

MALCOLM BILSON

Sonata in E-flat Major, Opus 44 ("The Farewell")	34:31	Jan Ladislav Dussek (1760-1812)
1. I. Introduzione: Grave – Allegro moderato	12:02	
2. II. Molto Adagio e Sostenuto	10:39	
3. III. Tempo di Menuetto più tosto Allegro	3:42	
4. IV. Rondo, Allegro: moderato e espressivo	8:05	
5. 11 Variations on "Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen wünscht Papageno sich" from Mozart's Magic Flute	6:10	J. B. Cramer (1771-1858)
Sonata in E-flat Major, Hob. 52	21:10	Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)
6. I. Allegro	8:58	
7. II. Adagio	6:14	
8. III. Finale: Presto	5:58	

5 ½ octave English Pianoforte by Longman & Clementi, 1798

Replica by Chris Maene, 2003

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London in the 1790s was a bustling industrial, cultural and musical capital. Johann Baptist Cramer, Muzio Clementi, Jan Ladislav Dussek and John Field, all foreigners, were magnetically drawn to this city with its variegated and sophisticated musical possibilities. These are the first genuine piano virtuosos, and their brilliant pianism and compositions will become known as the *London Pianoforte School*.

To make general characterisations about the musical vernacular of a specific time and place is always imperfect conjecture at best, but several important aspects of the London musical life at the time are significant: Firstly, we see the appearance of a strong middle class earlier here than on the continent with music clearly the favorite among the arts, hence the latest compositions could find a fertile market. Secondly we see the development of the English pianoforte, an instrument radically different from those being built and played in Germany and Vienna, there hand-made in small shops, here produced in factories. Thirdly, a new playing style emerges inspiring fuller textures to exploit the inherent rich sonority of these instruments.

I have been playing and recording on early pianos for almost 40 years, but my interest has always been centered on Viennese repertoires and Viennese instruments. But from about 1780 to about 1870 (the appearance of the now ubiquitous Steinway-type) two very different types of pianos developed parallel to each other; Hummel writes about these differences in 1829:

"Piano-fortes, generally speaking, are constructed on two different plans, the *German* or *Vienna*, as it is termed, and the *English*; the former is played upon with great facility as to touch, the latter with considerably less ease...The German piano...allows the performer to impart to his execution every possible degree of light and shade, speaks clearly and promptly, has a round, fluty tone, which in a large room contrasts well with the accompanying orchestra...To the English construction, however, we must not refuse the praises due, on the score of its durability and fullness of tone."

In the revival of early pianos less attention has been generally accorded English instruments than those of the Viennese school for a number of reasons. Viennese fortepianos boast an extreme clarity of sound, a clear balance between treble and bass and a light and rapid action that, as Hummel states above, so favors sensitivity and flexibility. And then, most of us are more interested in the music of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven than that of those composers mentioned above.

For our ears today the music of these English composers sounds astonishingly modern, as if it were written some 20 or 30 years later. Especially Dussek's music seems to foreshadow not only Schubert, but even Chopin and Liszt. For it is here in this particular repertoire that a pianistic style is born that will, in the 19th century, become the standard virtually everywhere on the continent.

In the keyboard style of both Mozart and Haydn, the similarity of texture to their string writing is undeniable. Indeed, Haydn's pre-London piano sonatas are very similar in texture and language to his string quartets, and the Mozart piano-violin sonatas treat the violin and keyboard right hand as equal partners sharing and exchanging identical material. The pianistic writing found in the London composers,

on the other hand, shows full, orchestral textures bearing little or no resemblance to a string quartet style. This music is also far more daring and chromatic, with adventurous modulations to far-off remote keys. The Dussek "Farewell" Sonata, in Eb Major, for example, begins in Eb minor, has a second movt. in B Major and a third in Ab minor, keys rarely to be heard in Vienna, and never in a single work!

Jan Ladislav Dussek (or Dusík) arrived in London in 1788, where he would spend the next 11 years, marrying the daughter of the music publisher Corri, with whom he entered into business as Corri, Dussek and Co. During his London years he played and taught extensively, and, along with Clementi, was very influential in the development of the burgeoning pianoforte industry there, working closely with John Broadwood and encouraging him to extend the range of their pianos from five to five-and-a-half and eventually to six octaves. In 1799 Dussek was forced to flee London, and the work heard here, considered by many to be his greatest piano sonata, offers the following on the title page:

The Farewell
A New Grand Sonata
for the Piano-Forte
composed and inscribed to his Friend
MUZIO CLEMENTI

By
J. L. Dussek
London

Printed by Longman, Clementi & Co. Cheapside

Now the instrument used for this recording was built by Chris Maene in 2003, and is modelled after a Longman & Clementi 5 ½ octave grand piano built in 1799 or 1800. It would be absurd and presumptuous to claim any kind of 'authenticity' by the rather extraordinary confluence of dedicatee, instrument and publishing house, yet I cannot deny that learning the work on this particular instrument has had a great influence on my playing style, suggesting inflections and gestures that neither a Viennese fortepiano of that period nor a modern Steinway-type could have inspired.

