

# Clementi on Clementi



PETER KATIN

*plays Clementi keyboard sonatas  
on an 1832 Clementi square piano*

# MUZIO CLEMENTI (1752-1832)

## KEYBOARD SONATAS

*played on a square piano made by Clementi & co in 1832*

### **Sonata in F sharp minor, op. 25 no. 5**

1	<i>Piuttosto allegro con espressione</i>	8:12
2	<i>Lento e patetico</i>	4:08
3	<i>Presto</i>	6:30

### **Sonata in B flat major, op. 24 no. 2**

4	<i>Allegro con brio</i>	5:26
5	<i>Andante</i>	3:53
6	<i>Allegro assai</i>	4:26

### **Sonata in G minor, op. 7 no. 3**

7	<i>Allegro con spirito</i>	5:43
8	<i>Cantabile e lento</i>	3:52
9	<i>Presto</i>	4:07

### **Sonata in D major, op. 25 no. 6**

10	<i>Presto</i>	3:38
11	<i>Un poco andante</i>	3:03
12	<i>Allegro assai</i>	4:13

### **Sonata in F minor, op. 13 no. 6**

13	<i>Allegro agitato</i>	6:55
14	<i>Largo e sostenuto</i>	5:36
15	<i>Presto</i>	4:53

**Total playing time:**

**74:35**

The opus numbers given are those according to the *Thematic Catalogue of the Works of Muzio Clementi* by A. Tyson.

## **Peter Katin writes:**

Until 1992, my experience of keyboard instruments other than the modern piano and the harpsichord was virtually nil. Broadly speaking, what I heard gave me no incentive to take period pianos particularly seriously and for years they remained, in my mind, curiosities - and usually in such poor condition that they seemed not only in danger of falling to pieces, but probably beyond restoration. This viewpoint has been strengthened by the display of pianos of more modern design such as those played by Chopin and lovingly but misguidedly “preserved” in Zelazowa Wola, Warsaw and Mallorca.

I have also seen square pianos that have convinced me that they are past hope -one, I believe, still sits in a museum in London, Ontario, bearing a DO NOT TOUCH label; having got permission to touch it when I lived there some years ago I discovered that so much of it was in an advanced state of decline that if I played more than the odd note it might well disintegrate. Interestingly enough, it appears that Chopin actually kept a square piano in a side room in Nohant, and played it for his own enjoyment in preference to the noisy and overbearing grand.

One visit to the Yehudi Menuhin School changed my attitude dramatically, when I was shown a restored Broadwood square piano. The sound and feel of this instrument was incredibly beautiful and I was highly impressed by the variety of tone colours that could be achieved. I decided to find out more about these pianos and discovered that they can indeed be restored, and while there may always be an element of uncertainty as to whether or not the restoration results in a complete picture of the original instrument when new, I feel that they are as completely convincing as an artist’s interpretation (or “re-creation”) of a great work, and no artist will say that he is one hundred per cent. sure that what he is doing is what the composer wanted.

If the finished product is wholly satisfying, then the maximum amount of which a human being is capable has been achieved, which is precisely the case with the square pianos I have recently played.

This brings me to the matter of how to play them. They do not respond to the mechanical onslaught our modern ears are used to, and they have their own unique dynamic and tonal range, but here I must dismiss any idea that they must be treated as delicate objects. One has to find out exactly what they are able to do, which involves many adjustments to the player's technical approach, and if that is successful the richness and reserve can be truly amazing.

Arm-weight, wrist position, and most importantly fingering, must be constantly modified to achieve the tonal effects of which the square piano is capable; even the absence of a soft pedal challenges the player's ability to vary the sound so that a new meaning can be given to the phrase "making a virtue out of necessity". All this is of course tied up inextricably with the interpretation of whatever is played on it - it will produce a very pleasant sound if the notes are played with no imagination at all, but like all fine instruments, it needs to be understood, and the greater the understanding, the greater is the response. Therefore phrasing, rubato and the hundreds of other elements that go to make up an interpretation must be re-thought without prejudice.

