

World-class playmaker takes to the field of classical piano



Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Piano Concerto in D major op. 61a*

Beethoven's arr. of the Violin Concerto op. 61

- [1] I. ALLEGRO MA NON TROPPO
- [2] II. LARGHETTO
- [3] III. RONDO (ALLEGRO)

CADENZAS BY BEETHOVEN

Muzio Clementi (1752-1832)

Piano Sonata in B minor op. 40 No. 2

- [4] I. MOLTO ADAGIO E SOSTENUTO – ALLEGRO CON FUOCO E CON ESPRESSIONE
- [5] II. LARGO, MESTO E PATETICO – ALLEGRO – TEMPO 1 - PRESTO

Johann Baptist (John) Cramer (1771-1858)

Piano Sonata in E major op. 62 'Le retour à Londres'

- [6] I. LARGO ASSAI - ALLEGRO
- [7] II. ANDANTE QUASI ALLEGRETTO
- [8] III. ALLEGRO NON TANTO

Dejan Lazić *piano*

Netherlands Chamber Orchestra*

Gordan Nikolić* *leader*

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In his latest studio production, “The London Connection” (Onyx 4187), the Croatian piano virtuoso and composer Dejan Lazić casts fresh light on the piano literature written around 1800 with three fascinating rarities: Beethoven’s own arrangement of his Violin Concerto op. 61 and sonatas by two historical superstars of the European piano scene: Muzio Clementi and Johann Baptist Cramer.

His playing combines “strength with beauty”, *The Guardian* once wrote about Dejan Lazić – a description that professional football players would also like to read about themselves in the World Cup year 2018. All-round comprehension, technical perfection, passion, creative will, stamina, overall vision and intuition in the decisive moment – these are abilities that the avowed football fan Lazić brings together at the very highest level in his artistic career as pianist and composer. With his new album, “The London Connection”, this Croatian-born artist is now taking to the playing field of classical music for piano with the magic triangle Beethoven – Clementi – Cramer, all of them exceptional talents of the 19th century who have left unique traces on musical history.

From his childhood, Dejan Lazić has loved challenges, risks, venturing into barely explored or completely unknown terrain. His two Hungarian teachers, Imre Rohmann and Zoltán Kocsis, have had a decisive influence on him in this regard. For example, when he took part in the Bartók Festival for the first time, at age 11, the latter greeted him by saying that it would be decided spontaneously who would play what when. “*I loved getting up in the morning and not knowing what would happen that day.*” This enjoyment of creative spontaneity and surprise has now become a part of Lazić’s musical DNA. And it is apparent not only in the concert hall, but also in the selection of works for his new CD: he puts Beethoven’s Piano Concerto op. 61a, a reprehensibly neglected arrangement of the Violin Concerto op. 61 carried out by the composer himself, at the centre, flanked by piano sonatas by Muzio Clementi and Johann Baptist Cramer, who are both celebrated for their epochal collections of studies but otherwise barely registered as composers.

The album “The London Connection” not only has a historical and stylistic focus on the era around 1800, but also takes the city of London as its geographical centrepiece, something that gives the listening experience yet another dimension. For we must thank the pianist, composer, teacher and instrument maker Muzio Clementi, who was active in London as a music publisher as well from 1790 onwards, for the piano transcription of the violin concerto. In 1807, this Italian-born musician travelled

personally to Vienna to visit Beethoven and negotiate a deal on the transcription for his publishing house. The London edition of 1810 then featured, among other things, a complete set of new cadenzas (the one in the first movement with an unprecedented tympani accompaniment) and alternative transitions to the final Rondo movement. At the same time, however, the interpreter faces a special challenge because the polyphonic virtuosity typical of the piano is lacking, Lazić says: *“If we pianists try to imitate the violin concerto and reproduce it with the same rubato and phrasing, it doesn’t work. But when you go into the story of how it came about, you see how unbelievably clever and intelligent Beethoven was in his treatment of the supposedly ‘thin’ piano part.”* And Lazić holds a firm conviction: *“The great golden age of this concerto is still to come – I’m a huge fan of the work.”*

During his lifetime, **Muzio Clementi** (1752-1832) was celebrated as the “Father of the Pianoforte” (a title that also appears on his tombstone in London’s Westminster Abbey). This reputation stands in urgent need of revitalisation today. Dejan Lazić is now contributing in a big way to this process with his recording of the Sonata in B minor, op. 40, No. 2, which was published in 1802 – the same year, incidentally, as Beethoven’s three sonatas op. 31 – and represents an outstanding visiting card for the composer: “Adventurous, experimental and very definitely his own man” (Jeremy Nicholas).

One of the pupils of Clementi, who was also in demand as a piano teacher, was **Johann Baptist Cramer** (1771-1858). During his later concert tours through Europe, Cramer also got to know Beethoven, and like his teacher, he was involved in building pianos and publishing music. With this recording of the Sonata in E major, op. 62, “Le retour à Londres”, Lazić is again doing pioneering work with regard to this English-born composer: *“In the case of Cramer, it took some time for me to locate the first and only edition of the work: the first edition by Breitkopf & Härtel (Leipzig 1818).”* This piece, dedicated to the Beethoven pupil and secretary Ferdinand Ries, is highly sophisticated music by a piano virtuoso who was celebrated throughout Europe. Even a connoisseur like Lazić is amazed by it: *“What an adventurous and uplifting spirit Cramer was with his revolutionary pedalling indications, which enhance and highlight the musical and pianistic effects, and with the wealth of contrasts and daring agogics he has written into the music.”*

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