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CLEMENTI

Early Piano Sonatas

Vol. 2

Susan Alexander-Max, Fortepiano



Muzio Clementi (1752–1832)

Piano Sonatas

Op. 11 • Op. 1, No. 2 • Op. 7, No. 3 • Op. 9, No. 3 • Op. 10, No. 1

Muzio Clementi was born in Rome in 1752. He studied music from early childhood, and by the age of thirteen, assumed the position of organist at San Lorenzo in Damaso. His precocious talent drew the attention of Peter Beckford, cousin of the English writer and dilettante William Beckford, who, according to his own explanation, “bought Clementi of his father for seven years”. He returned to England with his purchase in late 1766. At Beckford’s house in Dorset, Clementi set himself to study and practise the harpsichord. In 1774, his solitary apprenticeship at an end after the stipulated seven years, he moved to London where he appeared more and more in concerts as harpsichordist, his popularity ever increasing as a result of the publication of his Op 2. in 1779. Thus encouraged, in summer 1780 he set out on his first tour abroad.

In Paris he was received with enthusiasm, as was reported in London, in a notice perhaps provided by Clementi himself, and having played with great success for Marie Antoinette, he was reportedly astonished by the contrast of his reception with the ‘gentle and cool approbation given by the English’ by comparison. He continued his tour, and also played for Marie Antoinette’s brother, Joseph II, in Vienna on Christmas Eve 1781. It was here that the famous piano contest with Mozart took place, described, with some disparagement, by Mozart in a letter home to his father. Although Clementi played well, he did not win the competition. Mozart was a difficult challenger, but it must be remembered that, until now, Clementi was self-taught, and then only on the harpsichord. This had been his first encounter with the new instrument, the fortepiano.

Despite his late start as a pianist, Clementi became a pioneer in cultivating many of the piano’s technical and expressive possibilities. Possibly influenced by Mozart’s playing, perhaps aided by his own early training as an

organist, he developed an expressive legato style of composition and performance for which he and his followers became widely known. He became a versatile and highly influential figure in the history of keyboard music. In addition to being a composer, a virtuoso pianist and a sought after teacher, he was a conductor, a music publisher, a successful piano manufacturer and an extremely astute businessman.

Clementi’s accomplishments centred mainly around the keyboard, and in fact, by the end of the 1780s he was considered the pianist with the greatest international reputation. His flamboyant virtuosity extended beyond the concepts of keyboard technique at that time, and he liked to display his talents by brilliant execution, with double-note passages and with improvisation. It was not until later that he adopted a more cantabile and refined style of performance. Reviews, in Cramer’s *Magazin der Musik*, of two concerts in London during March 1784, reflect the change in Clementi’s playing. ‘*Mr. Clementi played a sonata on the pianoforte and everyone had to admit that his execution displayed matchless facility and expression.*’ Two weeks later one reads that his playing displayed ‘*fine taste, delicacy, and great dexterity.*’ ‘*Clementi ... is regarded as the greatest pianist who has ever lived ... He excels equally in the adagio and the allegro ... He improvised in a manner to make one believe that the music had been written out.*’

Clementi had great influence on other composers, not least of all Beethoven, who was, indeed, one of his greatest admirers. The influence of Clementi’s sonatas is evident in youthful Beethoven. It was Clementi who passed on, to a whole new generation of pianists, his ideals of performance, which not only emphasized legato technique, but fluency in a brand new range of technical challenges.

Clementi’s sonatas were often printed several times during his lifetime, sometimes under different opus

numbers, and sometimes a particular opus number represented several different works, a cause of some confusion, but indicative of the popularity of the composer throughout Europe after 1780. Almost always, the publications of Clementi's continental tours were republished in England a little later, and almost always Clementi took the opportunity to incorporate minor additions and alterations. Described as 'revisions', they must be taken into consideration when assessing the composer's work.

Op. 1, No. 3 later became *Œuvre 1, Sonata 2*. The *Œuvre 1, Sonata 2* preserves little of the original material of the earlier version of 1771. In the revised *Sonata in B flat* (1780 or 81), the first movement begins like *Op. 1, No. 3* then diverges completely after nine bars. *Opp. 5 to 11* dating from 1780–1784 were all composed during Clementi's first continental tour, which took him to Paris, Vienna, Strasbourg and Munich, Lyon and probably Zurich. *Op. 7, Op. 9* and *Op. 10* can be dated by announcements in the *Wiener Zeitung*, and Haydn wrote to Artaria in 1783 thanking the publishers for 'the pianoforte sonatas of Clementi', and said that 'they are very fine'. Among the *Sonatas Opp. 7–10*, there are movements that show great advances in structural merit and successful integration of different techniques of previous years. The opening movement of *Op. 10, No. 1* is surely an example of this. One of the most impressive sonatas from this period is the G minor *Sonata Op. 7, No. 3*. The first movement presents extremely diverse musical materials that nevertheless accomplish a complex motivic unity on several levels. The dramatic and harmonically strong slow movement reflects the experiments of earlier sonatas and, in the finale, Clementi's famous octaves appear creating a movement of Haydnesque dexterity and humour.

Sonatas often appeared in England after they had been published on the Continent. *Op. 11* is one such example.

