

# ***DISCOVERING HUMMEL***



1778-1837

## **INTRODUCTION**

Hummel was as popular a composer as Beethoven in their lifetimes, and the subsequent decline to near-oblivion of Hummel's music is extraordinary. The principle reason given is the onset of the Romantic Age, leaving the Classical Age, of which Hummel was the last representative, out of fashion. It is not, however, my purpose to analyse the reasons for Hummel's decline, it is to make the case for restoring his reputation, and his music, amongst music-lovers, and to give practical help.

The tide for Hummel turned as recently as 1958 when Merrill Debsky, a student at Yale University, obtained a copy of the manuscript of the very early Trumpet Concerto from the British Museum, which had purchased many Hummel manuscripts in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Five years later the first recording was released in 1964. Now recorded by all prominent trumpet players, it is still the composer's best known work, though far from his best. The next significant event was the recording of Hummel's A-minor and B-minor piano concertos by the pianist Stephen Hough for the British classical specialist recording company, Chandos, released in February 1987. This made an enormous impact and brought Hummel to the attention of many music lovers for the first time (including me), winning the *Best Concerto Recording Award* of the Gramophone magazine that year. Since then there has gradually developed a flow of recordings of Hummel's music, with Chandos leading the field, but other specialist companies such as Naxos and Hyperion have played an important part.

So, out of the dense fog that hid Hummel's compositions from us, first the Trumpet Concerto emerged, then over the succeeding forty plus years, more and more have emerged (though there are many unrecorded works still), all the time giving us a clearer and clearer picture of Hummel. The Masses were a revelation (*"It is astonishing that such fine works have been so completely neglected."* – Penguin Guide to Classical Music, 2008) and the first opera recording should appear in 2009. Cecilia Bartoli's recorded tribute concert for the great 19<sup>th</sup> century soprano Maria Malibran also plays a part.

I have taken the time to listen to most of Hummel's recorded music and my perspectives are given below. The works now include opera and every genre he wrote in. For me, already an enormous admirer of Hummel, it has been a revelation. The composer - who had such an amazing life, living

with Mozart, succeeding Haydn, rival of Beethoven, admirer of Schubert, mentor to Chopin – emerges as a magnificent composer, with a natural gift for melody, the orchestra and the voice, who wrote extremely attractive and popular music, but whose ambitions included having a balanced, successful and happy life. And there are masterpieces aplenty, particularly in the choral field. (As a last thought I decided to add the ballet music of *Sappho von Mitilene* to my review of Hummel’s music and it was a wonderful discovery with a particularly life-enhancing finale.)

The Hummel scholar Joel Sachs memorably wrote “*Hummel’s music reached the highest level accessible to one who lacks ultimate genius.*” I, humbly, differ, but I don’t want to get into semantics about what makes a genius. What I do know is that he is one of my favourite composers and I remember how some of those I have revered for 45 years - Berlioz, Bruckner, Mahler and Janáček – now have far greater reputations than they did then. I am for the underdog and trust that Hummel will assume his rightful place as one of the greats in that glorious age for classical music in Vienna. Not as great as Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert – but who is?

Stephen Hough, the celebrated pianist mentioned above, has offered me this assessment of Hummel:

“The Charles Bridge in Prague is one of those structures which is as interesting and beautiful as the two points which it links. Johann Nepomuk Hummel (named after the saint who met his death by being thrown from that very bridge) is a key link between the classical and romantic styles. As we listen to his music, beautiful in itself, our ears catch both sounds of Mozart and Chopin, of Beethoven and Liszt, of Haydn and Schumann ... and yet all is Hummel. He reaches forwards with audacity into the 19th century yet is not afraid to draw on past resources, on the elegance and order of 18th century models. He built on the foundation of his teacher Mozart’s discovery of the piano as a vocal, operatic instrument, and Hummel’s singing lines, decorated exuberantly with coloratura figuration, paved the way for a whole generation or two of virtuosos down the line.”

Recordings have led the way to Hummel’s music. The field of live performance is a pretty barren one, what does exist centres mainly around Bratislava and Weimar where Hummel is one of the great sons. Both recordings and performances have to contend with the fact that much of Hummel’s work is not available in modern editions. One needs to be a researcher, identify where original manuscripts or 19<sup>th</sup> century editions exist and get copies. Hummel’s published oeuvre is also pretty chaotic, with opus numbers often bearing no relation to when the work was composed – it badly needs an official edition. The British Museum is the primary source of Hummel Manuscripts, having purchased 54 volumes in 1884.

Hummel is still in a vicious circle, he is known to few, therefore not box office, therefore not heard in concert. Music schools and teachers do not teach their students Hummel works because they are largely unaware of him, so there are few musicians who (can) perform his works, and as the piano works can be particularly difficult – why learn them if you are not going to be asked to play them? I organise around thirty chamber music concerts a year and almost none of the artists has ever played any Hummel – Stephen and the Florestan Trio being notable exceptions.

Until the end of 2007 no English language biography of Hummel existed, but thankfully Mark

Kroll's book "*Johann Nepomuk Hummel – A Musician's Life and World*" brings much valuable information to those interested in the composer and I owe a substantial debt to him. The book goes into considerable depth, particularly about Hummel's relationships with other composers, and gives valuable information on dates of composition, publication and dedications of almost all Hummel's known works. I thoroughly recommend it as the in-depth biography based on current knowledge. This document has used Mark's book as primary source material, and has had the active participation and support of Mark himself, for which I am deeply grateful.

I have written, in a series of books entitled *Discovering Classical Music*, about the lives, personalities and music of forty composers, four volumes in all, because I think this knowledge eases readers into exploring a composer. Hummel was not one of the 40 because I couldn't get sufficient information on his life (nor listen to enough of his music) but I have in this document redressed this. I also give details of recommended recordings, and a pointer to source of many published scores, although this list is not comprehensive at this stage.

The chances of breaking the vicious circle of invisibility – resurrecting Hummel's reputation - are now improving with the significant numbers of recorded works as hard evidence for a reassessment of Hummel's reputation. But there is a lot still to be done.

**First** there is the need for a greater awareness - in which we can all play a part - spreading the word, being gently evangelical to right a wrong of public estimation to Hummel and enriching music-lovers' lives. That is why I have added Hummel as my 41<sup>st</sup> composer, and I have written in more depth than before. Feel free to circulate this file as you think fit. Classical music radio stations must surely be targets for requests.

**Second**, we can be aware of where the scores are. The wonderful International Music Score Library Project ([www.imslp.org](http://www.imslp.org)) has many out-of-copyright Hummel scores available for free download. I have my own project to provide full scores and parts, plus chamber versions of the Opp.85 & 89 Piano Concertos – the chamber versions to allow practical live performance.

**Third**, we can all encourage the inclusion of Hummel works in concerts by suggestion. As I organise concerts I have decided to have my first Hummel Festival in 2009 and I intend to make it an annual event. Also, there will be gentle pressure on the artists to perform a Hummel work and already the Wihan and Chilingirian Quartets have agreed this – in both cases for the first time.

**Fourth**, I intend to create a website at [www.jnhummel.info](http://www.jnhummel.info) to act as a focal point in this project.

I hope research will continue on Hummel, there is so much more to learn about his life and his personal relationships that will surely enhance our understanding of the man and his music.

## **Hummel – *His Life***

Johann Nepomuk Hummel was born on 14 November, 1778 in Pressburg, 80 kms east of Vienna in Hungary – now Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia. He was – unusually for that period - an only child, the son of Johannes and Margarethe Hummel who married just four months beforehand. Johannes was an excellent violinist and orchestral director at the Neues Theatre at the age of 24. His own father, Caspar, was a successful businessman – inn-keeping and farming – and an all-round musician who sent Johannes to Vienna to study. Margarethe, a widow, was three years older than her second husband.

A year after Johann's birth the family moved to Prague but, unable to find a good position, after a year Johannes took up the position of music director in Wartburg, close to Pressburg. They soon discovered that their young son had an exceptional aptitude for music and by the age of four Johann was learning the violin. A year later he commenced lessons on a miniature piano - he kept it for many years - and took singing lessons from his father as well. A prodigious learner, by his seventh year Johann was a remarkable pianist.

In 1786 his father was given the opportunity to join Schikaneder's *Theater auf der Wieden* in Vienna, capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, as music director. Recognising that Johann was a child prodigy and outstripping his ability to teach him, Johannes Hummel jumped at the chance and the family moved to Vienna and an extraordinary musical milieu where Mozart was then at his peak. Inevitably, Johannes' and Mozart's paths soon crossed and Johannes told Mozart about his extraordinary son. Father and son were invited to Mozart's apartment, and in spite of Mozart's normal reluctance to take on young students, he was so impressed by the playing of the seven-year-old that he insisted that Johann must come and live with the Mozart family, where he would be given free lessons.

Lessons with Mozart meant more than instruction, more like osmosis. The boy became a little assistant to Mozart (so like Mozart himself a generation beforehand), playing Mozart's piano music, playing four-hands with him, and experiencing the maelstrom of musical activity that went on in Mozart's house at a time when he was composing *Don Giovanni* and many other masterpieces. Many formidable musicians will have passed through those rooms. Mozart's teaching had to fit in with his life-style and it is well documented that he used to give instructions while playing billiards or bowls. Music-making of the highest order would also take place as new works were tried out.

