

CLEMENTI

Piano Jewels

Capriccios • Toccata • La Chasse

Rodolfo Leone, Piano



Muzio Clementi (1752–1832)

Piano Jewels

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 San Lorenzo in Damaso 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 time 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, expression 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* ('charlatan'), 'like all Italians', accusing him of marking movements as *Presto* or *Prestissimo*, but 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 & Broderip and then, 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. Through his compositions and his teaching, he introduced a new virtuosity and explored the possibilities of a newly developed instrument to a society that had changed greatly since his own childhood in Italy. Born four years before Mozart, he outlived Beethoven by four years.

In a note on a French publication of the *Sonata, Op. 24, No. 2*, Clementi provided the statement: *Cette Sonate, avec la toccata qui la suit, a été jouée par l'auteur devant Sa Majesté Joseph II en 1781 Mozart étant présent* ('This Sonata, with the toccata that follows it, was played by the composer before His Majesty Joseph II in 1781, Mozart being present'). The *Toccata*, marked *Prestissimo*, a tempo indication to which Mozart alludes in a letter to his father, was paired with a *Sonata in E flat major, Op. 11*. The *Toccata* provides a testimony to Clementi's technical ability and his facility in the right-hand series of thirds, an element to which Mozart, rather disparagingly, refers.

La Chasse, Op. 16 ('The Hunt'), published in 1786, follows contemporary convention in offering – here in three movements – a common scene, allowing horn-calls particularly in the first and third movements.

Clementi's *Capriccio in B flat major, Op. 17*, published in 1787 and revised in 1801, includes an introductory explanation as a work 'in which are introduced the favourite songs of *Ma chère amie* and *For tendress form'd* with considerable improvements by the Author'. The first of the two songs is introduced with a change of tempo to *Andantino* leading to the second song, marked *Larghetto*. The *Capriccio in A major, Op. 34, No. 3* and *Capriccio in F major, Op. 34, No. 4*, were published around 1795, together with two sonatas, and dedicated to Miss Isabella Savery. The two caprices make varied technical demands on a performer, with moments of display contrasted with *cantabile* passages.

The *Capriccio in E minor, Op. 47, No.1* and *Capriccio in C major, Op. 47, No. 2* were published in 1821 and dedicated to Clementi's wife. Both works combine the notion of a caprice with the form of a three-movement sonata. The first of the pair opens with a duple time *Adagio*, continuing as a triple time *Allegro agitato*. The following movement moves first to an *Adagio sostenuto* in C major, modulating to C minor, and the work ends with a triple time *Allegro vivace*, including a passage in canon, before the final *Presto*. The second work opens with an *Adagio sostenuto* in 5/4, an introduction to an *Allegro con espressione e passione*. The slow movement, marked *Adagio cantabile*, allows the usual elaborate melody-writing characteristic of such movements and the whole work. Designed to exhibit Clementi's own technical command, it closes with an *Allegro vivace*. These two capriccios belong to a new world, that of Beethoven, suggesting, as elsewhere, the particular genius of a musician who was no mere *mechanicus*.

Keith Anderson

Rodolfo Leone

Photo: Silvano Bacciardi



One of the most insightful pianists of his generation, Italian-born pianist Rodolfo Leone was the First Prize winner of the 2017 International Beethoven Piano Competition Vienna. Described as ‘a true sound philosopher’ (*Oberösterreichische Nachrichten*), Leone released his debut all-Beethoven album on the Austrian label Gramola in May 2018. He has performed under the baton of conductors such as James Conlon, Michael Francis, Sascha Goetzl, Xian Zhang and Stéphane Denève; and at concert venues including the Musikverein in Vienna, Steinway Hall in London, the music hall of the NCPA in Beijing, the Teatro Carlo Felice in Genoa, and the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles. An avid chamber musician, he has collaborated with musicians such as Lynn Harrell, Clive Greensmith, Demarre McGill, Oliver Herbert and the Viano String Quartet. Leone is based in Los Angeles where he holds a faculty position at the Colburn Music Academy. He previously studied with Fabio Bidini at the Colburn School of Music, where he was awarded a Master of Music degree and an Artist Diploma. He is a recipient of the Amron-Sutherland Fund for Young Pianists.

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Clementi's influence on pianists has proved enduring, whether through his compositions, books of instruction, or the introduction of new levels of virtuosity on the pianoforte. This album explores a selection of works that have never been recorded, reflecting the variety of his imagination and invention. Mozart heard Clementi perform his *Toccata in B flat major* and grudgingly admired the Italian's technical prowess. The *Capriccios* trace a quarter century of development – the earlier pieces exude *cantabile* warmth and bravura, while those published in 1821 belong to the new world of Beethoven.

Muzio
CLEMENTI
(1752–1832)

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| 1 Toccata in B flat major, Op. 11 [No. 2] (pub. 1784) 5:30 | 7 Capriccio in F major, Op. 34, No. 4 (pub. c. 1795) 10:20 |
| La Chasse in D major, Op. 16 (pub. 1786) 12:24 | Capriccio in E minor, Op. 47, No. 1 (pub. 1821) 22:16 |
| 2 I. Allegro 5:51 | 8 I. Adagio – II. Allegro agitato 9:41 |
| 3 II. Andante vivace 3:51 | 9 III. Adagio sostenuto 8:09 |
| 4 III. Allegro assai 2:40 | 10 IV. Allegro vivace – Presto 4:22 |
| 5 Capriccio in B flat major, Op. 17 (original version) (pub. 1787) 7:04 | Capriccio in C major, Op. 47, No. 2 (pub. 1821) 19:34 |
| 6 Capriccio in A major, Op. 34, No. 3 (pub. c. 1795) 7:22 | 11 I. Adagio sostenuto – II. Allegro con espressione e passione 8:10 |
| | 12 III. Adagio cantabile 6:01 |
| | 13 IV. Allegro vivace 5:21 |

WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS

Rodolfo Leone, Piano

Recorded: 4–5 October 2019 at Herbert Zipper Concert Hall, Colburn School, Los Angeles, USA
Producer and editor: Fabio Bidini • Engineers: Fabio Bidini, Francesco Perlangeli
Booklet notes: Keith Anderson • This recording was kindly sponsored by Ann Mullaly.
Cover: *The Suffolk Hunt: Full Cry* (1833) by John Frederick Herring Sr (1795–1865)

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