



**DUX 1231 / 2015**



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**LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN / Jean-Claude HENRIOT – piano recital**

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**Ludwig van Beethoven :**

- \* 11 Bagatelles, Op. 119
- \* Fantasia in G minor, Op.77 (1809)
- \* Andante Favori, WoO 57 (1803-1804)
- \* 32 Variations in C minor, WoO 80 (1806)
- \* 6 Bagatelles, Op. 126 (1825)

**Jean-Claude HENRIOT – piano**

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**DUX Małgorzata Polańska & Lech Tołwiński ul. Morskie Oko 2, 02-511 Warszawa**

tel./fax (48 22) 849-11-31, (48 22) 849-18-59

e-mail: [dux@dux.pl](mailto:dux@dux.pl), [www.dux.pl](http://www.dux.pl)

**Aleksandra Kitka-Coutellier – International Relations [kitka@dux](mailto:kitka@dux)**

## Civilized Play and Games: Beethoven's Intimate Style

Four years after recording the *Diabelli Variations*, Jean-Claude Henriot continues his explorations of pianistic Beethoven 'from-the-next-door'. To approach the depth of his main works in the corpus outside the sonatas, it is important to disregard at least some of the stylistic representations associated with classifications broadly marking out 'Beethoven the prodigious descendant of Haydn', 'Beethoven the heroic and pre-Romantic', and finally, 'testamentary and speculative composer': in our case, the program extends from 1800 to 1824, encompassing all three categories. The one with isolated pieces and miniatures gives good reason to be heard outside these representations, considering the permanent double-dimensionality of this music: the charm and lightness that are nearly always implied by the small form or essentially private dimension and which are often found in the admirable simplicity of the material itself, but also a laboratory dimension proper to a miniature test in writing process later possible to be reproduced on a larger scale, or simply a touring spirit or a territory-clearing endeavour without any grandiose justificatory ambitions. The common picture of Beethoven is perhaps chiefly that of a master architect, and it is for a reason. But it does not mean that it brings about an unequivocal truth about the most original quality of his art that would unify in a single, recognizable way the treatment of the small as well as the grand musical form. In Mozart, such an aspect is perhaps the spirit of chromatic motion. In Schubert, it would be the cumulative expansion of musical material. In Beethoven, a synoptic survey of isolated pieces in relation with the 'great' works allows us to see still something else, which he himself termed in his titling of the *Diabelli* the spirit of *transformation* ('*Veränderung*').

The latter is already at work where nothing should really be transforming. In the rondo, such as the one of the *Andante favori* whose structure is more complex than in the rondos from previous sonatas by Beethoven, it completes, in a sense, a process of refinement begun with the finales of the Sonata No. 4 and continued with Nos. 11, 13, 15, 16 and 17. One might think that because the Andante in F major is not a sonata rondo, it is condemned to a cruder form, but this couldn't be further from the truth, since Beethoven uses a double presentation of the theme to distinguish it from the former pieces, and then immediately extends his genius of thematic derivation, conceiving from a simple ornamentation of the second exposition a new idea that itself becomes the object of two variations. The head motive simultaneously retains its own privileged status as theme. Thus, the rondo coexists with a double variational structure resembling that of another varied Andante masterwork, namely Haydn's composition in F major. Many years afterwards, Beethoven applied the same 'recipe' to prepare a piece with a strikingly opposite character: the rondo 'for a lost penny'. But here, instead of the expected, extended final variation, or the (nevertheless) prepared coda, Beethoven offers a variation on nothing! At least nothing identifiable among the main ideas at play, but which still refers to them all through reminiscence and amalgamation. This poignant passage of 12 measures produces an impression that is all the stronger because the textural density and polyphonic richness - by then quite considerable - pass a threshold to reach a degree that will become the standard for Romantic music. The solemn coda, where the head theme reappears in a key furthest removed from *g flat*, is a mock surprise in perfect Haydnesque spirit, revealing the hidden solution to the strange appoggiatura with *appui* over the *d flat* which served as a keystone for transitions between each double thematic presentation: following the previous, disquieting shadow of the 'phantom' variation, the general musical unity is peacefully reaffirmed in the long term.

