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## Beethoven :Diabelli" Variations / Alfred Brendel, piano

### 33 Variations on a Waltz by Diabelli in C major, Op.120 (53:05)

1. Theme	0:52	18. Variation	1:07
2. Alla marcia	1:53	19. Moderato	1:39
3. Poco allegro	0:47	20. Presto	0:54
4. L'istesse tempo	1:21	21. Andante	2:11
5. Un poco piu vivace	0:57	22. Allegro con brio	1:20
6. Allegro vivace	0:54	23. Molto allegro	0:40
7. Allegro ma non troppo	1:40	24. Assai allegro	0:50
8. Poco piu allegro	1:19	25. Fughetta	3:43
9. Poco vivace	1:25	26. Allegro	0:49
10. Allegro pesante	1:45	27. Variation	1:00
11. Presto	0:38	28. Vivace	0:57
12. Allegretto	0:54	29. Allegro	0:59
13. Poco piu mosso	0:46	30. Adagio ma non troppo	1:18
14. Vivace	0:57	31. Andante sempre cantabile	2:30
15. Grave	4:02	32. Largo	4:27
16. Presto scherzando	0:33	33. Fuga: Allegro	2:53
17. Allegro	1:00	34. Tempo di Menuetto	3:49

35. Bagatelle in A minor, WoO 59, "Fur Elise"	2:45
36. Rondo a Capriccio in G major, Op. 129, "Rage over a Lost Penny"	6:07
37. 7 Variations on "God Save the King" in C major, WoO 78	8:43
38. 5 Variations on "Rule Britannia" in D major, WoO 79	4:29
39. 6 Easy Variations on a Swiss Air in F major, WoO 64	2:52

TOTAL TIME 78:32

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# Beethoven Diabelli Variations Alfred Brendel



Variations:  
 Rage over a Lost Penny  
 God Save the King  
 Rule Britannia  
 On a Swiss Air  
 Für Élise



Original Vox masters

alto

Early in 1819 the composer and publisher Anton Diabelli (1781-1858) invited fifty of the most prominent composers of the Austrian Empire to supply variations on one of his waltzes. The first reply came from a former pupil of Beethoven, Carl Czerny, whose offering was dated 7 May 1819. Space does not permit a full list of other contributors but they include Schubert, Hummel, Liszt (then only 11 years old), Pixis, Moscheles and Archduke Rudolph as well as Beethoven. It is known that Beethoven was composing his *Missa Solemnis* during the summer months of that year but it can be seen from entries in his sketchbooks that work on the *Diabelli Variations* had begun before the *Missa Solemnis*. Completion of the Mass and of subsequent works was clearly a higher priority for Beethoven since there are no further sketches made of the *Variations* until not only the *Missa Solemnis* had been finished, but also the three *Piano Sonatas op 109 – 111* and the *Bagatelles op 119*. Thus the *Diabelli Variations*, begun in 1819, were not completed until 1823.

In his exhaustive study on the *Diabelli Variations* (OUP 1987) William Kinderman guides the reader through Beethoven's creative process. Beethoven must surely have known that other composers had been asked for a single piece of music, and would supply that. Yet it seems from the outset that he planned something on a large scale with at least 19 of the 33 variations sketched before the work was set aside in 1819 in favour of the *Missa Solemnis*. He also made extensive plans for the pacing of the work ie the placing of slow variations and of those in a minor key, the position of the fugue etc. Therefore when he returned to the work in 1822, much of the spade work had already been carried out, but among the tasks that remained was a means of ending the work. Although the sketches only present ideas for the form these variations might take, Kinderman makes the point that most of the material in these early drafts was drawn on; only proposed variation in the 1819 drafts was entirely unused by the work's completion dated 30 April, 1823. As far as can be judged, only variations 1,2,15,23-26,28,29,31 and 33 were conceived and composed once Beethoven returned to the *Variations* in November 1822.

