



Ludwig van Beethoven: Piano Sonatas | Wilhelm Backhaus

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[American Record Guide](#) 01.11.2010 (John P. McKelvey - 2010.11.01)



This was recorded in concert in Berlin in April 1969, about 10 weeks before the pianist died (July 5). The broadcast tapes give us sound that is less smooth, rich, and sleek than in Audite tapes recorded 20 years earlier. It is stereo, satisfactory though not outstanding. In these performances, the pianist turns aside from the usual Bösendorfer instrument in favor of a less rich-voiced Bechstein E. It is a very good instrument, though its sound is drier and less sustained than the big, strong Bösendorfer.

These performances lack the clarity and ambience of the ones recorded by Decca, but they compensate with an element of freshness and spontaneity lacking in the studio productions. The earlier works, Nos. 15 and 18 have a spontaneity mighty scarce in the recorded competition. The Waldstein, No. 21, is also very good—a slow though weighty, extremely forceful and powerful account. The splendid account of No. 30, intimate and thoughtful to a fault, has a 17 minute CD to itself, since the 86- minute program is too long for a single disc. Audite does not charge full price, but 24 US dollars is still pretty hefty. The edition is handsomely packaged with copious notes and illustrations. All the pictures show Backhaus not as he looked at age 85, when these recordings were made, but instead about 30 years earlier. The notes are really excellent, and in themselves almost worth the price of the recordings. Backhaus was obsessed with privacy. Information about his life has been hard to come by. The notes go rather far to ameliorate that difficulty, and are definitely quite valuable to anyone seeking to penetrate the veil of silence the pianist erected.

Audiophile Audition August 11, 2010
(Gary Lemco - 2010.08.11)



Backhaus stands as among the most consistently satisfying of all Beethoven...

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BBC Radio 3 Sat 18 Sep 2010, 10.45 am (Andrew Mc Gregor - 2010.09.18)



BROADCAST CD review

Recent releases:

Kenneth Hamilton talks with Andrew about recent releases of Beethoven piano music.

Sendebeleg siehe PDF!

Classica – le meilleur de la musique classique & de la hi-fi n° 126 octobre 2010 (Jacques Bonnaure - 2010.10.01)



Une beauté intemporelle

Au soir de sa vie. Wilhelm Backhaus laisse un témoignage conciliant urgence, pureté et d'une intense expressivité.

Une beauté intemporelle

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Columns - Sound and Music - Novità discografiche Novembre 2010 (- - 2010.11.01)

Fin dai primi anni della sua lunga carriera Wilhelm Backhaus si accostò a ogni opera con la massima obiettività possibile. Sotto questo aspetto Backhaus esercitò una grandissima influenza sui pianisti della generazione successiva e il suo stile esecutivo rappresentò il degno contraltare a quello di Wilhelm Kempff. Il repertorio di Backhaus spaziava dai grandi capolavori del Classicismo e del Romanticismo, partendo da Bach per arrivare a Brahms, con le opere di Beethoven al centro. Durante gli oltre 70 anni della sua camera concertistica Backhaus eseguì un gran numero di volte le sonate di Beethoven, dimostrando ogni volta di possedere una tecnica assolutamente irreprensibile e una straordinaria capacità di esaltare anche le più piccole nuances espressive. Questo disco della Audite propone un concerto live tenuto da Backhaus a Berlino nel 1969, ultimo anno della sua vita lunga e ricca di soddisfazioni. Le quattro sonate proposte consentono di apprezzare il fraseggio chiaro e trasparente e l'approccio classico di Backhaus, che seppe mettere in evidenza come pochi altri pianisti la raffinata architettura delle sonate di Beethoven senza sacrificare nessun dettaglio e senza scendere mai a compromessi.

