

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON THE KEYBOARD  
SONATAS OF MUZIO CLEMENTI

# QUADERNI CLEMENTIANI 2

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NEW PERSPECTIVES ON THE  
KEYBOARD SONATAS OF  
MUZIO CLEMENTI

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*Quaderni Clementiani*  
QC 2  
ISBN 88-8109-458-4

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Palazzo de' Strazzaroli  
Piazza di Porta Ravennana, 1  
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<http://www.utorpheus.com>  
<http://www.muzioclementi.com>

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Stampato in Italia - Printed in Italy 2006 - Global Print S.r.l. - Via degli Abeti 17/1 - Gorgonzola (Mi)

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## PREFACE

CLEMENTI HAS NEVER HAD IT SO GOOD AS HE DOES NOW — said W. Dean Sutcliffe in a recent review<sup>1</sup>. The scholarly developments stimulated by the two-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of the composer's birth in 1752 have indeed been significant. Clementi was the subject of an international conference in Rome in 2002<sup>2</sup>, the proceedings of which were published as the first volume of the present series<sup>3</sup>. Anselm Gerhard's monograph *London und der Klassizismus in der Musik: die Idee der «absoluten Musik» und Muzio Clementis Klavierwerk* also appeared in 2002<sup>4</sup>. Most importantly, Clementi's surviving output of keyboard, chamber, orchestral, pedagogical works and treatises is becoming available in a sixty-volume modern collected edition, of which a significant proportion is now in print<sup>5</sup>. The sixty-first volume of the edition is the multi-author, multi-lingual book, *Muzio Clementi: Studies and Prospects*<sup>6</sup>. The editorial team of *Opera omnia* have also established a website containing updates on the edition plus details of conferences, a bibliography of contributions to Clementi scholarship and a discography. Information on Clementi has never before been so accessible, nor so widely disseminated as it is now.

The new wave of activity surrounding Clementi creates unprecedented opportunities for a long overdue revival of his music and the liberation of him from the role of «father of modern piano technique and keyboard teaching» in which he has so long been «imprisoned»<sup>7</sup>. My fundamental objective in this book is to offer close readings of individual keyboard sonatas originating from all stages of Clementi's career. With the exception of Anselm Gerhard's monograph cited above, this is the approach most conspicuously lacking

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<sup>1</sup>. SUTCLIFFE, 2004, p. 295.

<sup>2</sup>. *Muzio Clementi: Cosmopolita della musica. Convegno internazionale in occasione del 250° anniversario della nascita (1752-2002)*, Rome, 4-6 December, 2002.

<sup>3</sup>. BÖSEL-SALA, 2004.

<sup>4</sup>. GERHARD, 2002.

<sup>5</sup>. CLEMENTI, Muzio. *Opera omnia*, edited by Andrea Coen, Roberto Illiano, Costantino Mastroprimiano, Luca Sala and Massimiliano Sala, 61 vols., Bologna, Ut Orpheus Edizioni, 2000—.

<sup>6</sup>. ILLIANO-SALA-SALA, 2002.

<sup>7</sup>. *Ibidem*, p. ix.