As a process, the transformation unfolds according to the same principle governing the Fantasia in G minor, whose long, introductory improvisation is only a preparation for the original theme and the (seven) variations in this tonality, which is far-removed from the opening B major, although the listener must still arrive at it, not without passing through a succession (separated by 'signals' from the initial, improvised gesture) of various, subtly linked ideas, whose continuity is subject to sabotage. One finds such a preliminary procedure to 'actual' variations, mixing new musical expressions and reflexive pauses - such as an improvised cadenza-like gesture, or a very considered melodic idea - in the contemporaneous *Choral Fantasy*, a preparatory sketch to the finale of the Symphony No. 9. This finale, itself a varied rondo, also opens with a sequential enunciation of non-interlinked ideas, which we understand as reminiscences from each of the preceding movements. Retrospectively, the procedure appears in the fantasias under a new guise: it involves feeling one's way through musical ideas whose full realization is, or would have been possible until the idea is reached whose 'marrow' must be extracted at once. The creative force as such is affirmed: separating the necessary from the conditional (or outdated necessity) is a choice, an act of will.

The employment of the ancient procedure of passacaglia in the 32 Variations and *Eroica Variations*, as well as the Finale of Symphony No. 3, reinforces this logic, according to which variation is no longer an art of ornamenting a theme that unfolds in a decorative dimension, but a powerful, integrated form that grows according to an organic principle of rapport between the parts and the whole. The intended *tour de force* is to combine an updating of the archaic procedure

with perfect mastery of Mozartian style, namely embroidery around a theme, essentially manifest in the *maggiore* section (var. 12 to 16). Carl Dahlhaus demonstrated that this combination is a typical case of what he termed 'sub-thematicism'. The liberty with which Beethoven moves between the constraints of a passacaglia and a pianistic fantasia (without archaic features, but foreshadowing the virtuosic variations of Schumann and Brahms) is insistent on breaking up the theme's constituent parts to approach it 'from below'. The 'sub-theme' consists here of a dotted figure identified as a 'theme', a succession of chords (I-V-VI-IV and their inversions), and a counterpoint with two chromatic voices (soprano and bass) moving in contrary motion, the voices taken as individual musical constituents. Most of the time, Beethoven treats a single one of these four aspects in variation, and instead of 'fanning his cards', he relentlessly 'plays them in turn'. Beethoven makes way for variation in broad sense, that brings one to think about what it really is. There is nothing obvious about a theme followed by 32 variations actually being a set of 32 or 33. A plausible intuition would be, in our case, that we have 33 varieties of a same idea, one could call it various states of the piece as a whole: but then, where is this idea? Another intuition is that 32 transformations are happening here: you don't number the states, but the changes of state. Now, this one weakens the generative status of the theme, continuously. A third vision is the one of the musical idea (Gedanke) as Schönberg put it, projected onto 32 images or representations of itself. This makes quite an elegant synthesis, well suited with what Beethoven compels us to hear, as he was the first since Bach's Goldberg to deal with the variation simultaneously seen as an ornament, as an artefact, and as a development of one same thing. This is how the *Veränderung* unfolds. It may announce its work on a title page, as in the *Diabelli*, but also play a game by wearing masks, as in the pirouette of the Bagatelle Op. 119/4, introducing 'in one throw' all the possible variations (places, values, and intervals) of the thematic head figure over a simple dominant pedal note: should we then listen to these five central measures as a variation or development? Of course it is both, in their complete economy. This sort of manipulation is common practice in Beethovenian play and supreme cultivation of intimate writing: we dream here of Charles Rosen's statement, in the first chapter of his *Classical Style*, about the Allegro of the Sonata No. 32, which is both a sonata and fugue by virtue of treating the head theme again with augmentation in the chief development: "Beethoven is very often interested more in the profile of his theme than the relations between the exact pitches of the notes".