Diapason N° 586 décembre 2010 (Jean-Charles Hoffelé - 2010.12.01)



Les studios d'enregistrement, que Wilhelm Backhaus a beaucoup fréquentés, pouvaient ternir sa sonorité, brider son imagination pourtant puissante. Les captations en concert dévoilent un autre artiste, disert, brillant, privilégiant les tempos rapides, et chez Beethoven pliant la forme à un sens de l'improvisation qu'il était un des rares pianistes de sa génération à faire ressortir avec tant de science (Hans Richter-Haaser lui emboîtera le pas). Toujours servi par cette sonorité royale, par ce plein clavier orchestral où l'on entend des clarinettes et des trompettes, l'ensemble rappelle que Beethoven fut le premier à mettre tout un orchestre dans son piano. Quelques doigts récalcitrants dans l'Allegro de la « Pastorale » – le temps que la fabuleuse machine à notes se chauffe – ne devront pas empêcher l'auditeur de se précipiter sur ce double-album. La prise de son, équilibrée et précise, déploie une belle stéréophonie, l'instrument, gorgé de timbres, chante avec profondeur et répète avec élégance : clavier léger, patte de lion. « La Caille » émoustille, tout emportée par son esprit de scherzo. Les paysages de la « Waldstein » montrent un art de coloriste doigts à doigts qui se délie dans les traits et dose de savantes alchimies dans les accords prolongés. Des brouilles ici encore. Et alors ? Une Sonate op. 109 sans métaphysique, chantante avant tout, vient conclure le programme. Magnifique.

Diverdi Magazin marzo 2011 (Roberto Andrade - 2011.03.01)

DIVERDI.COM

Beethoven de referencia

Audite rescata, con maravilloso sonido, un recital de 1969 del gran Wilhelm Backhaus

Hace un año, señalaba en estas páginas a Wilhelm Backhaus (1884-1969) como uno de los grandes pianistas del siglo XX. Su dilatadísima carrera –cerca de 80 años– se extendió justo hasta el final de su vida: se conserva la grabación de su último concierto, que ofreció en la iglesia de Ossiach, Carintia, una semana antes de fallecer. Y su presentación en público había tenido lugar cuando apenas era un niño, en 1892; parece ser que Brahms escuchó al joven pianista y le dirigió palabras de aliento. La consagración de Backhaus se produjo en el Concurso Anton Rubinstein, celebrado en París en 1905, en el que obtuvo el primer premio, venciendo a competidores como Béla Bartók y Otto Klemperer.

Desde entonces, Backhaus fue un pianista de renombre mundial y mantuvo una fructífera relación con el fonógrafo para el que, en 1909, realizó la primera grabación de un concierto para piano y orquesta, el de Grieg, si bien en versión muy abreviada. Entre otros registros históricos figura la primera integral fonográfica de los Estudios de Chopin opus 10 y 25, fechada en 1929, que aun hoy resulta notable. Tanto por el repertorio que cultivó como por la forma de abordarlo, Backhaus fue un pianista clásico, objetivo, fiel a la partitura y, en tal sentido, adelantado a sus coetáneos (citemos solo a Paderewski), que a menudo se permitían unas libertades que hoy juzgamos inaceptables. Antes de la segunda guerra mundial, en su repertorio figuraron, además de Chopin, autores como Liszt o Rachmaninov que no asociamos con el Backhaus de posguerra. A partir de 1945, el pianista se centró en Bach, Mozart, Haydn, Schubert, Schumann, Brahms y, especialmente, Beethoven, de quien fue intérprete de referencia: ya en 1928 ofreció en concierto el ciclo de las 32 Sonatas.

