

# BEETHOVEN

## Bagatelles



VLADIMIR FELTSMAN

# BEETHOVEN BAGATELLES

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	<b>Bagatelles Op. 33</b>	<b>22.22</b>
1	I Andante grazioso, quasi allegretto	3.52
2	II Scherzo. Allegro	3.23
3	III Allegretto	2.00
4	IV Andante	3.53
5	V Allegro ma non troppo	3.14
6	VI Allegretto quasi andante	3.47
7	VII Presto	2.13
8	Bagatelle in C minor WoO 52 Presto	4.19
	<b>Bagatelles Op. 119</b>	<b>16.35</b>
9	Allegretto	2.23
10	Andante con moto	1.06
11	à l'Allemande	1.50
12	Andante cantabile	1.49
13	Risoluto	1.21
14	Andante – Allegretto	1.52

15	Allegro ma non troppo	1.10
16	Moderato cantabile	2.03
17	Vivace assai ed un poco sentimentale	0.49
18	Allegramente	0.17
19	Andante ma non troppo	1.55
	<b>Bagatelles Op. 126</b>	<b>19.50</b>
20	Andante con moto	3.20
21	Allegro	2.04
22	Andante	2.28
23	Presto	4.49
24	Quasi allegretto	2.10
25	Presto	4.59
26	Bagatelle in A minor 'Für Elise' WoO 59	3.58
		Total playing time 67.15

Record production and engineering : Adrian Farmer  
Recorded by Nimbus Records at Wyastone Leys, Monmouth January 2019

Cover Image : istockphoto

Photograph of Vladimir Feltsman by Robert Millard

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## Beethoven Bagatelles

Alongside the many works of Beethoven that are staples of the concert repertoire there are a number of piano pieces that have not received as much attention as their more famous siblings and remain infrequently performed. This recording (with the notable exception of “Für Elise”) is dedicated to these works.

Beethoven put together three sets of bagatelles: Seven Bagatelles op. 33 published in 1803; Eleven Bagatelles op. 119 published in 1823 (the last five of these had been previously published in 1821); and Six Bagatelles op. 126 published in 1825, which Beethoven considered his best. The Seven Bagatelles op. 33 belong to Beethoven’s “Classical” period. The two later sets are representative of Beethoven’s experiments and way of writing in the final period of his creative life.

The term “bagatelle” has multiple meanings, but the most common is a trifle or trinket, something of little size and value that should not be taken too seriously. In music, this term was used for the first time by Couperin in his seventh *ordre* (suite) for harpsichord, which includes a rondeau titled *Les Bagatelles*. Eventually many composers wrote such “trinkets” under various titles, for the pleasure of connoisseurs of music. It was Beethoven who made the bagatelle a legitimate musical form in its own right, creating a new genre of small-scale works that could be called “character pieces”. 100 years later, a work like *Visions fugitives* by Prokofiev could be viewed as a set of bagatelles. Beethoven’s bagatelles explore musical procedures and structural ideas that were at the center of his creative process, regardless of the scale of the work; there are obvious similarities between Beethoven’s piano sonatas and his bagatelles. Indeed, some of the bagatelles were initially written as sonata movements.

The Seven Bagatelles op. 33 present features typical of the Classical tradition in formal procedure and texture. Most of these pieces are written in ternary form in a rather conventional manner, including repeated arpeggiated chords in the left hand, ascending arpeggios over the whole keyboard, and scales in thirds. Beethoven noted

the exact date of composition of each bagatelle. If we accept these dates at face value, some of these pieces were composed in his teens. This seems quite unlikely, because of the maturity and sophistication of the writing. Most probably, Beethoven came back to his earlier works and sketches and reworked them, as he did time and again in his creative life. All seven bagatelles explore a common vernacular of classical idioms. The third and sixth pieces are in moderately slow tempos and the rest are quite lively, especially the very last bagatelle in A-flat major, which is marked *presto*. Beethoven's wit and rather blunt sense of humor are abundantly present in these delightful bagatelles, all of which are written in major keys.

Bagatelle in C Minor WoO 52, published in 1888, was originally intended to be a movement in Sonata op. 10, no. 1. It was written in 1796 and revised in 1798 and 1822. It is a brilliant, virtuosic, and witty piece that should be played very fast – the tempo indication is *presto*.

