

CLEMENTI

Keyboard Sonatas

Op. 50, Nos. 2 and 3 'Didone abbandonata'

Op. 1, No. 3 • Op. 8, No. 2

Sandro De Palma, Piano



Muzio Clementi (1752–1832)

Piano Sonatas, Op. 50 – No. 2 in D minor; No. 3 in G minor ‘Didone abbandonata’

Piano Sonata in B flat major, Op. 1, No. 3

Piano Sonata in E flat major, Op. 8, No. 2

At regina gravi iamdudum saucia cura / volnus alit venis, at caeco carpitur igni.

(‘But Dido suffering profound anguish nourishes her wounds while being consumed by a blind rapture.’)

– Virgil: *Aeneid*, Book 4, lines 1–2

Muzio Clementi was born in Rome in 1752, the son of a silversmith. By the age of 13 he had become proficient enough as a musician to be employed as an organist at the Church of S. Lorenzo in Domaso and to attract the attention of an English visitor, Peter Beckford, cousin of William Beckford, author of the Gothic novel *Vathek* and builder of the remarkable folly, Fonthill Abbey. Peter Beckford, as he himself claimed, bought Clementi from his father for a period of seven years, during which the boy lived at Beckford’s estate in Dorset, perfecting his ability as a keyboard player, and, presumably, his general education. In 1774 Clementi moved to London, where he began to take part in professional concert life as a composer and performer, playing his own sonatas, some of which were published at this time, and directing performances from the keyboard at the Italian opera.

Clementi’s success as a performer persuaded him to travel. In 1780 he played for Queen Marie Antoinette in France and early in 1782 performed for her brother, the Emperor Joseph II, in Vienna. Mozart met Clementi in January, when they were both summoned to play for the Emperor. Mozart had a poor opinion of Clementi’s musical taste and feeling, but grudgingly admitted his technical ability in right-hand playing of passages in thirds, otherwise dismissing him as a mere *mechanicus*. It should be added that Mozart was often disparaging about the abilities of his contemporaries, as he was of Clementi on a later occasion. In a letter to his father in June 1783 he describes Clementi as a *ciarlatano*, like all Italians, accusing him of marking movements as *presto* or *prestissimo*, but actually playing them *allegro*. Clementi was more generous in his assessment of Mozart, and as a publisher was later of

service to Beethoven, who had a high regard for Clementi as a composer.

In 1785 Clementi returned to England, winning a reputation for himself there as a performer and teacher, although as a composer he was eclipsed in the 1790s by the presence in London of Haydn. It was in these years that he involved himself in piano manufacture and music publishing in London, first with Longman and Broderip and from 1798, after the firm’s bankruptcy, with Longman, and others. In the earlier years of the 19th century he travelled abroad in the interests of the business, accompanied at first by his pupil John Field, who served as a demonstrator of Clementi’s wares, and later left a somewhat prejudiced account of his experiences after he parted company with Clementi in Russia.

From 1810 Clementi was again in England, where he was much respected, not least for his teaching compositions, his *Introduction to the Art of Playing the Piano Forte* of 1801, revised in 1826, and the famous *Gradus ad Parnassum*, completed and published in the latter year. He retired from business in 1830, settling first in Lichfield and then in Evesham, where he died in 1832, to be buried in Westminster Abbey. His legacy to pianists was a significant one, both through his compositions and his teaching. He provided an introduction to a new virtuosity and exploration of the possibilities of a newly developed instrument, in a society that had changed greatly since his own childhood in Italy. Born four years before Mozart, he outlived Beethoven by four years.

Clementi’s last sonata, *Op. 50, No. 3*, dedicated with its two companion sonatas to Cherubini, is unusual for Clementi as it follows a literary or dramatic programme,