As is evident - yet contrary to common belief - Beethoven did not wait until his ripe years to interrogate the inner workings of classical structures in lieu of seeking to deliberately explode these frameworks. He does the former by calling on the learned techniques of past ages (fugue, chaconne), but also popular material that since Haydn's death no longer seemed destined for pure, instrumental music. Since 1800, the same goes for such works as the *alla tedesca* dance of Op. 119/3, which we find a quarter century later in the String Quartet No. 13; the *sicillienne* of Op. 119/5, which we conceive with difficulty as having been brought out of the drawer by Beethoven after 20 years and treated without connection to the Scherzo of Symphony No. 9, but also, in 1823-1824, the charming waltz in the 'children's book' style of 119/9, and finally the barcarolle, which in 126/5 springs forth as the ritornello's wondrous, unexpected development in the opening antiphony, clouded in the softness of the subdominant (intentionally or not, almost the same barcarolle as the *Gondoliera* from Liszt's *Years of Pilgrimage*).

At times, as in the Op. 119/8, the learned or popular genre to which reference is made seems so impenetrable that the unique valid way of listening is pure curiosity and wonder in the face of what might actually be figuration at the keyboard, from choral lyricism proper to writing for strings, whether we think of the Praeludium to the *Benedictus* from the *Missa Solemnis*, the cavatine from String Quartet No. 13, or the *Diabelli* var. XX and XXX. Material constraints are no longer of Beethoven's world: there are patent cases where, according to an expression by Maurizio Pollini, the pianist must believe, like an expert in miracles, that he or she can execute a crescendo on a held note. Elsewhere, they are gestures of pure writerly speculation tested in the laboratory of the miniature. Thus, we have the long, trilling pedal of Op. 199/7, which also refers the listener to all the incredible usages of the trill in late Beethoven: the example in C major, presented first in the dominant, then the tonic, before fixing itself there permanently, is thus an obstinate affirmation of tonality (e.g. in the arietta of opus 111 and *Diabelli* variation X), structural material with full rights (e.g. opuses 106 and 133), imitation of a fugal stretto (e.g. opuses 101 and 106), and finally, basis for variations (e.g. opus 109), since it serves as a foundation to a bold acceleration of the figure: one, two, and three times the speed, until the physical exhaustion of the right hand.

The first and the second bagatelle from Op. 126 suggest an ideal synthesis of ideas concerning variation and development, beginning with the underlying constituents of musical material. But it is more appropriate to forget these imperfect terms to instead evoke techniques of musical expansion, making audible the organic dimension of transformations in real-time. In both, passing to the area of the dominant serves as pretext to a progressive musical derivation. In Op. 126/1, this assumes the form of a sudden change in metre (from ternary to binary), generated by

the appearance of a new idea issuing from a flowing cantilena: this three-note motive undergoes the variation through acceleration used already in Op. 119/7, before a short cadenza leads to an expanded recapitulation. In the last bagatelle - whose frenetic introductory and closing gesture makes one wonder whether its source is the popular Hungarian tradition or if it follows the same logic (but a civilized one) of the opening chaos from the Finale of Symphony No. 9 - the passage to the dominant occurs again through a disjoint conception of the opening theme, which in fact had already served to clear the way to B flat minor. The felt continuity, evoking a miniature sonata, is reinforced as it opens onto a symmetrical return of the opening idea in the sub-dominant, presented in a varied form and ultimately giving place to an expansion of overpowering lyricism, sitting atop the transformation of the accompanying triplets into a melodic impulse.

These sublime ways of developing Op. 126 Nos. 1 and 6 maintain themselves in such manner, particularly in the second case, which is completed by a page of recapitulation in the tonic skilfully bringing back the initial 'parting shot'. Beethoven has by the way felt a mysterious need to apply a repetition, in entirety and without modification, with a repeat bar line. One cannot properly speaking 'explain' this gesture, except through the spirit of playful abstraction, a wish to prolong play for play's sake, and fantasy of absolute, immediate expression. To our knowledge, this type of repetition of micro-expansions is found only in the late piano music of Janáček, composed exactly a century later.