Así lo demuestra este magnífico concierto, ejemplarmente grabado en Berlín por la RIAS el 18 de abril de 1969 en la sala de la Filarmonía. Backhaus abordó impávido, a sus 85 primaveras, un programa sin concesiones que superó con toda brillantez, formado por cuatro sonatas de Beethoven. Otros grandes

pianistas como Arrau, Rubinstein u Horowitz no hubieron podido afrontarlo a esa edad. La longevidad de Backhaus fue excepcional si consideramos la estupenda forma, física y mental, en que se hallaba en el año de su muerte. La Sonata opus 53, conocida como Waldstein o Aurora es una de las más insidiosas para el intérprete que Beethoven escribió. Su larga sección de desarrollo en el movimiento inicial exige un férreo control mecánico y, sobre todo, mental, para poder comunicar al oyente el complejo entramado musical beethoveniano, dominio que parece reservado a pianistas más jóvenes de lo que Backhaus era en 1969. En sus manos, la Sonata Waldstein adquiere una intensidad que prende al oyente en la red de su lógica inexorable y no lo deja escapar hasta su conclusión: Backhaus es un magistral arquitecto, un profundo recreador de esta imponente Sonata; las pequeñas imperfecciones mecánicas son irrelevantes. Y no menos admirable es la espléndida calidad de su sonido – poderoso o delicado según se requiera, siempre timbrado y redondo – el mismo que ofrecía en sus primeras grabaciones de comienzos de los años 50 para Decca, captado ahora por los micrófonos de la RIAS alemana en toda su dimensión, con el auxilio de una magnífica estereofonía. Espléndida también la Sonata opus 31.3, otra de las magnas creaciones de Beethoven, en la que Backhaus no solo muestra su autoridad indiscutible sino que responde con versatilidad a los muy diferentes estados de ánimo de sus cuatro movimientos – presididos por un desusado buen humor que no suele asociarse al músico de Bonn – que culminan en una brillantísima tarantela final. De nuevo asombra la vitalidad del intérprete, más inspirado y más convincente que en sus grabaciones de estudio. De las otras dos Sonatas ofrecidas en este concierto berlinés, la Pastoral opus 28 y la maravillosa opus 109 en mi mayor, cabe destacar las Variaciones que culminan esta última, por su claridad formal, su noble expresividad y su elocuencia. Uno de esos recitales que no se olvidan, recomendable con entusiasmo.

Fanfare Issue 34:3 (Jan/Feb 2011) (Paul Orgel - 2011.01.01)

fanfare

Passagework is a little smudged here and there, and sometimes, Backhaus bangs or rushes slightly, but considering that this recording of one of his last concerts was made when he was 85, these small imperfections are easily forgiven. Backhaus specialized in Beethoven's sonatas—he first performed the complete cycle in 1928—and he goes for the larger structural picture, not all the precise details. His sound is big and generous and his ability to convey the span of long melodic lines is the most impressive aspect of these performances. From early in his career, Backhaus was considered to be a “classicist” whose playing emphasized textual fidelity and served as a corrective to self-indulgent performances of the time, but these things are relative, and by current standards, these performances are refreshingly impulsive and freely paced. Backhaus isn't afraid to linger or to push forward more than most contemporary pianists, and the music benefits.

Considerable rubato heightens the tender character of op. 31/3's minuet and the playful one in op. 28. Backhaus plays these two warm-hearted sonatas with real affection and no lack of speed in the fast movements. Op. 31/3's Presto finale never lets up and is a technically impressive performance by any standard.

Technical limitations hinder Backhaus the most in the first movement of the “Waldstein” and in the finale's motoric episodes, but he plays the work's central Adagio sostenuto with convincing rhythmic freedom, and the third movement's opening theme sings beautifully. He slows way down for the octave glissando passage and plays each octave with an individual stroke.

If the “Waldstein” is, overall, a performance to avoid, op. 109 is a pleasant surprise, a performance that improves as it goes on. Backhaus's control falters at times in the opening movement with too many arpeggiated chords and some shaky timing, but the prestissimo second movement is solidly played and he rises to the occasion of the third movement's variations—there is no more beautiful movement in any Beethoven sonata—with an eloquent, unfussy performance that is both technically impressive and

emotionally soaring.

