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**Johann Nepomuk  
HUMMEL**

**Piano Sonatas Volume 1  
Opp. 13, 20 & 81**

**Hae-won Chang, Piano**



## Johann Nepomuk HUMMEL (1778-1837)

Sonata in E flat major, Opus 13 (1805)

Sonata in F minor, Opus 20 (1807)

Sonata in F sharp minor, Opus 81 (1819)

A child prodigy of tremendous gifts, a teacher and pianist of unequalled influence in his time, a paradigm of classical form and feeling unable — or unwilling — to make passage into the new era, Johann Nepomuk Hummel is now barely remembered. (His middle name is invariably used to distinguish him from Johann Julius and Johann Bernhard Hummel, a family of otherwise unrelated German-Dutch music-publishers.)

Hummel's earliest teachers included Mozart himself, with whom he lived and performed. When he was ten he began a four-year European tour, astounding his audiences and being favourably compared to Amadeus. Returning to Vienna, he would spend much of the next decade in study with Salieri, Albrechtsberger, and Haydn. Ultimately successor to Haydn in the court of the Esterházy's, he also developed a curious rivalry with Beethoven. Several important appointments followed, most notably that of Kapellmeister in Weimar. Here he returned to public performance, and added to it a period of feverish enterprise as composer, conductor, and teacher. His pupils would ultimately include Hiller, Henselt, Thalberg, and Mendelssohn.

In some four decades of prodigious work as a composer, he would write vocal, piano and chamber music of all kinds, concerti, occasional music, ballet and orchestral works (but no symphonies), in virtually every genre of religious music, and more than twenty-five operas. Hummel also wrote a three-volume treatise on piano pedagogy, one employed and revered for decades. And, for a time, he was considered the greatest piano virtuoso of the early nineteenth century.

Today, however, he is seen quite differently, and much of this revision has to do with the utterly overwhelming historical success of Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, and Liszt. Whereas each of them may be considered to have achieved supreme mastery

in several areas of musical endeavour, Hummel found no such singular identity. Rather, he was simply very good in all of the work he did. The question of whether or not this work was touched by genius cannot be answered.

Hummel's compositions for solo piano may be characterized by several properties: a complete knowledge of the technical problems and prospects of the instrument; a canny grasp of that which would 'sound' on the piano and on no other device; a conservative manipulation of received classical form combined with a working musician's interest in fresh expression; a gift for melody, but little for its transformation over extended periods; a commitment to form and design in which harmony served as bedrock for every invention above it; and, an abiding professionalism in counterpoint, ornamentation, and voicing. Throughout his best work Hummel sang, and the effect remains delightful to this day.

In the *Piano Sonata in E flat major, Op. 13*, an early work written around 1805, we may hear Hummel marching to perfect his syntax in this three-movement form. Even so, his simultaneous capacity for innovation and retrospective surfaces. In its first movement, wondrously and literally, he ends with a song — an *Alleluja*.

The movement begins *Allegro con brio*, powered by a strong dotted rhythm which will keep pulse throughout. The opening melodies are triadic and scalar, vigorous and masculine. However, they are a feint. Hummel's plan turns out to be an alternation between this opening gesture and the *Alleluja* tune which very quickly appears in high contrast. Although it is not formally named in the score until its last minute, this hymn does in fact share the stage the entire time, occasionally disappearing into the wings only to return in another tonal costume, slightly altered. It is a wonderful compositional device, entirely consistent with the nature of Hummel's musical intelligence.

The second movement opens with harp-like arpeggiation, suggesting an open frame of events. We cannot be certain where he intends to take us. We cannot surmise the boundaries. This sense of instability is heightened by the odd, almost ungainly chromatic descent which follows, and this awkwardness is reinforced by an alternating use of block chords and couplet or triplet figures in reply. For what are we being prepared? The eventual presence of one of the most sweet-figured and

even-tempered tunes he ever wrote. Having been disoriented by his elaborate misdirections at the beginning, we are now reassured to be on cool and familiar classical ground, the grand expression of a master designer.

The third movement is much simpler. Hummel employs a brief rhythmic motto in the first measure: short-short-long. It turns out to be the herald of everything which follows, and the generator of a winsome set of variations. They run like the wind on a brisk day, heading home from every direction.

The *Piano Sonata in F minor, Op. 20*, was written in Vienna around 1807. Hummel remains firmly rooted in the classical sensibility. His grammar is order, his textures homophony, his brilliant colours applied and attached to straightforward underpinnings below. In this sonata we find continuing evidence of Hummel's mastery of melody-driven contrast and variation. Harmonic motion is slow and predictable, as is the emotional content of it; Hummel is not yet exploring the impulsive shores of the dawning century.

The first movement opens in tempo *Allegro moderato*, a recurring respite in *Adagio* following at unexpected intervals. Here is a rather dark mood occasionally lit by a sunny Italian elaboration. In these mood swings lies a principle of "compare and contrast" familiar to students of essay style and Hummel-style equally. The movement is further driven by a shifting of pace and mood in *Allegro agitato*. By the end we find that development has not been organic at all; rather, it has been a splicing together of related materials, cogent and exact.

