



33 Variations

By Moisés Kaufman
Directed by Nick Bowling

STUDY GUIDE

Prepared by
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— STUDY GUIDE —

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The Playwright: Moisés Kaufman

“The important thing in an archeological dig is not only the objects that are found, but looking at the dig itself, and seeing where every shovel came onto the earth. All of the marks are part of the thing that was rescued.”

— Moisés Kaufman quoted on National Public Radio



Moisés Kaufman is a Tony and Emmy award-nominated director and playwright. He is perhaps best known for the plays *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde* and *The Laramie Project*, which are among the most performed plays in America over the last decade.

Gross Indecency ran more than 600 performances in New York starting in 1997. Kaufman also directed it in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Toronto and London’s West End, receiving the Lucille Lortel Award for Best Play, Outer Critics Circle Award for Best Off-Broadway Play and Los Angeles’ Garland Award for Best Play, among other honors.

The Laramie Project—a play developed by Kaufman and his company Tectonic Theater Project from hundreds of interviews exploring reaction to the 1998 murder of gay student Matthew Shepard in Laramie, Wyoming— opened at The Denver Theater Center in February 2000 and moved to New York in May 2000. TIME Magazine called the play “one of the 10 best plays of 2000” and it was nominated for the Drama Desk Award for Unique Theatrical Experience. In November 2000, the play was performed in Laramie.

Kaufman also directed the film adaptation of *The Laramie Project* for HBO. It received multiple honors, including two Emmy Award nominations, for Best Director and Best Writer. Kaufman’s other credits include directing *The Nightingale* (La Jolla Playhouse) and *The Common Pursuit* (Roundabout Theatre Company). He also directed his adaptation of Tennessee Williams’ screenplay *One Arm* and the opera *El Gato con Botas* (Puss in Boots). In 2004 Kaufman directed the Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award winning play *I Am My Own Wife*, earning him an Obie Award for his direction as well as Tony, Drama Desk, Outer Critics Circle and Lucille Lortel nominations.

He was nominated for a Drama Desk Award for directing *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* on Broadway in 2011. Other recent credits include *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* (Mark Taper Forum); *Macbeth* (Public Theater); *This Is How It Goes* (Donmar Warehouse); *One Arm* (Steppenwolf Theatre); *Master Class* (Berkeley Repertory); and *Lady Windermere’s Fan* (Williamstown Theater Festival). He is the Artistic Director of Tectonic Theater Project and a Guggenheim Fellow in Playwriting.

Tectonic Theater Project

Tectonic Theater Project was founded in 1991 by Moisés Kaufman and Jeffrey LaHoste, is an award-winning company whose plays have been performed around the world.

“Tectonic” refers to the art and science of structure and was chosen to emphasize the company’s interest in construction—how things are made, and how they might be made differently. Tectonic creates its work collaboratively, with company members often operating outside their area of specialization over a long workshop process. For example, actors and designers might become writers and dramaturgs, directors become designers and actors. These techniques have created some of the most unique and innovative works on the American stage. For more information, visit tectonictheaterproject.org.

The Play: Production History

Initially developed by Moisés Kaufman and Tectonic Theater Project, *33 Variations* premiered at Washington, D.C.’s Arena Stage in 2007 and was performed at La Jolla Playhouse in 2008. The play premiered on Broadway in 2009, starring Jane Fonda in her first stage role in 46 years. The Broadway production was nominated for five Tony Awards, including Best Play, and received the award for Best Scenic Design. A 2010 production at Center Theater Group’s Ahmanson Theatre also starred Fonda. TimeLine’s production is the play’s Chicago premiere.

The Play: A Note on Structure

The play is written in 33 scenes that Kaufman calls “variations.” Characteristically for Kaufman and Tectonic, the play experiments with theatrical forms from scene to scene. Action shifts from past to present, and repetitions, music, singing and even a fugue are built into the play’s structure. Scenes do not correlate with Beethoven’s Variations; rather, Kaufman uses them as a catalyst to think about form and explore theatrical themes.

The Interview: Andrew Hansen

“I was a kid who liked recording things and liked sound effects records and making homemade radio dramas with sound effects. I’ve been a sound geek for a long time.” — Andrew Hansen

During rehearsals for *33 Variations*, TimeLine Artistic Director PJ Powers (PJP) talked with TimeLine Associate Artist and Sound Designer Andrew Hansen (AH) about his work at TimeLine, which has spanned 13 years and 24 productions—nearly half of TimeLine’s shows—and his love for Beethoven.

(PJP) I’ve been working with you since 1999 and I just realized that I actually have no idea (or at least no recollection) what your musical background or training was prior to that time. Can you answer this mystery?

(AH) I’m semi-formally trained. I’ve had a few years of piano lessons. I took some music theory and music skills classes in college, but abandoned it because the pace of learning was very slow. I was impatient and figured I’d learn more on my own.

Since then I’ve done a lot of reading on composition, harmony, counterpoint, orchestration, and the like. I’m still reading about it. I also do score analysis, which is examining scores by established composers to see how they do what they do. And I listen to a wide range of styles.

There are lots of gaps in my knowledge, but the main thing I lack is expert feedback on my own work—someone to point out ways I can improve. Every year I think about going back to school to get formal one-on-one instruction, but I have yet to do it.

(PJP) How did you get started doing sound design and music composition for theatre?

(AH) I was a film major in college and wrote scores for student films. At one point, a friend of mine asked me to write a theme for a one-act play he’d written, which I did.

