

# Arthur Balsam, piano

Disc A (60:12)

## Sonata No. 60 in C major, Hob. XVI, 50 (13:32) Franz Joseph Haydn

(1732-1809)

- 1 I Allegro (6:41)
  - 2 II Adagio (5:13)
  - 3 III Allegro molto (1:37)
- Performed November 9, 1987*

## Variations on a Waltz by Diabelli, Op. 120 (46:31) Ludwig van Beethoven

(1770-1827)

- 4 Thema: Vivace (1:01)
- 5 Var. 1 - Alla Marcia maestoso (1:26)
- 6 Var. 2 - Poco allegro (0:52)
- 7 Var. 3 - Listesso tempo (0:57)
- 8 Var. 4 - Un poco più vivace (1:05)
- 9 Var. 5 - Allegro vivace (0:55)
- 10 Var. 6 - Allegro ma non troppo e serio (1:51)
- 11 Var. 7 - Un poco più allegro (1:07)
- 12 Var. 8 - Poco vivace (1:33)
- 13 Var. 9 - Allegro pesante e risoluto (2:02)
- 14 Var. 10 - Presto (0:36)
- 15 Var. 11 - Allegretto (1:06)
- 16 Var. 12 - Un poco più moto (1:03)

- 17 Var. 13 - Vivace (1:03)
- 18 Var. 14 - Grave e maestoso (1:35)
- 19 Var. 15 - Presto scherzando (0:36)
- 20 Var. 16 - Allegro (1:10)
- 21 Var. 17 - Allegro (1:09)
- 22 Var. 18 - Poco moderato (1:26)
- 23 Var. 19 - Presto (0:57)
- 24 Var. 20 - Andante (1:40)
- 25 Var. 21 - Allegro con brio-Meno allegro (1:25)
- 26 Var. 22 - Allegro molto (0:44)  
(alla "Notte e giorno faticar" di Mozart)
- 27 Var. 23 - Allegro assai (0:55)
- 28 Var. 24 - Fughetta: Andante (1:50)
- 29 Var. 25 - Allegro (0:45)
- 30 Var. 26 - [Piacevole] (0:38)
- 31 Var. 28 - Allegro (0:36)
- 32 Var. 29 - Adagio ma non troppo (1:13)
- 33 Var. 30 - Andante, sempre cantabile (2:12)
- 34 Var. 31 - Largo, molto espressivo (3:27)
- 35 Var. 32 - Fuga: Allegro - Poco adagio (3:29)
- 36 Var. 33 - Tempo di Menuetto moderato  
(ma non tirarsi dietro) (3:50)

*Performed November 9, 1987*

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| <p>1 <b>Intermezzo in B minor, Op. 119, No. 1 (3:27)</b><br/><i>Performed November 7, 1986</i></p> <p>2 <b>Intermezzo in A major, Op. 118, No. 2 (5:38)</b><br/><i>Performed November 9, 1987</i></p> <p>3 <b>Capriccio in C-sharp minor, Op. 76, No. 5 (3:39)</b><br/><i>Performed November 7, 1986</i></p> <p>4 <b>Lied ohne Worte in E-flat major, Op. 67, No. 1 (2:57)</b><br/><i>Performed November 7, 1986</i></p> <p>5 <b>Mazurka in B major, Op. 63, No. 1 (2:19)</b></p> <p>6 <b>Mazurka in F minor, Op. 63, No. 2 (1:43)</b></p> <p>7 <b>Mazurka in C-sharp minor, Op. 63, No. 3 (2:12)</b></p> <p>8 <b>Nocturne in F-sharp minor, Op. 48, No. 2 (7:52)</b></p> <p>9 <b>Polonaise in E-flat minor, Op. 76, No. 2 (7:45)</b></p> <p>10 <b>Mazurka in A minor, Op. 17, No. 4 (4:20)</b></p> <p>11 <b>Variations brillantes, Op. 12 (8:19)</b><br/><i>Performed February 3, 1982</i></p> | <p><b>Johannes Brahms</b><br/>(1833-1897)</p><br><p><b>Felix Mendelssohn</b><br/>(1809-1847)</p><br><p><b>Fryderyk Chopin</b><br/>(1810-1849)</p> |
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The present volume of Bridge's Artur Balsam series presents the listener with 'in concert' performances from the latter portion of Balsam's career. Recorded in the Manhattan School of Music's acoustically superb Borden Auditorium, the early digital recordings (from 1986 and 1987) preserve Balsam's luminous touch and huge tonal palette in some of the best recorded sound we have available of this well documented artist. The three concerts from which the present recording was taken were 'faculty' recitals given by Balsam in 1982, 1986 and 1987 and as such represent not only concerts, but pedagogical presentations for eager students, fellow faculty members and an enthusiastic public. Dan Berlinghoff, a Balsam student, writes of Balsam's teaching: "What Balsam did singularly well was to demonstrate. He did not require that his students play like him or adopt his interpretations, but a 'picture' being worth a thousand words, his observation of every nuance in the score, the singing quality of his tone, and his un-self-referential musicianship were powerfully persuasive." The performances on these discs, though occasionally

showing blemishes associated with live concerts, are indeed powerfully persuasive, reflecting a lifetime of music-making.