Beethoven's example has a charming paradox that unifies his least public and most secretive style; the respect for the 'good manners of old' seems to be paramount - both through its amiable tone and omnipresence of outdated genre exercises - and better domesticated than in the concertos, symphonies, and grand sonatas. But the kind of complicity with which the cultivated listener is called here as witness enables a play on these 'manners' with incomparable finesse. Let us muse again on the moving conclusion of the chapter on Beethoven in *The Classical Style*, which exposes this essential dimension of the Viennese musical tradition, whose sense could be lost with time, when historical distance makes one always make a greater contrast between the amiable and the provoking, conservative and revolutionary, traditional and innovative. Thus, at the end of the commentary to the closing Diabelli variation, we read: "*I should like to emphasize the modesty of the concluding minuet (...), its exquisite urbanity, its elegance and its ultimate refusal of the sublime - its amabilità, in short. (...) No eighteenth-century minuet ever sounded like the final variation of the Diabelli Variations, which, however, clearly functions as an evocation of the past. (...) If these works recall a past it is one which still seems alive. (...) Their urbanity expresses an ideal of society in which his music was possible, even if many of his compositions amounted to an outrageous violation of that society's decorum and often provoked a musical scandal for that reason*". Then, concerning the recapitulation of the third movement of the String Quartet opus 130: "*This moment of amiability, delight, and grace is an essential aspect of Beethoven's aesthetic, as much as his grotesque humor and his tragic vision. The autumnal regret inherent in this late and radical reinterpretation of an old convention is a reminiscence of a culture that had always lived mainly in the imagination. Just as the Eroica Symphony incarnated a political and public vision, this quartet movement is a musical image of an intimate and civilized society, one that certainly existed only as an imperfectly realized ideal. The ideal culture, however, was implicit in the musical language that Beethoven inherited and made his own*". Rosen's reflections suspended themselves at this observation of an impossible equilibrium between tradition and modernity, but which for a magical moment becomes incarnate in Beethoven's intimate style.

A goal of the present program is to show that even the most enigmatic compositions of late Beethoven are not dissociable from the general spirit of his *oeuvre*, at least not more than the grasp of this work's unity from its belonging to the Classical tradition. The subtle nature of sub-thematic play, micro-developments, and variation as a living and moving process makes reference as much as to Haydn's heritage, where the composer discovered that an entire sonata could spring from an idea presented in a single measure, as to the manner in which Schönberg and Berg appropriate the sonata and the rondo outside the tonal framework, and Webern the passacaille or the bagatelle. Such is the unity of the First and the Second Viennese School. Listening to and interpreting Beethoven *in general* only through the prism of savagery, unbridled whim, and subversion of tradition makes it a superficial exercise in listening, attending only to fill the contemporary need to identify genius and extreme originality, and associate the label 'visionary' with 'powerful'. But this observation is even truer when we approach works with a private or semi-private calling, where this civilizational ideal expresses itself in a more immediate manner. The anticipatory power of the late quartets, sonatas for cello, and works interpreted by Henriot on his two discs from Dux, is primarily the result of a vision from the past and the goodwill with which the creative genius makes the present eternal. Good and goodwill, coincidentally, are qualifiers well suited to our pianist's playing.

*Théo Bélaud*

Translated by *Maksymilian Kapelański*

**Jean-Claude HENRIOT** was born in Paris in 1949, to a family of amateur musicians. At that time, music-lovers tended to still find their conception of music upon one particular legendary musical figure, generally upon one of the three gods: Bach, Mozart, or Beethoven. In the case of Henriot, it was Beethoven. As a child, Jean-Claude encountered his first musical great experience – obviously of the Beethovenian variety – by listening to a recording of the 'Emperor' Concerto, by Cor de Groot; later, he would be deeply influenced by concerts and recordings from pianists such as Artur Schnabel, Samson François, Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli, and Radu Lupu. Conscious of his gifts, his parents would eventually put themselves through considerable financial difficulty to afford him private lessons, which, at that time, were a necessary preliminary to entering the Paris Conservatoire.