Fast forward many years and that same friend, Christopher Tiffany, asked me to come to Chicago to write the music for an adaptation of Machiavelli’s *The Mandrake* that he’d written, which I did. It was produced by Greasy Joan & Co. in 1999 and was my first show in Chicago. I’ve been doing it ever since. As far as sound design goes, I was a kid who liked recording things and liked sound effects records and making homemade radio dramas with sound effects. I was also very, very interested in how the sounds were made for films and it took off from there. I’ve been a sound geek for a long time.

(PJP) *33 Variations* marks your 13th TimeLine production working with director Nick Bowling, dating all the way back to *Gaslight*, which was our first show in our home on Wellington Avenue. Tell me about that initial collaboration and how it's evolved over 13 years and 13 productions.

(AH) I was referred to Nick by a mutual friend, Kathy Van Zwoll, who was the music director for *The Mandrake*. From the beginning, it felt very much like we were on the same page.

My favorite thing about working with Nick is that he is constantly trying new things—new kinds of shows, new approaches to design. I get bored when a director wants me to give them the same design over and over again. Nick allows me to take a different approach with each show.

We also bicker like a married couple, but it's never personal—it's always about the design and the show.

Nick is innately musical, which is always a pleasure to work with. I remember on *Streeterville* he was convinced that “My Country Tis of Thee” could be sung as a round, and I was not. He was right.

(PJP) What have been some of your favorite TimeLine shows and why?

(AH) *The Crucible* is my favorite script we've done. *Not About Nightingales* is the production that made me decide to stick with doing theater. *This Happy Breed* is probably my sentimental favorite. And I loved *Pravda*—always a fan of black comedy and satire. *Halcyon Days* was the first show where I started to get bold about what I brought to the process. And I think *Not Enough Air* is the best work I've done at TimeLine.

(PJP) Now you get to work on a show about Beethoven—a composer I've heard you mention countless times over the years. Why has he been an inspiration to you? And has he had any particular influence on any other shows you've worked on?

(AH) I am obsessive—I get deeply interested in something and consume everything about it that I can get my hands on. Beethoven was my first obsession.

When the kids on my block were listening to Kiss and *Saturday Night Fever*, I asked my parents to buy me the *Time/Life* boxed set of Beethoven. It was my first classical music collection, and the first time I understood that it's ok to like things because you like them, not because other people tell you to like them. I was 7 years old. That he was first, I think, is what makes him a significant influence.

He is not my favorite. He is not the composer whose works I listen to most. But he is consistently the guy I go to for comfort. Angry? Beethoven's 9th, 2nd movement. Sad? 5th Piano Concerto, 2nd movement.

A few years back I was on the last day of a five day hike to Machu Picchu. I was tired of walking and ready to quit. So I “played” the entire 5th Symphony in my head from memory and everything was right again.

Hauptmann was the first Beethoven filled show at TimeLine, and your performance was a big part of it. The script suggested Fred Astaire songs, which we used, but I’ve found Europeans, particularly from Germanic countries, to be deeply rooted in classical music, so I felt strongly the character needed to be rooted in Beethoven. I turned the 2nd movement of the 7th symphony into the theme of the play and wrote little variations on it. The full orchestral version underscored your final march to execution. But the coup de grace of that production was setting your End of Act One monologue about the abduction of the Lindbergh baby against the Moonlight Sonata. It was as if those words and that music were meant to live with each other. I don’t think I’ve done anything more artistically satisfying than bringing those pieces together. And you floated over it beautifully.

(PJP) Your work with us (and elsewhere) shifts from show-to-show depending on the needs of the play and the overall design aesthetic. Can you explain the differences between sound design and original composition?

(AH) If the characters can hear it, it’s sound. If only the audience can hear it, it’s music. If you have a scene in a house where a radio is playing music, the characters can hear it so it’s sound design. If at the end of the scene the music on the radio gets louder and plays on the theater sound system instead of the radio, it becomes something the audience hears in a way the characters don’t. It becomes “music.” An abstract tone that adds tension to a scene is music, even though it may seem like “sound design.” The characters can’t hear it and it provides emotional information directly to the audience. The job of sound design also covers speaker selection and placement, volume levels, and other technical elements.

Original composition is where it gets harder for an audience to track. Original” means it is unique to the production, having been written specifically by the person credited for writing it. This is easy to understand but hard to identify because many productions intermingle original music with pre-existing music. If the pre-existing music is obscure, an audience can’t make the distinction between what is original and what is pre-existing. Personally, I do not like to blend the two. If the credit in the program says “Original Music by,” then I want every piece of music the audience hears to have been written by me. In the case of *Hauptman*, I put a line in my bio crediting the Beethoven symphony, and assumed that nobody would mistake the Moonlight Sonata as “original.”

(PJP) So for *33 Variations*, the bulk of the music composition has been provided by Mr. Beethoven, and your work will focus on all of the non-Diabelli-Variation sounds that the audience hears. But can you talk about how you approach the shows in which you are responsible for a full musical composition. Where do you start and how does it evolve?

(AH) I like “Mr. Beethoven.” Everyone should call him that from now on. Structure is the most important thing to me, more than specific themes or styles. In classical music, a piece is often structured with a fast section followed by a slow section, or a major key followed by a minor key. The contrast gives the work as a whole a sense of movement.

