

“Variations on a waltz for pianoforte alone (there are many)” –

Beethoven’s 33 Diabelli Variations

**Special exhibition in the Beethoven House Bonn
from 17th December 2009
to mark the acquisition of the original manuscript
of the Diabelli Variations**

The 33 variations on a waltz by Anton Diabelli in C major op. 120 are among the most outstanding compositions of Beethoven’s œuvre as well as of piano music as a whole. The strange story of how they came to be written is characteristic of Beethoven’s conception of himself as a composer. Asked by his publisher to write a variation for inclusion in a collection, he eventually produced a total of 33 variations, differing greatly in style. Beethoven wanted to demonstrate his mastery of composition by mobilising his whole range of forms of expression and his skills in the use of the instrument, merging them into a cosmos. This exhibition tells the story of their composition and introduces their initiator, the composer and publisher Anton Diabelli.

The Diabelli Variations show the composer in a way that no other work of his does: balancing on “the edge“. Beethoven regularly wrote groups of works, and in his last three piano sonatas, for instance, he gave each a thematic focus and sought a unity of content. Not so in the Diabelli Variations. Here we have a very broad spectrum of forms: from the deepest tragedy to the most exalted joy of life, from the most serious emotions and the complete inner sanctity of Variation 20 to mischievous humour – all emotions are contained and juxtaposed within the music. Sometimes the composer relies on extreme contrasts, sometimes he groups variations together. And at the end of the cyclis we find allusions to his own last piano sonata in C minor op. 111.

Room 7 (1st floor):

In *Showcase 1* is the most important and valuable exhibit: the 81 page original handwritten manuscript of the complete composition. This manuscript, which until now has been in inaccessible private ownership has been acquired for the Beethoven House Collection with the support of numerous public and private backers, and thus saved for the general public. This is indeed the very first time that this manuscript has been exhibited. It will also be made accessible on the internet and will be available for purchase in a facsimile edition. The page will be turned every four days, so that it will be possible within the duration of the exhibition to see the whole of this fascinating manuscript. The direct comparison with the first printed edition of the work shows clearly how much the study of the original manuscript can teach us. Interesting information about Beethoven’s struggle to decide on the final printed version of the

work is otherwise lost, as inevitably as is the flow of his handwriting which provides the performer with a variety of instructions.

Showcase 2: Just how quickly the work achieved international recognition is shown by the printing of Anton Diabelli's waltz theme – “being the subject of Beethovens' thirty-three variations op. 120” – in the English music journal “The Harmonicon” soon after the work first appeared in June 1823. Beethoven later ironically referred to the simple original theme as a “Schusterfleck” – a triviality (see the letter in Showcase 3), but in fact it was that simple structure which gave him such great scope for his diversified elaboration of the theme. One contemporary reviewer likened the theme to a mounted canvas, upon which the composer was free to “paint” whatever he wished. In the letter on display, written in January or February 1823, Beethoven announced to the publisher that he would be dedicating himself to the completion of the variations after having left them unfinished for two and a half years while he concentrated on projects such as the *Missa solemnis* and the last three piano sonatas. In June he asked Diabelli for one more proof copy of the first edition, and copies which he could give to friends – “all eight on good quality paper”. The first edition is dedicated to Antonie Brentano, to whom the composer had been under obligation since 1809. The etching of her on the wall was copied from a painting by Joseph Karl Stieler, who also painted the famous portrait of Beethoven (on display in Room 8, where impressive portraits of the Brentano family also hang).