Particularly talented at music in school, Jean-Claude began at the age of twelve to study Beethoven's op.111 sonata. He now says that he was only 'making it seem as though' he were playing op.111. He was told then that one may only lay claim to play Beethoven in one's fifties or sixties. After entering the Paris Conservatoire at the age of fourteen, and successfully studying first in the classes of Jean Doyen and Yvonne Lefébure, and then in Yvonne Loriod's class, from which he graduated, Jean-Claude Henriot remains puzzled by this assertion. Although he did not forbid himself to play Beethoven, he would actually wait almost forty years before placing his interpretation of the late works of Beethoven before audiences.

Thus his career developed around two alternative poles. On the one hand, the one composer apart from Beethoven who would help, as much as an antagonist as anything else, in the construction of his musical life, has been Debussy: Henriot has performed almost the complete solo and chamber works with piano since the outset of his professional activity. On the other, hand, he has during his career afforded a special place to chamber music, devoting himself equally to Beethoven's oeuvre, which he has played in its entirety, and to repertoire from the Romantic and modern periods.

In that latter respect, notably with reference to his work with the Ensemble InterContemporain and with Maryvonne Le Dizès, Henriot has been brought into contact with some of the principal compositional figures of the twentieth century, including Elliot Carter, Pierre Boulez and Olivier Messiaen. He is one of the founding members of the Messiaen Quartet, with whom he has made a critically acclaimed recording of the *Quartet for the End of Time*. The distance Jean-Claude Henriot for a long time kept from a solo career may be understood in terms of the variety both of his musical experiences, which have brought him to perform and teach in more than forty countries, and of his other interests.

On account of his musical gifts, Jean-Claude Henriot had pulled out of promising academic studies; he therefore latterly elected to pursue classes in aesthetics at the Paris Conservatoire, and is passionately interested in literature and painting, developing a particular interest in the study of forms, such as cubism, abstraction, 'Oulipo' literature, and the works of Julien Gracq.

It has long been a characteristic of great virtuosi to devote themselves to games such as poker and chess. In Jean-Claude Henriot's case, the game was bridge: an overwhelming passion that led him to become the French champion and almost bade him abandon his musical career. He now analyses this taste for the game and competition as almost analogous to high-level musical activity, a bridge connecting the most onerous challenges in patience, memorisation, concentration and long-term strategy. To that, one may add an obvious substitutional element of excitement, adrenaline, and necessarily obsessional practice. He considers it in retrospect to have afforded a schooling in discipline and recalls, more than thirty years later, some of the hands he played.

Having dedicated himself increasingly to teaching (he was assistant to Jean-François Heisser in his class at the Paris Conservatoire from 1993 to 1995, prior to assuming his current position at the conservatoire in Evry), Jean-Claude Henriot then began to build up his solo career, performing both concertos and recitals, alone or as a duo with his wife Isabelle Henriot. Having performed most of Beethoven's early and middle-period sonatas, alongside the principal works of Schumann, Chopin and Debussy, he has returned to exploration of the final works of Beethoven, and has often performed during the first decade of the twenty-first century the three last sonatas, opp.109, 110 and 111. The pianist has almost by accident observed the delay he had been advised as a teenager and, having reached this moment, has found himself seeking a new milestone to replace that he had foreseen forty-five years previously. He hesitates between the monumental *Hammerklavier* sonata, as an obvious challenge any true Beethoven pianist wishes to accept, and the *Diabelli Variations*, whose greater rarity and enigma value tend to imply a greater individuality of interpretation, characteristics that have guided his decision. In opening a new partnership with the Duw label (for which he has already recorded some chamber works by Ivan Bellocq), Jean-Claude Henriot has opted for the Variations, in the wake of several concert performances, to mark his debut recording as a young concert pianist.

*Théo Bélaud*