Hummel stayed with Mozart for two years, until he was nine, an unparalleled education for the youngster. It was a turbulent time for Mozart, he had to move for financial reasons, and he lost both his father, Leopold, and son, Thomas, during 1787. In 1788, influenced by Mozart's success in touring Europe 25 years earlier, Johannes decided the time was right to embark on a similar venture with his son, and the two commenced a European tour that was to last over four years.

The Hummels set off in atrocious conditions of ice and snow in December. Romantic as such tours might seem the reality was very different. Travelling by sleigh or coach was uncomfortable at best, dangerous at worst - and slow. Venues for concerts ranged from palaces at best, local taverns at worst. Audiences ranged from the sophisticated to the bawdy. Main stops en route included

Prague, Dresden, Berlin (where Mozart attended a concert), Hanover and Copenhagen. In the big cities the Hummels were content to stay for weeks or months on occasion, and the prodigy performed before the ruler and court in most instances and would be rewarded with gifts or money. The Hummels set off for the Scottish capital Edinburgh, via the port of Hamburg, in the spring of 1790. They were fortunate to survive a severe storm at sea.

The young Hummel attracted much favourable attention in Edinburgh and they stayed for several months. Apart from concerts, both were in demand for lessons. Then the two travelled south to London via Durham and Cambridge. They arrived in London in the autumn and were to stay for two years. Haydn was there during this time and met the Hummels frequently, with Johann premiering a Haydn Piano Trio amongst the numerous concerts he gave. These included a number of private ones for King George III and Queen Charlotte. Hummel's relationship with British royalty was to last for many years. He published his first work, *Three Sets of Variations*, in 1791. A prominent business-man later wrote that Hummel at this time was "*the most surprising performer that had visited except the young Mozart.*"

The proposed continuation of the Grand Tour to include France and Spain was abandoned in the light of the French post-revolution violence and the Hummels returned via Holland. Their ship was attacked by a French cutter, cannon fire was exchanged and Johann was next to a sailor who was badly wounded in the exchange of fire. The Hague provided a safe refuge for two months and Johann performed for the Prince of Orange on regular occasions before a French bombardment forced them to move north to Amsterdam. From there they travelled back east through Cologne, Bonn and Frankfurt and finally met up with Hummel's mother in Linz, 100km west of Vienna, after a five-year absence. Hummel had developed enormously during this period, was now a skilled improviser as well as an exceptional pianist, and had made a significant number of useful contacts, many at the highest level, in making his name well known.

The Hummel family settled back to life in Vienna in the spring of 1793 and Johann was taken on as a pupil by Antonio Salieri and Albrechtsberger (who was also teaching the 22-year-old Beethoven who had just arrived in the city.) Haydn gave some instruction on the organ but advised it would affect his piano-playing adversely. Composition became an increasingly important activity, but this was a period, with Mozart recently dead, where the virtuoso pianist was becoming a great attraction.

Beethoven and Hummel crossed paths regularly as competitors for the title of virtuoso king of Vienna. Beethoven was eight years older than the teenage Hummel, and was much better connected in Vienna, but they evolved to become the two most celebrated composers and virtuosos in the city. Their relationship, which was to last until Beethoven's death, was a stormy one at times and Hummel recognised Beethoven's greater genius early on. Years later he reminisced to his pupil, Ferdinand Hiller: "*It was a serious moment for me when Beethoven appeared. Should I have tried to walk in the footsteps of such a genius? For a while I didn't know who I was, and I finally said to myself: "It is best that you remain true to yourself and your nature."*" Hummel never wrote a symphony as a result.

Hummel spent ten years in Vienna, developing as a composer and giving rare concert recitals and performing in private homes. As a leading Viennese pianist he was much in demand as a teacher –

he needed the money to survive – and he gave up ten hours a day to this, in contrast to Beethoven’s ability to dedicate himself to composition thanks to his financial sponsors. As a virtuoso Hummel’s style was very different from that of Beethoven, and preferred by many. As improvisers they were in a class of their own.

Hummel maintained a good relationship with Haydn, who recommended him, still only 24 in 1803, to be Kapellmeister at the Württemberg Court. This failed but Haydn immediately recommended him to his own Prince Nicolas Esterházy as Concertmaster. While Haydn remained titular Kapellmeister, he was now too frail to carry out his duties, but the new responsibilities at Esterháza, a magnificent but isolated palace at Eisenstadt, 50 kms north of Vienna, were conflict laden. To replace Haydn there was now a Vice Kapellmeister, Fuchs, and a second Concertmaster, Tomasini, in addition to Hummel.

Hummel’s compositional gifts were to develop strongly, particularly in choral music, at Esterháza over an eight-year period. He had nearly a hundred musicians and singers to compose for and to conduct, interestingly the second cello in the orchestra (as well as forester for the estate) was Adam Liszt who would father a son, Franz, in 1812. Hummel started initially at the Prince’s palace in Vienna in 1803. One of the first of his works performed was the Trumpet Concerto, written for the virtuoso Anton Weidinger, and performed at the Imperial Court on New Year’s Day, 1804. Some of Hummel’s melodies owed much to Mozart and he wittily included a popular contemporary march from a Cherubini opera in the last movement.

Hummel did not integrate that well at Esterháza. With the split responsibilities (for example he was not meant to conduct choral works, this being reserved for Fuchs) the situation required tact, modesty and diplomacy, particularly from someone nearly 50 years younger than the beloved Haydn who had been in the role since 1766. In contrast, Hummel, used to European cities and courts and being a soloist, was tactless and showed arrogance in a role that was completely new for him. He became, for some, a figure of fun, helped by the fact that he was overweight, even at this early age, and physically unattractive.

But Hummel as a composer pleased Prince Nicolas, particularly with the series of five Masses that continued the tradition started by Haydn of composing a Mass for the name-day of the Prince’s wife. Beethoven was commissioned to compose such a Mass for 1807, but his C major Mass failed to find favour with the Prince who reportedly said “*My dear Beethoven, what is this you have done again?*” Hummel, also present, laughed, and Beethoven took this amiss, although Hummel was probably laughing at Prince Nicolas, for whose musical taste he had very limited respect.

Hummel also composed for the theatre in Vienna, and it is clear that his composing activities caused him to neglect some of his other duties. His father was music director at the famous Apollo Saal and Hummel had a ready outlet for his compositions such as minuets and dances. At Christmas in 1808 the Prince sacked him after an underprepared concert on Christmas Eve, on the grounds that Hummel “*devoted most of his time to giving lessons and to his own compositions for the theatre in Vienna, with a complete disregard for his obligations here.*”

Hummel managed to get himself re-instated on this occasion, perhaps with Haydn’s help, but he continued to do little to hide his contempt for his employer’s musical taste or to conform to his

demands. A second sacking in May 1811 was final, in spite of Hummel's pleas, and the composer returned to Vienna, freed of his obligations, much more experienced, and able to concentrate on teaching and composing. He was to stay there for four eventful years, back in the mainstream of musical life, during which time he courted and married Elisabeth Röckel, an attractive and well-known singer and sister of Josef Röckel who had premiered the role of Florestan in Beethoven's opera *Leonora* (renamed *Fidelio* by the theatre management) in 1805. Elisabeth was just 19 when they met in 1812 – they married the following year - and Beethoven, whom she knew well, was a serious admirer. However Beethoven was deeply involved in an emotional crisis – to set up home or not - with his “*Immortal Beloved*” (almost certainly Antonie Brentano according to Beethoven's biographer, Maynard Solomon, though he considered Elisabeth's candidacy) in 1812. Thus the rivals made different decisions, each of which had significant consequences for their future music.

Marriage to Elisabeth was a crossroads that saw a more mature and selfless Hummel emerge, but ended his life as a dedicated composer at a time he was reaching the highest levels of his art. She encouraged him to restart his career as a virtuoso pianist, which led him to compose some major works for his own performance. It would not be unrealistic that she had a significant influence on her husband, in spite of her youth.

The defeat of Napoleon in 1813 led to the commission of Beethoven's *Wellington's Victory* and Hummel was one of many famous musicians who formed the orchestra for its premiere in December 1813. Apart from Beethoven, who conducted, others included Salieri, Spohr, Meyerbeer and Moscheles. Hummel was invited to give a concert for the Congress of Vienna in 1814, and regained his formidable reputation as a pianist, particularly as Beethoven's performing career was over. His first son Eduard - who would also have a career as a pianist - was born in the same year, his second son Carl - who became an excellent painter - didn't arrive for a further eight years.

Hummel and his wife next set off on a concert tour that included Trieste, Pressburg and Prague. In January 1816 he returned to Vienna to premiere his *Septet, Op.74*. While in Prague Hummel gave a piano recital attended by fellow composer and virtuoso pianist Carl Maria von Weber, on whom he made a huge impression. Further concerts helped reinforce his reputation as an exceptional performing artist and convince him that concert tours should be an important part of his future activities.

However, a sense of responsibility and the need to have a stable family life led Hummel to seek another Kapellmeister position and again the position at the Württemberg Court in Stuttgart became available. Although he knew the position was less than ideal from the incumbent, a good friend, he offered his services and terms, ensuring he would be in sole charge of music and have two months free each year for concert tours. He proved his credentials by conducting an opera and giving a concert in Stuttgart in October 1816. King Friedrich I, the reigning monarch, was delighted and Hummel was appointed.