Showcase 3: A year after the appearance of Beethoven's variations as a separate work, the Viennese newspaper “Wiener Zeitung” of 9th June 1824 announced in a conspicuously long advertisement the publication of an anthology “Vaterländischer Künstlerverein” or “Patriotic Artists' Association” with Beethoven's variations making up the first volume and 50 additional variations on the same theme written by “patriotic” composers, virtuosos and “well respected dilletantes” (meaning aristocrats) in a second volume. It was Diabelli's intention to create the impression of a collaboration for the purpose of which all the country's artists had united within the framework of the “association”, with the intention of serving a higher national purpose through the advancement of music. The enterprising publisher took advantage of the prevailing patriotic mood of the time, appealed to buyer's nationalist awareness and made clever use of terminology in order to promote sales. After all it was the first work brought out by the “new” publishing house “Diabelli & Compagnie”, after Anton Spina had taken over Pietro Cappi's share (when Beethoven's first edition was published the company was still known as “Cappi & Diabelli”). Piano variations were “en vogue” anyway, and it was common practice to commission virtuoso pianists to produce compositions based on popular opera melodies to satisfy the wider audience's enthusiasm for piano music. Anthologies containing works by different composers were considered best-sellers. On display next to the first volume is an

extremely rare copy of the second volume, which has been kindly lent to us by the Anna Amalia Library in Weimar. The alphabetically arranged collection of pieces shows that Diabelli had cleverly chosen a representative cross-section of Austrian composers. In addition to well-known composers such as Johann Baptist Schenk, Johann Nepomuk Hummel, Mozart's youngest son Franz Xaver Wolfgang Mozart and the cathedral director of music Johann Baptist Gänsbacher there are pieces by the 11 year old "wunderkind" Franz Liszt, the then little-known Franz Schubert and Wenzel Johann Tomaschek from Prague. Other important piano virtuosos were Friedrich Kalkbrenner (who at the end of 1823 was on a concert tour at Vienna and was thus the last contributor) and Ignaz Moscheles, but also leading music educationalists such as Carl Czerny and Joseph Abbé Gelinek and theoreticians such as Simon Sechter and Emanuel Alois Förster were involved. String instruments were represented by the violin virtuoso Joseph Mayseder and Franz Weiss, the violist of the Schuppanzigh Quartet, with whom Beethoven had a close relationship. Another group comprised of the aristocrats who cultivated and practised music, among them Beethoven's pupil Archduke Rudolph and Earl Moriz von Dietrichstein, the founder of the music collection of the Austrian National Library. A selection of portraits hangs on the wall. Diabelli gave all the composers involved his waltz theme as it is exhibited here and invited them to add their variations. Beethoven's lack of enthusiasm for this anthology is evident from his letter on display here, in which he writes to Diabelli: "Ihr habt ja ein ganzes Heer Komp.[onisten], die es weit besser können als ich, gebt jedem einen Takt, welch wundervolles werk ist da zu nicht zu erwarten? – Es Lebe dieser euer Österr. verein, welcher SchusterFleck – Meisterl.[ich] zu behandeln weiß –" (You have indeed a whole army of composers, who can do it far better than I, give one bar to each and what wonderful piece of music may be expected? Long live this, your Austrian Association, which can so expertly handle [your] 'Schusterfleck').

The next two showcases tell of the origins of the work. The earliest sketches for the variations are to be found in the so-called "Wittgenstein Sketchbook" (*Showcase 4*). It is a matter for conjecture why this book has come to be named after the family which owned it in the early twentieth century even though it had such illustrious previous owners as Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy and Ignaz Moscheles. Anyway, in the spring of 1819 Beethoven worked extensively on the project and within a few months had laid out a detailed draft, which already contained two thirds of the final variations. Then he interrupted the work and addressed himself initially to the *Missa solemnis*, which takes up the most part of the sketchbook. The mass was originally intended to be performed at the inauguration ceremony of his patron Archduke Rudolph as Archbishop of Olmütz in March 1820. However, its composition occupied him for a much longer period of time and it was not until

late 1822 that he returned to work on the “Diabelli Project“. In the letter written in November 1822 he asked the publisher to be patient and named 40 ducats as being the highest fee he would expect for all planned variations. If there turned out to be fewer, then the fee could be reduced. It is not untypical of Beethoven’s business acumen that he had in June already offered the “Variations on a waltz for pianoforte alone (there are many)“ together with a long list of other works to the Leipzig publisher Carl Friedrich Peters. The sketches for the last two variations in the 1823 Sketchbook originate from the second composition phase, when Beethoven revised the old material, rearranged it and expanded it to include 33 variations.