Listeners seeking refinement of touch should look elsewhere—almost any pianist I can think of would strive for more subtle balances between melody and accompaniment, more clearly delineated degrees of non-legato or staccato, and more sparing pedal—but I recommend this recording for its documentaton of an important Beethoven specialist playing extraordinarily well, considering his age, in three of the four sonatas. The music-making is very much alive. The miking sounds close, the recording is in stereo, and Backhaus's Bechstein is a bright, clear sounding instrument.

Fono Forum Dezember 2010 12/10 (Ingo Harden - 2010.11.17)

FONO FORUM
KLASSIK JAZZ HIFI

Alt und gut

Die Erstveröffentlichung des Beethoven-Abends, den der 85-jährige Wilhelm Backhaus im Mai 1969 in Berlin gab, ist einer der wertvollen Funde auf dem vielbeackerten Feld der Archiv-Bestände. Backhaus galt hierzulande spätestens nach 1945 als der zuverlässigste, aber nicht unbedingt beflügelndste "Klassiker" unter den pianistischen Hausgöttern. Im Vergleich zu Gieseking, Kempff und Fischer ging es bei ihm immer etwas nüchterner zu, sein bekannter Studiozyklus der 32 Klaviersonaten wirkt wie eine Bestätigung dieser Eindrücke.

Die neuen Mitschnitte aus dem RIAS Fundus ergänzen dieses Bild ähnlich aufschlussreich wie Deccas legendäres, im Ton sehr persönliches "letztes Konzert" vom Juli desselben Jahres. Sie machen erfahrbar, was die künstlerische Bedeutung Backhaus' im Kern ausmachte: nämlich über die souveräne (und uneitel eingesetzte) technische Beherrschung des Instruments hinaus der sichere Blick für die inneren Zusammenhänge des Komponierten. Ihnen ordnete er mit großem Zugriff alle Einzelheiten unter, seine "Klassizität" hatte nichts mit den Notenfuchserieien zu tun, die heute gerne mit diesem Etikett versehen werden.

Am eindrucksvollsten offenbart sich dieser große Backhaus im ersten Satz der späten E-Dur-Sonate, deren fantasieartiger Charakter wohl kaum jemals eindringlicher herausgespielt wurde als an diesem Abend. Tadelloses Remastering, vor lauten Akkorden machen sich leise, an entschwundene und fast schon vergessene Tonbandzeiten erinnernde "Vorechos" bemerkbar.

France Musique mercredi 13 octobre 2010, 8h40 (Christophe Bourseiller & Jean-Michel Boissier - 2010.10.13)



BROADCAST Musique matin

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[France Musique](#) jeudi 20 janvier 2011 (- 2011.01.20)



BROADCAST Concert du midi

Bad Kissingen: Beethoven, Haydn

Sendebeleg siehe PDF!

[klassik.com](#) Oktober 2010 (Kai Schabram - 2010.10.19)
source: <http://magazin.klassik.com/reviews/revie...>



'Metronom' oder Mediator?

'Metronom' oder Mediator?

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La Musica 2010 August (- 2010.08.01)

Beethoven

Beethoven

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**Märkische Oderzeitung Mittwoch, 15. September 2010
- 21. Jahrgang Nr. 215 (Peter Philipps - 2010.09.15)**



Fast akademischer Klang

Fast akademischer Klang

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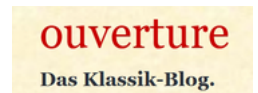
Morgenpost am Sonntag Sonntag, 12. September 2010 (- 2010.09.12)



Beethovens Klaviersonaten bilden einen eigenen Kosmos in der klassischen Musik...

Full review text restrained for copyright reasons.

[ouverture Das Klassik-Blog](#) Sonntag, 17. Oktober 2010 (- 2010.10.17)



Wilhelm Backhaus (1884 bis 1969) debütierte als Zwölfjähriger im Leipziger...

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Piano News September / Oktober 5/2010 (Carsten Dürer - 2010.09.01)



Richter, Gulda, Backhaus, Fischer etc.