Eleven Bagatelles op. 119 (initially op. 113) were written over the span of three decades, from the 1790s to 1822. By 1803 Beethoven had written the first five pieces, based on earlier sketches. Five more bagatelles were written in 1820 and published in 1821 in Vienna. The Leipzig publisher Carl Friedrich Peters expressed interest in publishing several of the bagatelles, but changed his mind and wrote to Beethoven that “these pieces are not worth the money and you should consider it beneath your dignity to write such trifles that anyone can write”. In 1822 Beethoven wrote an additional bagatelle to connect the two groups of five, and the full set of eleven was published in 1823 by Clementi in England. Beethoven approved this collection of eleven works and its order. Indeed, there is a sense of unity in these works, which are connected subtly from within themselves. Because of the long timespan of their composition, these eleven works give us a precious view of the development of Beethoven's craft as a composer and his approach to handling musical material. This set of bagatelles is the shortest, taking about 14 minutes to play. (The tenth bagatelle in A major is the shortest piece Beethoven ever wrote – it lasts only about 15 seconds.)

Six Bagatelles op. 126 is the very last of Beethoven's published piano works. This set was assembled and published in 1825, two years before his death. He called it "Ciclus von Kleinigkeiten" (cycle of little pieces) and held it in high esteem: "probably the best I've written". He indicated that it should be played as a cycle in the exact order printed in the score. Beethoven's Bagatelles op.126 are stylistically more innovative, unpredictable, and personal than the other sets. There are shifts in time and mood, unexpected improvisations (mini-cadenzas), harmonic fluidity, and heightened emotional expressiveness. There are numerous traceable references to his own works, such as the opening of the last bagatelle in E-flat major and the finale of the Ninth Symphony, with a turbulent passage that comes out of nowhere, the elaborate figurations in high register in the middle part of the same bagatelle, and the Adagio from the "Hammerklavier" sonata. The manner of writing and voice leading recalls the first and third bagatelles and his late quartets. The tonal design is not incidental and follows a descending order of major thirds.

With his Bagatelles op. 119 and especially op. 126, Beethoven connects Classical and Romantic aesthetics and initiates a new art form, a cycle of small works bonded together by their musical material, story lines, and intended cumulative effect. It is hard to overestimate the significance of this monumental discovery: the cyclic form became one of the most important and auspicious features of the Romantic movement, a form of choice for many great artists, especially in music and poetry. Schubert's *Impromptus* and *Moments Musicaux*, as well as his late collections of songs, are cycles. Schumann, Chopin, Liszt, Brahms, Wolf, Mahler, and Shostakovich composed some of their finest works in cyclic form.

Numerous works of Beethoven were published without opus numbers (WoO), during his life and after his death. Among these is "Für Elise" WoO 59 written in 1810 and published in 1867, forty years after Beethoven's passing. This charming, intimate, and melancholy bagatelle is one of the most popular musical works in existence. The title "Für Elise" may be a misreading; the manuscript carries Beethoven's handwritten

dedication to Therese Malfatti. He proposed marriage to her in 1810, but was rejected. So the right title for the world's most famous bagatelle might actually be "Für Therese". But no matter the name: a rose is a rose is a rose.

Vladimir Feltsman, 2019

**VLADIMIR FELTSMAN** Pianist and conductor Vladimir Feltsman is one of the most versatile and constantly interesting musicians of our time. His vast repertoire encompasses music from the Baroque to 20th-century composers. A regular guest soloist with leading symphony orchestras in the United States and abroad, he appears in the most prestigious concert series and music festivals all over the world.

Born in Moscow in 1952, Mr. Feltsman debuted with the Moscow Philharmonic at age 11. In 1969, he entered the Moscow Tchaikovsky State Conservatory of Music to study piano under the guidance of Professor Jacob Flier. He also studied conducting at both the Moscow and Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) Conservatories. In 1971, Mr. Feltsman won the Grand Prix at the Marguerite Long International Piano Competition in Paris; extensive touring throughout the former Soviet Union, Europe and Japan followed this.

In 1979, because of his growing discontent with the restrictions on artistic freedom under the Soviet regime, Mr. Feltsman signalled his intention to emigrate by applying for an exit visa. In response, he was immediately banned from performing in public and his recordings were suppressed. After eight years of virtual artistic exile, he was finally granted permission to leave the Soviet Union. Upon his arrival in the United States in 1987, Mr. Feltsman was warmly greeted at the White House, where he performed his first recital in North America. That same year, his debut at Carnegie Hall established him as a major pianist on the American and international scene.

A dedicated educator of young musicians, Mr. Feltsman holds the Distinguished Chair of Professor of Piano at the State University of New York, New Paltz, and is a member of the piano faculty at the Mannes College of Music in New York City. He is the founder and Artistic Director of the International Festival-Institute PianoSummer at SUNY New Paltz, a three-week-long, intensive training program for advanced piano students that attracts major young talents from all over the world.

Mr. Feltsman's extensive discography has been released on the Melodiya, Sony Classical, and Nimbus labels.

Mr. Feltsman is an American citizen and lives with his wife Haewon in upstate New York.

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