The first disc of this set consists of two performances from Balsam's November 9, 1987 recital. Though he would make several more chamber music appearances at MSM, this was to be the 81 year old pianist's final solo recital at the school. Balsam's reading of Haydn's *Sonata No. 60* in C major, Hob. XVI, 50, encapsulates many of the qualities that made the artist such a potent interpreter of the classical composers: his projection of a singing line (the result of his innate sense of rubato, which gave a sense of improvisatory freedom without destroying the underlying symmetry of the composer's formal design); his seemingly infinite variety of articulation, shading and dynamics; and his wit and love for this repertoire, which he specialized in for the entire length of his musical career. Of the many details in this performance, one marvels at Balsam's heavenly rendering of the final variant of the main tune before the coda of the first movement (5:10), his

uncanny ability to inflect the slow movement with rich nuance, and his subtle pedaling throughout.

Beethoven's *Variations on a Waltz by Diabelli*, Op. 120, presents a formidable challenge to many pianists who are at the peak of their careers, let alone an artist in the waning years of professional life. That Balsam undertook this challenge speaks to his fascination with this monumental score and the mercurial musical world it inhabits. Balsam's interpretation ranges broadly, and just as his opening 'Waltz' incorporates suggestions of playfulness, lyrical expansiveness and aggressive grandeur, all of these characteristics and many more are artfully explored in this valedictory performance. In this reading, for reasons unknown, Balsam omits the 27th variation. But that decision, whether an act of omission or commission, hardly gets in the way of a reading rich in detail and emotional depth.

Clara Schumann called Brahms's B minor *Intermezzo*, Op. 119, No. 1 "grey, pearl-veiled and very precious." The veiled

quality of the Intermezzi is notoriously difficult to capture in live performance, and Balsam's readings of Op. 119, No. 1 and the soulful *Intermezzo*, Op. 118, No. 2, are inspired models of keyboard voicing and the introspection needed to give these passionate autumnal utterances their due. The C-sharp minor *Capriccio* is part of a set of eight pieces that Brahms finished in 1878, during the period that he was composing his *Violin Concerto* and his *Symphony No. 2*. The piece begins in mid-flight and in this performance Balsam ably projects the work's restless turmoil. Balsam performed Mendelssohn's lovely *Song without Words* Op. 67, No. 1 as an encore to his 1986 recital. Here, he perfectly captures the simple, yet dreamlike quality of Mendelssohn's heartfelt little gem.

Artur Balsam was born in Warsaw, Poland on February 8, 1906. Though he played Chopin throughout his career, Balsam rarely, if ever, recorded Chopin's music for commercial release. The only Chopin that I am aware of Balsam recording is a 78 RPM version of the *Cello Sonata*, Op. 65 on RCA, with cellist Edmund Kurtz. These 1982 concert performances,

then, present a rare opportunity for us to hear a selection of Balsam readings of his great countryman's music. From the intimacy of the A minor *Mazurka*, to the florid flamboyance of his *Variations brillantes*, Balsam's idiomatic interpretations of some of his favorite Chopin make us wish that he had recorded more. Writing of a Balsam Rachmaninoff performance, critic Harris Goldsmith called Balsam "a paragon—a marvel of relaxed professionalism; he was, as many of his colleagues and disciples attest, an instrumentalist of awesome facility and accomplishment....hearing his masterly phrasing and luminous singing tone is sufficient aural testimony to place Balsam in the highest artistic echelon."

—David Starobin, May, 2007

**Artur Balsam** (b. February 8, 1906, Warsaw) studied at the Łódź Conservatory—making his debut in that city in 1918—and the Berlin Hochschule; in 1930 he won the Mendelssohn Prize. In 1938 he became Nathan Milstein's duo partner, following the violinist to America two years later. He played piano

continuo for Adolph Busch's Chamber Players and toured with Busch and Rudolf Serkin as the violinist's accompanist. In due course he became recognized as a soloist, although he continued to tour and record as Milstein's duo partner for more than twenty years. Among other string players that he worked with were Zino Francescatti, Joseph Fuchs, Yehudi Menuhin, Erica Morini, Zara Nelsova, Oscar Shumsky, Joseph Szigeti and the Budapest String Quartet. He joined the faculty of the Manhattan School of Music in 1965, where he was both an instructor in piano and chamber music. Although he had associations with several other schools, including Boston University and Eastman School of Music, he settled into the position at Manhattan, teaching until 1992. Artur Balsam made his last public appearance playing chamber music by Haydn at Carnegie Recital Hall, a week after his 87th birthday. He died on September 1, 1994.



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Artur Balsam photographs courtesy of the Artur Balsam Foundation

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All performances on this recording were recorded in concert at the Manhattan School of Music, Borden Auditorium, 1982, 1986, & 1987.

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