Structural decisions for a theater score are essential for the same reason. If you start with something fast, loud, and aggressive, at some point in the show you need to have something that balances it. Where and when you change is dictated by the emotional changes in the script. If everything has the same drive and intensity, the composer isn’t telling the story and the music is nothing more than noise between scenes to cover shifts.

I almost always have an A theme and a B theme that contrast each other, or sometimes an A style and a B style. They exist as guiding ideas until I start writing, at which point the structural needs of the play take priority. Also, I find it easier to write music once I’ve seen the play on its feet. I have tried repeatedly to write a complete score before rehearsals begin, but it is difficult because I rely on details about staging, choices actors make, and logistics like how much furniture needs to be moved between scenes.

(PJP) The technology of sound design and composition has changed dramatically since you started working with us. The days of needing to go home, re-record, burn a new CD (or egads, make a new cassette tape) and return to the theatre the following day with a revision are happily long gone. Now, in rehearsal with a few clicks on your laptop you can completely overhaul a cue and we can hear it anew moments later booming through the theatre’s speakers. How do you keep up with technology and how has it impacted your work?

(AH) I would say it has impacted the stage managers more than it has impacted me. CD playback is more limited and complicated than computer playback, but the basic work of writing music and building sounds remains the same for me. For stage managers, however, computers reduced a series of gymnastic moves to a single action. They used to have to push go on one CD player while simultaneously pushing pause on another, and/or adjusting a level, and/or starting a light cue. Now they hit the space bar. That said, we still find ways to make it complicated.

(PJP) Just a few weeks after we open *33 Variations*, you’ll be back at our home on Wellington Avenue for our production of *Wasteland*, directed by

TimeLine Associate Artist William Brown. Like your long-time collaboration with Nick, you and Bill have worked together on many, many shows and over a similarly long period of time. Can you talk about that partnership and also give a preview of what to expect with *Wasteland*?

(AH) *Not About Nightingales* was my first show with Bill, and we hit it off immediately. I've done nearly every one of his plays since. My favorite thing about working with Bill is that if I give him a piece of music, he will use every second of it, and I mean USE it. He structures staging around it. The opening scene in *To Master the Art* was staged entirely to the demo music I played at first rehearsal. If you see a play and the music fades out before the scene starts, that's the opposite of what I'm talking about. A piece of music should end coherently. If it doesn't, it's just filler and it's not telling story. I will almost always trim the music down to the right length to avoid a fade. But Bill often wants more. Bill was once staging a sequence to a piece of music I wrote and an actor commented that the music was too long. Bill responded, "It's not about making the music shorter, it's about making the play longer." Bill likes people who bring ideas with them and I am not shy about ideas. The big idea for *Wasteland* is "No music. Just sound." That's what I'm saying now. We'll see what I think when I see it on its feet.

The Historical Context

The era in which Beethoven lived was a tempestuous one. Revolutions in America, France and later Spain sparked fears of revolution amongst the nobility in countries across Europe. The age gave us the Romantic poets Lord Byron, John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelly, and authors Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Victor Hugo and Jane Austen. Georg Wilhelm Frederich Hegel was writing major works of philosophy. Francisco Goya, John Constable and Joseph Mallord William Turner were all producing new paintings.

At one point, Beethoven was caught by the political upheaval and lost his post in Bonn. He remained in Vienna because French troops had occupied Bonn. Against this backdrop of war and political upheaval, Beethoven often ignored the preferences of his teachers in favor of his own stylistic innovations. Just as literature and art were moving into Romanticism, music was moving from Classical to Romantic. Beethoven is a transitional figure who seems to embody the volatile nature of the age.

Timeline of Beethoven's Life and Times

1733

Beethoven's grandfather Ludwig van Beethoven (1712-1773) is appointed to the Bonn electoral choir, first a bass, then in 1761 as the court musical director (Kapellmeister).

1756

Beethoven's father Johann (c. 1740-1792) helps out in the court choir. From 1764 he holds a post as tenor.

December 17, 1770

Ludwig van Beethoven is baptized. He likely was born on December 16.

March 26, 1778

Beethoven undertakes his earliest known public performance. Billed as a child prodigy, he plays "various piano concertos and trios" in Cologne.

1782

Beethoven's first publication is released: *Nine Variations on a March* by Dressler.

1783

Beethoven dedicates three Piano Sonatas to his patron, the Elector of Cologne and Münster, Maximilian Friedrich.

1784

Beethoven is appointed deputy court organist.

1786

Between January and April, Beethoven travels to Vienna, intending to study with Mozart. While a meeting with Mozart may have been arranged, it is not clear whether or not Beethoven is able to study with Mozart.

Caption (at right): Mozart in a painting by Johann Nepomuk della Croce



July 17, 1787

Beethoven's mother dies.

1789

Beethoven becomes a member of the Bonn court chapel as violist.

February 20, 1790

Emperor Joseph II (a brother of the Bonn Elector Maximilian Franz) dies. Beethoven composes a cantata on his death and another cantata for the coronation of Leopold II. Joseph Haydn visits Bonn and Beethoven is introduced to him.

1792

Beethoven goes to Vienna to study with Haydn, and later with Johann Baptist Schenk, Johann Albrechtsberger and Antonio Salieri.

1794

French troops occupy the Rhineland. The Electorate in Cologne is dissolved and the Elector flees. Beethoven thus loses his post in Bonn; what was to have been a study trip to Vienna now becomes a permanent move.

March 29, 1795

Beethoven undertakes his first public performance in Vienna. He plays a piano concerto in the Hofburg Theatre in a concert organized by Haydn.

