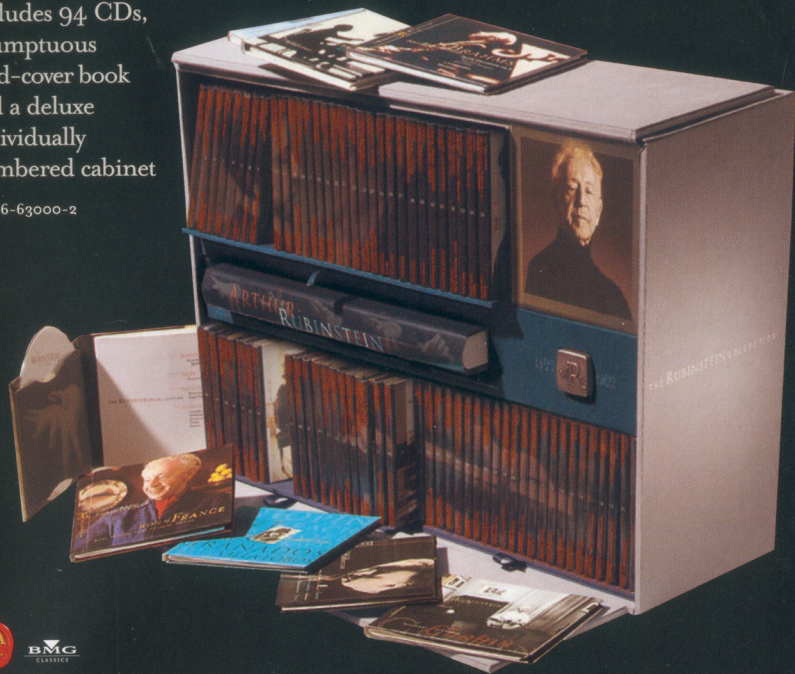


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# BEETHOVEN ARTHUR RUBINSTEIN

PIANO CONCERTOS  
NOS. 1 & 2



London Philharmonic Orchestra  
Daniel Barenboim



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Ludwig van  
**BEETHOVEN**  
THE RUBINSTEIN COLLECTION (1770-1827)

PIANO CONCERTOS

No. 1, Op. 15

No. 2, Op. 19

London Philharmonic Orchestra

Daniel Barenboim, conductor

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Cover photograph by Clive Ranks / Performing Arts Library, London

PIANO CONCERTO NO. 1, OP. 15

in C / C-dur / ut majeur (39:20)

cadenzas: Beethoven, ed. Busoni

- 1 Allegro con brio (17:54)
- 2 Largo (11:38)
- 3 Rondo: Allegro scherzando (9:39)

PIANO CONCERTO NO. 2, OP. 19

in B-flat / B-dur / si bémol majeur (31:09)

cadenzas: Beethoven

- 4 Allegro con brio (14:54)
- 5 Adagio (9:43)
- 6 Rondo: Allegro molto (6:25)

Recorded April 9-11, 1975

DISC TIME: 70:38



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OVER THE LONG COURSE OF HIS PROFESSIONAL CAREER, ARTHUR RUBINSTEIN HAD OCCASION TO COLLABORATE WITH MOST OF THE LEADING ORCHESTRA CONDUCTORS OF THIS CENTURY. (Of the literally hundreds of maestros he worked with, his associations with George Szell, Sir John Barbirolli and Alfred Wallenstein proved especially fruitful.) Rubinstein also befriended a number of young pianists, lending them support and encouragement at formative stages of their careers. Emil Gilels, Emanuel Ax, Janina Fialkowska and Maurizio Pollini are among the keyboard artists who benefited from his advice and recommendations.

One musician belongs to both these groups: Daniel Barenboim, the Argentine-born pianist and conductor, for whom Rubinstein was an important and felicitous early influence. In his autobiography (*A Life in Music*, Scribner, 1991), Barenboim recalls that as a boy he heard Rubinstein play on several occasions, and that these encounters made a lasting impression. "I remember vividly my sheer fascination at his playing," Barenboim writes of Rubinstein in his memoir, "at the sound he made, and even at the way he sat at the piano, erect and simple,

without all those distortions I saw later on in other pianists. He really was a legend."