Muzio Clementi was born in Rome in 1752. At the age of thirteen he attracted the attention of Peter Beckford (a wealthy traveller) who decided to patronise him for a number of years: this is rather engagingly put in Beckford's own words, "I bought Clementi of his father for seven years!". Clementi moved to London in 1774 and died in Evesham in 1832. An extraordinarily inventive character, he played and taught extensively, ran a very successful publishing company (in 1807 he acquired the rights for some of Beethoven's works) and composed profusely, although relatively few of his compositions are heard these days - somewhat surprisingly, as he produced over seventy

sonatas as well as concertos and symphonies. He appears to have had quite an influence on other musicians, and there are references to his music in a few of Mozart's works, although Mozart's opinion of him was less than kind, to put it mildly.

On the other hand John Field was persuaded to demonstrate the square piano to would-be buyers, but Clementi's view of Field was just about as unkind! In the middle of all this activity he also developed his business expertise by investing in a firm of instrument makers, and he eventually ran a business of his own. His concert tours in the early part of the nineteenth century were also useful in exploiting the Clementi piano (in earlier tours he had played a harpsichord), which at that time had a range of five and a half octaves; it was not until 1810 that Clementi produced a six-octave model.

I have used a splendid six-octave piano of 1832 for this recording.

In choosing the sonatas I have been very conscious of the fact that what sounds right on a modern piano does not have the same effect on a square piano, but I have also been made aware that the reverse is also true - certain passages that sound somewhat trite on a modern instrument take on a quite different character when played on the Clementi.

The five sonatas here almost chose themselves, once I realised that I could not choose them by sitting at my Steinway! Therefore one result of this procedure was the discarding of one sonata which I had initially thought would be an ideal choice, and the addition of another which I had previously not thought a lot of. All of them have totally different characters.

The F sharp minor has a superbly lyrical first movement - one very good reason for retaining both repeats - a tragic, almost operatic slow movement, and a dance-like finale, containing those fiendish passages in thirds in which Clementi as a player seemed to revel, according to Mozart. The B flat major is the sonata in which one hears what sounds like a definite reference to Mozart's Die Zauberflöte overture, although of course the overture came some years later. It contains an uncomplicated slow movement

of some charm, and also one of the two Rondos on this recording, this one ending with a further reference to the Zauberflöte theme.

The sonata in G minor is somewhat perplexing, and the first movement seems full of ideas which are almost unconnected and certainly not developed, although the apparent reference to Beethoven's Eroica theme is intriguing. Here I found that by taking a more leisurely view than the word "spirito" might suggest, these ideas sound more complete and better linked. The slow movement is one of solemn intensity, and the finale is a kind of tarantella, a whirlwind of sound, which also shows the surprising reserves of power in the piano itself.

After this there is the charming sonata in D major, its first movement with its triplet bass reminding me of one of Haydn's sonatas that I have often played. There is no slow movement as such, but an exquisite "intermezzo" (my term for it) in which the player's liking of embellishments can be put to very good use. The Rondo has a slight, humorous theme that can bring a smile with each repetition, and is the only finale from the five to end without a coda, using only two quiet and simple phrases.

The last sonata is in F minor, widely regarded as one of the best, and it is certainly highly dramatic throughout. The first movement conveys a restlessness, an agitation which persists throughout, while the slow movement is most profound, with long, tragic phrases, ending without consolation. The finale unleashes a torrent of energy, which at the end dashes away into a very dark distance. Here, too, is a more disguised Eroica quotation, but one is never sure if similarities really mean conscious copying from one composer or another, and I am far from convinced of its importance, even though books have been written on the subject!

I cannot make more comprehensive comparisons of the ancient and the modern pianos, and in this case it would be inappropriate, as the square piano was a domestic

instrument and the forerunner of the more economical (and sadly unimaginative) upright piano. I think it is enough to say that in playing a square piano one is in effect speaking a different language, and a very absorbing one.

