

MUZIO CLEMENTI

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Clementi was a maligned composer in his day and it is only recently that he has begun to emerge as a composer of distinction.

Mozart and his father, Leopold, both suffered from high opinions of themselves. The Mozarts hated Salieri because they thought he was a better musician than both of them and he was. They also verbally abused Clementi. Young Mozart wrote to his father about Clementi, "He has not a Kreutzer's worth of taste and feeling. In short, he is simply a mechanicus." This was professional jealousy and yet Mozart was even more dishonest. He stole the main theme from Clementi's Piano Sonata in B flat, Op. 24 no. 2 for use in his overture to his opera *The Magic Flute*.

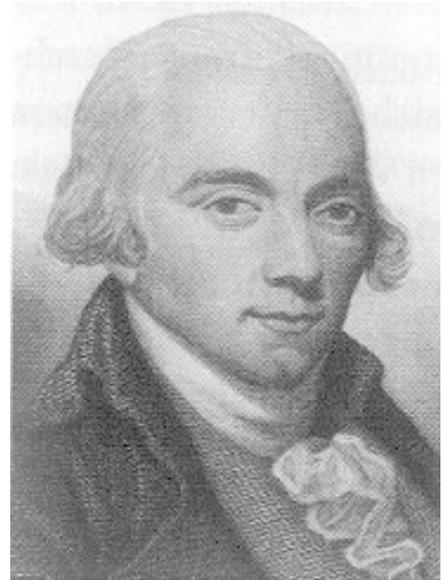
Whereas Mozart was a villain, as already indicated, Beethoven was quite different. He did not disparage Clementi but held him in great esteem. Beethoven often played Clementi sonatas and often a volume of them was on Beethoven's music stand. Beethoven recommended these works to many people including his nephew, the ill-fated Karl.

The other problem is that Clementi is usually remembered simply for his 'facile' piano sonatas dismissed as merely educational music. But educational music is not to be sniffed at. The music of Albert Loeschhorn, Bertini, Le Coupey, Louis Kohler, Stephen Heller are worthy to be played. Clementi's *Gradus ad parnassum* is a collection of a hundred piano exercises which have troubled students for years since educational piano music raises technical problems that many would not wish to face. They never seem to be performed professionally as if they are set aside as merely exercises but the three volumes are the precursors of Hindemith's great *Ludus Tonalis*. Nonetheless his greatest sonatas are played from time to time and had Vladimir Horowitz as one champion. Other champions were Lamar Crowson, Malcolm Binns and the great Peter Katin.

Mozart's opinion of Clementi's piano playing was way off target and deliberately so. Sir Peter Beckford on a visit to Rome was so impressed with young Clementi that he brought him to London where he took the concert halls of London by storm. From 1766 until 1773 Clementi was based at Sir Peter's home in Wiltshire. The London public who had already heard Mozart said of Clementi, "A greater composer than Mozart is here." Clementi then travelled all over Europe with great success. He was the darling of the keyboard and an exceptional pianist. No wonder the Mozarts scowled.

There was also the curious piano competition between Mozart and Clementi instigated by Emperor Joseph II of Austria. It turned into a combat. As to who won there was no decision. But Mozart came off worse. Clementi played his B flat Sonata which Mozart later stole for his opera *The Magic Flute*.

Muzio was born in Rome on 23 January 1752 of a Roman father, who was an accomplished craftsman in silver, and a Swiss mother. He was precocious both as a performer and composer from a very early age and he did not have a Leopold to write music for him to which he could ascribe his name. He was taught the rudiments of music by Buroni, a local church choirmaster, and, in 1759, began organ lessons with Cordicelli and, two years later, had a church organist's post. Carpani taught him counterpoint and Santarelli taught him singing. In 1764, at the age of twelve, he composed an oratorio *II martiro de gloriosi Santi Girolami e Celso* which was performed in Rome. After his successful concerts throughout Britain in 1776 and later in Europe (he was particularly well received in Vienna which Mozart regarded



as his exclusive territory) he was involved in the first potential scandal in his life. He eloped with the daughter of a Lyons banker and only just avoided being arrested in Switzerland where he left the girl and fled to London where he set up a thriving music business with his friend W F Collard which included the manufacture of pianos. Collard pianos still exist to this day. In March 1807, his business Clementi and Co. was destroyed by fire to the value of about £40,000. Clementi was also active with piano pupils and composing piano sonatas. He travelled extensively giving concerts and recitals which was financially profitable and he renewed contact with Haydn and Beethoven the latter to whom he granted an impressive publishing contract.

