

JOSEPH SCHMITT

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Joseph Schmitt has been called the Dutch Haydn. Such expressions are often ridiculous and serve no useful purpose and, in fact, create problems.

He was born in Gernsheim, Germany in 1734 and died in Amsterdam in 1791. In his lifetime his music was played all over Europe with success. He was not only a composer but also a conductor. Fortunately he was a publisher as well. He was the first artist-in-residence at the first purpose-built concert hall in the Netherlands, the Felix Meritis in Amsterdam. He has been described as a jet-setter rubbing shoulders with all the important people of his time. He had links with composers such as Bach's sons, Abel, Haydn, Mozart and the Mannheim composers.

Joseph Schmitt was a musical priest at the Cistercian Cloister at Eberbach in Germany. He was responsible for all the music there, and this is where he composed much church and instrumental music. The Cloister was also famous for its wine which is still available today.

He was one of the pupils of Carl Friedrich Abel (1723-1787) as was Mozart. His music shows some affinity with Abel but Schmitt seems to have taken on board all the various developments in music of his time. There are touches of the Mannheim school, early Haydn and the gallant styles. There is clearly some influence from C P E and W F Bach.

The composer Cramer and the musical historian Burney praised Schmitt's music.

After 37 years in Germany, Schmitt moved to Amsterdam in 1771 which had a thriving music publishing industry. He joined the publishing house of J J Hummel and then formed his own publishing house immediately publishing his first symphonic work in 1772, the Symphony in G, known at first as Symphonie Periodique no. 1. He also published works by other composers and was responsible for arranging the premieres of works by Abel and Mozart in Northern Europe. He actually published some works of Mozart. His own work was especially admired in Scandinavia.

The Felix Meritis concert hall was opened on 31 October 1788 and remains to this day. People like Julius Röntgen were closely connected with it. The building is known as Keizersgracht 324.

Like composers such as Scriabin, Schmitt had a system of colours for various keys and it has been extended to indicate the following possible interpretations:

D major	grandeur, splendour, bellicose, majestic
B flat major	masculine energy, cheerful love, aspiration, clear conscience, hopefulness
G major	pleasant, rustic, idyllic, lyrical, calm
E minor	pensive, aggrieved, sad, innocent declaration of love, naive, womanly
E flat major	beautiful, majestic, honest, noble, ardent.

He wrote many symphonies, flute quartets, instrumental and other chamber music and church music. It is well written and attractive.

Whether it is right to call him the Dutch Haydn is another matter.