But disaster struck almost immediately. Within a week the king was dead and his son Wilhelm succeeded him, and declared a period of mourning for two months requiring the closure of the Stuttgart theatres. Unfortunately for Hummel, Wilhelm was no music-lover and he re-appointed a former Theatre Director, Baron von Wächter, to the latter's former position in November.

Wächter, the son of the Danish ambassador to the Württemberg Court, was an aristocrat, haughty and - in Hummel's view – an amateur on the subject of music. Thus the appointment unfolded with remarkable similarities to the Esterháza experience, in spite of Hummel's greater reputation, experience and maturity.

Matters soon came to a head with conflicts about Hummel's contractual right to tour as well as his wish for Elisabeth to sing in opera productions. She eventually sang in a few performances but Wächter refused to pay her and she refused to perform again unless she was given a contract. This, and a host of other political intrigues, made life unbearable for the Hummels and in September 1818 Hummel resigned. His resignation was refused by the king, but Hummel forced the point and it was accepted six weeks later. Inevitably, it took some years for him to receive the money owed him. Outside court circles, Hummel's departure was much regretted as he had done much to improve musical life in Stuttgart.

Hummel had known that the position of Kapellmeister was vacant in Weimar after the death of the incumbent August Müller at the end of 1817 and the post held great appeal. The court at Weimar had a long and exceptional artistic reputation. Johan Sebastian Bach had been a court musician in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century and his godson Johann Ernst had been the first Kapellmeister of a new orchestra in 1756.

Since then Weimar had become the intellectual centre of Germany, as the Duchess Anna Amelia, widow of Duke Ernst August, became regent for her son Carl August. He was less than a year old when his father died in 1857 and Anna Amelia ensured her son had an extensive and enlightened education through her choice of tutors, in particular the poet, writer and philosopher Christoph Martin Weiland who arrived in Weimar in 1773 and remained until his death 40 years later. Weiland, amongst many publications, was responsible for the first translation of Shakespeare's plays in Germany.

Carl August took over the reigns of government at the age of 18 and was to become a highly enlightened ruler. One of his first actions was to appoint the brilliant young German poet, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, whom he had met two years earlier, to his Privy Council. Goethe lived in Weimar until his death, as did fellow poet and playwright, Friedrich Schiller, who settled in Weimar in 1787. The influence of Weimar was enhanced in 1805 when Carl August's elder son, Carl Friedrich, married the music-loving Maria Pavlovna, a daughter of Emperor Paul I of Russia.

Goethe loved music, as had Weiland, a great admirer of Mozart whom he had known personally, so a strong musical tradition had developed over the years, with Mozart's operas at the core. The Hofkapelle orchestra was of a high quality, with around 30 permanent musicians and 16 in the chorus.

Hummel applied for the vacant position and was appointed at the beginning of 1819. His contract gave him three months off each spring to pursue his concert career. This was third time lucky for him as he was to have an exceptionally happy and productive artistic and family life at Weimar, settling down to a comfortable domestic life, with an imposing house and garden. Maria Pavlovna became his principal pupil and Hummel attracted some of the brightest young virtuoso talents in the following years, including Ferdinand Hiller and Adolf von Henselt. Schumann would have

liked to count Hummel as his teacher but was not encouraged.

At the time of Hummel's appointment Adam Liszt was looking for a teacher for his 6 year-old son and prodigy, Franz, and approached his former colleague, but the distance was too great and Hummel's fees were prohibitive, the highest of any teacher. Carl Czerny, a former student of Beethoven's living in Vienna, took on the task for free and did a wonderful job in developing the young Liszt's potential. Hummel's virtuosic piano writing was a magnet for Liszt, however, and the A minor and/or B minor piano concertos were to be Liszt's calling card, the works with which he was to later debut in Vienna, Paris and London, amongst many other cities.

Hummel's primary task was conducting operas and he performed a wide repertoire. Rossini was the contemporary rage, soon to be superseded by Carl Maria von Weber's *Der Freischütz*, first performed in 1822, but other composers included Meyerbeer and Bellini. Strangely, only once, in 1821, did he conduct one of his own operas, *Mathilde von Guise*.

Concert tours were an annual part of his planning from the beginning. In 1820 he performed in Prague and Vienna, where the concert included his *A minor Piano Concerto*. In 1821 he played in Berlin and met Spontini, Kapellmeister to King Frederick III of Prussia. In 1822 he visited Russia where he made the acquaintance of the Irish composer and piano virtuoso, John Field. Concert venues included St.Petersburg and Moscow. 1823 saw a return to Holland, with performances for the Royal Court and in the major cities and it was here he was enraged to discover the numerous pirated editions of his compositions.

Even at an enlightened court such as Weimar there were still conflicts. Hummel reported from 1824 to the Intendant, Karl Stromeyer, who put a number of obstacles for public concerts in Hummel's path. But Hummel did much to increase the number of concerts and invited numerous artists to play over the years, the best known being the violin phenomenon Niccolò Paganini.

Weimar was a Protestant court and the Catholic Hummel didn't have to write sacred music but instead composed cantatas for the court and the Masonic lodge of which he became a member. His compositions were also strongly influenced by commercial demands and he wrote a considerable number of chamber transcriptions, such as the piano concerti and symphonies of Mozart and symphonies of Beethoven, plus many arrangements of songs.

These, of course detracted from his original compositions, as did many of his other activities in his very busy life. A shrewd business-man, he devoted time to two important projects. He worked extensively on his *Klavierschule ("Piano School")*, eventually published in 1828. A guide to mastery of the piano and interpretation, it is an extensive work with more than 2000 examples and was an immediate success. The other was his work to achieve copyright protection for composers' works, as he knew how much money he lost by unscrupulous publishers pirating his own and other composers' music.

Hummel stayed in Weimar in 1824, working on his piano treatise and preparing for his next year's tour. Cherubini, the Director of the Conservatoire, had long been an admirer and friend of Hummel and the shrewd Hummel was adept at achieving publicity, with many years of experience in the essential art of stimulating interest in advance of arrival in a foreign town or city.

Paris was a major new challenge, increasingly a musical centre attracting the great pianists of the day - such as Moscheles and Kalkbrenner - to its vivid and partisan audiences. Hummel set off in 1825 on the long journey from Weimar with Elisabeth and his elder son, plus one of his students, Ferdinand Hiller. Hummel announced four concerts at the Salle Érard in April, and had to add a fifth at the Conservatoire where he performed his Concert piece *Les Adieux*, promoting that it was a new work although it was actually composed in 1814. The concerts received critical acclaim and were soon followed by his election as Chevalier du Legion d'Honneur, France's most prestigious award, in 1826. Present at the Salle Érard concerts were Adam and the young Franz Liszt and they must surely have met Hummel.

There was close intimacy in court circles at Weimar. Hummel met Goethe regularly and often performed concerts at his house. After a concert by Ignaz Moscheles in 1825 Hummel presided over a grand dinner and the two played four hands together. Earlier Moscheles improvised, with Hummel seated on one side, the Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna on the other.

Hummel was elected to the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna in 1826. Early the next year saw Hummel, Elisabeth and Hiller in that city, drawn by the news that Beethoven was close to death. They met four times between March 8 and 23, events recorded by Hiller. Any past differences in their 25-year relationship were forgotten in an emotional reunion. Significant subjects were Beethoven's request that Hummel take his place at a charity concert in April, Beethoven's desire to talk to Elisabeth, who cut a lock from his hair, and Beethoven's agreement - and a letter - to support Hummel's copyright project.

Beethoven died three days later, and Hummel was one of eight Kapellmeisters who walked beside the coffin. It was Hummel who was given three laurel wreaths to throw onto the coffin before the grave was filled with earth. Hummel did play in the charity concert in aid of Schindler, Beethoven's supporter. Schindler spoke of the circumstances many years later. *"It is true that Hummel, although in the middle of March he had promised Beethoven on his deathbed to take part in my concert on April 7, 1827, at the Josefstädter Theatre, tried to back out of his promise after Beethoven had died. But Hummel's wife, born Röckel, still living as a widow in Weimar, was once loved by Beethoven; he had wanted to marry her, but Hummel snatched her away from him. When she heard from me that her husband had changed his mind, she said. "I have so much respect for Beethoven's memory that I will not permit this. Let my husband be, he will play for you." And in fact Hummel did play, and improvised on a theme of Beethoven's in the most beautiful way imaginable."* The music Hummel chose was from the *Allegretto* of the *Seventh Symphony*, and the *Prisoners' chorus* from *Fidelio*.

Hummel also met Schubert during his time in Vienna and was much moved to hear performances of some of the young composer's songs sung by the famous Vögl to Schubert's accompaniment. Schubert resolved to dedicate his latest three piano sonatas to Hummel, but his tragic death the following year prevented this happening.

