 1927 he gave the first of several recital series featuring all 32 numbered sonatas. The 1920s proved to be a glorious time for Berlin and for Schnabel and Behr. The family's large apartment, with its four grand pianos, became an important meeting-place for the leading musicians of the era. Through the 1930s, after the Nazis came to power in Germany, Schnabel divided his time mostly between Trezzano in Italy, where he taught a summer course, and London, where in 1932 he had begun recording

Beethoven's solo piano music at Abbey Road Studios. He was fifty when he finally consented to record for HMV. His recordings, the first complete cycle of the Beethoven sonatas on disc, were issued by subscription through the Beethoven Sonata Society (BSS).

In 1937 and 1938, after recording all of the sonatas, Schnabel produced recordings of selected variations and other pieces. On the present disc are works Beethoven intended both for amateurs and professional pianists. The earliest of these pieces is the *Rondo in A major, WoO 49*, which Beethoven composed at the age of twelve. The *Minuet in E flat, WoO82*, is also a modest piece dating from 1805. Three years earlier, in 1802, Beethoven composed several important piano works. The *Bagatelles, Op. 33*, a collection of seven individual pieces, was the composer's first larger work for amateurs. There were also the sonatas of *Op. 31* (contained on Volumes 5 and 6 of the present Naxos Historical series), and, composed immediately after these, his first substantial sets of piano variations, *Op. 34* and *Op. 35*. In these works Beethoven sought to expand upon the Classical methods of variation form. In a letter dating from October 1802, he described *Opp. 34* and *35* as 'written in quite a new style and each in an entirely different way'. With *Op. 34* he employs a novel key scheme, progressing from the theme in F major downward by a third with each variation, to D major, B flat major, G major, E flat major, and C minor/C major, preparing a return to the home key in the sixth variation. The set concludes with a highly decorated reprise of the theme marked *Adagio molto*. The *Fifteen Variations and a Fugue on an Original Theme, Op. 35*, is a larger and more ambitious composition. As it served as the model for the finale of the *Third Symphony, Op. 35* became known as the '*Eroica Variations*'. In both the symphony finale and the *Op. 35 Variations*, the bass of the theme is heard first on its own and then with introductory variations with two, three, and then four voices, before the theme is heard in its full form. Beethoven completed

the *Fantasia in G minor, Op. 77*, in 1809. The free and shifting character of its opening material suggests that its origins may go back to the composer's famous improvised performances. It culminates in set of variations in B major. The title '*Für Elise*' was given to the very famous *Bagatelle in A minor, WoO 59*, as a result of a misinterpretation of the composer's handwriting. The manuscript, dated 27th April 1810, and titled '*Für Therese*', was found in the album of Therese Malfatti, a student with whom Beethoven was then in love. Like the *Bagatelles of Op. 33*, it is a relatively easy work. With this piece Beethoven intended to express his love for Malfatti and also encouragement her to practice.

The BSS released Schnabel's recordings of these works in Volumes 14 and 15. In his February 1939 review in *The Gramophone*, the critic Alex Robertson found Volume 14 to be 'full of "small" Beethoven, and no piece without great interest'. The *A major Rondo* he found to be 'very touching and appealing – it is very carefully constructed and not without a hint of what was to be – and the *Op. 34 Variations* interesting quite apart from their remarkable key-system'. The 'odd' *Fantasy, Op. 77*, was 'indeed, a really fascinating document'. Turning to Schnabel's performances, Robertson noted

that the pianist's 'fine musicianship has rarely been so triumphantly displayed as in this album. Beethoven in furious mood is evidently congenial to him, but at the other end of the scale is his tender and amazingly apt handling of the little early *Rondo*'. Over all, the critic was satisfied with the 'excellent' sound quality, although noting 'the lack of fullness of tone often present in these albums'.

Despite their imperfections, Schnabel's set of Beethoven recordings became a classic almost immediately and the yardstick by which all others would be measured. It may be no surprise that his recordings of the sonatas have attracted most attention. Hearing these other works reminds us that Schnabel's feel for Beethoven extended also to minor works. As he noted in his book *My Life and Music*: 'If I spend the same amount of time with a Chopin study or some Beethoven bagatelle, I get tired of the Chopin piece sooner; it demands on me become, after a while, merely external.' In the works of Beethoven, in the lighter pieces as well as the most profound sonata movements, he found music that demanded an 'inner participation'.

Brian 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.

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 thirty-two 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 lead 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 declicking (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.

The sources for the current transfers were British shellac pressings. Because of CD timing limitations, the early *Rondo a capriccio in G major* ("Rage over a lost penny") will be featured in the next and final volume of our series.

Mark Obert-Thorn

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.

