

COOK SOUNDS OF OUR TIMES

long play 1039

A PERSPECTIVE OF

BEETHOVEN



PIANOFORTE

LEONID HAMBRO plays THE 32 VARIATIONS IN C MINOR and LATE BAGATELLES

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BEETHOVEN-PIANOFORTE

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Beethoven's early popularity was largely the result of his imaginative and expressive improvisations as a pianist. His performances were impetuous, liberally pedalled, and conducted with a complete disregard for the audience reaction. As a result, of course, he proved to be a captivating performer. In a word, the young Beethoven was a "trouper" in spite of himself. Yet these improvisations for which he was famous at 22 underly the remarkable inventiveness which he later displayed in composing variations. At least 29 sets of variations were turned out by Beethoven, of which the C minor here recorded was representative of a fairly early period (published when he was 37; no opus number).

It is said that in later years upon hearing the 32 Variations, the composer remarked in all seriousness, "Whose are those?" When told that they were his, he mumbled, "What an ass I was in those days!"

Beethoven was well known and not universally admired for his unbridled practical humor. Having described himself as "a disorderly creature," he proceeded to prove the statement at frequent intervals, spilling ink into the piano, cutting himself horribly while shaving, and absently forgetting that he was the owner of a horse until the bill came in for the feed. In addition to writing letters containing bad puns, he was fond of horse-play, freely throwing books, plates and housewares at the servants. To a lady who asked him for a lock of his hair he sent a wisp of goat's beard.

Leonid Hambro

The composer Hindemith remarked, "You have just witnessed a kind of miracle" — referring to Hambro's performance of one of his works in Town Hall. *Hambro had learned the difficult modern work overnight!* . . . to meet an emergency schedule change. It was a 20th century miracle that paralleled the famous musical legends of the past.

Hambro's modesty of person may, ironically, be considered a disadvantage in this day of aggressive promotion. This same character trait makes the scope of his career seem the more remarkable. As official pianist for the New York Philharmonic and permanent soloist with WQXR he has performed a staggering number and variety of works. He has been soloist with almost every major conductor, winner of the Walter Naumburg Award, touring artist with Szigeti and Felix Saloman. It is our hope that this record will be a means for extending the impact of a rare musician.

Hambro's choice of these two contrasting works presents an original side by side comparison of Beethoven's piano style. Interpretively he approaches the Late Bagatelles with the quality and flavor of the late quartets — Beethoven's musical language in this period. He conceives the 32 Variations in terms of Beethoven's orchestral voicing as the clue to the treatment of the various contrasts in the work.

For waiters, Beethoven reserved a special affection, pouring a toureen of stew over one who had served him badly, punishing another for the staleness of the eggs by throwing the whole batch at her one by one.

This humor was perhaps the only personal trait he carried over into his music, especially evident in the 4th Bagatelle. The Bagatelles represent very late Beethoven, composed in the same year that produced the monumental *Missa Solemnis*, the Ninth Symphony and his last Quartets (1823). He had already written his last two immortal piano sonatas.

Beethoven found composing a slow and painful process; every bar literally was written dozens of times, and a result the volume of his lifetime work bespeaks an application of almost inconceivable intensity. Even on his death bed he was excitedly making plans for finishing his 10th Symphony. There, with the great stream of his life's work at an end he said, "I feel as if I had written scarcely more than a few notes."

THE 32 VARIATIONS IN C MINOR SIX BAGATELLES Opus 126

1. Andante con moto
2. Allegro
3. Andante
4. Presto
5. Quasi Allegretto
6. Presto

The recording situation used for this record was identical with #1038: PIANO — THE ROMANTIC FABRIC. Both used the same piano, concert hall, microphone placement and equipment.

another SOUNDS OF OUR TIMES recording by

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