The death of Archduke Carl August in 1828 resulted in Hummel's position being substantially strengthened as Carl Friedrich, the new Archduke, was much more supportive, influenced by his wife, Maria Pavlovna, a strong admirer of Hummel. Stromeyer was forced to retire, and the other

long-standing force in Weimar's musical life, the soprano Caroline Jagemann, lost the basis of her influence – her position as mistress of Carl August. But even the new regime was resistant to Hummel's far-reaching proposals for modernising music-making and improving the conditions for the musicians, though he persisted over the ensuing years.

1828's tour was short and included Berlin and Warsaw where Hummel met Chopin for the first time, the start of a significant friendship and influencing role on the younger composer. The following year Hummel took a holiday in the spa of Karlsbad and started preparations for his visit to England the following year. There had been an invitation from the Philharmonic Society outstanding since 1822 and Hummel's reputation there was very high, with his music well known and frequently performed, for example by Liszt.

On route to London Hummel visited Paris in March 1829 and gave two successful concerts before heading on for England. Advance publicity, aided by help from the residents and fellow virtuosi Moscheles and Kalkbrenner, ensured great interest and the critics were not disappointed. Other artists featured on the programmes, including the famous young soprano, Maria Malibran, who premiered the *Tyrolean Air with Variations* which she had commissioned from Hummel. Hummel spent three months in London, played for the Queen, and participated in other concerts, including a benefit for Moscheles.

This was the peak of Hummel's touring career, as a visit the following year was far less successful. Paganini, with his daemonic appearance, showmanship and unprecedented virtuosity on the violin, was now the rage and Liszt was following the same path on the piano, effecting a change in public taste. Further, Hummel had not ingratiated himself in some musical quarters with his focus on fees. Also there were some suggestions that his remarkable technique was in decline. But he took the opportunity to tour the north-west of England before returning home via Paris and a visit to London in 1833 was in the role of conductor of the German Opera company. As before, he was invited to Windsor Castle to perform for King and Queen. The opera venture was an artistic success though a number of works were cancelled. He gave one concert, but also performed one of his concertos for the Philharmonic Society and appeared as a guest with Kramer. Unfortunately he had a breakdown in performing a Mozart 2-piano *Fantasia*.

This was Hummel's last tour, the financial rewards were diminishing and his health was now in serious decline in his mid-fifties. He continued to perform his duties at Weimar and gave his last concert there in March 1837 when his son Eduard played one of his concertos. His health deteriorated further during the summer and he died on October 17. His funeral was three days later, when one of his cantatas was played. Hummel's death marked the end of the classical era.

Hummel died a wealthy man, providing well for his family. Elisabeth Hummel survived her husband for 45 years, remaining a widow. With the onset of romanticism and new fashions, Hummel's music gradually disappeared from the repertoire and by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century his music was almost unknown.

## Hummel – *The Person*

Hummel was physically not attractive, he was short, increasingly fat from late teenage years and his face had a slightly twisted look. He was, unusually for the time, an only child, furthermore one who had a peripatetic childhood with little formal education and absent from his mother for some years. It took him time – and the love of a good woman – to mature into the person described as “*a person of the most gracious and kind nature..... he never neglected his family..... and invited friends to his dinner table happily and often.*” He had an unusually happy family life with two talented sons. His ambition then was not, like Beethoven’s, to be the greatest composer, but to have a happy, comfortable and successful life, and bring pleasure to others with his playing and his compositions. In this he totally succeeded, to his enormous credit.

His upbringing, however, left him somewhat selfish and arrogant in his early years, and his behaviour at Esterháza could be boorish and often rude to his aristocratic employer. Also, he was not above some shady dealings to his own advantage, no doubt thinking his talents justified them, as did Beethoven in selling individual works to several publishers! Even in late life his desire to make money was noticed and criticised, perhaps out of envy, but he was certainly an astute businessman. He also strove to improve the lot of his musicians at Weimar and had a sense of justice that was more progressive than that generally prevailing at the time. His work in Weimar to create a widows and orphans fund is one example, his ground-breaking work to seek intellectual property rights for composers is another.

He was profoundly aware of Beethoven’s greater genius, but also the sacrifices that Beethoven made for his genius. I find Beethoven’s influence on Hummel’s music much less than Haydn and Mozart, but like many others he was intimidated by his elder colleague. He did not take up the challenge of competing because he felt he could not win and the sacrifices he would have to make would be too great. Many would call that sensible, although there is the question of what more he might have achieved with his great talent if he had been more ambitious as a composer, or had he not married. Time will judge his pre-marriage vs. post-marriage works, but listening to the choral music of the 1800s, the opera *Mathilde von Guise* of 1810 and the ballet commission of *Sappho von Mitilene* from 1812 I find a particular joie-de-vivre, melodic inventiveness and orchestrating brilliance. Remember too that in 1813 Beethoven was about to enter a five-year period of deep crisis emotionally and musically, leaving an opportunity to be rivalled - even overtaken - when works such as *Wellington’s Victory* were his output.

Before Hummel married he was a dedicated composer who taught, was prolific and expert in most genres. After marriage he was a family man, a virtuoso, a teacher, increasingly a conductor of other composers’ music and a business man, and a composer largely for his own performing career and writing for his current market and not posterity.

Hummel’s philosophy in his later years was given to his pupil Ferdinand Hiller. “*Your purpose is to touch the heart, to instil joy, to delight the ear. Model yourself after great masters in form and plan, although don’t copy their style, which must be your own. Be diligent but not too hasty, everything good comes with reflection. Enjoy the world, while you attempt to provide it enjoyment... never forget this watchword: Moderation.*”

## Hummel – *His Music*

I have yet to hear a Hummel work that is not attractive and interesting. Many are much more than that and he seldom outstays his welcome, conciseness being a frequent feature. Here then is my path for an introduction to Hummel the composer. Star ratings for recommended recordings, where given, relate to the review in the Penguin Guide to Recorded Classical Music 2008. (See footnote) 🎵 indicates score available free from [www.imslp.org](http://www.imslp.org) or stated source. Absence of a source does not mean one is not published.

For the **Hummel Starter Pack** I recommend the following six works, the last three show Hummel's lighter side:

**1. Piano Concerto in A minor, Op.85.** (1816) This wonderful work has an orchestral introduction of a magnificent swagger, which then, with the cellos, dissolves into a jaunty march, before building a magnificent momentum. Hummel's mastery of the orchestra is clear, and it is nearly four minutes before the piano gently enters. Great melodies and virtuosity and delicacy abound and you are swept along on a great tide. The short *Larghetto* is declamatory in its orchestral introduction, before a solo piano enters – beautiful, and Chopin was only 6 years old when it was written! The music eases gently into the final *Rondo*, which via a succession of melodies and a fugue breaks into a dramatic virtuosic display with dazzling finger-work. *Recommended recording: \*\*\*\* Stephen Hough, English Chamber Orchestra, cond. Bryden Thomson. Chandos CHAN8507* 🎵 *Full score plus parts, also chamber version available from Orpheus & Bacchus.*

**2. Te Deum** (1805) Trumpets usher in violins and a crescendo that launches the choir. Next there is a repeat of the introduction and we are launched into a state of exaltation, helped by a soprano line that spends much time in the high registers. There are intense quiet passages of great solemnity. The conclusion of this short work – just 12 minutes long – starts with a fugue and ends in a glorious blaze of trumpets and thrilling modulations. One of the greatest settings of the Te Deum! *Recommended recording: \*\*\* Tower Voices, New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, cond. Uwe Grodd. Naxos: 8.557193* 🎵 *Score- Ataria Editions AE412*

**3. Ballet Suite: Sappho von Mitilene, Op.68** (1812). Hummel chose not to write any symphonies, but the suite from this ballet score is a wonderful showcase for his writing for orchestra. It has an impressive overture and 11 numbers of great variety of form and mood in the recording below. The slow numbers are my favourites – try the *Larghetto sostenuto assai*, and listen to the horns and clarinets and the following *Allegro Vivace*. Beauty and wit to leave you smiling and chuckling. The *Finale* is magnificent music, a superb flute and orchestra number, *Andante* to start with, moving into *Allegro*. The scintillating orchestral ending is one of the best I have ever heard, it really swings! (The last time I felt so bowled over was when I first heard Mozart's *Champagne Aria* many years ago - it has the same exhilaration and effervescence!) *Recommended Recording: London Mozart Players, cond. Howard Shelley CHAN10457*

**4. Wind Serenade** This four movement work exploits the clarinets, oboes, bassoons and horns to mutual advantage. A lively first movement is followed by a melancholy *Adagio*, then a lilting *Menuetto*. A rollicking, humorous and exuberant *Rondo* finishes the work in fine style, particularly as the tempo surges as the theme re-appears for the last time. Guaranteed to bring the house down!

*Recommended recording: Consortium Classicum, MDG 301 0440-2*

**5. Piano Trio No.1, Op.12** opens with a violin theme over piano arpeggios, then moves into a second theme of great humorous potential. Cello and violin take turns at the lead, the piano providing a brilliant back-cloth. A singing *Andante* that could melt a heart of stone follows and the work concludes with a brilliant *Presto*, with much humour again. This is happy music-making with delightful tunes – and there are six more piano trios! *Recommended recording: \*\*\* Trio Parnassus, MDG 3307/8* 🎵 Breitkopf & Härtel

**6. Fanatasie, Op.18** (1805) is effectively a grand sonata for piano. The first movement, marked *Allegro con Fuoco*, is highly dramatic and melodic. It melts into a *Larghetto e cantabile* of great beauty that builds to a passionate climax. The last two movements, an *Allegro assai* followed immediately by a *Presto* create a thrilling conclusion. *Recommended recording: Madoka Inui, Naxos: 8.557836*, 🎵

After this just follow your instincts by the preferred genre.