from the existing literature; it is also the method most likely to stimulate the enthusiasm for Clementi's compositions that is so imperative if any revival is to gather momentum. My aim is to cultivate a more comprehensive vision of Clementi's relationship with the stylistic cross-currents of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and to explore outstanding features (or idiosyncrasies) of his style, like the unusually overt archaisms in the later sonatas, extreme bouts of virtuosity in the earlier ones and the frequently flexible approach to recapitulatory grammar. Noted before by a number of writers but never explored in detail, these aspects of Clementi's style reflect his significance as a composer of ingenuity and originality and close examination of them relates large portions of his output to broader linguistic preoccupations of the time. Close examination of many of Clementi's works may even call for a rethinking of certain established conceptions about late eighteenth-century musical language concerning, for instance, the importance usually attached to the 'double return' as a normative feature of sonata recapitulations, the stance composers took towards ideals of large-scale unification when cultivating harmonic and/or motivic links between movements (as in Clementi's Sonata in G major, Op. 40, no. 1) and the exact meanings, purposes and effects of Clementi's frequent engagements with severely learned styles compared with equivalents in contemporary works. Questions are also provoked by sonata expositions by Clementi that contain more than two articulated key areas, and whether these can, as some writers have suggested, usefully be compared with the 'three-key' expositions seen in sonata movements by Mendelssohn, Brahms and others — as if Clementi were anticipating an important nineteenth-century trend<sup>8</sup>. Thus, the 'new perspectives' I am offering on Clementi's keyboard sonatas may well open up equally 'new perspectives' on eighteenth-/early nineteenth-century musical language *per se*. In the introductory chapter I survey the factors that established the composer's essentially pedagogical image in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and which continue to perpetuate it today. I then evaluate the more recent scholarship and assess its relationship to the earlier, more sporadic writings on the composer that punctuated the «virtual silence» preceding 2002<sup>9</sup>. I end the book by confronting what is in some ways the most elusive but urgent task of all: reconfiguring the artistic image of the composer in more auspicious terms, to replace the 'father of the piano' categorisation that has proved so pernicious for so long.

The roots of this project extend back almost exactly a decade, to the early part of 1994, when as an undergraduate I first came into contact with

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<sup>8</sup>. LONGYEAR-COVINGTON, 1988.

<sup>9</sup>. SUTCLIFFE, 2004, p. 295.



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Clementi's orchestral works and soon afterwards, with his larger-scale piano sonatas<sup>10</sup>. The direct foundation for this study, however, was my Ph.D. thesis, researched and written between 1997 and 2001: *Towards a New Ontology of Musical Classicism: Sensationalism, Archaism and Formal Grammar in the Works of Clementi, Hummel, Dussek, and Parallels with Haydn, Beethoven and Schubert*<sup>11</sup>. The present book is a thoroughly revised and expanded version of the thesis, which has provided a skeleton only for the new study. The principal aim in the new version has been to centralise Clementi relative to the other figures mentioned in the thesis title whilst still devoting considerable space, in particular, to the works of Dussek, as well to exploit the activities of 2002 and beyond to develop much further some of the lines of inquiry only begun in the thesis. Consequently, many discussions relating to the other composers in the thesis title were removed or compressed and a great deal of new material specifically on Clementi has been added, expanding the proportions of the whole by well over fifty percent. One obvious additional area for expansion would have been Clementi's orchestral works, particularly in view of the progress that is now being made in re-appraising and revising earlier reconstructions of these<sup>12</sup>. In order to control the scale of the study, I nevertheless decided to remain focused on the keyboard works, with a view to pursuing the orchestral material subsequently.

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I would like to acknowledge the assistance of many people, both with the Ph.D. and with the new version: Roberto Illiano and Massimiliano Sala, for their initial encouragement of the present project, careful editing of the text and musical excerpts, their constructive and supportive advice at every stage and their great enthusiasm for all matters relating to Clementi; Susan Wollenberg and Nicholas Marston for their careful reading of, and useful comments on, new drafts of several chapters; W. Dean Sutcliffe for his outstanding support throughout the Ph.D. and continued input, Lol and Angela Crème, Brian Osman, Gladys Osman, Marguerite and John Lawson-Reid and the P&M

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<sup>10</sup>. I am indebted to W. Dean Sutcliffe for bringing about this important initiation. The works in question were the third movement of the Symphony no. 4 in D major WO 35, the subject of a lecture (SUTCLIFFE, 1994/2000) and the second movement of the Piano Sonata in G minor, Op. 50, no. 3 (*Didone abbandonata*), set for a written assignment.

<sup>11</sup>. STEWART-MACDONALD, 2001.

<sup>12</sup>. See SALA, Massimiliano. 'Muzio Clementi's Symphonies: Contributions towards a New Edition', in: ILLIANO-SALA-SALA, 2002, pp. 229-146.