Artur Schnabel: BEETHOVEN: Piano Works, Vol. 10

- 1 Rondo in A major, WoO 49** **3:13**
- Recorded 14th January, 1937 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3
Matrices: 2EA 4542-2
First issued as HMV DB 3629 in Society Volume 14
- 2 Minuet in E flat major, WoO 82** **3:44**
- Recorded 10th November, 1938 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3
Matrices: 2EA 7023-1
First issued as HMV DB 3786 in Society Volume 15
- Bagatelles, Op. 33** **21:22**
- 3** No. 1 in E flat major 4:01
4 No. 2 in C major 3:09
5 No. 3 in F major 2:02
6 No. 4 in A major 3:05
7 No. 5 in C major 3:21
8 No. 6 in D major 3:58
9 No. 7 in A flat major 1:47
- Recorded 10th November, 1938 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3
Matrices: 2EA 7016-2, 7017-1, 7018-1, 7019-1, 7020-1, 7021-1 and 7022-2 [part]
First issued as HMV DB 3783 through 3786 in Society Volume 15
- Six Variations on an Original Theme in F major, Op. 34** **15:12**
- 10** Tema: Adagio. Cantabile 1:56
11 Variation I 1:45
12 Variation II: Allegro, ma non troppo 1:15
13 Variation III: Allegretto 1:24
14 Variation IV: Tempo di Minuetto 2:14
15 Variation V: Marcia 2:14
16 Variation VI: Allegretto 4:24
- Recorded 11th January, 1938 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3
Matrices: 2EA 6055-2, 6056-2, 6057-3 and 6058-2
First issued as HMV DB 3623 and 3624 in Society Volume 14

Variations and Fugue in E wflat, Op. 35 (“Eroica”)**23:35**

17	Introduzione col Basso del Tema: Allegretto vivace	3:26
18	Variation I	0:35
19	Variation II	0:43
20	Variation III	0:37
21	Variation IV	0:35
22	Variation V	0:42
23	Variation VI	0:38
24	Variation VII: Canone all’ottava	0:42
25	Variation VIII	0:46
26	Variation IX	0:37
27	Variation X	0:41
28	Variation XI	0:44
29	Variation XII	0:38
30	Variation XIII	0:37
31	Variation XIV: Minore	1:21
32	Variation XV: Maggiore. Largo	5:56
33	Finale Alla Fuga: Allegro con brio	4:16

Recorded 9th November, 1938 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3
Matrices: 2EA 7009-1, 7010-3, 7011-1, 7012-1, 7013-1 and 7014-1
First issued as HMV DB 3787 through 3789 in Society Volume 15

34 Fantasia in G minor, Op. 77**9:37**

Recorded 14th January, 1937 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3
Matrices: 2EA 4540-1 and 4541-1
First issued as HMV DB 3625 in Society Volume 14

35 Bagatelle in A minor, WoO 59 (“Für Elise”)**2:48**

Recorded 10th November, 1938 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3
Matrices: 2EA 7022-2 [part]
First issued as HMV DB 3786 in Society Volume 15

Playing
Time
79:31

Complete

Beethoven Sonata Society Recordings Vol. 10

Artur Schnabel (1882-1951)



- | | | | |
|--------------|--|-------|---|
| 1 | Rondo in A major, WoO 49
Recorded 14th January, 1937 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3
Matrices: 2EA 4542-2
First issued as HMV DB 3629 in Society Volume 14 | 3:13 | At first reluctant to make recordings, by the 1930s, at the age of fifty, the great pianist Artur Schnabel finally consented to record Beethoven's <i>Piano Sonatas</i> , the first complete cycle on disc. After the sonatas, Schnabel produced recordings of selected variations and other pieces. This tenth release in the Naxos Complete Beethoven Sonata Society Recordings includes works intended both for amateurs and professional pianists. Writing in the February 1939 issue of <i>The Gramophone</i> , Alec Robertson noted that the pianist's 'fine musicianship has rarely been so triumphantly displayed as in this album. Beethoven in furious mood is evidently congenial to him, but at the other end of the scale is his tender and amazingly apt handling of the little early <i>Rondo</i> '. Schnabel's set of Beethoven recordings became a classic almost immediately and the yardstick by which all others would be measured. |
| 2 | Minuet in E flat major, WoO 82
Recorded 10th November, 1938 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3
Matrices: 2EA 7023-1
First issued as HMV DB 3786 in Society Volume 15 | 3:44 | |
| 3-9 | Bagatelles, Op. 33
Recorded 10th November, 1938 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3
Matrices: 2EA 7016-2, 7017-1, 7018-1, 7019-1, 7020-1, 7021-1 and 7022-2 (part)
First issued as HMV DB 3783 through 3786 in Society Volume 15 | 21:22 | |
| 10-16 | Six Variations on an Original Theme in F major, Op. 34
Recorded 11th January, 1938 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3
Matrices: 2EA 6055-2, 6056-2, 6057-3 and 6058-2
First issued as HMV DB 3623 and 3624 in Society Volume 14 | 15:12 | |
| 17-33 | Variations and Fugue in E flat, Op. 35 ("Eroica")
Recorded 9th November, 1938 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3
Matrices: 2EA 7009-1, 7010-3, 7011-1, 7012-1, 7013-1 and 7014-1
First issued as HMV DB 3787 through 3789 in Society Volume 15 | 23:35 | |
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Matrices: 2EA 7022-2 (part)
First issued as HMV DB 3786 in Society Volume 15 | 2:48 | |

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MADE IN
THE EU



Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn

A complete tracklist can be found pages 5 and 6 of the booklet

www.naxos.com

Cover Photograph: Artur Schnabel
(The Tully Potter Collection)