Lying open in *Showcase 5* is the list of corrections to some of the variations. It refers to “London“, as Beethoven has repeatedly noted in red ink. He had indeed asked his old friend and former pupil Ferdinand Ries, who lived in London, to find him an English publisher. Beethoven had the enclosed copy made as an engraver’s copy for the English edition, and he made painstaking corrections. As Beethoven noted on the hand-written cover, he intended to dedicate the English edition to “Der Gemahlin meines lieben Freundes Ries“ (the wife of my dear friend Ries). For this he wanted “no greater reward than a kiss, which I have to collect in London“. Also on the cover he asked that care be taken to “see that the alignment of the notes is correct, particularly in Var: 14“, a point he made again next to the variation itself. The copy, dated 30th April 1823, was deposited by Beethoven at the beginning of May with an agent for dispatch to London. Unfortunately, the shipment was delayed for so long that the copy did not arrive in London until July, by which time the work had already been published in Vienna. As a result, the English publisher Thomas Boosey withdrew his commitment and Ferdinand Ries was most upset about the dedication to Antonie Brentano. In the letter of September Beethoven promised him to dedicate another work to Harriet Ries, a promise which he in fact failed to keep. He laid the blame for the lack of coordination of the publishing dates of the German and English editions firmly with that “arch-scoundrel“ Anton Schindler. Beethoven’s amendments and corrections for the London engraver’s copy are marked also in his own manuscript. This is apparent when looking at the insert on which he wrote down the end of the 31st Variation, which was not contained in his original manuscript.

The second part of the exhibition concerns itself with Anton Diabelli (1781–1858) as an arranger, publisher and composer. He received his first music education from his father, who was director of music and sexton at the Collegiate Abbey of Mattsee near Salzburg. At the age of seven he became a choirboy at the Benedictine monastery of Michaelbeuren and when he was nine he was admitted into the Salzburg Kapellhaus (court music school) where he was a scholar of the cathedral organist Michael Haydn, at whose death in 1806 he in fact composed a funeral march for solo guitar. With the secularisa-

tion of the Sistercian Monastery Reitenhaslach, which he had entered in the meantime, Diabelli was forced in 1803 to give up his wish to become a monk. His profound music education and a recommendation from his teacher to his brother Joseph enabled him to earn a living giving piano and guitar lessons in Vienna. He released his compositions of sacral music through his own publishing company, which he founded in 1817. In addition to explicitly educational literature such as his “scale sonatas“ for practising scales, Diabelli wrote a large number of works and arrangements for home music ensembles as well as for two-handed or four-handed piano, many of which were exceedingly popular at the time. The next showcases are dedicated to arrangements of works by Beethoven. What Diabelli called Beethoven’s “Letzter musikalischer Gedanke“ (last musical thought) was published in the series “Vienna’s favourite modern pieces, for piano alone or with four hands“ (*Showcase 6*). Six months before his death Beethoven had actually promised the publisher a quintet, but he was not able to finish it. The auction journal shows that Diabelli’s partner Spina bought “Bruchstücke eines Violinquintetts“ (fragments of a violin quintet) out of Beethoven’s estate, of which only this drafted score still exists. Diabelli transformed the fragments into a piano piece with 26 bars.

Showcase 7: A further example of Diabelli’s talents as an arranger is provided by his adaptation of Beethoven’s “Grande Sonate pathétique“ op. 13 for piano quartet. The piano part is missing, this was played from the original score. Before Diabelli founded his own publishing company he had worked as a proof-reader for the Vienna music publisher Sigmund Anton Steiner. Beethoven’s long relationship with Steiner began with the piano sonata in E minor op. 90, which Beethoven gave him in 1814 as compensation for forgoing a debt. On the printer’s score Beethoven dispensed with writing out the notes when passages were repeated, writing instead just “sim[i]ll[e]“ (same) oder “come sopra“ (as above). The wavy line indicates that the notes are to be repeated from the parallel passage. Anton Diabelli copied in the melody part as an aid to orientation and to make it easier for the engraver, who had to transcribe the music onto the printing plates. In the note to Steiner Beethoven asked the publisher for his manuscript, which he needed in order to compare it with the galley proof, on which “our First Imperial Lieutenant-General Diabelli has found several mistakes“. Beethoven held Diabelli’s work in very high regard. The jocular appellations “Diabolus“ or Lieutenant-General (“g-l“ - for Steiner) and “Generalissimus“ (“g—s“ for himself) were a normal, not exactly dainty part of the correspondence of two business partners who were also good friends. The concluding wish “May the Devil take you g.-l. God protect you“ also indicates how intimate their relationship was. Four years later Beethoven wrote for Steiner a canon (WoO 173) based on that very text.