1796

Beethoven performs a concert tour through Prague, Dresden, Leipzig and Berlin.

1798

Beethoven composes Piano Sonata op. 13 "Pathétique."

1799

In a coup d'état, Napoléon Bonaparte becomes first consul of France.

Caption (at right): Napoléon Bonaparte in a painting by Jacques-Louis David.

April 2, 1800

Beethoven holds the first concert for his own benefit in Vienna with the première of the First Symphony.

1801

Beethoven describes the first symptoms of his deafness in letters to friends.

1802

Beethoven writes the "Heiligenstadt Testament," a letter to his brothers, reflecting on his increasing deafness.

1803

Beethoven's Second Symphony, Third Piano Concerto and the Oratorio Christus on the Mount of Olives premiere on April 5 at the Academy in the Theater an der Wien.

Beethoven composes the "Kreutzer Sonata" op. 47.

April 18, 1804

Napoléon proclaims himself Emperor of France. Deeply disappointed by this, Beethoven does not name the Third Symphony "Bonaparte" as originally planned; he later calls it the "*Eroica* Symphony."



1805

The British Navy defeats the French at Trafalgar.

French troops occupy Vienna for the first time. The nobility leaves the city. On November 20, the premiere of the opera *Fidelio* (first version under the title *Leonore*) is not a success.

1806

From August to October Beethoven stays with Prince Lichnowsky, one of his important patrons, at the Prince's castle in Grätz (Silesia). He returns to Vienna following a dispute with Lichnowsky.

Commissioned by Count Rasumowsky, Beethoven composes String Quartets op. 59.

1807

Beethoven composes Mass in C Major op. 86 for Hungarian Prince Nikolaus II Esterházy.

1808

Beethoven's Fifth and Sixth Symphonies premiere on December 22 at the Academy in the Theater an der Wien. Composes the Fourth Piano Concerto and the Choral Fantasia, op. 80.

1809

After Archduke Rudolph, Prince Lobkowitz and Prince Kinsky guarantee Beethoven an annuity, the composer rejects the post of court musical director in Kassel offered to him by Napoléon's brother.

On May 4, the Emperor Napoléon's family leaves Vienna and the city is once again occupied by French troops. The departure of Archduke Rudolph occasions Beethoven to write the Piano Sonata op. 81a "Das Lebewohl."

1810

Beethoven composes music for Goethe's play *Egmont*.

1811

King George III of England is deemed unfit to rule. His son is appointed Prince Regent.

1812

In poor health, Beethoven goes to Teplitz for hydrotherapy. He writes a letter to the "Immortal Beloved," whose identity is unknown. He meets Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

1813

Beethoven composes Wellington's Victory or the Battle of Vittoria op. 91 in honor of a decisive victory over Napoléon. It is first performed, together with the Seventh Symphony, on December 8.

1814

The Congress of Vienna opens in September, to settle issues arising from the French Revolution and the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire. Beethoven enjoys great success with occasional works (Congress Cantata "The glorious moment"), performances of his Seventh and Eighth Symphonies and the new version of *Fidelio*, due to the interest shown by international high society.

In March, Paris falls and Napoléon is exiled to the Mediterranean island of Elba.

1815

In March, Napoléon escapes Elba, gathers an army and marches on Paris.

On June 18, in the Battle of Waterloo, Napoléon is defeated with heavy losses on both sides. Napoleon is imprisoned on the Atlantic island of St. Helena.

1818

As a consequence of his increasing deafness, Beethoven starts using conversation books to communicate.

Beethoven composes Hammerklavier Sonata op. 106.

1819

Anton Diabelli writes to 50 composers requesting variations on a waltz of his own composition.

1820

In March, the Archduke Rudolph is enthroned as the Archbishop of Olmütz. Beethoven starts writing the Missa Solemnis for this occasion, but does not complete it until 1823.

1821

Napoléon dies on May 5.

1822

Beethoven composes his last Piano Sonata: op. 111.

1823

Beethoven completes his *Diabelli Variations*.

May 7, 1824

The Ninth Symphony premieres. Beethoven begins work on the last String Quartets.

1826

Beethoven's nephew Karl attempts suicide on August 6.

Beethoven's last completed work: new Finale for the String Quartet op. 130.

March 26, 1827

Beethoven dies in the "Altes Schwarzspanierhaus" in Vienna after a protracted illness and four surgeries to remove fluid from his abdomen.

The Composer: Ludwig van Beethoven

“Let us begin with the primary original causes of all things, how something came about, wherefore and why it came about in that particular way and became what it is, why something cannot be exactly so!” — Beethoven in an 1821 Letter to Georg Treitschke, a libretto writer who revised *Fidelio* at Beethoven’s request

Ludwig van Beethoven was born in Bonn, which was at the time part of the electorate of Cologne and a principality of the Holy Roman Empire. He was likely born on December 16, 1770 to a court singer, Johann van Beethoven, and his wife, Maria Magdalene (née Keverich). Ludwig had two younger brothers who survived to adulthood: Caspar (b. 1774) and Johann (b. 1776).



Caption (at right): Ludwig van Beethoven in a portrait by Joseph Karm Stielor, 1819, Collection Walter Hinrichsen.