Musicologists have been unkind as to the quality of the waltz tune provided by Diabelli; Kinderman calls it a trivial 'beer hall waltz', whilst Lars Ulrich Abraham in 1967 finds it banal. In his initial statement of the theme Beethoven seems to be almost derisive of his material and he further subjects it to parody in variations 13 and 21. Most commentators agree however that, having been provided with relatively simple material, Beethoven was better placed to make something substantial from it; as Charles Rosen has said 'the range and length of the *Diabelli Variations* (was) made possible by the existence of a theme with primitive virtues'. And in doing so Beethoven did not restrict his material

to Diabelli's waltz alone: the twenty second variation famously makes reference to the opening to the first act of *Don Giovanni*, the orchestral passage that precedes Leporello's lines 'Notte e giorno faticar'. During the spring of 1822, Beethoven composed his *Piano Sonata opus 111*, the 'Arietta' final movement of which bears some resemblance to the final variation and coda to the *Variations*.

Diabelli was overwhelmed by the work submitted by Beethoven which quite overshadowed anything else sent by other contributors. He pronounced it 'a work to set alongside J S Bach's masterpiece' (by which he meant the *Goldberg Variations*) and he must have been exceptionally gratified that his otherwise rather ordinary tune would doubtless survive in perpetuity as a result of Beethoven's efforts (indeed it has been considered by the greatest living interpreter of Beethoven's piano works Alfred Brendel to be 'the greatest of all piano works'). It is certainly the longest of his piano works and predictably covers every emotion including the overtly humorous (13,15,21,25), pompous (1), the harsh (6), the manic (9), the solemn (14), the withdrawn (20), the dissonant and jarring (28), and the lament (29). Late in the cycle Beethoven doffs his hat to Bach in both the Fugue (32) and in No 31, in which he makes reference to the 25th *Goldberg Variation*. In the final variation Beethoven turns the rustic waltz into a classically upper-class minuet.

*Bagatelle in A minor*, known as ***Für Elise***, has long been one of Beethoven's most popular works. There are several candidates as to the identity of Elise, the most likely being that it was Therese Malfatti (1792-1851), a pupil of Beethoven with whom he fell in love. The two became engaged briefly in 1810, the date of this work's composition. After Malfatti's death the autograph score was purchased in 1867 by the publisher Ludwig Nohl who clearly misread Beethoven's inscription. Unfortunately the original manuscript has now been lost.

***Rondo a capriccio in G major, Op. 129*** was composed c1795. It was among the works purchased by the publisher Diabelli in November 1827 after the composer's death. Supposedly inspired by the sight of a somewhat ungainly academic attempting to retrieve a small coin lost under the furniture, Diabelli gave this incomplete work its famous nickname ***Rage Over the Lost Penny*** when he published it in January 1828. Beethoven's sense of humour is evident with the tempo marking not *alla ongarese* but by the malapropism *alla ingharese* and Schumann later compared the professor's rage to that when one vainly attempts to remove a stubborn boot.

In 1803 the Scottish song collector George Thomson (1757-1815) commissioned from Beethoven

a series of six keyboard sonatas to be based on Scottish folk tunes. Beethoven never provided the sonatas but instead, he arranged a large number of folk songs from the British Isles and also sent two sets of variations: ***God Save the King*** (in C major) and ***Rule Britannia*** (in D major). Uncertain of his command of the English language Beethoven wrote to Thomson in French, saying that since the variations were very easy, he hoped that they would be a commercial success. The pro-British sentiment prevailing in Vienna guaranteed this when they were published there in 1804 and they were even more successful when they appeared in London the following year. Several years later Beethoven used both tunes for his *Battle Symphony 'Wellington's Victory'*.

The original melody that forms the basis of ***6 Variations on a Swiss Air WoO 64*** was published in 1781; Beethoven's work followed some nine or ten years later. Musicologists have noted the unusual neatness of the manuscript and the piece, designated for either fortepiano or harp, presents few challenges to the performer.

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