The beautiful copy of the “Canon of the first day of 1815 written in the house of Baron von Pasqualati and dedicated to him by Lud. van Beethoven” (this was Diabelli’s title) is written entirely in Anton Diabelli’s meticulous handwriting and can be sung at sight. Beethoven was well acquainted with the baron and lived on and off in an apartment in his house in the Mölkerbastei.

As an employee of Steiner’s Diabelli produced the very legible engraver’s copy for the first printed edition of Beethoven’s 7th Symphony. The composer checked the copy through, but made only one correction, although his notes on the cover leave no doubt about the fact that he had indeed read it. Nevertheless, the first printed edition contained so many mistakes that Beethoven made bitter complaints (“A work of mine has never before been printed so inaccurately and full of mistakes”) and demanded belated corrections in the printed copies, as well as a register of mistakes.

The last three piano sonatas were first published by Schlesinger in Berlin and Paris. Furious about the number of mistakes in the piano sonata in C minor op. 111, Beethoven asked Diabelli to produce a corrected second print. In late May / early June 1823 he advised the publisher to use the newly published Paris edition as model, rather than the re-print of the Vienna publisher Sauer & Leidesdorf. But the corrected rival print – of which Beethoven immediately requested four copies – would serve right for both publishing houses.

Anton Diabelli wrote down on a single sheet the beginnings of the movements of Beethoven’s oboe concert, which has unfortunately been lost. The Vienna autograph collector Aloys Fuchs added comments in red ink.

From Beethoven’s estate Anton Spina also purchased fragments of a piano composition, now known as “Die Wut über den verlorenen Groschen” (the anger of the lost penny). This title is attributed to Diabelli, who finished the caprice and published it in 1828. The title is indeed written on Beethoven’s manuscript and so Diabelli’s footnote is not entirely unfounded, although the handwriting is not Beethoven’s.

Room 12 (on the Ground Floor at the end of the tour)

Showcase 1: An addendum was produced for the first edition of the piano trio in E flat major WoO 38 published posthumously by Dunst, in which Anton Diabelli, Carl Czerny, Ferdinand Ries and Franz Gerhard Wegeler – all closely connected in one way or another with Beethoven – confirmed the authenticity of the original manuscript of the work, which was in the possession of Anton Schindler. This again reflects on the magnitude of Diabelli’s reputation.

In his capacity as publisher Diabelli felt committed to supporting the contemporary music scene. This orientated itself in particular towards opera and was influenced by the resounding success of Rossini and others, whose enormous popularity could even be increased by the publication of whole series of different arrangements. Such anthologies as “Rossini’s Operas: A Repertory for

Young People“ – subtitled: “Pleasant melodies for the pianoforte with the lyrics omitted, in the easiest of styles and with consideration for those who cannot yet play a complete octave“ obviously owe their publication to his activities as a music teacher. Diabelli also published Beethoven’s variations on popular opera themes WoO 69, 70 and 72 as well as four-hand arrangements of the theatre overtures from “Egmont“ and “Coriolan“ by Carl Czerny, and a few other works and songs.

On the other hand the publishing house was to become very important for Franz Schubert, who in 1821–1823 was able to sell his first self-published works in commission to Cappi & Diabelli. Some of them were actually published by Diabelli, for instance the four-hand variations on a French song, dedicated to Beethoven. The publisher succeeded in purchasing Schubert’s estate as well as being able to enlarge his Schubert portfolio by buying from other publishers, and so, after Schubert’s death, became his main publisher.