Beethoven’s father, an abusive alcoholic, often put the family in difficult financial situations. However, Beethoven’s grandfather and namesake was a well-known and respected musician. Young Ludwig was initially trained by his father and had his first public piano performance at age 8 as his father tried to establish his son as a musical prodigy. He was not particularly good at school and in 1781, at age 10, he withdrew from school to study with the court organist Christian Gottlob Neefe. Soon, he was filling in as organist. Neefe also helped with the publication of Beethoven’s first composition (at age 12), a variation on a theme by Dressler. In 1784, Beethoven was appointed Assistant Court Organist, and began supporting his family as his father’s alcoholism worsened.

Beethoven’s plans to study with Mozart were cut short by the illness and death of his mother in 1787. In 1792, he travelled to Vienna to study with Haydn. He was still in Vienna when, in 1794, Napoleonic forces swept through Bonn, removing the Elector under whom Beethoven had received his posting. Beethoven decided to remain in Vienna, where he studied vocal composition with Antonio Salieri and counterpoint with Johann Albrechtsberger while establishing himself as a virtuoso pianist.

Deafness

Beethoven began to suffer from hearing loss as early as 1801. He described tinnitus, a ringing in the ears which made it hard to hear music. His deafness eventually made it impossible for Beethoven to perform publicly, with the result that he lost a significant source of income even as he continued to

compose. By 1814, he was entirely deaf, and relied on conversation books to communicate with others.

The causes of Beethoven's symptoms are contested. Childhood typhus, lead poisoning, and venereal disease have all been suggested as causes; an autopsy showed that he had a distended inner ear and lesions in the ear.

While Beethoven was often temperamental and rude to his patrons and friends, his inability to hear them clearly may have increased his reputation for rudeness. It certainly kept him from attending social functions and he wrote about contemplating suicide while struggling with frustration over his worsening deafness. He feuded with his brothers, publishers and patrons, reputedly calling one of his staunchest patrons, Prince Lichnowsky, a "donkey."

Beethoven's moodiness, depression and unattractive personal appearance may have contributed to his never marrying, although he did fall in love with a series of his female pupils, often dedicating compositions to them. He also addressed an unsent letter to his "immortal beloved," a mysterious woman who some scholars believe to have been a married woman named Antoine Bretano.

"My heart is full of so many things to say to you — ah — there are moments when I feel that speech amounts to nothing at all—Cheer up—remain my true, my only love, my all as I am yours." — From Beethoven's letter to the "Immortal Beloved"

In 1815, on the death of his brother Caspar, he began a legal battle with his sister-in-law Johanna to obtain custody of his nephew Karl. The ugly litigation lasted seven years before Beethoven succeeded in gaining custody of his nephew.

Composition

Beethoven's life as a composer is generally divided into early (1783-1803), middle or heroic (1803-1812), and late (1812-1827) periods. The heroic period is particularly notable for the rapid pace of his compositions even as he was losing his hearing. Many scholars consider the late period of his life to be one of his most creative and innovative periods of composition: the Missa Solemnis, the Ninth Symphony with its famous chorale rendition of the Schiller poem "Ode to Joy," String Quartet No. 14 and of course the Diabelli Variations were all composed during this period. Scholars view Beethoven's work as a link between the Classical and Romantic periods of music.

On November 27, 1826 Beethoven returned from his brother's house in an open carriage. He contracted pneumonia after exposure to the cold, inclement weather. Beethoven's health continued to decline. He had symptoms of dropsy, jaundice and liver disease. He had four surgeries to remove fluid from his body.

Beethoven died on March 26, 1827 at the age of 56. His autopsy revealed cirrhosis of the liver as well as lesions on the inner ear. A family friend, Gerhard von Breuning, reported that on his deathbed Beethoven quoted the phrase with which classical comedies concluded: “Plaudite, amici, comedia finita est.” (“Applaud, friends, the comedy is over.”)

The Associates: Anton Diabelli and Anton Schindler



Anton (Antonio) Diabelli (1781-1858)

Diabelli was a Viennese music publisher, singer and composer of Italian descent. In 1818, he partnered with Pietro Cappi to form Cappi & Diabelli, a music arranging and publishing firm. Diabelli is best known as a music publisher and as the author of the waltz which is the source for Beethoven’s Variations.

Anton Felix Schindler (1795-1864)

Schindler’s calling card read “a friend of Beethoven.” He was in fact Beethoven’s associate and secretary. Schindler wrote the earliest biographies of Beethoven; as early as the 1850s, however, his account was called into question as inconsistencies with the historical record came to light. Schindler appears to have exaggerated the length of his acquaintance with Beethoven (six years, not the 12 he claimed) and may have made false entries into his conversation books to suggest a greater length of friendship with the composer. The unreliability of his accounts and the pervasiveness of some of the myths he established about Beethoven have continued to complicate the issues of Beethoven’s biography.



Caption (top): Anton Diabelli, lithograph by Josef Kriehuber.

Caption (bottom): Anton Schindler.

Selected Music Terminology

Fugue — From the Italian for “flight,” a Fugue is a specific musical form for instruments or voices, which is often a contrapuntal and follows a strict set of rules. Characteristically, there is a set theme, which is successively taken up in each part or voice.

Mass — The Eucharist, especially in the Roman Catholic Church. Many composers wrote music that would have been sung and played at certain parts of the liturgy. The Ordinary Mass usually includes the following five musical pieces: Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus and Agnus Dei. Beethoven wrote two Masses — C major, op. 86 and the *Missa Solemnis* op. 123. The Kyrie Eleison is the portion of the mass that translates from the Latin, “Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy.”

Musicology — Refers to the scholarly study of music. Rather than the emphasis being on performance, it focuses on a critical analysis of music.