The *Adagio maestoso* which follows is a truly noble idea. The grand octaves which begin this slow march-like theme are a kind of moral argument, and the counter-claims which follow take some smaller case and turn it over and over, examining for opportunities to vary, enhance, strengthen. His tools are powerful: ornamentation, broadening of tempo, transferring the melody between the hands, sharing a counter-melody between them, but always returning to home base at the end of the day.

The finale is a brilliant *Presto*, rather like a Chopin étude (though written decades earlier) in its vivacity and control. Unlike Chopin, though, Hummel contrasts these

materials with easier passages, and so honours the building blocks of his own compositional style.

The *Piano Sonata in F sharp minor*, Op. 81, marks a major turn for Hummel, away from the traditional verities of the eighteenth Century with which he had become so comfortable. It was written in 1819, and could no longer suppress the rising musical expressiveness of the Romantic age. Here, like Schubert, he toyed endlessly with key relations of the third. Like Beethoven, he also employed secondary and tertiary dominants in his large-scale harmonic posture. And, as he had rarely attempted before, he combined old forms with new devising. *Opus 81* may be the best work he ever did in this new environment.

The first movement, marked *Allegro*, is more ambitious than any other in his piano sonatas. Compare the opening harp-like figures here with those in the slow movement of his *E flat Piano Sonata*. There, it prepares us for the unlikely; here, for drama and surging energy. Resentful as he may have been of Beethoven's success, Hummel was not immune to his influence.

This sonata's slow movement, marked *Largo con molto*, opens with a startling attack, an almost histrionic, a rapidly descending scale at the bottom of the keyboard leading to a robust dotted exclamation mark in both hands. This device is then made gentle by a rocking left-hand line, a modified Alberti bass of much earlier origin but in Hummel's hands one of modern application. The melody for which we have waited is pleasantly afflicted by more odd exclamation marks. All in all, the movement is best understood as a kind of arranged marriage between two eras.

The finale is ferociously difficult and almost — in its dissonances, in its crude impulse — something folk-like and harsh. Here too is the elegant Hummel departing from his own norm.

As a group, these three piano sonatas demonstrate the prodigious technical skill which Hummel brought to every musical enterprise. They also suggest something of his inability to make the transition into the Romantic tumult around him. More importantly, they remind us of the delights to be enjoyed at the home of one who

has preserved a system that works in its own terms, largely unchanged by the contests around it.

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### Hae-Won Chang

Hae-Won Chang was born in the Korean city of Seoul and started to play the piano at the age of six, completing her studies there at Ewha University in 1963. From 1964 until 1968 she studied at the Frankfurt Musikhochschule on a German government scholarship and was awarded her diploma as a concert pianist. On her return to Korea she was appointed professor of piano at her old university. In Korea Hae-Won Chang won various prizes, including first prize in the 1960 Korean National Piano Competition. Her career as a soloist had begun in 1957, when she appeared with the Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra. Since then she has enjoyed a busy career as a performer in Korea, in other Asian countries, in America and in Europe, with annual concert tours and engagements at home and abroad. She has appeared as a soloist with major orchestra and in recitals in collaboration with musicians of the greatest distinction. Festival appearances include participation in the Paris Château de Breteuil Festival, the National Music Festival in Korea and the festival for the opening of the Sejong Cultural Centre and of the Goethe-Institut in Seoul. She has served on the jury of the Lisbon Vianna da Motta Competition in Lisbon and in 1985 was acclaimed by the Music Critics' Circle of Korea as Musician of the Year. Her recordings for Naxos and Marco Polo include works by Pierné and Ibert, Scarlatti's sonatas, concertos by Hummel and Haydn and the complete J.S.Bach solo keyboard concertos. She is Dean of the College of Music at Ewha University.



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STEREO

Johann Nepomuk  
HUMMEL

(1778 – 1837)

## Piano Sonatas Vol. 1

Hae-won Chang, Piano

DDD

Playing  
Time:  
76'30"**Sonata in E flat major, Op. 13** (27:10)

- 1 Allegro con brio – Alleluja (10:04)
- 2 Adagio con gran espressione (7:43)
- 3 Finale: Allegro con spirito (9:26)

**Sonata in F minor, Op. 20** (21:41)

- 4 Allegro moderato – Adagio – Allegro agitato (9:42)
- 5 Adagio maestoso (7:00)
- 6 Finale: Presto – Ancor più presto (4:58)

**Sonata in F sharp minor, Op. 81** (27:35)

- 7 Allegro (8:54)
- 8 Largo con molto espressione (9:38)
- 9 Finale: Vivace (9:05)

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Engineers: Michael Weakley and Jason Sherbundy

Piano: Steinway & Sons, Hamburg

Music Notes: Dr. Charles Barber

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by Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840)