### **Piano Music – Sonatas**

There is a feast of music for solo piano and more still to emerge. It largely consists of formal sonatas, fantasies, and theme and variations.

**Piano Sonata No. 6, Op.106** (1824) – my favourite – looks forward to Chopin and has an exquisite second theme in the captivating first movement, followed by a scintillating virtuosic passage up and down the keyboard. After a spikey *Scherzo* there is a lovely *Larghetto a capriccio*, left hand accompaniment like a boat rocking gently on a lake. The concluding *Allegro vivace* returns to Hummel's contrapuntal style, the attractive themes always suggesting fugal treatment but just teasing – clever and successful, with a quiet ending. *Recommended Recording: \*\*\*\* Stephen Hough, Hyperion CDA67390* 🎵

**Piano Sonata No.5, Op.81 in F-sharp minor.** (pub.1819) Considered one of Hummel's greatest works in his lifetime, it is a highly demanding work to play. From the beginning Hummel's signature of arpeggios and contrapuntal writing is evident but in a much more romantic and imposing context. The opening *Allegro* is like a roller-coaster ride, exciting but pausing at times for reflexion before re-launching. Often cascades of notes intersperse. The *Largo con molto espressione* is demanding, relying on the belief of the interpreter to plumb the depths which are possible. It melts towards its gentle end. The *Finale* is technically and physically demanding, an almost relentless wild dance with a thrilling end. *Recommended Recording: \*\*\*\* Stephen Hough, Hyperion CDA67390* 🎵

**Piano Sonata No.3, Op.20 in F-minor** (pub. ca.1805) this serious sonata is somewhat in Hummel's baroque/contrapuntal style as in some of the contemporaneous string quartets in the first movement. The following *Adagio maestoso* also, although after 2 minutes the theme is lighter and more romantic. The concluding *Presto – Ancor pui presto* - is virtuosic, almost back to Bach at times. *Recommended Recording: \*\*\*\* Stephen Hough, Hyperion CDA67390* 🎵

**Piano Sonata No.4, Op.38** (ca.1808) is the longest of Hummel's piano sonatas. It makes a grand

entrance -*Adagio maestoso* – before rushing off in an *Allegro*, echoes everywhere. The second theme reminds of Mozart, but not the treatment, which gets increasingly virtuosic. A very enjoyable movement. An *Adagio con molto espressione* by Hummel is always a pleasure, this one is quite florid. The last movement, *Prestissimo*, is melodic, virtuosic and essentially light-hearted with a punchy conclusion. *Recommended recording: \*\*\* Chang, Naxos: 8.553296* 🎵

**Piano sonata No.2, Op.13** in E-flat (pub.1805) This is an attractive early sonata, with Mozart's influence clearly audible in the outer movements. I love the theme that arrives after a minute, it's like balm. Hummel's individuality is more to the fore in the musing and rapt *Adagio con gran espressione* which opens with graceful rising arpeggios. Highly appealing! The finale, *Allegro con spirito*, is firmly rhythmic at the onset; it has its themes over-ridden regularly by the imposition of the rhythm in the bass. *Recommended Recording: \*\*\* Chang, Naxos: 8.553296* 🎵

Hummel also wrote two mature sonatas for two pianists, four hands. The shorter and lighter **Piano Sonata, Op.51** is Hummel at his best, totally entertaining and delightful. It opens with a jaunty march tune evolving into a lyrical variation. I regret to say it is one of those simple viral themes that remain in your head hours later! After various treatments it ends in sombre mood. A very short *Andante* in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time acts as an introduction to the last and longest movement, the main twinkling theme, closely related to the first movement, again memorable. The march-like opening movement quickly arrives in the background and the fantasia element develops to create a thoroughly entertaining experience with a dying away erupting to a scintillating conclusion. Fun and witty! *Recommended Recording: Steinhöfel, Roth HARMS050902 [www.ha-rms.de](http://www.ha-rms.de)* 🎵

**Piano Sonata Op.92** (1820) is much more serious and ranks with his best. A slow introduction opens into a serious, brooding theme which develops formidable momentum, helped by contrasting lighter second subject. Fugal treatment in the development helps maintain the tension to a majestic ending. An *adagio* opening hymn-like broadens into declamatory statements from the two pianists before the hymn returns to die away with gentle trills. The concluding movement contrasts a light opening theme with a strongly rhythmic one. The interplay between the two pianists is scintillating and we are swept to a thrilling conclusion where the two subjects are brought together. *Recommended Recording: Recommended Recording: Steinhöfel, Roth HARMS050902 [www.ha-rms.de](http://www.ha-rms.de)*

### Other Piano Music

Here lies some of Hummel's most attractive piano music. The **Rondo quasi una fantasia in E major, Op. 19**, opens arrestingly with dramatic chords, then follows a declamatory but gentle theme before a memorable and haunting melody appears. In the second half the music takes off, melodies and virtuosity together. This short work – 9 minutes or so – is a little gem. *Recommended recording: Madoka Inui, Naxos 8.557836* 🎵

**Bagatelles, Op. 107: No. 3 in A flat major, "La contemplazione"** (1826) Another gem, beautiful yet powerful, with a raptness that holds you, particularly the exquisite melody at the heart. *Recommended recording: Madoka Inui, Naxos 8.557836* 🎵

If you want more fun and fireworks, and a sense of what it must have been like when Hummel improvised, listen to **Recollections of Paganini** (1831) and the **Fantasina on Mozart's Non piu andrai, Op.124** (1833). These works abound with great melodies and virtuosity and are enormous

fun – ideal encore pieces. *Recommended recording: Madoka Inui, Naxos 8.557836* 🎵

**24 Etudes, Op.124** (1833) Hummel's brilliant *Etudes* are perhaps more for pianists to prove themselves than for listeners, but these short pieces (the etudes, covering every key, last 30 minutes in all, the longest 4 minutes) give the pianist the opportunity to seduce with virtuosity and effects and a wide variety of moods and you will not be bored as these works flash by. Perhaps a connoisseur's work, but listen to the cascading notes of *No.5* (definitely previewing Chopin) and the sombre *No.22*. This work really grows on you. *Recommended recording: Khouri, Music and Arts Programs of America, CD-1165* 🎵

**Rondo Brillant, Op.109** is exactly that, virtuosic at times and with a beautiful quiet middle section. *Recommended recording: Khouri, Music and Arts Programs of America, CD-1165* 🎵

There is much more, but this will keep you going for a while!

### **Concertos - The Piano Concertos**

The early concertos are like discoveries of lost Mozart concertos, the mature ones are formidable, you will be reminded of the later Chopin, but Hummel's orchestral writing is far greater.

**Piano Concerto No.3 in B minor, Op.89** (1819) opens with timpani and wind throwing the simple theme around, building to a climax. The relaxed second theme, flutes and violins, provides the ideal foil. The orchestration is masterly and the ebbing away before the piano enters with timpani is like laying down a red carpet. The mood is intimate initially but develops dramatically and virtuosically – a movement with magic and magnificence. The highly original *Larghetto* opens with a long passage for four horns ushering in a hushed and musing piano. A movement of genius. The concluding playful *Vivace* brings us back to the real world, Hummel the virtuoso and entertainer at his best driving to a rousing conclusion. *Recommended recording: \*\*\*\* Stephen Hough, English Chamber Orchestra, cond. Bryden Thomson, Chandos CHAN8507* 🎵 *Full score plus parts, also chamber version available from Orpheus & Bacchus.*

**Piano Concerto in E, Op.110** (1814) is uplifting, a favourite of mine. It has an opening movement marked *Allegro pomposo e spirito* that is particularly joyful and festive - perhaps influenced by his marriage - if less strong thematically than its immediate successors. The *Andante con moto* is also more exuberant in its orchestral opening, and its later interaction with the piano. There is a superb passage for horns, one of a number of accompaniments that makes this a beautiful and original slow movement. The concluding *Allegro moderato ma con brio* is full of fun, again Hummel showing his ability in exploiting the instruments of the orchestra, which join in enthusiastically. In the middle there is a change of mood for a beautiful love song, the most intimate part of the concerto. The conclusion is a riot, horns, full orchestra, the piano producing fantastic effects, as if to say "I am so happy!" *Recommended recording: Howard Shelley, London Mozart Players, Chandos CHAN9687.* 🎵

**Piano Concerto in A flat, Op.113** (1827) opens quietly but builds into a passionate and powerful movement, Hummel in peak form, with classical and romantic styles meeting in contrast. Think Mozart meets Chopin, but of course it is Hummel! You are swept along by the first movement, the following *Romanze* has a declamatory orchestra answered and easily tamed by a very gentle piano.

