

BEETHOVEN SONATAS Vol.5
COSTANTINO MASTROPRIMIANO

01. Rondo in C Major WoO 48: Allegretto	02:38
02. Rondo in A Major, WoO 49: Allegretto	02:56
03. Sonatina for Piano In F Major, WoO 50: Allegretto	02:10
04. Piano Sonata in C Major, WoO 51: I. Allegro	05:16
05. Piano Sonata in C Major, WoO 51: II. Adagio (F Major)	01:31
06. 9 Variations on a March by Dressler in C minor, WoO 63	14:52
07. 6 Variations on a Swiss Song in F Major, WoO 64	03:09
08. 24 Variations on 'Venni Amore' in D Major, WoO 65	25:58

Total Time: 57:33

Recording October 2021 – Smarano Organ Academy, Concert Hall

Sound engineer **Federico Mastroprimiano**

Fortepiano tuning **Silvia Frezzato** and **Cinzia Di Mattia**

Producer, Manager, Art Direction, Post-production **Rosella Clementi**

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Why devote an entire recording to Beethoven's youthful keyboard works?

These compositions allow us to observe at close range the process through which the young Beethoven, in Bonn and under the guidance of Neefe, became acquainted with the most modern expressive instrument of his time: the fortepiano built by J.A. Stein. Step by step, he explored its technical and expressive possibilities. Here we encounter a young musician who, thanks to Stein's new instrument equipped with the *Prellungenmechanik*, discovers technical and expressive possibilities unknown to earlier instruments, not only in comparison with the harpsichord and clavichord, but even with earlier generations of pianos: "I also heard one of the finest keyboard players, the good Bethofen (sic), some of whose compositions were published in Speier's *Blumenlese* in 1783 (the Sonatas WoO 47), composed when he was eleven years old. He did not feel inclined to perform in public, probably because the instrument was not to his liking. It was a Späth piano, and in Bonn he is accustomed to playing only on Stein instruments. Nevertheless, I had the great pleasure of hearing him improvise, and I was even invited to give him a theme for variations. [...] His manner of playing differs greatly from that of other keyboardists: it seems as though he has opened his own path toward that perfection which he already appears to have attained."¹ The works recorded here, variations on popular and operatic themes, small rondos, and sonatinas, rarely occupy centre stage. Yet when performed on a Stein fortepiano such as the one used for this recording, they reveal something striking. Through the living dialogue between score and instrument, they show how Beethoven gradually deepened his understanding of the expressive potential and specific resources of this particular keyboard instrument. The *redende Stil*, the "speaking style" that imitates the inflections, rhetoric, and pauses of verbal language, is here constantly shaped in relation to the expressive medium at hand. In the Dressler Variations WoO 63 (1782), a rather rigid, march-like theme acquires a new expressive character through subtle shifts of accent and sharply articulated repeated notes. On the Stein instrument these gestures take on the quality of a syllabic declamation, animated by the young composer through meticulous articulation, rhythmic transformation, and an unexpectedly imaginative use of the instrument's registers. A similar spirit of experimentation emerges in the two Rondos WoO 48 and 49, whose episodic structure provides Beethoven with an ideal framework for exploring sudden changes of *affect*: playful passages give way abruptly to brief shadows in the minor mode, while light figurations contrast with more declamatory gestures. Thanks to the quick action and clarity of attack characteristic of Stein's instruments, these contrasts translate into rapid changes of atmosphere, almost like shifts of tone within a lively conversation. The more gentle and serene writing of the Sonatinas WoO 50 and 51 reveals a search for a more inward and intimate expressivity. Finally, in the Righini Variations WoO 65, the principle of articulated musical speech expands into a wide range of pianistic gestures: leaps across registers, hand-crossing passages, trills that pass from one voice to another, and brilliant figurations. These elements exploit the expressive potential of the instrument while systematically drawing on the resources of the *Prellungenmechanik*, pushing the language of Stein's fortepiano

to the limits of its possibilities. A recording devoted to these works is therefore not merely an attempt to rediscover a "minor" or "juvenile" Beethoven. Rather, it offers an invitation to enter the composer's workshop: to hear how the musical gestures are formed that, only a few years later, would unfold on a much larger scale in the great Viennese sonatas, also thanks to Beethoven's encounter with the instruments of Anton Walter. But that is another story... For this recording, a copy of a Johann Andreas Stein fortepiano (c. 1785) built by Monika May was used. Around 1783 Stein entered what Malcolm Latham has identified as the third phase of his experimentation and production, in which his instruments feature solid leather-covered hammers, double stringing, and rear bridge pins across the entire compass of the instrument.

¹ Carl Ludwig Junker (1748–1797), German composer, theorist, teacher, and theologian, in *Musikalische Korrespondenz*, vol. 47 (23 November 1791). Italian translation by Jacopo Sibilia.

C. Mastroprimiano - ph. F. Mastroprimiano



Constantino Mastroprimiano is one of the leading experts in historical piano performance internationally. After his studies in piano and chamber music with Michele Marvulli, Guido Agosti and Riccardo Brengola, devoted himself to the Forteplano (historical piano). His vast discography features compositions by Chopin, Alkan, Burgmüller, Staehle, Moscheles, Ries, Hummel, Beethoven, Kraus, and in particular the complete piano sonatas by Muzio Clementi and by Hummel for Brilliant Classics. He is currently recording all Beethoven fortepiano sonatas and all Mozart fortepiano and violin Sonatas (with David Plantier) for Aulic Classics. He is frequently invited to give concerts (Accademia Filarmonica Romana, I Concerti della Normale, Società del Quartetto di Milano, Accademia Cristofori di Firenze, Micat in Vertice, etc.) and abroad (Les Nuits de Septembre – Liège, Noites de Queluz, Mozarteum di Salzburg, Salle Cortot, Musikfestspiele Potsdam Sans Souci, Haydn Geburtshaus Rohrau, la Grange aux Pianos, Ignaz Pleyel Zentrum, PBA Charleroi, etc.). He regularly teaches masterclasses in Italy, Europe, the US and Russia (APM Saluzzo, Ecole Normale de Paris, Koninklijk Conservatorium Den Haag, Universit at – Mozarteum Salzburg, Conservatorio di Stato P. I.  ajkovskij, CSM di Malaga, Sam Houston State University – Texas, Conservatorium van Amsterdam). He teaches Historical piano in the Conservatory of music in Perugia (Italy).