It, along with its celebrated toccata, was announced in England after Clementi returned to England at the end of 1782. The toccata was one of the works played before the Emperor Joseph II in his famous contest with Mozart in December 1781. Subsequently the toccata, 'full of errors', was reworked, republished and followed *Op. 24* instead of *Op. 11*. Another example of Clementi's 'revision'.

With the influence from Haydn and the skill of his own, Clementi made his impression on those who followed. His influence on the young Beethoven is apparent in Beethoven's early sonatas, and although Clementi's developmental style was perhaps never as sophisticated as that of Beethoven, his sonatas offered all the ingredients necessary for Beethoven and his contemporaries to carry on and move forward. Clementi's work was unrivalled as the benchmark for nineteenth-century pianistic style.

The secret with all of these sonatas, and the music of this period, is to make the dynamic contrasts sound as great as possible, to make a *fortissimo* seem the loudest possible and the *pianissimos* seem a colourful whisper. The intent is always to generate the true excitement of the music. All of these sonatas are about taking the piano to its extremes, about extending limits, about making an emotional impact. On the early fortepiano, all this is possible. Citing *Op. 7* again, the first and second movements are quite extraordinary for their cantabile legato lines. The third movement, with its exciting array of octaves, is full of *fortissimos*, *sforzandos* and exhilaration. The music sounds truly 'grand' on the fortepiano whose palette of colours and range of dynamics can be pushed to the full to make the most of the musical content and the dramatic rhetoric of the early sonatas of Clementi.

Susan Alexander-Max

Susan Alexander-Max

Susan Alexander-Max was born in New York City and is recognised internationally as a leading fortepianist and clavichordist specialising in the music of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Having graduated from the Juilliard School of Music with distinction, she won a scholarship to study with Ilona Kabos in London, where she now resides. She was finalist in the international Bach Competition and has performed, recorded and taught extensively throughout the United States, the United Kingdom, the Far East and Europe. A featured performer on International radio and television, she has played, as soloist and chamber musician, in festivals, museums and galleries, universities and music colleges world-wide. She has performed in some of the world's most prestigious venues and festivals. Highlights of these performances include the Cheltenham International Festival of Music in England, Banqueting House, London, the Haydn Festival in Eisenstadt, Austria, the Vleeshuis Museum in Antwerp and the Prague Spring International Festival of Music in the Czech Republic. She has been a frequent guest at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City and can be heard regularly in all major London venues. In 1996 Susan Alexander-Max made the decision to dedicate her work to period performance when she founded what is now the world renowned *Music Collection*. The ensemble specialises in music of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, performing solely on period instruments. With the *Music Collection* she has been featured as concerto soloist and chamber musician. Her solo career includes performances on both fortepiano and clavichord. She has appeared on British, American and European radio and television and has given important première performances of contemporary works for period instruments. She has been professor of piano at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London for many years, and today devotes most of her teaching time to giving lecture-recitals, workshops and master-classes on the fortepiano and clavichord in universities and conservatories in the United Kingdom, the United States, Europe and China. She has participated in the master-class series at the Juilliard School of Music, New York City, the Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts, and the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et Danse, Paris. Her recordings include the chamber music of Hummel, early Clementi piano sonatas and the complete keyboard works of Domenico Zupoli.



Photo by Jessica Max



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Playing Time
71:49

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Booklet notes in English

Muzio Clementi was famous throughout his lifetime as both a composer and a virtuoso performer, appearing at the court of France and competing with Mozart in Vienna. His keyboard sonatas, over a hundred in number, were immensely popular and influential, and his legacy as a performer and teacher was of considerable importance in the development of piano technique. The sonatas composed at the beginning of the 1780s heard on this recording are about extending the limits of the piano and making an emotional impact. The *Sonata in G minor, Op. 7, No. 3* is a fine example: the first and second movements are quite extraordinary for their cantabile legato lines while the third movement, with its exciting array of octaves, is full of *fortissimos*, *sforzandos* and exhilaration.

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Sonata in E flat major, Op. 11 (1784)	14:10	Sonata in E flat major, Op. 9, No. 3 (1783)	16:34
1 Allegro con grazia	5:37	10 Allegro assai	5:33
2 Larghetto con espressione	4:42	11 Larghetto	4:22
3 Rondo: Allegro spiritoso	3:50	12 Prestissimo	6:37
Sonata in B flat major, Op. 1, No. 2 (c.1781)	10:05	Sonata in A major, Op. 10, No. 1 (1783)	13:49
4 Allegro moderato	5:56	13 Allegro con spirito	5:17
5 Andantino grazioso	1:39	14 Minuetto: Allegretto con moto	3:32
6 Allegro	2:30	15 Prestissimo	5:00
Sonata in G minor, Op. 7, No. 3 (1782)	16:59		
7 Allegro con spirito	8:14		
8 Cantabile e lento	4:04		
9 Presto	4:40		

Susan Alexander-Max, Fortepiano

Recorded at St Paul's, Southgate, London, UK, 20th–22nd September 2004
 Producer & Editor: Phil Rowlands • Engineer: Michael Ponder • Booklet notes: Susan Alexander-Max
 Fortepiano made by Derek Adlam, after Michael Rosenberger (c.1798)
 Cover image: Northumberland House, Charing Cross, London, by Canaleti (Mary Evans Picture Library)