



(LEMS 8042)

THE ART OF THE FORTE PIANO
JOHN VAN BUSKIRT, FORTEPIANIST
Sonatas of J.C. Bach, Mozart, Clementi & Beethoven

Program Notes by John Van Buskirk

INTRODUCTION

The four sonatas on this disc form two distinct pairs. The first pair, sonatas of J.C. Bach and Mozart, embody high Classicism – music of formal perfection and proportion, glowing with exquisite and winsome charm. Their shared style is modest in scale, free of bombast and polyphonic devices. The second pair, sonatas of Clementi and Beethoven, are larger in scale and have in common elements of virtuosic display, dramatic expression and exploration of the full capabilities of the fortepiano. Elements of late Classicism blend with hints of early Romantic style. In both of these pairs, the works of the first composer contributed to the oeuvre of the second.

JOHANN CHRISTIAN BACH

Sonata in C minor, Op. XVII, No. 2

Johann Christian Bach (1735-1782) was the youngest surviving son of Johann Sebastian Bach. After his father's death in 1750, Christian lived and studied for four years with his famous older brother, Carl Philipp Emmanuel, in Berlin.

In Italy, from 1754 to 1762, J.C. Bach learned the new operatic style then evolving in Naples, studied the modern Italian instrumental forms of sonata and symphony, and even served for two years as organist in the Milan Cathedral.

He moved to London in 1762, embarking on a successful career as a composer. J.C. Bach's music was full of original features that captivated his contemporaries. His rounded instrumental form based on vocal melody and his balanced pairs of phrases, loud and soft, question and answer, were especially noted by critics of the time and were imitated by Mozart.

The Sonata in C minor of Johann Christian Bach opens with a modestly paced Allegro (Track 1), filled with bursts of color. A lyrical Andante (Track 2) follows. Both movements demonstrate the features mentioned above, in which we hear the sources of Mozart's style. J.C. Bach enjoyed a lofty reputation as a composer of instrumental music in his lifetime; slow movements such as this refined andante were regarded as music for the connoisseur.

The Prestissimo finale (Track 3) wittily combines charming melody and forceful rhythm – a clear example of musical and technical demands working together to create dramatic affect.

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Sonata in E-flat Major, K. 282

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) wrote five sonatas in Salzburg in 1744 that reflect the musical influence of his recent travels to Italy. The Sonata in E-Flat Major, K. 282 opens with a cantabile adagio (Track 4) in sonata-allegro form. The initial three-part polyphonic writing gives way to a contrasting melodic idea written in homophonic texture (the paired antiphonal phrases in this section show the influence of J.C. Bach). The two halves of the motive are repeated and merge fluidly in the concluding section. The development begins with a highly charged diminished seventh chord followed by two short crescendos and two bars of transition to a condensed recapitulation; the three-bar opening motive does not return until the coda.

The next movement is two Minuets (Track 5) that clearly draw on Austrian dance traditions. (Minuet II takes the place of the expected "Trio" in the normal "Minuet and Trio" arrangement. A quick, energetic Allegro (Track 6), also sonata-allegro inform, concludes this distinctly original work. Here, as in the other movements, Mozart's numerous, meticulous dynamic markings give a clear idea of the composer's intent. The whole sonata – expressive, exquisite and perfectly proportioned – demonstrates young Mozart's genius.

MUZIO CLEMENTI

Sonata in F minor, Op. 13, No. 3

Muzio Clementi was born in Rome in 1752 and died in England in 1832.

Although originally a harpsichordist, his multiple careers as composer, performer,

teacher, publisher and manufacturer, all revolved around the piano and after 1780, his name and reputation became firmly attached to that instrument. Clementi spend many hours perfecting his double thirds, octaves, trills, scales and arpeggios, all essentials to brilliant display; his influence on subsequent generations of pianists and piano composers cannot be overstated. Beethoven's early keyboard writing seems unmistakably indebted to Clementi's music of the 1780's and 1790's.

Clementi's Opus 13 Sonatas were probably composed in 1784. The F minor Sonata, the third of that set stands above the others, because of its power of expression achieved with an economy of means. The tortuous, driving figuration of the two- and three-part texture in its first movement, *Allegro agitato* (Track 7) comprises a dramatic adaptation of traditional Italian keyboard style.

