

NAXOS

# CLEMENTI

## Early Piano Sonatas

### Vol. 3

Susan Alexander-Max, Fortepiano



## Muzio Clementi (1752–1832)

### Early Piano Sonatas, Vol. 3

Clementi's early sonatas were possibly his greatest compositional achievement. Although he would continue to develop, these early works established a musical language that was futuristic. His interest in *cantabile* style of playing was a glimmer of what was to become nineteenth century Romanticism, and he taught this to his pupils, amongst them professional performers such as J. B. Cramer, John Field and Kalkbrenner. He is renowned for his teaching compositions, *Introduction to the Art of Playing the Piano Forte* of 1801, revised in 1826, and the famous *Gradus ad Parnassum*, completed and published also in 1826. Therefore, despite his late start as a pianist, Clementi became a pioneer in refining the piano's technical and expressive possibilities. His *legato* style in both composition and performance brought him recognition, and he became widely known as a versatile and highly influential figure in the history of keyboard music. In addition to being a composer, a virtuoso pianist and sought after teacher, he was a conductor, a music publisher, a successful piano manufacturer and an extremely astute businessman.

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 disciplined his own studying and practising. In 1774, this solitary apprenticeship came to an end after the stipulated seven years, and he moved to London where he appeared more and more in concerts as harpsichordist. His popularity ever increasing, possibly as a result of the publication of his Op. 2 in 1779, and encouraged by his success, he set out on his first tour abroad in summer 1780.

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 for that time, and he liked to display his talents by brilliant execution, with double-note passages and with improvisation. It was later that he adopted a more *cantabile* and refined performance style. Clementi had great influence on other composers, not least of all Beethoven, who was, indeed, one of his greatest admirers. It was Clementi who passed on, to a whole new generation of pianists, his ideals of performance, which not only emphasized a *legato* technique but also a facility that demonstrated a brand new range of technical challenges.

The Sonatas, often printed several times during his lifetime and often under different opus numbers, creating cause for some confusion, were indicative of the popularity of the composer throughout Europe after 1780. For example, the publications of Clementi's continental tours were republished in England a little later, giving Clementi the opportunity to 'revise' his works, the revisions appearing with new opus numbers.

Volume 3 of the *Early Piano Sonatas* of Muzio Clementi is designed to study the path of the composer in the years of his continental travels and parallels the choices used in Volumes 1 and 2, complementing and demonstrating the extent of the technical, musical and emotional impact of these early piano sonatas. All the sonatas were composed in the 1780s, many of them either reissued or revised by Clementi himself, bringing them more 'up to date' with the development of both music and piano of the day. For example, the *Sonata in C major, Op. 20*, was first published in London in 1787. An unchanged version was reissued by Clementi & Co (after 1801); there is, however, also a revised version which appears as *Sonata VI*, with considerable changes that were made by the composer during his stay in Leipzig in 1804. The graceful simplicity of the earlier versions of his

sonatas tended to grow in stature with revision, becoming more florid, more *cantabile* and often longer pieces. They introduce the public to a new virtuosity which was exploring a newly developed instrument in a society that was changing as rapidly.

Using the *Sonata in F major, Op. 13, No. 5*, as a benchmark, one can see how the composer combines his method of playing the piano with his developing compositional technique of longer *legato* lines, his revisions always leaning towards this *new* style. The sonata is both dramatic and playful, always making use of his favourite technical complications, perhaps to demonstrate his own prowess as a pianist. Although the first movement is marked *Allegro*, it has the sense of an *Andante* and the effect is that of being an introduction-like movement which guides the performer to the two following movements. The *Larghetto* is equally dramatic, but this time is followed by a lively and fanciful finale. Where Clementi could simply have used long, single melodic lines to express himself, he could never resist the use of octaves or double thirds. In all three movements of the sonata, no matter how *cantabile*, no matter how *legato*, no matter how fast or how slow, Clementi challenges the skills of the pianist. Thus we have this paradoxical personality, who was both simple yet complicated, both early yet forward-looking, both sensitive yet business-like, all these

attributes suggestive of his early piano sonatas.

The *Sonata, Op. 13, No. 5*, is placed, once again, at the end of this recording; ‘once again’, because the last sonata of *Early Piano Sonatas, Volume 1*, is the *Sonata in F minor, Op. 13, No. 6*. I have chosen this approach to produce symmetry between the recordings. The *F minor Sonata* is perhaps one of Clementi’s most dramatic works, equal in emotional impact to any of his later sonatas. The *F major Sonata* in this recording, perhaps not quite so forceful, is positioned best to articulate the certain transition from expressive *galant* to eloquent dramatic.