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Charitable Trust for funding the Ph.D. research and Wye J. Allanbrook, John Butt, Stefano Castelvechi, Daniel Chua, John Fallas, Douglas Hollick, Robin Holloway, Madeleine Lovell, Nicholas Marston, Roger Parker and Alexander Rehding for their additional academic contributions to the Ph.D. I would also like to thank my mother, Lyndsay MacDonald and grandmother, Isobel MacDonald-Robertson for their sustained help with the arduous process of proof-reading both versions and for listening and responding to frequent progress reports. Others who have contributed to the new version through stimulating discussion, by suggesting and/or locating source materials or reference details have included Oliver Brett, Federico Celestini, Dorothy de Val, Karl-Johann Dürr-Sørensen, Thierry Favier, Elizabeth French, Anselm Gerhard, Aix Harper, Robin Holloway, Roberto Illiano, Marguerite Lawson-Reid, Bridget Marsden, Adèle Martin, Gareth Nellis, Leon Plantinga, Alice Reed, Annette Richards, David Rowland, Luca Sala, Massimiliano Sala, Laura Sheldon, Michael Spitzer, W. Dean Sutcliffe, Katy Thomson, Claire Wadsworth, James Walker, the late Claire Walsh and Susan Wollenberg. I am also grateful to the Librarian and staff of the Pendlebury Library (Music Faculty, University of Cambridge), Andrew Bennett (Former Librarian), Anna Pensaert (Librarian), Sandra Dawe and Sue Soame for their unflagging patience with me at every stage.

Thanks are also due the many undergraduates I have taught at Cambridge over the last eight years. Their written and verbal comments on many aspects of eighteenth-century musical style and, in some cases, on actual works by Clementi, have proved greatly beneficial. In a number of cases their names are cited in the footnotes of what follows. Unfortunately, it has proved impractical to acknowledge directly all contributions of this kind, so numerous (and often unwitting!) have they been. Sustained interaction with several generations of students has illuminated the process by which the traditional image of a composer or of a period/style is perpetuated by a network of educational experiences that have just as much if not more power to inculcate basic opinions and to sustain long-standing perceptions (and misconceptions) than scholarly literature. A number of the students' reactions to individual works by Clementi — both positive and pejorative — and their sometimes spirited criticisms of my own ideas have compensated for the dearth of published commentaries on Clementi's keyboard sonatas and have helped me to maintain some sense of perspective when dealing with repertoire about which I feel much personal enthusiasm, but which is outside the scope of most people's experience, and therefore likely to provoke either indifference or mild disdain.

Jan Ladislav Dussek's second two names appear in several different forms in different sources, namely 'Ladislav', 'Ladislaus', 'Ladislav' and 'Dusik',

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‘Duschek’, ‘Dussik’ and ‘Dussek’. For all references to the composer I have adopted the most usual form of his name, ‘Jan Ladislav Dussek’. I have also customized the various national spellings of ‘fantasia’, which include the French forms ‘fantasie’, ‘fantaisie’ and the German ‘Phantasie’. I have retained the English spelling ‘fantasia’ for all citations of works bearing the title.

The main primary source of Clementi’s keyboard sonatas used for the new version has been the volumes of *Opera omnia* available at the time of writing. In referring to Clementi’s works I have adhered to the numbering introduced by Alan Tyson in his *Thematic Catalogue of the Works of Muzio Clementi*<sup>13</sup>. In citations of Dussek’s piano sonatas I have used the opus numbering system that appears in the 1960 *Musica Antiqua Bohemica* edition, edited by Jan Racek and Václav Jan Sykorá. This was in preference to Howard Allan Craw’s less familiar numbering system, introduced in the thematic catalogue in his doctoral thesis on the composer<sup>14</sup>. In citing Haydn’s piano sonatas I have used the Cristha Landon numbering rather than Hoboken numbers.

Given the relative unfamiliarity of the repertoire discussed it has been necessary to include a large number of musical excerpts in Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5. I am grateful to the editors and the publisher for facilitating this. It has not been possible to illustrate all of the analytical discussions with musical excerpts and some of the illustrations are only partial; thus the reader will need to have some access to editions of certain works.

ELY, June 2004

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<sup>13</sup>. TYSON, 1967.

<sup>14</sup>. CRAW, 1964.