The cello section then memorably goes into raptures. The last movement is a *Rondo alla Spagniola* – the Spanish flavour in fashion at the time. It makes for a different, light and enjoyable conclusion, with a long home-straight of virtuosity. *Recommended recording: \*\*\* Howard Shelley, London Mozart Players, Chandos CHAN9558.*

**Hummel's last Piano Concerto in F** (1833) has a mellow reflective and intimate mood. A connoisseur's piece with much that is beautiful. It's opening twinkles, and has a touch of a martial flavour. Bassoon and cello open the curtain on an extended piano solo in the middle movement, the main melody delayed. Musings follow, then the concluding *Allegro* is introduced, the spirit playful. *Recommended recording: \*\*\* Howard Shelley, London Mozart Players, Chandos CHAN9886.*

**Piano Concerto in A** (London manuscript S4) is an early work from the 1790s, revisited at least once by the composer. Inevitably very Mozartian, but very well crafted. The problem of a missing middle movement has been solved practically with a later Romanze, beautiful in itself. The well-judged *Finale* has an extended and attractive orchestral opening, concluding an attractive, derivative work – but derived from a genius. *Recommended recording: \*\*\* Howard Shelley, London Mozart Players, Chandos CHAN9886.*

**Piano Concerto in A** (Florence manuscript S5 ca.1798) is a second early concerto. Again Mozartian, but more assured and attractive, it opens exuberantly and confidently, with a stately second theme, orchestra beautifully scored, particularly for wind. Playfulness and seriousness together. The *Romanze* (essentially the same referred to above) is rapt, the piano rhapsodic. The concluding *Rondo* is related (not for the first time in Hummel's compositions) to the last movement of Mozart's last piano concerto and wraps up a highly appealing work, which shows how gifted Hummel was while still in his late teens. *Recommended recording: \*\*\*\* Howard Shelley, London Mozart Players, Chandos CHAN10374.*

**Piano Concerto Op.34** (1809) opens in a martial mood, trumpets prominent in their warnings. The spirit of Mozart is not far away. The piano on entry is in a much happier mood, playful and virtuosic. The *Adagio* is Hummel's longest amongst the concertos, and I find it the most beautiful, starting with the melody given out initially by the orchestra. With arpeggios the piano enters and a rapt song quietly unfolds. Contemporaneous with Beethoven's Emperor Concerto, perhaps it is here that Hummel is closest to his great rival. The concluding *Vivace assai* brings a light-hearted mood, a jaunty and viral theme, a delicious street-band of wind-players in the middle of the orchestra. There are lots of jokes to enjoy, led by Pied-Piper Hummel – listen for the timpani roll – right up to the last bars. Fabulous entertainment, just what was needed to try take the Viennese minds off Napoleon's occupation! *Recommended recording: \*\*\* Howard Shelley, London Mozart Players, Chandos CHAN10216.*

**Other Piano and Orchestra works.** There are a number of works outside the traditional concerto structure. The **Rondos** are like a concerto without the opening movement, thus a slow introduction and a main fast rondo, typically lighter material.

**Concertino in G, Op.73.** (1799/1816) This is the piano version of the early Mandolin concerto and works extremely well in this form. It is so easy to delight in this vigorous, happy and melodic

work. A little gem. *Recommended recording: \*\*\* Howard Shelley, London Mozart Players, Chandos CHAN9558.* 🎵

**Rondo Brillant in A, Op.56** (1814) opens with a *Larghetto maestoso*, majestic orchestra, intimate piano, horns leading into a bubbling and light *Allegro*, dominated by piano with a wide variety of accompaniment from the instruments of the orchestra, much like chamber music. *Recommended recording: \*\*\* Howard Shelley, London Mozart Players, Chandos CHAN10216.* 🎵 (2 piano reduction)

**Rondo Brillant in B flat, op.98** (ca.1824) A solo clarinet, then bassoon, then oboe gently usher in orchestral arpeggios, and finally the piano in a memorable and soulful aria. The *Allegro* is elegant and bouncy, the piano scampering along much of the time. *Recommended recording: \*\*\* Howard Shelley, London Mozart Players, Chandos CHAN10216.*

**Theme and Variations, Op.97** (1820) The seven variations on a Mozartian theme make an attractive work, the penultimate *larghetto* being the highlight and leading gently into a scintillating conclusion – beautiful and fun, a little gem. *Recommended recording: \*\*\* Howard Shelley, London Mozart Players, Chandos CHAN9886.*

**Gesellschafts (Society) Rondo, Op.117** (1829) is a short work, less than 15 minutes. A declamatory opening from the orchestra introduces the piano in conversation, increasingly beautiful, always *Adagio*. At the end of these musings there is a pause and the orchestra then modulates away into a sparkling and playful *Rondo*, sparkling repartee between orchestra and piano now, gossip with a fugue, flirtations from the piano and a happy conclusion, all instruments applauding. *Recommended recording: \*\*\* Howard Shelley, London Mozart Players, Chandos CHAN9558.*

**L'Enchantment d'Oberon, Op.116** (1829) is a *Fantasia* for piano and orchestra, effectively a *Konzertstück* with links to Weber's opera *Oberon*. It has four sections, the second an impressive *Larghetto* leading into a stirring march. Next comes a gathering storm, a thundering piano, growing waves of sound exploding into the storm, itself brief then led by a flute into Oberon's horn call. The orchestra gathers into a climax and a swinging  $\frac{3}{4}$  finale leading to the required bring-the-house down virtuoso ending. *Recommended recording: \*\*\*\* Howard Shelley, London Mozart Players, Chandos CHAN10374.*

**Le Retour à Londres, Op.127** (1833) has a *Largo* introduction, rhapsodic, beautiful, intense, which leads, after a cadenza into the main rondo, a twinkling melody. It is fun from now on, there is a wind band passage and a hymn like orchestral theme en route to the jaunty conclusion. *Recommended recording: \*\*\*\* Howard Shelley, London Mozart Players, Chandos CHAN10374.*

### Other Concertos

Hummel was prolific as a concerto writer in his early years, particularly for some relatively unusual instruments.

The **Trumpet Concerto** (1803) opens *Allegro Spirito* and briefly you think “Mozart, *Haffner Symphony*”. This was written as a fun piece and that is exactly what it is, felicitous writing with the

spirit of Mozart in the orchestra and the keyed trumpet showing it's new found virtuosity with a delightful melody. The *Andante* sings, with more than a touch of Mozart's *C major Piano Concerto*, what better model? Listen to the trills of the flutes and oboes that appear on occasion. The short concluding *Rondo* swings along and suddenly out of nowhere he drops in Cherubini's popular march theme, an ideal build up to a scintillating conclusion. *Recommended recording: \*\*\*\* Hardenburger, Academy of St.Martins in the field, Marriner, Philips Duo: 464028-2.*

The **Violin Concerto** (c.1803) was never completed, except for the solo part. At least two performing versions have been created from the manuscript and show a very appealing compact work, with a violin part that demands considerable virtuosity and with Mozart's influence relatively low. Thematically it is strong. The opening movement is lyrical and elegant. The *Adagio* is too brief, a soulful song for the violin, a gentle string accompaniment. It fades out to usher in the *Rondo*, a dancing movement, the soloist soaring above an orchestra relatively subdued. *Recommended recording: Ehnes, London Mozart Players, cond. Howard Shelley, Chandos CHAN10255. Also a Naxos recording \*\*(\*) 8.557595*

The **Bassoon Concerto** (ca. 1805) opens with a particularly gracious first movement. The following *Romanza* is a beautiful aria, the bassoon gruff, but answered by a sweet oboe, at times in duet, before a significant solo cadenza, then a serene ending. The concluding *Rondo* opens in strolling  $\frac{3}{4}$  time with a jaunty theme. The bassoon struts his stuff, accompanied discretely, and then accelerates into the home street. An excellent and attractive bassoon concerto. *Recommended recording: \*\*\* Popov, Russian State Symphony Orchestra, CHAN9656.*

**Mandolin concerto** (1799) A jaunty theme opens this charming – particularly if you like the sound of the mandolin – entertainment. Hummel revisited the work with a piano version years later (see above). The orchestra has to be restrained in accompaniment and the style is Mozartian. The slow movement is a delicate theme and variations, and the concluding *Rondo* borrows from Mozart's last Piano Concerto. *Recommended recording: Stephens, London Mozart Players, cond. Howard Shelley, Chandos CHAN9925.*

In the **Concerto for Piano & Violin Op.17** (1805) the Mozartian influence is still strong. This is Hummel's *Sinfonia Concertante* effectively, but for a rare combination, which works very well. It is a over half-an-hour long, melodically very fine and in the opening *Allegro con brio* the piano tends to dominate, but when the violin gets a solo slot it is very effective. The extended cadenza is a high spot. The *Andante con moto* is a theme and variations – the theme itself delightful and the mood is playful throughout. The concluding *Rondo* is jaunty and rounds of an appealing work that, would be well known if it had Mozart's signature. *Recommended recording: \*\*\* Shaham, Howard Shelley, London Mozart Players, cond. Howard Shelley. Chandos CHAN9687. Also a Naxos recording \*\*(\*) 8.557595*

### **Choral Music**

There is a strong case for arguing that Hummel's choral music is his best genre and it is a sad reflection that these great works are so little known.

### **The Masses**

Hummel doesn't put a foot wrong in his five concentrated masses, wonderful choral writing,

superb orchestration, memorable melodies and taking full advantage of the descriptive possibilities of the words. Exaltation, excitement, exhilaration - those EXs of great musical experiences – abound.

