

Produced by Andrew Kazdin

GLENN GOULD
BEETHOVEN VARIATIONS

Side 1
THIRTY-TWO VARIATIONS IN C MINOR (12-12)
VARIATIONS IN F MAJOR ON AN ORIGINAL
THEME, Op. 34 (12-00)

Side 2
EROICA VARIATIONS, Op. 35 (12-02)
The variations are in the public domain.

Variation is the oldest of musical principles and, as the natural remedy for the tedium of repetition, is the basis of all formal development. It was in the Classical period, with the evolution of the sonata-allegro form, that variation techniques were amplified and became increasingly more complex. Closely related to this fact was the contemporary passion for improvisation, as nothing more delighted the nobility of the time (which comprised the major part of the serious music audience) than a composer who was not only a keyboard virtuoso but was also able, at will, to improvise variations upon a given theme. Such persons became the "lions" of the salons, and Beethoven was no exception. In fact, he had the reputation of being a brilliant practitioner of the art, and on at least one occasion, his penchant for improvisation spilled over into a performance of one of his "composed" works. Ferdinand Ries, a pupil of Beethoven, related an anecdote about a performance of Beethoven's Quintet in E-Flat Major for Piano and Winds, Op. 16, that took place in 1797 or 1798: "In the final Allegro, there occur several holds before the resumption of the theme. At one of them, Beethoven suddenly began to improvise, took the Rondo as a theme and entertained himself and the others for a considerable space. But not his associates. They were displeased and Ramm [a famous Munich oboist] enraged. It really was comical to see those gentlemen waiting expectantly to go on, continually lifting their instruments to their lips, then quietly putting them down again. At last, Beethoven was satisfied and dropped again into the Rondo. The entire audience was delighted."

Beethoven composed twenty-one sets of variations for solo piano, but, of these, only four can be viewed as being important works: the Variations on an Original Theme in F, Op. 34, the Variations "a Theme from Prometheus," called "Eroica," Op. 35, the 32 Variations in C Minor on an Original Theme, and the 33 Variations on a Waltz by Diabelli. None of these date from before 1802, and this fact, plus the occasional nature of the other variations, helps to explain the essential inconsequentiality of the latter. Also relevant is the consideration that many of these very traditional variations are based on less-than-immortal themes from obscure operas and ballets of the time. As a result, they vary in quality from the eminently forgettable 12 Variations on the Russian Dance from Wranitsky's "Das Waldmädchen" (G. 182) to the quite charming 7 Variations on Winter's "Kind, willst du ruhig schlafen" (G. 186). And, perhaps mention should be made of two insignificant but delightful works that

date from 1803, the 7 Variations on "God Save the King" (G. 189) and the 5 Variations on "Rule Britannia" (G. 190).

It was in 1802 that Beethoven wrote to a publisher: "I have made two sets of Variations, the first of which can be said to number eight and the second, thirty. Both are written in quite a new style and each in an entirely different way. . . . Each theme in them is treated independently and in a wholly different manner." Then, he added this comment: "As a rule, I only hear of it from others when I have new ideas, since I never know it myself" and concluded that ". . . this time I can assure you that in both works the style is completely new for me." Beethoven was referring to his Variations in F Major, Op. 34, and his Variations in E-Flat Major, Op. 35, and, in a subsequent letter, he again mentioned them, describing them as being "different from any other."

His belief in the "newness" of these works was quite justified, for the composer had made a real break with the traditional style of variation. Suddenly, decoration and virtuosity for their own sake were discarded and an attempt was made at serious expression by means of sharply-defined, uncluttered structures. And Beethoven inserted a prefatory note in the printed score of each set that stressed their distinction: "Inasmuch as these [Variations] differ radically from my earlier ones," he stated, "instead of designating them like the former ones . . . I have included them in the numerical list of my greater musical works. . . ."

Indeed, with his Op. 34 and Op. 35 and the later (1823) Diabelli Variations, Beethoven, even more than Haydn or Mozart, elevated the variation to a level with the great classical forms.

* * *

Six Variations on an Original Theme in F Major, Op. 34
This work was composed in 1802, the year that also saw production of three sonatas for piano and violin, the Bagatelles, Op. 33, for piano, and the stylistically simple Variations in G on an Original Theme, Op. 15. In his sketches for the "Eroica" Variations, Beethoven put down two measures of the theme of Op. 34 with the remark, "Each variation in a different time signature—but alternatively passages now in the left hand and then almost the same or different ones in the right."

The first five variations are all in different keys and tempos, each having its own special character. The final variation is once again in the tonic key of F Major and is followed by a lengthily embellished Adagio. Throughout, these variations are distinguished by an exquisite and expressive lyricism.

Thirteen Variations on a Theme from "Prometheus," called "Eroica," Op. 35

Like his Op. 34, these bold and profoundly experimental variations date from the year 1802. They are based on a theme from Beethoven's ballet "The Creatures of Prometheus," written in 1800-01. Obviously, this melody was of great importance to the composer, for it was also soon to reappear in the finale of his "Eroica" Symphony.