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## CHAPTER FIVE

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# CLEMENTI'S HISTORICAL REPUTATION: TOWARDS A RE-EVALUATION

MUZIO CLEMENTI (1752–1832):  
THE «BÊTE NOIRE OF ASPIRING YOUNG PIANISTS»

WHEN I WAS ABOUT FIFTEEN the first of the cheap editions of the «pianoforte classics» began to appear, and I zealously purchased them all and strove to master them. In the sonatas of Beethoven one came upon single movements that one could play and that appealed to even the most undeveloped taste. Yes, Beethoven must be a great man [...] Then came Mozart's sonatas, the smallness and naiveté of which repelled one. Yet one could not help feeling that Mozart was rather like the old literary geniuses of the eighteenth century, polished and high-bred, but speaking an idiom of the past which failed to attract the schoolboy mind. Haydn the same, though there was a lurking jollity in his music that made him seem more human than Mozart. Next appeared a volume of Weber, and here one felt that one was getting one's money's worth [...] But by this time had appeared Schubert's Sonatas, which were rank boredom to the youthful mind, and after those came volumes of Dussek, Hummel and Field, which were so dry and disgusting as to make one loathe the name of 'classic' and to shun those red-bound volumes with horror. Dussek, Clementi and Hummel to be ranked with Beethoven and Weber? Impossible to speak of them in the same breath; there must be something wrong somewhere. The more one tried to extract pleasure and profit from them, the more the difference between these and the others become manifest. Yet one's teachers and elders insisted that all were equally «Classical» and good, and that all were to be equally revered and admired<sup>1</sup>.

Mentioning Clementi's name in the course of conversation usually provokes perplexity. Reactions are often tinged with scepticism, sometimes tempered by strained politeness, occasionally marked with open disdain and not infrequently informed by repulsion. People commonly disassociate themselves from the composer («rather you than me»); «I'm glad to say I know

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<sup>1</sup>. CORDER, 1917, p. 283.

practically nothing by Clementi») or advocate similar dissociation («now that you've worked on Clementi, why don't you move onto another composer?»). In other cases, there can be a disinclination to be convinced by professed academic enthusiasm for Clementi's work, implying that the subject has been selected more for its accessibility as an unfulfilled scholarly enterprise than by a genuine desire for intimate acquaintance with, or to cultivate new approaches to, the composer's music. At other times, people express doubts about the fruitfulness of studying music of 'inferior' quality, despite the fact that canonical status is far from being a prerequisite for in-depth scholarship in any sphere: the aspiration, for instance, to study music by women composers of the nineteenth century would in the current ideological climate be commended with few concerns voiced about 'quality'. Indeed, established convictions of the *low* quality of such composers' compositions would probably be considered beneficial in stimulating re-evaluation; inquiry into the 'masculine'-orientated models of reception that might have led to their marginality, and so forth.

Reactions to the 'lesser' figures of the Baroque and Romantic periods are usually more straightforward and simply less negative. This is reflected in the much larger market for the music of composers like Vivaldi, Albinoni and Pachelbel, despite the generally acknowledged superiority of J. S. Bach and Handel. Not only are certain works by these three composers immensely popular, but inserting them into the same concert programme or including them in the same recording as works by Bach or Handel would probably not generate adverse reactions. Similar statements could be made about the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Proposals of an academic study or performance, say, of works by Theodor Kirchner or Franz Berwald would be more likely to stimulate curiosity than to provoke disdain or scepticism about issues of 'quality' or relative artistic stature.

Although members of every historical period are and to some extent must be judged hierarchically, the hierarchy of *Classical*-period composers seems especially steep and immutable. It should be acknowledged that reactions of the type quoted above are much more marked where Clementi is concerned than with other 'lesser' composers of the same period. It is instructive, in conversation, to substitute his name with Johann Nepomuk Hummel's or Jan Ladislav Dussek's and observe the different reactions. It should also be acknowledged that negative attitudes towards Clementi are more evident in Britain and possibly France<sup>2</sup> than in Germany, or in Italy.

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<sup>2</sup>. I am indebted to Thierry Favier (University of Dijon) for his useful comments concerning Clementi's reputation in France.