The second movement, *Largo e sostenuto* (Track 8) juxtaposes abrasive dissonances with expressive melodic writing, creating an atmosphere of harmonic ambiguity that is very much like C.P.E. Bach. In the presto finale (Track 9) there are remarkable prophecies of Beethoven's keyboard writing: the opening melody, very similar to the contredanse tune used in the finale of the *Eroica*, is fragmented by octave displacements and set against an active, oscillating middle-register accompaniment.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Sonata in C Major, Op. 2, No. 3

Ludwig Van Beethoven (1770-1827) quickly became known as a bold pianist when he moved permanently to Vienna in 1792. He established his reputation as a composer with the publication of Three Piano Trios, Op. 1 in 1795 and Three Piano Sonatas, Op. 2 in 1796. The Sonata in C Major, Op. 2, No. 3 is a virtuosic work of fast temp and elaborate, flashy passagework. The first and last movements include integrated cadenzas suggesting that Beethoven had public display in mind rather than the private satisfaction and study of the amateur. The first movement, *Allegro con brio* (Track 10), opens with a simple motive but is filled with episodes of bravura and grandeur. In this movement, as British pianist Denis Matthews puts it, we "admire (Beethoven's) unflinching sense of the whole, of key relationships and continuity, so that seemingly disparate ideas unfold and link up with logic and dramatic purpose.

A superb, romantic adagio movement (Track 11) with many unusual textures follows in the surprising key of E major. Adding a scherzo to this particular sonata (Track 12), the composer expands it to the usual four movements of the string quartet or symphony.

The final *Allegro assai* movement (Track 13) is relaxed and playful: a discursive pastoral sonata rondo that shifts freely, like quicksilver, between outward display and inward poetry.

CONCLUSION

Although the chronological progression of the four sonatas played on this compact disc suggests musical – structural and expressive – development, it should not be taken to imply "progress." Each work, taken individually, perfectly suits its time and place. I

suggest that each sonata be enjoyed within the context of the fortepiano – each composer fashions the ever-changing vessel of the instrumental sonata as he explores and experiments with the new tonal possibilities of the uncharted instrument, which was to “rule” the Nineteenth Century.

JOHN VAN BUSKIRK

John Van Buskirk, pianist, is known as a versatile musician and appears as soloist, chamber musician and recital partner to prominent instrumentalists and singers. He has toured throughout the U.S. and Europe in these diverse roles. Mr. Van Buskirk is a graduate of the Eastman School of Music and the Julliard School; he also studied at the Liszt Academy in Budapest.

Van Buskirk has been a member of the music faculty of Smith College since 1986. He has a special interest in Classical and early Romantic performance practices, is a noted player of the fortepiano and has performed as fortepianist at the Mostly Mozart Festival at Lincoln Center, a Weill Hall at Carnegie Hall, at Merkin Hall and on National Public Radio.

John Van Buskirk was associated with the Waterloo Music Festival in New Jersey as faculty member and as summer administrator; he was an original member of the Music Today Ensemble in New York City. He is currently the keyboard player of the New York Chamber Symphony, Gerard Schwarz music director. Mr. Van Buskirk has also performed at Mohawk Trail Concerts in Massachusetts, The Lake Winnepesaukee Festival in New Hampshire and is program director for Music Week of “Art in Avila” in Curacao, Netherland Antilles. He has recorded for Nonesuch, Vanguard, Delos, Decamera Magna, Albany, Pro-Arte, EMI and Newport Classic.

SELECTIONS:

J.C. Bach - Sonata in C Minor, Opus XVII #2
Mozart - Sonata in E-Flat Major K. 282
Clemente - Sonata in F minor, Opus 13 #2
Beethoven - Sonata in C Major Opus 2, #3

TRACKS:

Sonata for keyboard in C minor, Op. 17/2, CW A8 (T. 341/3)
1. Allegro - 4:40
2. Andante - 4:59
3. Prestissimo - 3:15

Sonata No. 4 in E flat major, K. 282 (K. 189g)
4. Adagio - 7:52
5. Minuet - 4:07
6. Minuet II - 3:19

Sonata in F minor, Op.13/6
7. Allegro agitato - 4:28

8. Largo e sostenuto - 6:11
9. Presto - 4:57

Sonata No. 3 in C major, Op. 2/3

10. Allegro con brio - 10:10
11. Adagio - 8:24
12. Scherzo - 3:32
13. Allegro assai - 5:52



The Lyrichord Early Music Series

PO Box 1977 Old Chelsea Station
New York, NY 10011 Ph: 212 404 8290 Fax: 212 404 8291
email: nick@lyrichord.com Web: www.lyrichord.com

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