It is not surprising that Beethoven was so impressed by Clementi’s early works. The impulsive rhythms, dynamic extremes and octave melodies initiated by Clementi are what we associate with the young Beethoven, but ten years later.

I am, once again, using my fortepiano after Michael Rosenberger, c. 1798. The delicacy and grace of the Viennese style instrument satisfies the emotional needs of the music of this period. The music sounds truly ‘grand’ on a fortepiano whose palette of colours and range of dynamics can be pushed to the full to make the most of the musical vocabulary and the eloquent language of the early piano sonatas of Muzio Clementi.

Susan Alexander-Max

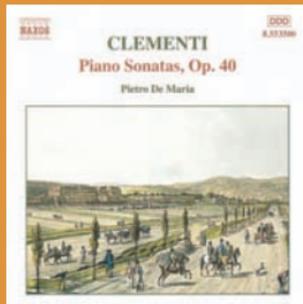
## Susan Alexander-Max

A native of New York, a graduate, with distinction, of the Juilliard School of Music, Susan Alexander-Max is recognised internationally as a leading fortepianist and clavichordist specialising in the music of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. A featured performer on international radio and television, she is known to festivals, museums, universities and music colleges world-wide. In 1996 she founded the world renowned period instrument ensemble, *The Music Collection*, with whom she has given premières of new works, some commissioned especially for *The Music Collection*. A professor of piano at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London for many years, she devotes most of her teaching time to giving lecture-recitals and master-classes in universities and conservatories, for example the Juilliard School of Music, Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts and Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et Danse in Paris. Susan Alexander-Max's recordings include both chamber music and solo repertoire, all to critical acclaim.

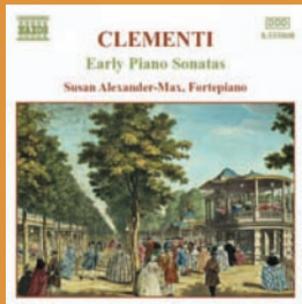


*Photo courtesy of the artist*

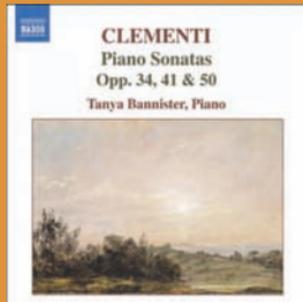
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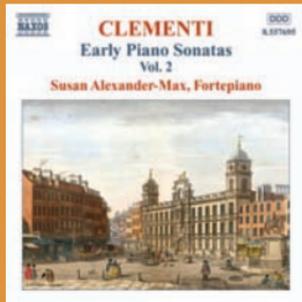
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Playing Time  
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Muzio Clementi was famous throughout his lifetime as both a composer and a virtuoso performer, appearing at the court of France and competing with Mozart in Vienna. His early piano sonatas, which greatly impressed the young Beethoven, were of considerable importance in the development of piano technique and its expressive possibilities. With their emphasis on dynamic contrast, singing lines and emotional impact, these pioneering pieces are arguably among the most influential in the transition of keyboard music from the classical to the romantic style.

Muzio  
**CLEMENTI**  
(1752–1832)

**Early Piano Sonatas Vol. 3**

<b>Sonata in C major, Op. 20</b>		<b>17:31</b>	<b>Sonata in B flat major, Op. 9, No. 1</b>		<b>17:57</b>
1	Allegro con spirito	9:05	8	Allegro assai	9:42
2	Adagio con espressione	3:17	9	Adagio cantabile e con espressione	3:03
3	Allegro con fuoco	5:04	10	Presto	5:05
<b>Sonata in F major, WoO 3</b>		<b>9:48</b>	<b>Sonata in F major, Op. 13, No. 5</b>		<b>20:02</b>
4	Vivace	6:41	11	Allegro	8:34
5	Rondo: Spiritoso	3:04	12	Larghetto	4:59
<b>Sonata in E flat major, Op. 6, No. 2</b>		<b>12:05</b>	13	Presto	6:22
6	Lento	5:47			
7	Presto	6:15			

**Susan Alexander-Max, Fortepiano**



Recorded at St Michael's Church, Highgate, London, UK, 14–16 November 2007  
Producer, Engineer & Editor: Phil Rowlands • Booklet notes: Susan Alexander-Max  
Fortepiano made by Derek Adlam, after Michael Rosenberger (c.1798) • a' = 430Hz / equal temperament  
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