One major difference between the 'lesser' composers of the Classical period and their Baroque and Romantic equivalents is their more exclusive association with keyboard pedagogy — and this is truer of Clementi than of Hummel or Dussek: Clementi produced a larger quantity of well-known pedagogical material than they did, that entered the teaching canon in the nineteenth century and retained a central position in this throughout much of the twentieth century. Clementi's reputation, moreover, as the «bête noire of aspiring young pianists» accounts more than anything for his lack of popularity and his neglect as a potential subject of research<sup>3</sup>. The corpus of generally familiar works by both the 'lesser' Classical and 'lesser' Baroque figures is comparably small. Nevertheless, the best-known works by 'lesser' Classical composers are generally those which were originally — and sometimes still are — used for keyboard training. The difference in peoples' attitudes, say, towards Vivaldi and Clementi is unsurprising when it is considered that the mental comparison being made is probably between works like Vivaldi's *Quattro stagioni* and Clementi's *Gradus ad Parnassum*, or between Pachelbel's *Canon* and Clementi's *Sonatina in C major*, Op. 36, no. 1. Both of the Baroque works are famous, extremely popular and well known due to their assimilation into a variety of commercial contexts and association with popular performers like Nigel Kennedy and Vanessa Mae. Works like Clementi's *Gradus* and infamous C-major *Sonatina* occupy a realm far removed from popular culture, evoking distant (and often unpleasant) memories of training. Whereas works like the *Quattro stagioni* have entered modern-day youth culture through association with Kennedy and Mae, Clementi's well-known pieces remain synonymous with boredom, the past, age and desiccation. Baroque keyboard repertoire also has strong pedagogical associations, but of a more comprehensive type, including prestigious aspects of learning like contrapuntal technique: one thinks immediately of *Das wohltemperierte Klavier*, BWV 846–893, in this context, whose iconic status is inseparable from that of Bach, a «colossus of the Western musical canon»<sup>4</sup>. It is also generally known that the output of composers like Bach is not exclusively composed of didactic works. Whereas Bach is universally known to have written works like the *Mass in B minor*, BWV 232, and the *Passions*, Classical-era composers like Clementi are known, certainly amongst the non-musically trained, only for their smaller-scale teaching

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<sup>3</sup>. GILLESPIE, 1965, p. 249.

<sup>4</sup>. YEARSLEY, 2002, p. 209.

works. Clementi is still identified in most people's minds with his C-major Sonatina and the *Gradus*, the ultimate emblem of pedagogical dullness and the butt of parodies like Claude Debussy's «Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum», the first member of the *Children's Corner* Suite, and Eric Satie's less well-known *Sonatine bureaucratique* — directed at the Sonatina.

Large-scale pedagogical works like Clementi's *Gradus* figure less frequently in teaching situations now than formerly, as can be seen by surveying syllabuses of Associated Board piano performing examinations during the twentieth century (see FIG. 1). This shows that works by Clementi have been set frequently, but that the range of repertoire to be included, certainly until recent years, has been limited to his shorter, simpler compositions: movements or complete pieces from the Sonatinas Op. 36 have been the most common choice (in particular, the Sonatina in C major, Op. 36, no. 1). The first instance of a large-scale later sonata appearing was in 1997, when the Sonata in D major, Op. 40, no. 3 was set for Grade VIII. Many who have passed through the lower grades will therefore have encountered Clementi's shorter, simpler works alongside equivalents by Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and others. Progressing further, students are less likely to come across the larger, technically more advanced works by Clementi, as these tend to be replaced by those of more prestigious figures. A progression from 'lesser' to 'greater' repertoire — or from the wider, more diverse teaching canon towards the more streamlined performing one<sup>5</sup> — is thus mapped onto an evolutionary learning process involving progressively more 'difficult' music, reinforcing the impression that the 'lesser' figures composed little more than studies and short, miscellaneous compositions. Clementi is thus seen as a pedagogical «bête noire»<sup>6</sup> because it is only his miniature or pedagogical works which many people have encountered during the earliest and probably least rewarding stages of their musical training.

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<sup>5</sup>. Marcia Citron makes this distinction between the teaching and performing canons: CITRON, 1993, p. 27.

<sup>6</sup>. GILLESPIE, 1965, p. 249.