

95606

COMPLETE PIANO SONATAS
VOLUME 7

BRILLIANT
CLASSICS

Lussek

SONATAS OP.47 & OP.64



Zvi Meniker
fortepiano

Johann Ladislaus Dussek 1760-1812

Sonata in D Op.47 No.1

- | | |
|---|------|
| 1. I. Allegro con spirito | 6'00 |
| 2. II. Adagio sostenuto ed espressivo | 2'36 |
| 3. III. Rondo a la Militaire: Allegretto moderato | 3'56 |

Sonata in G Op.47 No.2

- | | |
|---|------|
| 4. I. Allegro ma moderato ed espressivo | 7'17 |
| 5. II. Rondo con espressivo: Andantino con moto | 4'45 |

Sonata in A flat Op.64

'Retour à Paris'

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 6. I. Allegro non troppo ed espressivo | 14'30 |
| 7. II. Molto Adagio, con anima ed espressione | 8'20 |
| 8. III. Tempo di Minuetto, Scherzo: Quasi allegro | 3'51 |
| 9. IV. Finale: Scherzo, Allegro con spirito | 8'22 |

Zvi Meniker *fortepiano*

Fortepiano by Clementi, London 1797, restored by Chris Maene

Recording: 7-8 October 2019, at Pianos Maene, Ruiselede, Belgium

Recording and editing: Peter Arts

Cover: Police bridge in St. Petersburg in the 19th century, lithograph after a drawing by Joseph-Maria Charlemagne-Baudet

© & © 2019 Brilliant Classics

The present CD is part of a long-awaited recording project. Eight excellent musicians with special expertise in historically informed performance practice took on the challenge of exploring the rich musical universe of virtuoso-composer Johann Ladislaus (also: Jan Ladislav) Dussek (1760-1812). As a result, we now have the first comprehensive recording of Dussek's piano sonatas on period instruments, presenting one of the most important piano composers on the threshold to early Romanticism.

From his origins as a Jesuit choir boy in rural Bohemia to his last employment with the prince of Talleyrand, Johann Ladislaus Dussek led a restless life that unfolded in some of the most important cultural centres of his time, among them Paris, Riga, St Petersburg and London. Most of Dussek's nearly 300 finished compositions involve a keyboard instrument, and the keyboard sonata holds a special position in his oeuvre: sonatas were among his first published compositions in the early 1780s, and the sonata Op.77 in f minor was to be his last work before his death in 1812.

When Dussek arrived in the city in 1786, eight years of extensive travelling and numerous concerts lay behind him. His performances in Eastern Europe, Germany and the Netherlands had gained him a reputation as an outstanding musician of both virtuosic prowess and sensitivity. Being moreover of pleasing appearance (nicknamed *le beau Dussek*) and versatile in conversation, Dussek was soon admitted to the most important *salons*. He became a frequent guest in the house of Beaumarchais and of court paintress Elizabeth Vigée-Lebrun. Eventually, music-loving Marie-Antoinette herself took a liking to him.

This idiom had come to full maturity in the *Grand Sonata* Op.75, composed in 1811, when Dussek lived in Paris for the second time. After years spent in London, Hamburg and in the service of Prince Louis Ferdinand of Prussia, Dussek had returned to the city in 1807. The great political and social upheavals which had occurred during his absence reflected directly into Dussek's personal circumstances: before the French Revolution, he had belonged to the royal family's social circle, now he was employed with the Prince of Talleyrand-Périgord, Napoleon Bonaparte's

former minister of foreign affairs. Dussek's official position was that of a chamber musician and music teacher to a young relative of the family. His moderate duties left him lots of time for composition, and were remunerated generously – his yearly income was estimated at 8.000 to 16.000 *francs*.

Still, Dussek seemed in constant financial troubles, possibly due to a somewhat self-indulgent lifestyle that also took its toll on his deteriorating health. Despite his physical condition, Dussek successfully appeared at several concerts at the Odéon theatre between 1808 and 1811. The impact of Dussek's piano playing on Parisian audiences was described by the correspondent of the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* in October 1811: “Dussek enjoys without controversy the greatest distinction, even with the general public. He is considered generally as the restorer of the true, more fundamental, more noble, and more expressive piano playing in France, and rightly so. His sureness in conquering the greatest difficulties, even his abundance of unusual ideas, he considers only as means to reach the higher aims of art. Therefore it can be said of him, perhaps more than of any other pianists, that his playing is speaking – he always knows what he wants to say with it to the understanding and to the heart, and his educated listeners know it too.”

May Dussek's music continue to speak to audiences today!

© Olga Witthauer

The two Sonatas Op.47 were most likely published in 1802, three years after Dussek had left London to escape debts, a failing marriage and business ventures. Despite these problems, this was a time when Dussek reached the zenith of his fame as performer and composer, with his works and playing conquering the entire continent from England to Russia. Indeed, the Op.47 Sonatas were first published in London, Dussek having obviously retained some ties to the British capital. They belong to the genre of the “Sonate facile” – easy sonatas, uncomplicated technically and musically, much like Beethoven's Op.49, published three years later. The last movement of the first Sonatas, the *Rondo a la Militaire*, became a famous hit of the period.

The great Sonata Op.64, *Le Retour a Paris*, is, by contrast, one of Dussek's largest and most complicated works. Composed as a result of Dussek's return to Paris in 1807 after the death of his patron, Prince Louis Ferdinand of Prussia, it is not really a programmatic work, but rather a description of the composer's feelings on his return to the city which he had left just before the French Revolution in 1789. After the bittersweet impressions of the city irrevocably changed by the Revolution and Napoleon's ascent in the first two movements, a feeling of despair and attempts of reconciliation with fate can be heard in the Scherzo, giving way to the new happy and carefree way of life in the witty final rondo. The Sonata was also published under the Opus numbers 70 and 71, the latter edition (London c. 1810) calling it “Plus Ultra” as a tribute to its musical and technical complications.

© Zvi Meniker

Harpsichordist, organist and fortepianist **Zvi Meniker** was born in Moscow and raised in Israel. He began advanced musical studies at the age of 15. Meniker received diplomas with distinction from the Salzburg Mozarteum and the Zurich Academy of Music, where he studied with Nikolaus Harnoncourt and Johann Sonnleitner, before moving on to the USA to study with Malcolm Bilson at Cornell University.

Zvi Meniker commands a wide repertoire on his three instruments ranging from late medieval works to 20th-century compositions. He has also won numerous awards at international competitions.

Zvi Meniker taught harpsichord and performance practice at Duke University, and was a regular faculty member at the annual Early Music Workshop in Jerusalem. After teaching at the Mendelssohn Conservatory in Leipzig, Germany, he accepted a professorship at the Hannover Conservatory, where he currently teaches harpsichord, fortepiano and performance practice. He was also a visiting professor at the Buchmann-Mehta School of Music in Tel-Aviv. His doctoral dissertation, is on the Performance Practice of Fr. Chopin's piano works.

He has performed with many renowned Early Music Ensembles, among which are Musica Antiqua Köln, Concerto Köln, Capella Savaria, Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin, the Dresden Baroque Orchestra, Il Gardellino, the Orfeo Orchestra Budapest, the Tel Aviv Soloists, the Israel Camerata and others.