Sketch — A sketch is a musical draft or outline. It is the incomplete set of notations, ideas and musical thoughts for the composer's personal use. It covers all phases of the compositional process, from the initial idea, through fully realized drafts, to score sketches.

Sonata — From the Italian for sound, a sonata is a musical form that was of the most important genres of the 18th and 19th centuries. It is a cyclic instrumental composition with several movements. The form is structured from a harmonic and conceptual point of view and is subject to distinct rules. There are usually three movements, typically fast, slow and fast. In Beethoven's case, however, there are sometimes two or four movements (in the case of the latter with the addition of a scherzo or minuet before the last movement). The most important movement is the first movement, which in the case of the Classical sonata follows sonata form, often for piano or a melody instrument with piano accompaniment. Beethoven composed 32 piano sonatas with opus numbers, as well as four early piano sonatas without an opus number, 10 violin sonatas, five cello sonatas, and a sonata for horn.

Variation — A variation is a composition or compositions in which a given theme is repeated in an altered form. Variations can include much humor in the juxtaposition of different variations and in references to other piece of music or to earlier variations.

Waltz — A waltz is a dance, or the music for a dance, in triple time. In Beethoven's time it had also been elevated into an art music form intended for listeners rather than dancers.

33 Variations on a Waltz by Anton Diabelli op. 120

“The fee for the variations would be 40 ducats at most, provided they are worked out on as large a scale as is planned. But if this does not materialize, then I would quote a smaller fee.”

— Beethoven, in a November 1822 letter to Anton Diabelli

Early in 1819, Anton Diabelli, a Viennese music publisher, sent his 32-bar waltz to 50 composers inviting them to compose a single variation to be published in a collected work of a “National Association of artists.” It was intended as a promotional piece for the publishing company he had recently founded with Pietro Cappi, which was called Cappi and Diabelli.

Beethoven initially derided the work as a “cobbler’s patch” (Schusterfleck). However, the source for this quote is actually a letter Beethoven sent to Diabelli teasing him about the success of the “cobbler’s patch.”

Scholar William Kinderman has written substantially about the Diabelli Variations. Through his research on Beethoven’s original composition sketchbooks and loose sketches, he determined that Beethoven had conceived about two thirds of the Diabelli Variations in 1819, and then set them aside for a time to work on his *Missa Solemnis*, but later returned to the variations and finished them in April 1823.

“Honored Sir! Why should you want yet another sonata from me? You have a whole host of composers who can do it far better than I. Give a bar to each of them, and what a marvelous work you can expect in return! Long live this, your Austrian Association, which knows how to handle your cobbler’s patch in masterly fashion. [...] Your old amicus, Beethoven”

—A July 1825 letter from Beethoven in which he teases Diabelli about the variations while putting off giving him a promised sonata

Creative intent is difficult to establish unless a composer has written about the impulses behind a work. Beethoven may have agreed to write the variations for a variety of reasons: for money; to best Bach (who wrote 32 Goldberg Variations); or because he found something appealing in the waltz itself.

Beethoven wrote several variations for piano, including the Thirty-three Variations for Piano on a Waltz by Diabelli, op. 120 and Variations and Fugue for Piano in E flat major, op. 35, and added variations as movements to nine other works. Beethoven often chose a portion of the music that was not the melody and expanded it into a full variation. The Diabelli Variations feature musical forms—including a march, an arietta and a fugue—that differ decidedly from the original waltz.

“Beethoven’s Diabelli Variations are an enduring monument to the principle that creative potential lies in the transformation of the commonplace.”

—Professor William Kinderman, noted musicologist and Beethoven scholar

The Beethoven-Haus in Bonn holds the Autograph score (in which Beethoven determined the final order of the variations and made revisions from his sketchbooks), the Wittgenstein Sketchbook (1819-1820) and the Engelmann Sketchbook (1823). Other sketches and pages are at other collections in Paris, Berlin and Montauban. Variations 1-2, 15, 23-26, 28-29 and 31 as well as the final minuet and coda were all added in 1823. The variations are not titled, but Beethoven does instruct the pianist with an initial term or phrase about the tempo or style of the variation.

Diabelli’s Theme Vivace Lively

Anton Diabelli

The musical score for Diabelli's Theme is presented in four systems. The first system (measures 1-7) is in 3/4 time, treble clef, and one sharp (F#). It begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic in the right hand and a forte (*f*) dynamic in the left hand. The second system (measures 8-15) continues with a forte (*f*) dynamic in the right hand and a piano (*p*) dynamic in the left hand. The third system (measures 16-24) features a piano (*p*) dynamic in the right hand and a forte (*f*) dynamic in the left hand. The fourth system (measures 25-31) starts with a sforzando (*sf*) dynamic in the right hand and a forte (*f*) dynamic in the left hand. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