**The Mass in D minor** (1805) is Hummel's longest and most original setting. It might be considered a tribute to Mozart as the *Kyrie* opens with an orchestral introduction that owes much to Mozart's *D-minor piano concerto* and the *Credo* to that of the *C-minor piano concerto*. After the orchestral opening, the *Kyrie* has dramatic pleading from the choir with a dying fall that is one of Hummel's choral trademarks, as are the high soprano registers. It is an extended and innovative setting, almost of the theatre (and *Don Giovanni*). Trumpets sound immediately in the *Gloria* and there are delightful touches when the soloists enter – but there are still operatic orchestral tutti! *Qui tollis* has a lyrical, gentle setting initially, mainly for the soloists and the *Gloria's* concluding fugue ends with exhilarating mensural patterns, trumpets and horns in syncopation, thrilling!. The highly original *Credo* is unusually in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time, it opens with the oboe and is soon swinging wonderfully, choir and orchestra in full flow, but there are some intimate episodes., the tenor and pizzicato strings at *Et incarnatus est*, with lovely accompaniment from horn and oboe. The remainder is extraordinary, much taken in untypical  $\frac{3}{4}$  time and the concluding *Et expecto resurrectionem*, with quiet and moving male voices opening, is unique. The *Sanctus* opens with a stately tempo, then accelerates rapidly, trumpets to the fore. The soloists open the *Benedictus*, unaccompanied for a long period – again unusual. Sinister drumbeats sound after the orchestral introduction to the *Agnus Dei*, but soon the music is skipping along, the mood ardent. A horn choir opens the *Dona nobis pacem* and Hummel builds tension and tempo as he hurtles to the end, but not before the horns intervene interrupt, with just a trumpet. *Recommended recording: Collegium Musicum 90, cond. Richard Hickox, Chandos CHAN0724.*

**Mass in D Op.111** (1808) The *Kyrie* opens quietly with winds prominent and a pleading and sometimes urgent chorus, beautiful melodies. The *Gloria* builds steadily with a great fugue *Cum sancto Spiritu* to conclude. An unusual horn solo introduces the initially restrained and individual *Credo*, initially in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time. A cello introduces *Et incarnatus est*, the choir increasingly rapt, then a crescendo into *Et resurrexit*, swinging dramatically in  $\frac{3}{4}$  again. A thrilling conclusion follows. After an enthralling *Sanctus* the lilting *Benedictus* is serene and highly memorable, supported by delicious woodwind. Listen in particular to the concluding *Hosanna in excelsis* with its swelling and dying theme. The concluding *Agnus Dei* of this choral mass without soloists is initially profound and austere, choir and organ alone, but it brightens with a fugue on *Dona Nobis Pacem* before concluding gently. *Recommended recording:\*\*\* Collegium Musicum 90, cond. Richard Hickox, Chandos CHAN0681*

### **Mass in B flat, Op.77**

The *Kyrie's* choral opening has instant appeal with its rise and fall and should hook you into this great music. This time the *Gloria* opens exuberantly, the first section has a fiercely joyful rhythmic climax, repeated before a plaintive oboe ushers in (and out) the meditative *Qui tollis*. The fugal conclusion bustles and surges to an exciting and emphatic end. The *Credo* is equally emphatic, but inventive too – listen to the pizzicato strings at *Et incarnatus est*. Trumpets sound at the *Et resurrexit* and choir and orchestra surge forward in exaltation. Fervour in the brief *Sanctus*, then a lovely *Benedictus*, a lovely theme wrapped around the word, keep us in musical heaven, interrupted by a middle section as if reminding of war. The *Agnus Dei* is an ardent prayer, a most

moving adagio. At *Dona nobis Pacem* the mood switches to joyful, introduced delicately then exploding. Reverence returns to conclude a magnificent choral mass. *Recommended recording: \*\*\* Collegium Musicum 90, cond. Richard Hickox, Chandos CHAN0681.*

**Mass in E flat, Op.80** The *Kyrie* opens with a stately march tread, gathering an underlying gentle orchestral drive, building to a climax, then dying away. The *Gloria* is packed with drama and thrilling choruses, plus a slow movement at *Qui tollis*. Hummel never fails to provide inspired orchestral accompaniment throughout. The opening statements of *Credo* have woodwind only, then open into full orchestra in Hummel's occasional penchant for  $\frac{3}{4}$  time. An oboe dominates a symphonic introduction to the tenor's sorrowful *Et incarnatus est*. The rest of the *Credo* is a thrilling ride, soloists fully involved, modulations, trumpets, pounding timpani. The latter is present after the opening cries of the *Sanctus*, later finishing in a great crescendo. The beautiful *Benedictus* brings memories of Gluck, beloved of Berlioz. There are glorious fortissimo *hosannas* at the end. The *Agnus Dei* opens full voiced and ardent, *Dona Nobis Pacem* is exultant, stops off, then winds up, soloists first, to a thrilling end. *Recommended recording: \*\*\* Collegium Musicum 90, cond. Richard Hickox, Chandos CHAN0712.*

**Missa Solemnis in C (1806)** Dramatic "Kyrie"s launch this *Solemn Mass*, quickly accelerating into soaring chorus, modulating down and driving on in fervent supplication with dancing violins. Ardent to the extreme, then gently dying! A simple rhythmic motif sets up the ecstatic choir in the *Gloria*, in which a glorious melody briefly distracts – a touch of genius. In the punchy *Credo* Hummel keeps you hooked and exaltation is all around – an idyllic oasis appears at *Et incarnatus est*, so beautiful to make one weep. The *Sanctus* is inspired, fervent, lilting. There is a steady tread in the supplicating *Benedictus*, soloists to the fore, with memorable orchestral and choral accompaniment. Brass introduce a rapt *Agnus Dei* and the *Dona nobis pacem* is launched by trumpets after which Hummel drives a double fugue to an exultant conclusion, the excitement ratches up and up as he modulates into the final bars – truly sensational! *Recommended recording: \*\*\* Tower Voices, New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, cond. Uwe Grodd. Naxos: 8.557193*  
♫Score- Ataria Editions AE419

The **Alma Virgo Mater** is a joy, a short work (6 mins.) for soprano, chorus and orchestra, with woodwind - particularly oboe - delighting in the accompaniment. Great melodies, dramatic coloratura singing, and horns blaze at the exciting conclusion. *Recommended recording: \*\*\* Gritton, Collegium Musicum 90, cond. Richard Hickox, Chandos CHAN0681.*

The Oratorio **The Passage through the Red Sea** is a thrilling choral work building on the style of Haydn's *Creation*. The date of composition of this unpublished work is unknown but likely to have been in Hummel's early Esterháza years. It is concise, lasting around 50 minutes and has 14 numbers in two Parts, almost all involving male and/or female choruses, which are exceptional. The duet between Aaron (tenor) and Moses (bass) (No.6) is dramatic with great harmonies. It is followed by a recitative with plenty of descriptive opportunities (frogs, locusts, hail, lightning). *Part 1* ends with the Destroying Angel, reminiscent of Mozart's Commendatore. In *Part 2* the momentum builds, highly melodic solo parts interspersed with powerful and exhilarating choruses, strongly rhythmic. Of particular note is the coloratura soprano aria describing the crossing of the Red Sea, beautifully orchestrated and succeeded by a thundering chorus as the waters bury

Pharaoh's army. The finale *Jehovah is a mighty warrior* is a tour-de-force, orchestra and male chorus initially, then the female chorus, finally combining in an exhilarating fugue, a dramatic modulation, before the orchestra, with trumpet fanfares, brings this wonderful work to a triumphant conclusion. *Recommended recording: Rheinische Kantorei, Das Kleine Konzert, Cond. Hermann Max, CPO 777220-2*

**Wind Music** Hummel wrote some delightful music for winds. For the traditional wind octet he wrote the **Serenade in E flat**. The **Parthia-Octet** for the same instruments is in three movements and the *Allegro con spirito* opens with a viral fanfare which returns regularly, interjecting into the bustling themes. A gentle *Andante* in waltz-time comes next and the work concludes with a bustling *Vivace assai*. The **Wind Sextet** is another highly appealing four-movement work, the horns prominent in the final *Allegretto*. **The Introduction, theme and variations, Op.102** is a highly attractive work, concerto-like for oboe which also exists in a wind arrangement as the **Oboe Concertino**. *Recommended recording: Consortium Classicum, MDG 301 0440-2*

### Chamber Music

With his **Piano Trios** Hummel provides guaranteed entertainment, with a template that consists of a fund of uncomplicated melodies, balanced writing for the instruments, not a little humour and brevity. It is difficult to pick favourites!

