



BEETHOVEN

Piano Concerto No. 1

Piano Concerto No. 2

Bagatelle in A minor
“Für Elise”

Artur Schnabel, piano

London Philharmonic Orchestra
London Symphony Orchestra
Malcolm Sargent

Historical Recordings 1932-35

Great Pianists • Artur Schnabel

BEETHOVEN (1770-1827): Piano Concertos Nos. 1 & 2 • Bagatelle in A minor

Born in 1882 at Lipnik, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Artur Schnabel was the son of a businessman, Isidore Schnabel, and moved with his family to Vienna, once his musical gifts had become apparent. From 1889 to 1891 he studied with H. Schmitt before becoming a pupil of the great Theodor Leschetizky and, for musical theory, of the well-known Romanian musicologist Eusebius Mandyczewski, a scholar who won wide attention for his work on the music of Beethoven, Schubert and, later, Brahms. In 1900 Schnabel moved to Berlin, from where he began his professional career as a pianist. He won his first outstanding success in the 1902/03 season in orchestral concerts under Nikisch, in chamber music and as the accompanist of the contralto Therese Behr, his future wife. As an exponent of the Lieder of Schubert, Schumann and Brahms, she exercised some influence over him, inspiring him to develop further the less usual repertoire of Schubert sonatas that Leschetizky had allowed and an interest in Brahms that reflected the concerns of Mandyczewski. As a chamber musician he collaborated in a piano trio with the violinists Alfred Wittenberg and with Carl Flesch, with whom he also appeared in duo recitals, and with the cellists Anton Hekking, principal cellist of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, Jean Gérardy and Hugo Becker, all musicians of the greatest contemporary distinction. To these may be added the later names of the cellists Pablo Casals, Emanuel Feuermann and Pierre Fournier, the viola-player Paul Hindemith and the violinists Bronislav Huberman and Joseph Szigeti. After 1918 he extended his activities further afield with concert tours to the United States and to Russia, as well as

establishing himself as a familiar figure in English concert halls. At the same time he was active as a composer and associated with contemporary trends in music. At the Berlin State Academy he held master classes, which won still further distinction.

In 1933 Schnabel's life in Berlin came to an end, with the accession to power of the National Socialists. He settled for a time in England, while teaching in summer courses at Tremezzo, on Lake Como, and in 1939 moved to the United States, where he held classes at Ann Arbor and continued his career as a performer, although his thoughtful approach and programming did not always satisfy the more commercial aspects of concert performance. Leschetizky, after all, had told him, at the outset, that he would never be a pianist, since he was a musician, directing him towards a repertoire that called less for virtuosity than for profound understanding. After the war Schnabel returned to international concert performance, continuing to impress musical audiences, particularly in his interpretation of music by Schubert and, above all, by Beethoven. He had given performances of the complete cycle of the latter's sonatas in the 1920s in Berlin and in the 1930s recorded the sonatas and concertos. Schnabel died at Axenstein, in Switzerland, in 1951.

The bare outlines of Schnabel's career can give little idea of the effect on audiences of his performances, which reflected an intellectual command, a profound understanding of every aspect of the music he was playing, coupled, of course, with an impeccable technique and a complete avoidance of gratuitous display. He concentrated largely on German classical repertoire, on Beethoven, above all, and on Schubert,

with a later interest in Mozart. Brahms, too, held an important place for him, witnessed by an extant recording of the *Second Piano Concerto*, with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Adrian Boult.

The two Beethoven concertos here included were recorded in London in 1932 and 1935 respectively, with an additional recording of *Für Elise* made in 1932 and released together with *Piano Concerto No.1*. This last was recorded with the London Symphony Orchestra, an independent orchestra founded in 1904, which had made its first recordings around 1914, here under Malcolm Sargent. *Piano Concerto No.2* was again recorded in London, with the same conductor, returning after recovery from a serious illness, and Thomas Beecham's London Philharmonic Orchestra, established in 1932 and employed, with Sargent, in the Courtauld-Sargent Concerts and subsequently in Beecham's operatic ventures at Covent Garden.