Variation	Tempo	Meaning
Theme	Vivace	Lively
Var. 1	Alla Marcia maestoso	March, majestic
Var. 2	Poco allegro	Somewhat fast
Var. 3	L'istesso tempo	same tempo
Var. 4	Un poco vivace	A bit lively
Var. 5	Allegro vivace	Fast and lively
Var. 6	Allegro ma non troppo e serio	Fast, but not too much and serious
Var. 7	Allegro	Fast
Var. 8	Poco vivace	A bit lively
Var. 9	Allegro pesante e risoluto	Fast, heavy & resolute
Var. 10	Presto	Very fast
Var. 11	Allegretto	Moderately fast
Var. 12	Un poco più moto	A bit faster
Var. 13	Vivace	Lively
Var. 14	Grave e maestoso	Slow and majestic
Var. 15	Presto scherzando	Very fast and playful
Var. 16	Allegro	Fast
Var. 17	Allegro	Fast
Var. 18	Poco moderato	Somewhat moderate
Var. 19	Presto	Very fast
Var. 20	Andante	Walking speed
Var. 21	Allegro con brio—meno allegro	Fast with energy—less fast
Var. 22	Allegro molto alla 'Notte e giorno faticar' di Mozart	Very fast after Mozart's 'Night and day I've been working...'
Var. 23	Allegro assai	Very fast
Var. 24	Fughetta: Andante	Little fugue: walking pace
Var. 25	Allegro	Fast
Var. 26	Piacevole	Pleasantly
Var. 27	Vivace	Lively
Var. 28	Allegro	Fast
Var. 29	Adagio ma non troppo	Slow, but not too much
Var. 30	Andante, sempre cantabile	Walking, always singing
Var. 31	Largo, molto espressivo	Very slow, very expressive
Var. 32	Fuga: Allegro	Fugue: fast
Var. 33	Tempo di Minuetto moderato	Minuet speed moderate

Thoughts on the Diabelli Variations from Scholars and Pianists

“The very first variation, a grotesque march with trumpets and drums, shoves Diabelli’s waltz unceremoniously aside and proclaims that the composer plans to handle the theme in anything but conventional fashion.”

—Andreas Staier, pianist and harpsichordist

“... how fascinated I was by the fact that Beethoven had the courage to begin such a large set of variations on a waltz theme with—a march! What a surprise! And the piece holds many more surprises in store. To the present day, despite the many years I have spent with the Diabelli variations as a performer and listener, the work still takes me by surprise.” —Stefan Vladar, pianist and conductor

“To me, the most exciting thing about the Thirty-Three Variations on a Waltz by Diabelli is the way Beethoven, immediately after stating the theme, relentlessly sets out on a breath-taking imaginative flight that holds us spellbound from beginning to end.” —Konrad Beikircher, musician and author

“In this early draft (1819) the piece began not with the March variation *Alla Marcia Maestoso*, but with Variation 3, in which the choppy surface of Diabelli’s theme is transformed into more sonorous, lyrical tones.

“A rhythmic intensification also takes place in the sequence of opening variations conceived in 1819 and revised in 1823. For example, in Variation 3 a decorated upbeat figure from the waltz becomes a three-note falling motive and in Variation 4 a rising two-note idea in a slightly faster tempo. Repeated eighth-notes mark this upbeat in number 5, a trill figure in number 6, and coordinated gestures in both hands in number 7, whereby each of these variations brings a further quickening in tempo.

“In the Brahmsian 8th Variation and vigorous 9th Variation in the minor, with its dark humor and incisive development of Diabelli’s turn figure, Beethoven broadens the range of expressive moods before we reach the first climactic landmark in the form of the whole work in Variation 10. Here he transforms the impulses from Diabelli’s repeated chords into chains of descending octaves in the fastest tempo yet: *Presto*.

“In the large central region of the work, Beethoven maximizes contrast and diversity. The quiet beginning brought by the Allegretto, Variation 11, opens into Variation 12, forming a pair of interrelated variations based on the turn figure derived from Diabelli’s Waltz. Thereafter, the comic buffoonery of Variation 13 is followed by the solemn procession of the Maestoso, Variation 14, and then by brilliant faster pieces, with numbers 16 and 17 joined as a pair of imposing march variations.

“The ensuing canonic Variations 19 and 20 are polar opposites, with the rhythmic drive of number 19 followed by almost motionless mystery in number 20.

“After the schizophrenic dualism of Variation 21, Beethoven unveils an operatic parody in Variation 22, marked “Allegro molto alla ‘Notte e giorno faticar’ di Mozart” in a sly allusion of Leporello’s opening number in Mozart’s Don Giovanni.

“Poised at the nexus between biography and aesthetics, Beethoven’s manuscripts can grant us access to an inner context of creativity, if these sources are regarded in relationship to one another as the record of an evolving process.

“The last large section of the Diabelli Variations is rich in stylistic allusions to other composers and various musical styles, a procedure that culminates in an elaborate self-allusion in the final minuet variation and coda.”

—Professor William Kinderman, noted musicologist and Beethoven scholar

“To me, the Diabelli Variations reflect Ludwig van Beethoven’s entire life, a retrospective glance containing all the peaks and troughs that Beethoven passed through with his extremely emotional temperament.” —Rudolph Buchbinder, pianist

“To me, the Diabelli Variations are a masterpiece of the first order, a compendium of the composer’s unparalleled creative urge, and a challenge for performers and listeners alike.”

—András Schiff, pianist and conductor

“Like thirty-three sketches, this most monumental set of variations in the whole of music history was hewn by Beethoven’s hand from simple Diabelli stone, from his own huge powers of imagination, and from his heart. Now we stand before the autograph and can admire how his great mind guided his hand.” —Christoph Eschenbach, pianist and conductor

“Beethoven’s struggle with the ending of Variation 28 is especially revealing. We can see from the quill and ink, he first wrote down a simple repeat. Then he decided in favor of a Prima volta and a Seconda volta, which were necessary only if he had to write two beats in the final bar since the next variation begins on a downbeat.”