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Scherzo Jg. XXVI, N° 265 (Rafael Ortega Basagoiti - 2011.04.01)



Grabación en vivo de cuatro bien conocidas Sonatas del ilustre sordo a cargo de...

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Süddeutsche Zeitung Mittwoch. 8. September 2010 (Wolfgang Schreiber - 2010.09.08)



Jung und Alt

Wilhelm Backhaus verabschiedete sich von Berlin mit Beethoven

Jung und Alt

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Universitas Nr. 11/2010 (Adelbert Reif - 2010.11.01)



Kaum mehr überblickbar ist die Anzahl junger Pianisten und Violinisten, die...

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Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung Donnerstag, 26. August 2010 (Hajo Berns - 2010.08.26)



Wiederhören mit Wilhelm Backhaus und Beethoven

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WETA fm Wednesday, 11.17.10, 4:00 pm (Jens F. Laurson - 2010.11.17)



Bits of Beethoven (Sonatas): Steven Osborne, Wilhelm Backhaus, Solomon

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Wochen-Kurier Mittwoch, 4. August 2010 - Nr.
31 (Michael Karrass - 2010.08.04)

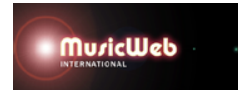
WOCHENKURIER

Wilhelm Backhaus galt bereits in frühen Jahren als Inbegriff eines Pianisten,...

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www.musicweb-international.com November 2010 (Jonathan Woolf -
2010.11.01)

source: <http://www.musicweb-international.com/cl...>



The last testament of this eminent musician

There is something indomitable, indeed magnificent, about Backhaus's recital at the Philharmonie in April 1969, given shortly before his death in the same year. Already in his mid-eighties, and with a vast career stretching behind him, he didn't stint. The programme consisted of four Beethoven sonatas; there were no concessions to other composers, or other forms. Form, indeed, was the essence for late Backhaus, which would be a sympathetic consideration, if nothing else, if the playing were raddled, but the remarkable thing is that it is very much not raddled. Indeed it's only at a few points, when one feels him tire, that one becomes aware of weaknesses in this area. For the main part Backhaus proves remarkably resilient for a man of 85, a performer whose digital control is married to profound resilience and perception.

The Pastoral sonata opens with a real sense of occasion, and it shows a formidable awareness of the need for flexibility within a strongly etched rhythm. The slow movement is neither over-stressed nor over-romanticised, but full measure of pawkiness attends the scherzo – heavy, assuredly, in part at least, but with a gnarly wit and plenty of rubati. This presages a fleet, fluent finale. The E flat major Op.31 No.3 sonata manages to combine strength of sinew and light heartedness of spirit. Its scherzo is full of energetic playfulness and one listens in admiration as Backhaus delivers on the finale's con fuoco marking with commensurate power and not a little swagger. By the Waldstein one begins to feel him tiring. Three years ago I reviewed a performance he gave of this sonata in the Beethovenhalle, Bonn, in September 1959. This earlier live traversal is lighter than the decade-later one under review, and contains fewer slips, though this does seem to have been a work that caused him digital problems notwithstanding the dates of the performances. What he invariably located in it however was a wonderfully sustained sense of piety. The second disc contains only the E major Op.109. It opens in rather 'tripping' fashion, but features a strong Prestissimo, and then the noble unfolding of the finale, which in this performance marries tonal depth to graphic architectural assurance.

Backhaus's complete Beethoven sonata recordings are on the 8 CD Decca Original Masters 475 7198 and various other examples of all the four sonatas played in 1969 exist, from 78s in the case of the earlier two to 1950 Deccas – these in addition to the 1960s Deccas contained in the box noted above. So, there is quite a deal of choice for even the Backhaus completist, but not even that fact should dent enthusiasm for the last testament of this eminent musician enshrined in this recording.

www.ResMusica.com 16 novembre 2010 (Patrick Georges Montaigu - 2010.11.16)



Le dernier Backhaus reste une référence

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