Beethoven's early career in Vienna, where he settled in 1792, after leaving his native Bonn, established him first of all as a pianist. He had already tackled a piano concerto in 1784, at the age of fourteen, but *Piano Concerto No.1 in C major*, the third attempted and the second completed, was ready for the composer's own use by 1795. It was revised in 1800, but is thought by some to have had its first performance either in March or December 1795. There is, however, some disagreement on the identification of the concerto played on these occasions. *Piano Concerto No.2 in B flat major* was in existence at the time, having been started in the later 1780s in Bonn, but underwent various further revisions in the following years, reaching its final form, it would seem, in 1798.

Piano Concerto No.1 is scored for an orchestra of flute, pairs of oboes, clarinets, bassoons, French horns, trumpets and drums, and strings and it is these last that

open the first movement, before the principal theme of the orchestral exposition is taken up by the whole orchestra, leading to the second subject in the less usual key of E flat major, although the soloist, after introducing other material, allows this theme its proper key of G major, in a movement of Mozartian proportions. Beethoven later, in 1808 or 1809, provided three possible cadenzas, of which Schnabel plays the third and most extended. The A flat major *Largo* calls for something of that singing keyboard tone for which Beethoven was known, as a performer. It is followed by a final energetic *Rondo*, a varied movement, opened by the soloist and including three brief cadenzas, the last of which is immediately followed by a very short slow passage for oboes and horns, introducing the closing section.

Piano Concerto No.2 is scored for an orchestra without clarinets, trumpets or drums and was certainly first heard in its final form in 1798, first in Prague and then in Vienna. Once again the model of Mozart is suggested, although Beethoven indulges in more extreme shifts of key. The passage-work allows Schnabel to show his customary lucid attention to every note, never cursory in his full attention to every detail of the score. The first movement duly opens with an orchestral exposition, before the impressive entry of the soloist, and contains Beethoven's own final cadenza of 1808 or 1809. The orchestra starts the E flat major slow movement, a preparation for the meditative theme, taken up by the soloist alone in a movement of clear beauty. Once again it is the soloist who starts the final *Rondo*, with its lively contrasts, a movement over which the spirit of Haydn and Mozart presides.

Keith Anderson

Producer's Note

This disc brings together the first and last recordings Schnabel made in his only complete Beethoven concerto cycle on disc. The performance of *Für Elise* included here is not the often-reissued 1938 version included in the original Beethoven Sonata Society set, but rather the 1932 “filler” side for the *First Concerto*. Although this was somewhat dimly recorded, I have tried not to filter the surface hiss excessively, so that what highs there are in the original recording would remain. The discs used for this transfer were all mid-1930s scroll-label American Victor “Z” shellacs, the quietest pressings on which these recordings were available.

Mark Obert-Thorn

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BEETHOVEN

Piano Concertos Nos. 1 & 2 Bagatelle in A minor "Für Elise"

Artur Schnabel

London Symphony Orchestra • London Philharmonic Orchestra *
Malcolm Sargent

Playing
Time
69:08

NAXOS Historical

SCHNABEL: BEETHOVEN: Piano Concertos Nos. 1 & 2 • Für Elise

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BEETHOVEN: Piano Concerto No. 1 in C major, Op. 15

37:56

1 **Allegro con brio**

16:50

2 **Largo**

12:27

3 **Rondo: Allegro scherzando**

8:39

Recorded on 23rd March, 1932 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 1, London
(on matrices 2B 3235-1, 3236-1, 3237-1, 3238-3, 3239-1, 3240-3, 3241-1, 3242-2, 3243-1.)
First issued as HMV DB 1690/4

BEETHOVEN: Piano Concerto No. 2 in B flat major, Op. 19 *

28:10

4 **Allegro con brio**

13:22

5 **Adagio**

9:12

6 **Rondo: Molto allegro**

5:36

Recorded on 5th April, 1935 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 1, London
(on matrices 2EA 1457-1, 1458-1, 1459-2, 1460-2, 1461-1, 1462-2, 1463-2, 1464-1.)
First issued as HMV DB 2573/6.

7 **BEETHOVEN: Bagatelle in A minor "Für Elise"**

3:03

Recorded on 9th May, 1932 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3, London
(on Matrix 2B 3376-1.) First issued as HMV DB 1694

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn
Source material kindly provided by Michael Gartz and Don Tait.



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