Among his pupils were John Field, whom he took to St Petersburg in 1802, John B Cramer and Meyerbeer. He also taught Moscheles and the gifted Kalkbrenner.

Curiously Clementi belonged to the 18th century. He did not like change which the 19th century brought. He was always looking back. At the age of 52 he married a girl of seventeen, daughter of J G G Lehmann, cantor of St Nicholas's Church in Berlin but she died within a short while in childbirth of their first child in August 1805. Eventually he returned to England, worked on Gradus ad Parnassum, married one Emma Gisburne and composed his greatest piano sonatas, op. 50, the last of the three being entitled Didone abbandonata. After further travel he retired to Evesham where he died suddenly on 10th March 1832 at the age of eighty.

His remains are laid to rest in the cloisters in Westminster Abbey.

It was largely through the work of another fine Italian composer, Alfredo Casella, that Clementi symphonies were discovered and edited. In 1934 Casella 'discovered' four symphonies, two in D major, one in C major and the 'Great National Symphony'.

Interest in the Clementi symphonies increased. The two symphonies for grand orchestra were published by Longman and Broderip as his opus 18 in 1787 but they were later published by Offenbach in Paris as opus 44 in 1800. A century and a half later they were edited by Renato Fasano and published by Ricordi who recorded them for FIMV. And so we had Symphony no. 1 in B flat and Symphony no.2 in D.

It appears that in the early 1800s Clementi abandoned writing piano sonatas in favour of the symphony and there is some evidence that he planned an initial set of six. But he wrote and rewrote them time and time again. The publishers Breitkopf and Hartel pleaded with the composer to finish them so that they could publish them.

The Grand National Symphony was performed on 26 March 1823 but was this the same symphony as played in April of that year?

Which two symphonies were heard at the Theatre des Italiens in Paris on 6 April 1817?

The Grand National Symphony is so called because the slow third movement is based on the National Anthem God save the king which tune is not English but American it would appear!

Entering this mystery was the English organist and scholar W H Cummings (1831-1915). Hidden in his archives were a bundle of Clementi manuscripts which were put up for auction at Sotheby's in 1917. They were acquired by Dr Carl Engel for the library of Congress in Washington.

Apparently when Clementi died his estate, including his manuscripts, passed to his widow, Emma and, in turn, to his daughter and ultimately to Rev P Clementi Smith, the composer's grandson who was a friend of Dr Cummings.

It was in Washington that Casella 'discovered' the symphonies. His editions were published by Ricordi

in 1938. From 1969 the Italian musicologist Pietro Spada correlated all the existing symphonic material and reconstructed four symphonies but he arrived at the same position as that of Casella namely four symphonies no. 1 in C, no. 2 in D, no. 3 in G (Grand National Symphony) and no. 4 in D. Pietro Spada produced a 45 page booklet on the complete symphonic works of Clementi which booklet was published by Edizioni Sulvini Zerboni in Milan in 1977, the British agents being Boosey and Hawkes. As well as the four symphonies there is a Minuetto Pastorale in D, and Overture in D and an Overture in C.

But what happened to the Symphony in B flat recorded by Fasano and also by Alberto Zedda for Angelium?, Are we going to adopt the Bruckner remedy and refer to a symphony as number 0 or number minus 1?

But Spada says that there are only four symphonies and three other symphonic works!

What about the Piano Concerto in C? Why wasn't this in Spada's complete catalogue of Clementi's symphonic works published in 1977? We knew about it at RCM in 1964!

And so, Muzio Clementi was not just a pedagogue and teacher or merely an educationalist but a composer of sonatas and symphonies deserving far more attention than they receive.

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