© 1993 Peter Katin (revised 2004)

## **The square piano** **by Andrew Lancaster**

Experiments were in hand very early in the eighteenth century, by Bartolomeo Cristofori in Florence and others, to produce a keyboard instrument capable of playing both loudly and softly, unlike the harpsichords and spinets. These early piano designs were extremely successful, but were considered far too complicated and difficult to manufacture by instrument makers of the time, and were not accepted by the musical public, who either ignored them or were more positively disapproving. Many of these early ideas, incorporated in a surviving piano of 1726, were effectively re-introduced later in the century as the pianoforte evolved.

In the early 1760s a group of instrument makers left Germany, settling in London to avoid the seven years war. One of these was Johannes Zumpe, who built small square pianos. In 1768 J. C. Bach performed the first solo piano pieces to be heard at a concert in England, thereby conferring 'respectability' on the instruments, which became immensely fashionable; so much so that no one who considered themselves to be of any consequence would be without one. The almost insatiable demand led to a surge in the number of makers producing these instruments.

The earliest form had a very simple mechanism, whereby a small hammer was effectively bounced into contact with the strings by a leather covered projection at the back of the key shank. While effective, the range of dynamics was limited and the lower dynamic range imprecise. In 1786 an employee of Longman and Broderip, John

Geib, invented and patented a superbly effective yet simple ‘double action’ which employed an intermediate lever to increase the velocity of the hammer and an escapement to allow the hammer to fall well away from the string even if the key was held down. His mechanism enabled the action to be very finely adjusted and greatly increased the dynamic range available, also improving the touch and expressiveness of the square piano. This action became ubiquitous, ultimately superseding the single action formerly used.

It is important to remember that the square piano is an instrument in its own right, as is the harpsichord or clavichord. Those who cavil at the tone as being different from that of a modern piano are missing the point; this is the sound that was familiar to the music loving world at this time, the instrument on which the majority of people would have listened to all the piano music they ever heard, and on which the composers of the time knew their music would be predominantly performed.

## **Clementi**

Muzio Clementi was regarded in his day as one of the greatest living pianists, a virtuoso of enormous repute. He was also considered a composer of the first rank and is generally acknowledged to have written the first music composed in a style suited specifically for the piano as opposed to the harpsichord, his famous Sonatas Op.2, 1773. He was a piano teacher of such standing that to have lessons with him virtually set the seal of success on his pupils’ careers. In about 1802 he was persuaded, in collaboration with some colleagues, to take over the then bankrupt firm of Longman and Broderip. His mastery of the piano being of the highest level of the period meant that he was acutely aware of the limitations, as well as the strengths, of the instruments then available. Having the brilliant piano technician F. Collard in his “team”, and with Clementi’s requirements as the motivating force, the firm of Clementi and Company very quickly acquired a formidable reputation, rivalling even the great makers such as Broadwood.



The development of the piano was rapid at this time, progressing from the relatively small, intimate pianos being produced in 1802 to the very highly sophisticated and subtle instrument heard on this disc. It is a “Patent Square Grand”, having a sound board which runs the entire length of the case instead of just occupying the right hand portion as is usual with square pianos.

The strings are terminated on hitch pins carried on a substantial metal plate suspended clear of the sound board and shaped to greatly reduce the extra free length of string between the bridge and the pin. This feature, combined with the rigidity of the plate, which is securely held by bolts passing through the wooden frame, contributes greatly to the strength and tuning stability of the instrument, allowing it to withstand the extra tension of heavier strings. The action employed is the English double action but with the added refinement of checks to catch the hammers.

The covering of the hammers is cloth (not felt, which later became associated with hammer coverings) except for the top octave and a half which are still leather covered. The heavier gauge strings and more substantial case produce a fuller, singing tone of great beauty, while the light positive action facilitates very expressive playing.