Although Rubinstein visited the Barenboim house in Buenos Aires—Daniel's father, Enrique Barenboim, was a respected piano teacher—it was only some years later, during a year-and-a-half period Daniel Barenboim spent studying in Paris, that the elder musician became aware of the younger one's talent. Barenboim was only twelve or thirteen when the composer Alexandre Tansman urged him to play for Rubinstein. Although Rubinstein did not realize that Barenboim was the same boy he had met years earlier in Argentina, he was so impressed by what he heard that he urged his manager, the renowned impresario Sol Hurok, to arrange some recitals for Barenboim in America. The result was Barenboim's first concert appearances in the United States, early in 1957.

In the years that followed, Rubinstein remained steadfast in his support of Barenboim's musical growth and professional advancement. Whenever he appeared in Israel, where the Barenboim family emigrated in 1952, Rubinstein always made time to hear his young protégé. "He was anxious to see how I was developing," Barenboim recalls in his autobiography, "and kept a close eye on me." And he remained supportive when

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Barenboim began developing a second career as a conductor. "When I started conducting," Barenboim writes, "Rubinstein was one of the few people who did not say: 'Be careful because your piano playing will suffer.' He was interested in other music besides the piano. He was an all-round musician, with an all-round musical awareness, and he encouraged me greatly when I started conducting."

Indeed, Rubinstein often attended performances that Barenboim directed, and early in 1967 he invited Barenboim to lead a concert with the Israel Philharmonic for which he had been engaged as soloist. Since Barenboim was still relatively unknown as a conductor, this opportunity represented an important step in his career. "It was a wonderful sign of his confidence in me," Barenboim acknowledges.

Subsequently, Rubinstein and Barenboim collaborated frequently as soloist and conductor, appearing together with some of the major orchestras of Europe and America. Their relationship, however, went beyond that of professional colleagues. A warm friendship developed between the two men. Barenboim was frequently a guest in Rubinstein's home, and when he married the English cellist Jacqueline Du Pré, the elder pianist put his newly acquired house in the Spanish town of Marbella at their disposal as a honeymoon retreat.

In the second volume of his autobiography (*My Many Years*, Knopf, 1980), Rubinstein writes: "It was my good fortune to make some records with the brilliant Daniel Barenboim." His reference is to a cycle of the five Beethoven piano concertos the two men recorded for RCA. It was the only time they worked together in the studio. Rubinstein was well into his ninth decade and had taped two previous Beethoven concerto cycles when he decided he wanted to record the composer's last three concertos again. With Barenboim conducting the London Philharmonic Orchestra, he performed the Fourth and Fifth Piano Concertos at the Royal Albert Hall on March 9, 1975. The next day, the musicians reconvened and recorded both concertos, and the day after that they did the same with the Third Concerto. Rubinstein was so pleased with the results that he decided to add the First and Second Concertos to make a full cycle. Because he had performed those works far less frequently than Beethoven's later concertos, he wanted some time to prepare them. He therefore returned to London a month later, and the First and Second Concertos were taped in sessions held on April 9, 10 and 11.

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The recordings with Barenboim represented the third time Rubinstein had committed all five Beethoven concertos to disc as a single project. (The other occasions were with the Symphony of the Air under

Joseph Krips in 1956, and with the Boston Symphony under Erich Leinsdorf in 1967. In addition, he recorded the later concertos at various times with other orchestras and conductors.) Despite this impressive achievement, Rubinstein never achieved widespread recognition as a major interpreter of Beethoven. In an interview with Rubinstein biographer Harvey Sachs, Daniel Barenboim acknowledged the perception that the Polish pianist had a more instinctive connection with Chopin, Brahms, even modern French and Spanish music than with Beethoven, but he took issue with the notion that his mentor's Beethoven performances were lacking in any way. "Rubinstein had innumerable qualities, but two of them stand uppermost," Barenboim declared. "One was his sense of rhythm: It was like a backbone. And of course for Beethoven rhythm is capital. The other quality was the unique, full-bodied sound." These two attributes, Barenboim went on, allowed Rubinstein to find successful solutions to whatever issue might arise in interpreting Beethoven's music. He added that even though Rubinstein maintained only a few of Beethoven's thirty-two sonatas in his concert repertory, he knew others intimately, especially the late sonatas. That knowledge could not but contribute to a deep understanding of the composer and his work.