For example, the Viennese instruments of the time had lightning-quick leather dampers, while these English instruments have rather inefficient 'feather-duster' dampers that stop the sound in a kind of lazy, imprecise fashion. And whereas Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven indicate precise articulations in their compositions (for music was thought to be like speech and needed a clear sense of inflection) here most notes are simply left bare: no slurs, no staccati, no articulation marks whatever. And if those sections on *Vortrag* (performance, execution) in the tutors of CPE Bach, Leopold Mozart and Daniel Gottlob Türk are clear that unmarked notes are *never* to be held full length, Clementi, in his 1803 *Introduction to the Art of Playing on the Pianoforte*, tells us:

"When the composer leaves the LEGATO, and STACCATO to the performer's taste; the best rule is, to adhere chiefly to the LEGATO; reserving the STACCATO to give SPIRIT occasionally to certain passages, and to set off the HIGHER BEAUTIES of the LEGATO."

Further – if Mozart's and Haydn's keyboard music shows few dynamic markings, here we find them in enormous profusion. Marks like *cresc.* and *dim.* are everywhere, with *ff* and *pp* often in almost immediate juxtaposition. Agogic indications for hurrying and slowing are sparse, on the other hand, being generally left to the discretion of the performer, but indications like *con passione*, *delicatamente*, *amoroso*, *scherzando*, *dolcissimo*, are clear indications for alterations of feeling. And such mood changes, as in this extraordinary example from the middle section of the second movement of the Dussek, cannot be realized without changes of tempo, as all sources in the 18th century tell us that 'when the pulse goes faster or slower, when we feel excited or more lethargic, speed must always reflect these passions accordingly.'

The image shows three systems of musical notation for piano. Each system consists of a treble and bass clef staff. The first system is in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time, featuring a bass line with a '6' below it. Dynamic markings include *ff*, *pp*, and *cresc.*. The second system is in E minor (two flats) and 3/4 time, with dynamic markings *ff*, *for.*, and *dim.*. The third system is also in E minor and 3/4 time, with a *pia* marking. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns, slurs, and articulation marks.

Ex. 1 (Track 2, 6:42-7:07)

Incidentally, it should be pointed out that this work precedes Beethoven's 'Farewell' (*Das Lebewohl*) Sonata, Opus 81a (likewise in Eb Major) by ten years. That Beethoven was generally influenced in his piano writing style by the London composers has been noted by Alexander Ringer (*The Musical Quarterly*, 1960) and the influence of this particular work on its later namesake is striking. The dotted rhythm figure of the main theme of the Dussek 2nd movement is used as the troubled 'alternate' motive of Beethoven's opening movement:

Molto Adagio è Sostenuto

Ex. 2

Adagio
Le - be wohl

Ex. 3

and the texture of these two passages from the slow movements of each likewise demonstrates clear inspiration from the earlier work:

Ex. 4, Dussek (Track 2, 5'50")

Ex. 5, Beethoven

To be sure, Beethoven's program (Farewell, Absence, Return) relates a 'different story' from that of Dussek's, which ends with a wistful sadness in contrast to Beethoven's joyous sense of return. The influence is in the use of musical material rather than in psychology. Great artists know their sources, how to use them and at times how to surpass them...

Haydn visited London twice, in 1791-2 and again in 1794-5. One can hardly overestimate the importance of these two visits on his artistic development and achievements. From these trips come the 12 so-called 'London' symphonies (for many years virtually the only ones heard), the late piano trios, the wonderful English songs, the three great London piano sonatas. The last of these, the Eb Sonata, Hob. 52 is Haydn's grandest work for piano in any form. I have played it for 40 years, always on Viennese pianos, and recorded it on a Walter-type for Nonesuch Records back in the 1980s (now out of print).