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Glenn Gould · Beethoven Variations

Eroica Variations · Thirty-two Variations in C Minor · Variations in F on an Original Theme

Especially in the "Eroica" Variations, bareness and lack of ornamentation serve to reveal the impressive architecture—the very bones, as it were—of the music. Here, where everything superfluous has been stripped away, one is constantly aware of the uncompromising nature of the work and, also, of its absolute seriousness and integrity.

The very opening is arresting and original, for the bass of the theme is presented in unadorned octaves, then with two, three, and four parts added. Only after this is the complete melody heard. Fifteen variations on both the theme and the bass, and a highly worked-out Largo section culminate in a figure whose subject is derived, again, from the bass of the theme. After a compelling restatement of the heroic melody, the work closes with a short coda.

32 Variations in C Minor on an Original Theme (G. 191)
(WoO 80)

These variations date from 1806, an exceedingly fruitful year during which Beethoven also composed his Fourth Symphony, Violin Concerto and Third "Leonore" Overture. The variations are, in a pianistic sense, a throwback to an earlier, more orthodox manner of treating a theme. But, although conspicuous virtuosity is required for performance, this element is an essential part of the grandiosity of expression characteristic of the whole work, rather than a conventional aspiration toward elegance as in the earlier sets.

Because of the element of display, it is not difficult to understand why the 32 Variations have enjoyed more favor with pianists than either the Variations in F Major or the "Eroica" Variations. And it is, also, perhaps, why Beethoven himself was to speak somewhat slightly of the work in later years. Nonetheless, the 32 Variations abound in sudden, vehement changes in both dynamics and mood, and, taken together, constitute a powerful and persuasive whole.

The composition divides naturally into four large sections: Variations 1-11 (in the minor); Variations 12-16 (major); Variations 17-29 (minor again)—and Variations 30-32, which include a grave chordal restatement of the theme and a dynamic finale, filled with contrasts, that resolves into a quiet, refined ending.

—Phillip Ramey

Engineering: Fred Plaut and Raymond Moore
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Other Beethoven albums by Glenn Gould:
Sonata No. 8 in C Minor, Op. 13, "Pathétique"; Sonata No. 14 in C-Sharp Minor, Op. 27, No. 2, "Moonlight"; Sonata No. 23 in F Minor, Op. 27, "Appassionata"; MS 7413
Symphony No. 9 in C Minor, Op. 92 (Transcribed for Piano by Franz Liszt) MS 7095
Sonata No. 8 in C Minor, Op. 13, "Pathétique"; Sonata No. 9 in E Major, Op. 14, No. 1; Sonata No. 10 in G Major, Op. 14, No. 2 MS 6945
Sonata No. 9 in C Minor, Op. 10, No. 1; Sonata No. 4 in F Major, Op. 10, No. 2; Sonata No. 7 in D Major, Op. 10, No. 3 MS 6686

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Ludwig van Beethoven 1770-1827

32 Variations on an Original Theme in C minor for Piano WoO 80

c-Moll · en *ut* mineur

1	Tema. Allegretto – Var. I – Var. II	1:03
2	Var. III – Var. IV – Var. V	1:05
3	Var. VI – Var. VII – Var. VIII	0:42
4	Var. IX con espressione – Var. X – Var. XI	0:56
5	Var. XII. Maggiore – Var. XIII – Var. XIV	1:29
6	Var. XV – Var. XVI	0:39
7	Var. XVII. Minore – Var. XVIII	0:47
8	Var. XIX – Var. XX – Var. XXI	0:42
9	Var. XXII – Var. XXIII – Var. XXIV	0:48
10	Var. XXV. Leggiermente – Var. XXVI – Var. XXVII – Var. XXVIII	1:15
11	Var. XXIX – Var. XXX	0:57
12	Var. XXXI – Var. XXXII	2:57

6 Variations on an Original Theme in F major for Piano op. 34

F-Dur · en *fa* majeur

13	Tema. Adagio	1:07
14	Var. I	1:36
15	Var. II. Allegro, ma non troppo	0:55
16	Var. III. Allegretto	1:12

17	Var. IV. Tempo di Menuetto	1:11
18	Var. V. Marcia. Allegretto	1:52
19	Var. VI. Allegretto – Coda – Adagio molto	4:11

15 Variations with Fugue in E-flat major for Piano op. 35 “Eroica”

Es-Dur · en *mi* bémol majeur

20	Introduzione col Basso del Tema. Allegretto vivace – Tema	4:42
21	Var. I	0:39
22	Var. II – Presto – Tempo I	0:35
23	Var. III	0:39
24	Var. IV	0:28
25	Var. V	1:04
26	Var. VI	0:32
27	Var. VII. Canone all’ottava	0:51
28	Var. VIII	1:12
29	Var. IX	0:40
30	Var. X	0:42
31	Var. XI	1:04
32	Var. XII	0:45
33	Var. XIII	0:51
34	Var. XIV. Minore	2:02
35	Var. XV. Maggiore. Largo	5:33
36	Finale alla Fuga. Allegro con brio – Adagio – Andante con moto	5:41

Glenn Gould piano

Total Time 53:40

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32 Variations on an Original Theme in C minor WoO 80

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PHILLIP RAMEY