Rubinstein's 1975 recording of the Beethoven concerto cycle represents the thoughts of a musician who had played and contemplated these compositions for nearly three quarters of a century. As always, the texture of his playing is marvelously clear, the interpretations lucid and unmannered: although there is no mistaking Rubinstein at the keyboard, the focus of these performances is Beethoven rather than the pianist. The vigor of the playing would credit a young musician. From one who was eighty-eight at the time of these performances, it is quite astonishing.

Beethoven's first two piano concertos, the subject of this disc, date from the composer's early years in Vienna. Their respective titles give a reversed impression of their chronology. The piece we know as Piano Concerto No. 1, Op. 15, was completed in 1798, at least three years after the work in B-Flat, now designated Concerto No. 2, Op. 19. However, the same confusion that attends Chopin's two piano concertos, of which No. 2 was the first to be composed.

Beethoven performed the C Major Concerto in Prague, during a visit to that music-loving city in 1798. His performance there was attended by many local musicians, including Jan (Johann) Tomášek, himself an accomplished pianist. In a reminiscence, Tomášek recalled that

"Beethoven's magnificent playing stirred me to the very depths of my soul; indeed, I found myself so profoundly bowed down that I did not touch my pianoforte for several days." One can hardly doubt this report, which corroborates other contemporary accounts of the brilliance of Beethoven's performances. But despite the impression Beethoven's virtuosity made on Tomášek, the C Major Concerto is not a technical showpiece, at least by the standards of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. There are, to be sure, moments of brilliant keyboard passagework throughout the composition, but these are always subordinated to larger musical purposes. Like all Beethoven's concertos, this one is notable for its thoughtful conception and musical integrity rather than as a vehicle for pianistic display.

The C Major Concerto begins in the tradition of the "military concerto" openings often used by Mozart. Indeed, Beethoven underscores the martial character of his initial theme through the use of trumpets after an initial statement by the orchestral strings. The introduction of the second subject provides an instance of the composer's fondness for harmonic deception. Here a rustling eighth-note figure in the violins promises a shift to a minor tonality, but the melody itself appears in a

bright major key. With the entrance of the piano, Beethoven proceeds to develop the movement's ideas with his usual thoroughness and energy. The recapitulation of the opening theme is prepared by some thirty measures of dramatic pianissimo.

The slow movement is elegant and dream-like, while the rondo-form finale brings the type of musical humor found so often in the works of Haydn. Among the composer's caprices is a lively episode in "Turkish" style, and another, approaching the close, in which the tempo slows to a decorous adagio only to accelerate suddenly to the final cadence.

As already discussed, the Piano Concerto in B-flat, Op. 19, is Beethoven's earliest acknowledged work in the keyboard concerto genre. (A previous Concerto in E-flat Major, WoO 4, is a student piece and does not properly belong to the Beethoven canon.) The composer used this composition for his public debut in Vienna, which occurred on March 29, 1795, at a concert to benefit the city's widows and orphans. According to one witness, Beethoven was still composing the finale two days before that event took place, while four copyists sat in the next room to extract orchestral parts from each page as it was finished.

Not surprisingly, for a work written early in Beethoven's career,

the Concerto in B-Flat Major is close to Mozart and Haydn in style and spirit. The opening movement even uses a monothematic construction, in which the ostensible second subject is really a variant of the first, a procedure more typical of Haydn than of the mature Beethoven. Still, this work gives plenty of evidence of its author's own compositional voice, particularly in its occasional surprising turns of harmony. Beethoven's cadenza, which Arthur Rubinstein plays in this performance, treats the movement's principal theme in fugal counterpoint.

The second and third movements are typical of Beethoven's concerto style. The *Adagio* conveys the deep spiritual serenity we find in the First, Third and Fifth Piano Concertos, as well as in the Violin Concerto. By contrast, the finale brings a light-hearted rondo movement in 6/8 time, both the form and the meter having been favored by Mozart and Haydn for their concerto finales.

—Paul Schiavo

*Paul Schiavo writes about music for a variety of publications throughout the United States. His articles appear regularly in the program books of Lincoln Center, the Saint Louis Symphony, the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Seattle Opera and other major musical organizations.*



#### THE ARTHUR RUBINSTEIN COLLECTION

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