—Professors Bernhard R. Appel and Michael Ladenburger

“The Diabelli Variations are at once funny and endlessly imaginative; but it is the wisdom of the Minuet at the end of the turmoil of fun and despair that makes this into one of the greatest works ever written.” —Mitsuko Uchida, pianist

Timeline of the Variations

- April – June 1819** Beethoven begins work on the variations in the Wittengstein Sketchbook and other sketch leaves.
- February – May 1823** Beethoven continues work on the variations in the Engelmann Sketchbook.
- April 1823** The Autograph version of the variations is written out and is followed by two rounds of proofreading before the copyist’s manuscript is prepared.
- Late April 1823** The Wenzel Schlemmer copying firm makes a copy of the Autograph, Beethoven adds the title, dedication and corrections. This version is described as the Corrected Copy.
- Late April – May 1823** Beethoven enters corrections in the Autograph version.
- May 1823** Beethoven proofreads both the Autograph and the Corrected Copy in red ink.
- Mid-May 1823** Wenzel Schlemmer employee, Wenzel Rampl, prepares a manuscript to be used as an Engraver’s Copy for Diabelli’s Variations.
- Mid-June 1823** The Original Edition appears in print with a dedication to Antonie Brentano.
- June 27, 1823** The Engraver’s Copy is presented as a gift to Archduke Rudolph, Beethoven’s patron. It has never emerged.
- June 1824** Another impression of the Original Edition is issued, forming the first part of a two-part publication. The second part is comprised of the variations written by the other 50 composers.

The Other Composers

50 other composers contributed a variation on Diabelli's theme:

Ignaz Assmayer	Ignaz Moscheles
Carl Maria von Bocklet	Ignaz Franz Edler von Mosel
Leopold Eustachius Czapek	Franz Xaver Wolfgang Mozart
Carl Czerny	Joseph Panny
Joseph Czerny	Hieronymus Payer
Moritz Graf von Dietrichstein	Johann Peter Pixis
Joseph Drechsler	Wenzel Plachy
Emanuel Aloys Förster	Gottfried Rieger
Franz Jakob Freystädler	Philipp Jakob Riotte
Johann Baptist Gänsbacher	Franz Roser
Abbé Joseph Gelinek	Johann Baptist Schenk
Anton Halm	Franz Schoberlechner
Joachim Hoffmann	Franz Schubert
Johann Horzalka	Simon Sechter
Joseph Hügelmann	Archduke Rudolf of Austria
Johann Nepomuk	Maximilian Stadler
Hummel Anselm Hüttenbrenner	Joseph von Szalay
Friedrich Kalkbrenner	Wenzel Johann Tomascheck
Freidrich August Kanne	Michael Umlauf
Joseph Kerzkowsky	Friedrich Dionysius Weber
Conradin Kreutzer	Franz Weber
Eduard Baron von Lannoy	Carl Angelus von Winkhler
Maximilian Joseph Leidesedorf	Franz Weiss
Franz Liszt	Johann Nepomuk August Wittasek
Joseph Mayseder	Johann Hugo Worzischek

The Disease: Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis

Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) is a progressive disorder caused by the destruction of nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord, which results in the progressive loss of muscle control. In the United States ALS is often called Lou Gehrig's disease after baseball player Lou Gehrig, whose death from ALS brought greater public awareness of the disease.

Symptoms of ALS include muscle weakness and loss of muscle strength and coordination affecting the shoulders, arms, hips and thighs, progressing to difficulty lifting, climbing stairs, muscle cramps, speech impairment and difficulty swallowing or breathing. When the muscles in the chest stop working it becomes difficult or impossible for someone with ALS to breathe without mechanical assistance. Some patients suffer from "emotional

incontinence” and may have trouble controlling crying or laughter. Death usually occurs within two to ten years; only about 20% of people with ALS live longer than five years.

There is no known cure for ALS. Current treatments focus on controlling or delaying symptoms. Physical therapy and the use of braces or a wheel chair may become necessary.

ALS is known as an “orphan disease,” the term for rare diseases and disorders that affect fewer than 200,000 people in the United States. Because there are few individuals with the disease, pharmaceutical companies are unlikely to invest in researching and developing new drugs. There are about 6,000 orphan diseases. In 1983, congress passed the Orphan Drug Act, which offers tax credits and other financial incentives to encourage research on medication for orphan diseases.

The cause of ALS is unknown. Approximately 10% of cases have a genetic component.

ALS affects nearly 30,000 Americans, and 2 out of 100,000 people per year worldwide.

Discussion Questions

About the play

1. The play experiments with form much like Beethoven experimented with variations. What effect do the different styles of scenes have on the overall feel of the play?
2. How are Katherine Brandt and Beethoven, both suffering with illnesses and the prospect of an imminent death, variations on a theme? How do their stories differ and inform each other?
3. What role do the other characters of the play serve? Why do characters like Mike and Clara or Diabelli and Schindler put up with the behavior of Katherine and Beethoven?

About the production

1. The play calls for a pianist to play music during the course of the play. What effect does this have on the play?
2. What role does music play in the theatrical experience?
3. Projected images are also crucial to the production. What is the effect of seeing certain images?

4. What do you think of when you see Beethoven's compositions in his own handwriting?

About the context

1. The past and present collide in this play. What is the relationship of Katherine Brandt to Beethoven?
2. What does their interaction on stage tell us about our own relationship to art?
3. Beethoven is a larger than life figure. What new information did you learn about his life?

References and Further Reading

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