

HUMMEL

STEREO CD-SAR 12

DIGITAL
RECORDING

Sonata Op.50 in D, Op.5 no.3 in Eb, Nocturne Op 99

Ralph Holmes Violin by Stradivari, Cremona 1736

Richard Burnett Fortepiano by Graf, Vienna 1826



COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO



on original instruments

Ralph Holmes

Violin by Stradivari, Cremona 1736

Richard Burnett

Fortepiano by Graf, Vienna 1826

Recorded at Finchcocks, Goudhurst, Kent, Jan 1983 by
Gef Lucena (Amon Ra) and David Wilkins (Valley Recordings)

Tuning by Alastair Laurence

Graf Fortepiano from the Richard Burnett Collection at
Finchcocks, Goudhurst, Kent

Photos by Andrew Sydenham

Booklet designed by Genny Lucena

Recorded and edited using CLUE system, Sony PCM 701 Digital encoder,
AKG C414 microphones in crossed hypercardioid configuration.

Made in EC

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WORKS FOR VIOLIN & PIANO

Sonata Op. 50 in D

allegro con brio [9'33"]

andante [3'22"]

rondo pastorale [4'39"]

Sonata Op. 5 no. 3 in Eb

allegro moderato [9'40"]

adagio e cantabile [4'51"]

rondo con moto [5'42"]

Nocturne Op. 99 [15'48"]

Total duration: 53'36"

A composer at his best in extrovert untroubled music is a rare phenomenon. Hummel occupies an unusual position in this respect, and if music reflects the man, then surely the composer's warm-hearted, somewhat wordly, nature is brought alive to us in his compositions. A blend of sophistication and innocent gaiety is the hallmark of Hummel's finest compositions and the three works chosen for the present recording reflect this admirable quality in full measure.

Authenticity, that much abused word, can be served in more than one way. Purest is, no doubt, the attempt to express a composer's intentions through the instruments he had in mind at the time of creation, a task usually fraught with difficulties and rendered doubly so when works written at different stages in the composer's lifetime are performed in the same programme. Another way, easier but valid nonetheless, is to recreate a performance of a composer's output at a given date, and it is this latter method which is employed in the present recording, where the same instruments used throughout give consistency to the three works which cover early, middle and late periods of Hummel's working life. The point of departure is provided by an edition

which dates from 1832, the evening of the composer's life, when his best works had been written and his star was in descent. The producer of this edition, F. W. Eichler, gives Hummel, that arranger of other people's music, a taste of his own medicine, for the E flat sonata was originally written for viola and piano, while the nocturne had been scored first for piano duet, before Hummel himself rewrote it for other combinations.

Of all the classical masters, none writes more felicitously for the Viennese fortepiano than Hummel, himself one of the great pianists of the age. The formative years with his companion and mentor, Mozart, laid the foundations of his style, which exploits to the full the salient characteristics of this type of instrument, incisiveness and clarity. Hummel's writing for the piano can in fact be considered an extension of Mozart's keyboard style taken to the furthest degree. His writing for the violin was not invariably as sure as that for the piano, but the sonata Op. 50 in D is as happy a blend of instruments as one

could wish for. And happy is perhaps the right word to describe this lovely work written between 1810 and 1815 when the composer was in his thirties and at the height of his fame. The characteristic use of short pithy sentences is throughout very much in evidence, notably the second subject of the first movement, the epigrammatic opening of the concise second movement and the middle section of the rondo pastorale where the violin introduces a "gypsy" theme in G major.

The E flat sonata dates from 1798. An early work, it shows clearly the influence of Mozart. The opening allegro is a large-scale movement full of rich and diverse textures, by turn lyrical and appealing, jaunty and sparkling. That and the equally lively rondo flank the heart of the sonata, the slow movement, where Hummel's equable temperament is evinced in the spacious tranquillity of this aria-like adagio.

The nocturne of 1822 is a fine work and one of its author's most joyous creations. It dates from the apex of Hummel's career when his style had deepened and reached its fullest maturity.

The sultry adagio in F minor serves as a curtain-raiser to the lively openhearted theme and variations in the major mode that throughout retain the romance of the introduction by means of highly chromatic harmony. The fourth variation extends to a minor section ('con dolore') which in turn leads to a lengthy codetta, followed by a 'tempo di valse'. which, with its own set of variations, rounds off the piece in exuberant fashion.

© **Richard Burnett**

The Instruments

The fortepiano by Conrad Graf of Vienna dates from 1826 and is a fine example of its type, in good original condition. The compass is six octaves and a fourth (CC-F⁴). The four pedals operate keyboard shift, cembalo, moderator and sustaining mechanisms. Of these, the keyboard shift and sustaining function similarly to those of a modern piano. The moderator, whereby strips of cloth are inserted between hammer and strings to sweeten the tone colour, was a very popular device and

one to be found in the great majority of Viennese fortepianos of this period. The cembalo, in which a rasping sound is produced by leather strips pressed down onto the strings in the lower registers, was reserved for special effects, although this and similar devices are found in a great many Viennese fortepianos. In the present recording the use of the cembalo is confined to certain passages in the last movement of the D major sonata.

Richard Burnett

By the time the three works here recorded had entered the repertoire, the majority of violins dating prior to 1780-90 had undergone a number of modifications. Subsequent to that period, instruments were increasingly made to specifications which differed in a number of respects from those commonly used fifty years before.

Encouraged by the virtuosi, who were playing and indeed contributing to a repertoire of growing technical difficulty and boldness, certain makers had been experimenting in order to develop the mid-eighteenth century model in such a

way as to enhance its resonance, provide a wider range of tone colour and bigger potential volume.

As an aid to a more brilliant sound, pitch had risen appreciably. Because of the additional tension in the strings and in order to counteract the resultant greater downward pressure of the bridge upon the belly of the instrument, it was found necessary to insert a longer and more substantial base-bar. Also, the growing tendency of composers to write in higher and yet higher registers suggested a longer finger board and the substitution of a slightly longer neck, set at a more suitable angle.

Initially, acceptance of these ideas was gradual; however, by the early years of the nineteenth century, instruments displaying these new characteristics, virtually 'modern violins' as we know them, were being produced by most of the leading makers of the day.

The violin heard in these recordings is by Antonio Stradivari. Loaned to Ralph Holmes by the Royal Academy of Music, London, it was made in 1736 and is a superb example of 'the late Strad'.

The label bears the inscription 'Antonius Stradivarius Cremonensis Faciebat Anno 1736' beneath which has been penned in capitals 'D'ANNI 92' indicating that the instrument was made in the master's 92nd year.

Ralph Holmes



Finchcocks is both a museum of historical instruments and a music centre of international repute. Founded by pianist Richard Burnett and first opened to the public in 1977 the beautiful 18th. century mansion houses his magnificent collection of keyboard instruments. Finchcocks is one of the few museums in the world where a large proportion of the instruments are in full playing order.

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