The case is of beautifully figured rosewood in a style now recognisably “William IV”. It is a very glamorous piano, deservedly the status symbol of the period. The six octave compass and greater sonorities make the piano very suitable for the dramatic and lyrical sonatas recorded on this disc.

Quite a number of instruments have survived with hammer coverings intact and with original strings. While it is important to preserve some of these as they are, the original materials do deteriorate and the instrument suffers a very noticeable degree of tonal decay in consequence. The piano used here has been restored, the original strings and

hammer coverings having been replaced using new but authentic materials. While one cannot state categorically that the piano sounds as it would have done when new, it certainly gives a closer picture than one in “museum condition”.

© 1993 Andrew Lancaster

## **Peter Katin**

“There exists no pianist of deeper sensitivity.” - *The Times*

Peter Katin was one of Britain's most distinguished pianists. His London debut in 1948 started him on a career that took him throughout the world. Early successes included performances of Beethoven's G major concerto at both the Royal Albert Hall and the Royal Festival Hall. Not long afterwards a performance of Rachmaninov's third concerto at a Henry Wood Promenade Concert drew critical declaration that he was a born virtuoso. His repertoire interests had always been very wide and as well as maintaining a span from early classical to late romantic and impressionistic schools, he was in the 1990s drawn to the attractions of authentic period pianos.

His interest in such pianos resulted in this recording of five Clementi sonatas an outstandingly successful venture which was greeted by critical superlatives, and he continued his series of square piano recordings with two sets of Schubert Impromptus. (Diversions DDV 24112), another Schubert recital (Athene ATH23007) and music by Chopin (Diversions DDV 24116).

Sadly, Peter Katin died in 2015 after a tragic accident at his home.

Recorded at Peter Katin's studio on 4,5 and 26 April, 1993  
Piano: Clementi & Co (1832) restored by Andrew Lancaster

Producer: Joanna Leach  
Engineer: David Turner  
Piano Technician: Martin Ness

An Athene Recording  
Original issue: Athene ATHCD4

Cover photo: The Clementi piano (courtesy of Mike Beville, Athene Records)  
The Longman & Broderip and Broadwood pianos referred to in the notes can be heard on ATHCD1 (John Field *Nocturnes*) and ATHCD2 (Josef Haydn *Sonatas*) played by Joanna Leach.

Also available by Peter Katin:

DDV 24112: Schubert: Impromptus  
ATH 23007: Schubert Recital  
ATH 23009: Liszt & Brahms

DDV 24116: Chopin First and Last  
RP 001: Fifty years of Music Making  
RP 002: Peter Katin Plays Chopin  
DDV 24157: Brahms Piano Works

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**PETER KATIN**

**TUNING:**  $a' = 423$

Standard pitch in this period varied from place to place according to local custom, a problem for many musicians of the time. The Vienna pitch of Mozart's time was  $a'=421.6$ ; the Broadwood pitch in 1820 was  $a'=433$ .

For this recording the 1823 Clementi piano was tuned in equal temperament to  $a'=423$ .

*PLAYBACK LEVEL: To obtain a realistic impression of the sound quality of the square piano (basically a domestic instrument for modest rooms), it is suggested that a slightly lower volume level be used.*

# Muzio Clementi Keyboard Sonatas

## PETER KATIN

1832 Clementi square piano

- |       |                                     |         |
|-------|-------------------------------------|---------|
| 1-3   | Sonata in F sharp minor, op.25 no.5 | [18:50] |
| 4-6   | Sonata in B flat major, op.24 no.2  | [13:45] |
| 7-9   | Sonata in G minor, op.7 no.3        | [13:42] |
| 10-12 | Sonata in D major, op.25 no.6       | [10:54] |
| 13-15 | Sonata in F minor, op.13 no.6       | [17:24] |

total playing time (including pauses): [74:35]



DDD 24113



an athene  
recording



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