

**Abstracts of the DLA Thesis**

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**The Piano Sonatas of Johann Nepomuk Hummel**

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## I. Preliminary research

Not only was Johann Nepomuk Hummel acknowledged by his contemporaries, but he has remained the subject of numerous academic forums to this day. While a detailed biography of the composer was published by Karl Benyovszky in 1934,<sup>1</sup> the first Hummel-monograph in English was written by Mark Kroll in 2007.<sup>2</sup>

In the process of my research, I have come to the realization that many former works are no longer available to the public. For instance, the dissertation listed in the bibliography of the Hummel article (found in the Grove Dictionary)<sup>3</sup> was destroyed in the Second World War. Also, a certain thesis written about the interpretations of Hummel's sonatas<sup>4</sup> is not to be found anywhere. What is more, I have found very few reviews about the composer's piano sonatas and exercises for the piano. In my dissertation I am attempting to meet this long-felt need.

## II. Sources

We are to examine the musical pieces of Hummel according to two works catalogues. The first one was published in 1971 by Dieter Zimmerschied.<sup>5</sup> This catalogue includes all the works which have an opus number. However, it does not contain every one of those pieces which remained unpublished during Hummel's time. In 1973-74, Joel Sachs published a more complex catalogue<sup>6</sup> in which he criticizes the deficiencies of the Zimmerschied-catalogue. All the missing works are listed in the Sachs-catalogue numbered in the order of origin with a mark of the letter S.

The publication of the complete piano compositions (1989-90) is linked with the name of Sachs as well. Beside the above-mentioned sources, studying Hummel's *Anweisung* was also indispensable in the process of writing my dissertation. Harold

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Benyovszky: *Johann Nepomuk Hummel: der Mensch und Künstler*. Bratislava: EOS, 1934.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Kroll: *Johann Nepomuk Hummel – A Musician's Life and World*. Lanham, Maryland; Toronto; Plymouth, UK: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2007.

<sup>3</sup> W. Meyer: *J. N. Hummel als Klavierkomponist* (diss. of U. Kiel, 1922)

<sup>4</sup> G. Sporck: *L'Interpretation de sonates de Johann Nepomuk Hummel* (Paris, 1933)

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Dieter Zimmerschied: *Thematisches Verzeichnis der Werke von Johann Nepomuk Hummel*.

<sup>6</sup> Joel Sachs: *A Checklist of the Works of Johann Nepomuk Hummel*. In: *Notes*, XXX/1973-74: 732-54.

Truscott's preface in the *Musica Rara* edition encouraged me to investigate the compositions more thoroughly.

It was Christoph Hust, researcher of the Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, who placed numerous Hummel-letters at my disposal. It is essential to point out that these letters are available in the form of manuscripts exclusively. The publication of these letters (along with the already published ones) is expected in the near future. The preface shall be written by Hust.

By examining a high number of descriptions about the Hummel era, I was allowed to inspect the vivid musical life of that time. Moreover, by reading the reviews, I felt as if the performing style of Johann Nepomuk came to life.

### **III. Methodology**

In the first chapter of my dissertation I shall present the biography of Hummel in the perspective of both the composer and the performer. Throughout his eventful career, Hummel fulfilled his life by composing and teaching. What is more, he had the chance to tour round Europe as a celebrated piano virtuoso.

In the second chapter, I shall analyse the structure and harmony connections of his six piano sonatas (C-major Op. 2a No. 3, E flat-major Op. 13, F minor Op. 20, C major Op. 38, F sharp minor Op. 81, D major Op. 106). Also, I intend to observe the different musical influences which may have had an effect on the sonatas either presumably or in all certainty.

Furthermore, I am going to discuss Hummel's piano technique in the third chapter. I am going to do this through one of his great methodological works, called *Ausführliche theoretisch-praktische Anweisung zum Piano-Forte-Spiel, vom ersten Elementar-Unterricht an, bis zur vollkommensten Ausbildung*<sup>7</sup> (Wien, Haslinger, 1828). I shall observe the connections of his sonatas. I am going to look for the most convenient solution for certain details with the help of the exercises for the piano.

### **IV. Results**

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<sup>7</sup> Wien: Haslinger, 1828.

I came across Johann Nepomuk Hummel's name as a child. Also, at the very beginning of my piano studies I had the opportunity to play a few of his compositions for the piano, as many of his works (such as his rondos) are played lovingly in numerous Hungarian schools of music.

When I decided that I wanted to write my doctoral dissertation about his sonatas composed to piano, I was mostly guided by curiosity. I wanted to discover what treasure could hide in Hummel's greater and more complex keyboard pieces, more specifically in his sonatas. As the genre of the sonata is to be observed throughout his life (Hummel composed piano sonatas in almost every period of his career), the question remains obvious: how did his style change in the process? How much was he influenced by the so-called "spirit of the age", meaning the transition from classicism to romanticism? Also, to what degree was he the initiator and the leading figure in this transitional process? Considering the fact that he was a pupil of Mozart, a successor of Haydn, a contemporary of Beethoven, an idol of Chopin and a predecessor of Liszt, where shall we place Hummel, the composer among all the significant musical individuals of his time? In addition, I was interested in what the genre of the sonata was turning into as a result of the changes in style.

In addition to his outstanding composing talent, Hummel's artistic character kindled my interest in a great way. In my humble opinion, there is even less mentioning about him as a performer than the number of times his pieces are performed in concert halls these days. I am curious why his name has fallen into oblivion so soon even though he had been incredibly popular during his life.

By analysing his piano sonatas, I intended to find the answers to all the above-mentioned questions, hoping that I could contribute to the popularization of Hummel's life-work. I believe that interpreting some of his compositions may help or even encourage musicians to perform one of his sonatas or any other works by Hummel.

The listed arguments provide grounds for emphasizing Johann Nepomuk Hummel's piano compositions when organizing a concert program of my own. I believe that the experience of performing a Hummel-sonata as part of one of my carefully considered concert schedules could become somewhat enduring. While working on my dissertation, I would very often sit down at the piano to try and examine the certain technical problems which occur in Hummel's compositions,

admiring the colourful changes in harmony. The fact that I have become immersed in his six sonatas will undoubtedly help me perform them more authentically.

## V. Selected bibliography

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