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COMPLETE PIANO SONATAS
VOLUME 6

BRILLIANT
CLASSICS

Lussek

SONATAS OP.9 & OP.75

Viviana Sofronitsky fortepiano



Johann Ladislaus Dussek 1760-1812
Complete Piano Sonatas . volume 6

Sonata Op.9 No.1 in B flat

- | | |
|------------------------------------|------|
| 1. I. Allegro non tanto | 8'32 |
| 2. II. Rondo – Allegretto grazioso | 4'19 |

Sonata Op.9 No.2 in C

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------|
| 3. I. Allegro con spirito | 8'52 |
| 4. II. Larghetto con espressione | 4'14 |
| 5. III. Presto assai | 6'30 |

Sonata Op.9 No.3 in D

- | | |
|------------------------|------|
| 6. I. Allegro maestoso | 8'37 |
| con espressione | |
| 7. II. Prestissimo | 6'30 |

Sonata Op.75 No.3 in E flat
 (Grande sonate)

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 8. I. Allegro ma non troppo | 16'32 |
| 9. II. Andante moderato | 7'02 |
| 10. III. Rondo – allegro moderato
grazioso | 7'59 |

Viviana Sofronitsky *fortepiano*
Fortepiano by Paul McNulty after A. Walter 1792

Recording: 2017, Prague, Czech Republic

Producer: Jean-Daniel Noir

Cover: The Mauritshuis in The Hague, 1825 by Bartholomeus Johannes van Hove, Rijksmuseum, the Netherlands

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Dussek's early mastery

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 Johan Ladislaus Dussek (1760-1812). As a result, we now have the first comprehensive recording of Dussek's piano sonatas on period instruments, presenting not only one of the most important piano composers on the threshold to early Romanticism, but also the diversity of 18th and early 19th century fortepianos. From his origins as a Jesuit choir boy in rural Bohemia to his last employment with the Prince of Talleyrand, Johan 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 prominent position in his oeuvre. He stuck to the genre throughout his life: 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.

The sonatas presented on this CD were all composed and first published in Paris. 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.

In the 1780s, English square pianos had become popular in Paris. These instruments made ample use of undamped sounds, following the footsteps of tympanon and tangent piano. In order to compensate for the pianos' fast-fading sound, composers of keyboard music often issued additional *ad libitum* parts for

instruments that were able to sustain sounds, like a violin or flute. Also Dussek's sonatas Op.9 were originally published with such optional parts for violin. However, the violin merely plays a supporting role, as the piano part is satisfactory in itself and displays a fullness of harmony in accordance with French taste. There can be little doubt that Dussek composed the sonatas Op.9 as virtuoso pieces for his own performances. Here, he puts on display textures and piano techniques highly innovative at their time. Orchestral effects are contrasted with lyrical side themes, rapid passages in thirds and sixths bring to mind the style of Clementi. Did Beethoven know Dussek's music when he composed his sonatas Op.2 in 1796? We do not have any proof to this, but Dussek's second sonata from Op.9 in C major and Beethoven's Op.2 No.3 in the same key at least share a similar spirit of self-confident exuberance. In the first movement of Dussek's sonata Op.9 No.1, the cascades of broken octaves seem to imitate a tympanon or Hackbrett, whereas the second movement is based on a simple folk-like tune, similar to the romances popular in 18th century Paris – allusions to local taste? In any event, the sonatas show Dussek's early mastery of an original pianistic idiom at the same time brilliant and expressive.

Restorer of the true piano playing

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!

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Anton Walter (1752 - 1826), who had the title of “Chamber Organ Builder and Instrument Maker in Vienna”, is considered to be the most famous fortepiano maker of his time. He improved the Viennese pianoforte action, which remained a standard for many years. He built about 700 instruments, which were praised for their quality by Mozart, who bought a Walter in 1782, and by Beethoven, who nearly succeeded in buying one in 1802. According to Mozart's son Carl: "Most remarkable is the wing-shaped Pianoforte for which my father had a special preference to such a degree that he not only wanted to have it in his study all the time, but exclusively used this and no other instrument in all his concerts, regardless of whether they took place in court, in the palaces of noblemen or in theatres or other public places"

Anton Walter was born near Stuttgart in 1752 and became active in Vienna in 1778. When in 1800 his stepson joined the company, the firm name was changed from "Anton Walter" to "Anton Walter und Sohn". The keyboard compass increased, but the basic construction and sound of the instruments stayed the same.

The fortepiano used for this recording was made by Paul McNulty, who is one of the most highly respected builders working today. His instruments, modeled after the fortepianos of J.A. Stein, A. Walter, Fritz, C. Graf, Pleyel, Liszt's Boisselot and Brahms's Streicher are result of meticulous research of the originals. McNulty fortepianos are owned by many fine players and feature in many recordings.

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Viviana Sofronitsky is a fortepianist, one of the world's leading performers specializing in Classical and Romantic music. Her concerts captivate audiences as well-known pieces reveal the most colourful and telling effects once available to classical and romantic composers. Her collection of top-quality new pianos includes Mozart's and Beethoven's favorites Walter and Stein, Schubert's Graf, Chopin's Pleyel and Liszt's Boisselot. Her recent London Wigmore Hall performance with 5 pianos on stage was acclaimed a "revelation".

Viviana Sofronitsky has followed in the footsteps of her father Vladimir Sofronitsky, a distinguished Soviet pianist. She holds a DMA from the Moscow Conservatory as well as fortepiano degree from the Royal Conservatory in Den Haag. She won prizes at the "Bach Tage Berlin" and "Musica Antiqua" Brugge competitions and has recorded with "AVI", "ETCetera", "Suoni e colori",

"Globe", "PMC" (complete Mozart concertos), Centaur and "Passacaille" labels. Viviana Sofronitsky is based in Prague from which she travels with her fortepianos.

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