indicated in its title *Didone abbandonata* (‘Dido Abandoned’). The story of Dido, Queen of Carthage, is well known, recorded in the fourth book of Virgil’s *Aeneid* and in Ovid’s *Heroides*. It was at the heart of Metastasio’s first libretto, *Didone abbandonata*, of which there were subsequently a number of settings, and formed the plot of Nahum Tate’s *Dido and Aeneas* set by Purcell in the 1660s and of Marlowe’s earlier drama. The Trojan prince Aeneas, a fugitive from Troy, is shipwrecked on the coast of Carthage, where he meets and falls in love with the Queen, Dido. Urged on by his destiny, he deserts her and sails away to Italy, where he is fated to found a new Troy, the city of Rome. Metastasio’s version brings greater complications, with Dido’s rejection of the King of the Moors, Iarbas, and the love of Araspe, confidant of Iarbas, for Selene (originally Anna), who is in love with Aeneas. Finally, the Moors set fire to Carthage and Dido throws herself into the flames, as Aeneas sails away. The sonata reflects Dido’s feelings, starting *Largo patetico e sostenuto* leading to *Allegro ma con espressione*, with a repeated exposition and followed by the sadness of an *Adagio dolente*. The last movement varies in mood, but leads eventually to sound and fury, at first marked *lamentando* and then *con furia, con fuoco* and finally *con passione*.

Clementi’s *Sonata in B flat major, Op. 1, No. 3*, belongs to a set of six sonatas, published in England in 1771 and dedicated to Peter Beckford. Like five of the six sonatas, the third of the set is in two movements, characteristic of the Classical style of Haydn or Mozart, with melodic interest entrusted principally to the right hand.

The three sonatas that form *Op. 8* were published in Paris in 1784. The *Sonata in E flat major, Op. 8, No. 2*, was dedicated to Mademoiselle Victoire Imbert-Colomès, whose father, a man of some substance and later mayor of Lyon, had put an end to Clementi’s amorous intentions, after the couple had planned an elopement. It opens emphatically with a movement that offers a degree of technical brilliance. The A flat major *Larghetto con espressione* makes use of octaves, an important element in Clementi’s performances, and the sonata ends with a scintillating *Rondo*.

The *Sonata in D minor, Op. 50, No. 2*, brings us again to the last group of three sonatas, published in 1821. The penultimate sonata is a dramatic work, making particular technical demands on the performer, with full use made of the possibilities of hand-crossing. The B flat major slow movement suggests an operatic aria, to be followed by a movement of dashing turbulence and contrast.

Keith Anderson

Sandro De Palma

Sandro De Palma was born in Naples and studied under Vincenzo Vitale, Nikita Magaloff and Alice Kezeradze-Pogorelich. He made his recital debut at the age of nine playing works by Bach, Chopin and Schubert, and at the age of 16 he made his debut recording of works by Liszt, and participated in the premiere recording of Clementi's *Gradus ad Parnassum* for Fonit Cetra – a recording which won the 20th Italian Critics Award. He has performed at prestigious venues and festivals around the world with some of the greatest artists and ensembles including Andrea Bocelli, Donato Renzetti, Yuri Temirkanov, Boris Belkin, Domenico Nardio, Ilja Grubert, the strings and winds of the Berliner Philharmoniker, the Pražák Quartet, the Ebène Quartet and the Quartet Amarcorde. From 1999 to 2010 De Palma was artistic director of the Festival Maggio della Musica di Napoli, and in 2000 he founded the Associazione Musicale Muzio Clementi in Rome of which he is the president and artistic director. www.sandrodepalma.it



Muzio Clementi saw the piano evolve from relative fragility in the 18th century to its dominance at the beginning of the Romantic era – his influence in developing the instrument's virtuosic possibilities cannot be overstated. These works embrace this progression, illustrating Clementi's earlier Classical style in the *Sonata, Op. 1, No. 3*, introducing more scintillating virtuosity in *Op. 8, No. 2*, and taking us to the dramatic final sonatas including *Op. 50, No. 3*, which narrates the story of Dido, Queen of Carthage.

Muzio
CLEMENTI
(1752–1832)

Piano Sonata in G minor, Op. 50, No. 3 'Didone abbandonata' (1821)	24:41	6 Allegro assai	4:14
1 I. Introduzione: Largo patetico e sostenuto – II. Allegro ma con espressione – Più allegro	11:48	7 Larghetto con espressione	2:51
2 III. Adagio dolente –	5:00	8 Rondo: Allegro	3:33
3 IV. Allegro agitato e con disperazione	7:52	Piano Sonata in D minor, Op. 50, No. 2 (1821)	19:39
Piano Sonata in B flat major, Op. 1, No. 3 (1771)	13:41	9 Allegro non troppo ma con energia	9:01
4 Maestoso	7:39	10 Adagio con espressione	4:09
5 Andantino grazioso	6:02	11 Allegro con fuoco, ma non troppo presto	6:24

Sandro De Palma, Piano



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