Another of Diabelli’s trademarks was guitar music, which was very popular at that time, as is shown by numerous new compositions and arrangements. For example we have Diabelli’s arrangements of the variations by Franz Weiss. The first series of works was called “Philomele, a Collection of the most popular songs with guitar accompaniment“ and the series began with Beethoven’s Goethe song “To Mignon“. Soon afterwards the series was complemented by a “Philomele for the pianoforte“. When Diabelli retired from business in 1851 his company had published approximately 9000 pieces of music.

Showcase 2: Not only are Diabelli’s numerous arrangements worthy of note, but also his own compositions. Like Beethoven, he let himself become infected in 1814 with the spirit of patriotism and composed suitable “paintings of sound for the piano“. The Prater Celebration to commemorate the Battle of Nations near Leipzig – the most important battle of the Wars of Liberation, in which the allies inflicted upon Napoleon a decisive defeat – was painted by Johann Nepomuk Hoechle. In connection with the congress of Vienna, for the cultural supporting programme as it were, Beethoven composed his cantata of homage “The Glorious Moment“ which was rapturously received. In 1837 a luxury edition was published with individual pages of dedication for the dedicatees King Friedrich Wilhelm III of Prussia, Emperor Franz I of Austria and Czar Nikolaus I of Russia. The front cover and one of the dedications are on display on the wall. The second illustration by Hoechle, who in 1827 captured on canvas the room in which Beethoven died, shows the march of the allied monarchs into Vienna. Diabelli composed a piece for piano to celebrate Emperor Franz I’s entry into Paris in April 1814. Friedrich Treitschke composed for the same occasion his patriotic musical “Germania“, the music for which was written by several Vienna composers. Beethoven was entrusted with the finale. On the manuscript he wrote down the name of the soloist “Basso Weinmüller“ – Carl Friedrich Weinmüller, who sang the part of Rocco in the Fiedelio production of the same year.

Considering his background it is hardly surprising that Diabelli had a fondness for the composition of church music. He published some of these compositions himself from 1817 onwards in his first publishing house, for instance the challenging vocal mass for two tenors and two basses. One of few compositions which is today still widely known and performed intermittently is his pastoral mass op. 147. The lithography by Joseph Kriehuber (on the wall) shows Diabelli with his 5th pastoral mass of 1841 and a booklet of the “Young Persons’ Musical Guide for Pianoforte”.

Showcase 3 contains the first edition of Beethoven’s song “Andenken“ WoO 136, based on a poem by Friedrich von Matthisson. In 1820 Diabelli published an arrangement for guitar accompaniment and two years later himself composed a song to a poem by Matthisson : “Liebe und Tonspiel“ (love and a play of sounds). On the front cover he refers back to the better known poem which had been set to music by Beethoven. The song “Die Bethende“ (the praying woman) for four male voices and piano is yet another Matthisson poem set to music. Diabelli dedicated the work to Princess Josepha of Liechtenstein, as had Beethoven 15 years previously his Sonata quasi una fantasia in E flat major op. 27 no.1, a sister work of the Moonlight Sonata. Despite their being easy on the ear and technically not too demanding, Diabelli’s more than 200 compositions are definitely underrepresented in today’s music world. Indeed they mirror exactly the musical tastes of that time and characterise him as a composer representative of the Biedermeier era and a person who was respected by such a man as Beethoven.

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page from the original manuscript



BEETHOVEN-HAUS BONN

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We are delighted to have succeeded in acquiring the original manuscript of the Diabelli Variations op. 120.

Since the beginning of 2007 the Beethoven House has been striving towards the purchase of this important manuscript. Now, at the end of 2009, we have been able to complete the biggest new acquisition in the 120 year history of the Beethoven House.

We wish to thank all public institutions, foundations, banks and companies for their generous support, the artists for their numerous benefit concerts and events, and the more than 3,000 friends of Beethoven throughout the world for their donations small and large and for their sponsorship of notes and bars. Without all those contributions it would not have been possible to add to our collection the handwritten original score of one of the most important works in the history of music.

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Thank you very much!