To sit down and play this work so familiar to me for the first time on an English instrument proved nothing short of a revelation. Although I had long known that it was these large English pianos that inspired this new kind of writing, the effect was far beyond what I could have imagined. The musical influence of Clementi and Dussek on all three of Haydn's London piano sonatas is undeniable, but is in greatest evidence in the present work. Dedicated to the young virtuoso Therese Jansen, a protégée of Clementi, this is first and foremost an extroverted, brilliant concert piece, in stark contrast to most of Haydn's (and Mozart's) piano sonatas conceived for more domestic music-making. Especially the first movement is composed in the grandest style with an almost bewildering amount of material. If one of Dussek's trademarks is the use of the Neapolitan key (a half-step up), this feature is exploited everywhere in this work, most notably by putting the entire second movement in the Neapolitan key of E Major. High drama, passion and wit are combined here to paint a variegated landscape perhaps unequalled anywhere. I play this sonata very differently from the old Nonesuch recording on a Walter, for I see it now as having starker dynamic and agogic contrasts - free-whccling, improvisatory and highly declamatory.

I would like to point out a curious passage in the first movement:



The listener cannot be quite sure what the octave g heard after the silence implies, but the stepwise chromatic descent to f (5th step of the dominant) soon makes it clear where it is heading (just exactly where it should: the half-cadence). In the recapitulation, however, the following alteration occurs:



Ex. 7 (Track 6, 8'22")

When the listener hears the octave c s/he doubtless says "Ah, but we know that trick; we know what will happen now," but then the descent toward the Bb (5th step of the tonic) actually bypasses that note to the outrageous and quite incomprehensible Bbb (actually a); the 'bottom literally drops out', returning to the proper note of Bb only one bar later. And to top it off, Haydn adds the little figure x, almost thumbing his nose at the audience! This is the boldest wit! It represents an ingenious stroke on the part of Haydn, but perhaps its real significance is more what it says about the audiences of the time. It is as if in a Woody Allen film an actor makes a remark near the end whose humorous sense is only clear if we remember another remark made near the beginning of the film. That is exactly the situation here - Haydn expected (and presumably got!) such attentive listening, otherwise this quite raucous joke would have been lost! (It is

to be presumed that if one tells jokes that get no laughs, one eventually stops telling them...Haydn never did.)

Johann Baptist Cramer was born in Germany in 1771 but moved very early to London and spent most of his life in that city as an active pianist, composer and teacher. He was perhaps the most universally admired pianist of the time. He left a large corpus of compositions, mostly for the piano, but is mostly remembered today for his 84 *Studio per il pianoforte*, exercises which, along with those of his contemporaries Czerny, Hanon and Clementi, were long the cornerstones of piano teaching. His style, unmistakably evident in these charming variations, was always marked by a kind of conservative elegance - skillful, idiomatic for the piano, but lacking the Gothic drama of a Clementi or Dussek. He lived until 1858, and in later years expressed dissatisfaction with the 'excesses' of the newer schools of composition, noting that when he was young piano playing had been '*fort bien*' (very good) but that it now had become merely '*bien fort*' (very loud).

Malcolm Bilson - Ithaca, New York
March 2008

Malcolm Bilson began his pioneering activity in the early 1970s as a performer of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert on late 18th- and early 19th-century pianos. Since then he has proven to be a key contributor to the restoration of the fortepiano to the concert stage and to fresh recordings of the "mainstream" repertory.

Bilson has recorded the three most important complete cycles of works for piano by Mozart: the piano concertos with John Eliot Gardiner and the English Baroque Soloists for Deutsche Grammophon Archiv, the piano-violin Sonatas with Sergiu Luca for Nonesuch records, and the solo piano sonatas for Hungaroton. His traversal on period pianos of the Schubert piano sonatas (including the so-called incomplete sonatas), likewise on Hungaroton, was completed in 2003, and in 2005 a single CD of Haydn sonatas appeared on the Claves label.

Bilson, a member of the Cornell Music Faculty since 1968, is also Adjunct Professor at the Eastman School of Music and gives annual summer fortepiano workshops at various locations in the United States and Europe, as well as master classes and lectures (generally in conjunction with solo performances) around the world. In the fall of 1994 Bilson and six of his former artist-pupils from Cornell's D.M.A. program in Historical Performance Practice presented the 32 piano sonatas of Beethoven in New York City, the first time ever that these works had been given as a cycle



on period instruments. The New York Times said that "what emerged in these performances was an unusually clear sense of how revolutionary these works must have sounded in their time." The recording of this series for Claves Records garnered over fifty very positive reviews and has recently been reissued.

An educational video entitled "Knowing the Score" was released in 2005, in which

Bilson discusses the question: Do we really know how to read the notation of the so-called 'classical' masters? (www.knowingthescore.com)

Malcolm Bilson is a member of the National Academy of Arts and Sciences, has an honorary doctorate from Bard College and is the recipient of the 2006 James Smithson Bicentennial Medal.

This is his first recording for Bridge Records.

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