**Piano Trio No.2 in F, Op. 22** (1799) The piano opens, then ushers in the violin and cello to a dancing  $\frac{3}{4}$  melody, playfully treated. Next comes a jaunty *Andante con variazione*, the melody memorable, the treatments full of humour. You won't forget the finale *Rondo alla Turca*, either. Its fast march and fierce rhythms should bring the house down. 🎵 Breitkopf & Härtel

**Piano Trio No.3 in G, op.35** (pre1804) has an opening *Allegro con brio* of great ardour, a principle theme with a leap at the end, the violin prominent. A swinging *Minuet* is the middle movement, much violin ornamentation around the theme. The concluding *Rondo* dances along, very rhythmic, with a joyful ending. 🎵

**Piano Trio No.4 in G, Op.65** opens with a gracious theme - a bow and a curtsy, the second more meandering. The piano opens the *Andante grazioso*, the opening style continuing. The *Rondo: vivace assai e scherzando* bustles along but has a yearning theme too. All participants thoroughly enjoy themselves and the final bars are exuberant. 🎵

**Piano Trio No.5 in E, Op.83** opens with piano solo, before a memorable theme appears with the violin and cello, their harmonies superb. The piano writing is at times virtuosic in contrast to the simplicity of the strings. The *Andante* is beautiful, a simple four note theme is developed in intimacy. The opening theme of the *Rondo* will bring a smile to your face, it's bouncy, memorable. Superb entertainment! 🎵

**Piano Trio No.6 in E flat, Op.93** has a quirky opening rhythm that becomes part of an extended theme, the second theme is an attractive yearning melody. The development is unusually forceful. Next comes, a beautiful song for piano, *Un poco larghetto*, with sighs from the violin and cello before they each take their own turn. A second lovely theme arrives on the violin, sadness, making this a very special movement right through to the final ebbing away. Normality returns with a happy *Rondo*. 🎵

**Piano Trio no.7, Op.96** exudes humour in its opening theme, the mood is light-hearted throughout. The *Andante quasi allegretto* has a slow march-like pace and a very appealing set of variations, the piano concluding with witty decorations. The concluding *Andante alla russa: Allegro vivace* is another dancing movement, memorable and fun. *Recommended recording:\*\*\**

*Trio Parnassus, MDG 3307/8* 🎵

**Piano Quintet in Op.87** (1802) is a very attractive early work, scored with double-bass. It opens with a short but memorable motto and considerable momentum is built up. The piano part is particularly fine. The *minuet* is quirky, rhythmic and effective. The relative shortness of the work is largely due to a beautiful, sombre and brief *adagio* (it lasts just two minutes) which I always think should have a repeat, but it serves to lead into a jolly finale that cannot fail to please, particularly as the piano lets rip towards the end. *Recommended recording: Klavierquintett Wien, Camerata CM-28055 (also has Quintet version of the Septet)*

**The Piano Septet in D minor, Op.74 (1816)** is arguably Hummel's greatest chamber work, whether in its original form (piano, flute, oboe, horn, viola, cello and double bass,) or in the much more practical **Piano Quintet** arrangement he made - scored as for his Op.87 – which inspired the commissioning of Schubert's *Trout Quintet* for the same instruments. The Septet was a favourite of Liszt, who played it often and made a 2-piano transcription. It is around forty minutes long, nearly twice the length of Op.87. Loud chords open the *Allegro con spirito*, unleashing a strong forward momentum that characterises the movement, together with a true virtuoso piano part. Soon the cello drops down, the flute too, then the horn takes on a new theme, followed by the other instruments – jolly, jaunty, exciting. The *Menuetto* is jagged and playful, the piano accompanying but trying to jump in amongst the other instruments that have the melody – the horn call prominent. The *Andante con variazione* has a wistful, memorable theme, triumphant at the end. The *Finale* is driven forward by the piano, there is a fugue, then a release of tension with the cello leading the other instruments. Then the original momentum takes charge again, continuing the drive to a powerful conclusion in a long home straight. *Recommended recording: Capricorn, Hyperion Helios CDH55214*

In 1829 Hummel responded to contemporary fashion for a military dimension in chamber music and composed his **Military Septet** (piano, flute, trumpet, clarinet, violin, cello and double bass). The strident trumpet is banned from the *adagio* and the work is a fascinating example of its time. It is a bit like having a coarse country cousin join the party! The trumpet announces its presence immediately, but then is allowed only some simple interjections. Everything is masterly when the trumpet is not playing. A beautiful, quiet *Adagio*, instruments blending beautifully, is followed by a rhythmic *Menuetto*, trumpet calls in the trio and at the playful end. The *Finale* is a jolly affair with a delightful later theme and a witty quiet end. I wonder what it would be like with a horn replacing the trumpet? Sacrilege? *Recommended recording: Capricorn, Hyperion Helios CDH55214* 🎵

The **Viola Sonata Op.5, No.3** (Pub. ca.1798) has much Mozartian influence. It opens with a memorable and jaunty theme and the viola is soon prominent. The *Adagio cantabile* opens like a slow march, the viola sings simply and expressively, though the piano has a prominent section on its own. The *Rondo con moto* is dramatic and concludes a pleasurable early work. *Bianchi, Orvietto, Dynamic CDS 192* 🎵

The **Cello Sonata Op.104** is highly appealing. It opens *Allegro amabile e grazioso* with a quietly yearning theme on the cello, quickly taken over by the piano. The pace quickly picks up and the

rhapsodic cello is matched by a formidable piano part. Beautiful music, which is surpassed in the following *Romanze* where a memorable but simple theme is introduced gently by the piano, which in turn introduces the cello in aria mode. Raptness is the mood, disturbed briefly by a stormy middle section before returning even more ardently before dying away. The concluding *Rondo* is the most virtuosic movement, almost playful until building to its exciting conclusion. *Recommended recording: Bonucci, Orvietto, Dynamic CDS 286* 🎵

The **Flute Trio, Op.78** – or to give the proper title **Adagio, Variations and Rondo on “Schöne Minka”** is a beautiful short work, a great melody and a wide variety of treatments and moods in the seven variations for the great combination of piano, flute and cello. The final *Rondo* has a sublime – if simple – ending. *Recommended recording Daoust, Dolin, Picard. Naxos 8.55347.* 🎵

### **String Quartets Op.30** (pre 1804)

Hummel wrote his quartets at an age younger than Beethoven and Mozart. Beethoven’s Opus 18 quartets were published in 1801 and Hummel too dedicated his to Prince Lobkowitz. The three are his only examples of this genre, a little surprising given their accomplishment and attractiveness. They are outside nearly all quartets’ repertoire but are very fine works!

**No.1 in C major** opens with a pregnant adagio in the minor key, then sets in motion an energetic rising theme that alternates with a lyrical one. The treatment is masterly, momentum maintained. The following short *Menuetto*’s opening theme is a descending one. The *Adagio e cantabile* comes third and is a gorgeous meditative movement, a high spot. The concluding *Allegro vivace*’s opening theme rises and falls and there is plenty of opportunity for each instrument to shine in a fugal treatment 🎵 *S J Music, 23 Leys Road, Cambridge CB4 2AP, England*

**No.2 in G major.** Firm chords resonate in the opening theme of the *allegro con brio*. This time the slow movement, *Andante grazioso* comes second, as usual, opened by the cello, commented on by the first violin. The second theme is soulful and the melodies are passed from instrument to instrument – graciously of course, particularly at the end. The *menuetto* is stately, with a delicious trio, a swinging waltz. The concluding *Vivace* skitters along, some fugal passages, a joyful second theme, all the instruments having fun to a perfect conclusion. 🎵 *S J Music*

**No.3 in E flat major** An arresting opening then a bouncy accompaniment from the cello as the gentle theme is passed from the viola upwards, then it is *Allegro con spirito*, with much interplay. The *Andante* opens like a gentle prayer, then we have the theme of *Comfort ye* from Handel’s *Messiah* briefly introduced. Sublime and very moving. The *Allemande* will stick in your head with its motor rhythm. The trio is very baroque in contrast. The *Presto finale* zips along, again fugal passages frequent, all very good-natured. *Recommended recording: \*\*\* Delmé Quartet, Hyperion Helios CDH55166* 🎵 *S J Music*

**Songs** Hummel wrote his **Tyrolean Air with Variations** (1829) - a yodelling aria - at the request of the great soprano Maria Malibran. In Cecilia Bartoli’s concert tribute to Malibran (captured on DVD) it brings the house down and the audience to its feet. Humour, virtuosity, melody – it has it all! Tailor made by Hummel and surely no composer could have done it better. *Recommended recording: Maria, Cecilia Bartoli, Decca DVD 074 3252* 🎵 *2 piano reduction*

## Operas

Hummel wrote 15 operas in total, the first in 1797, the last around 30 years later, but most composed in his Vienna and Esterháza days. They include some recycled music, and some are lost, some unfinished. Those that exist are buried in museums and libraries. The most prominent is **Mathilde von Guise**, first performed in Vienna in 1810 and revised for a performance in Weimar in 1821. Suffice it to say that a concert performance I attended in November 2008 was the first in 175 years, and I was totally bowled over by it! The story is of Mathilde, the sister of the Duke de Guise, whose planned marriage of convenience to the King of Poland is prevented by her secret marriage to Monsieur Beaufort, the Duke's secretary, providently supported by the passing-by King of France. So, a nice romance! The music is very fine, with Hummel deploying his substantial experience in orchestral, choral and vocal writing. He demonstrates a full absorption of Mozart's skill in the many ensembles – 12 of 16 numbers – and each of the three acts concludes with full ensemble and chorus. The *Overture* has an opening adagio theme from three divided cellos, before we are off into a full orchestral tutti, led by the oboe. Then Hummel introduces more of the opera's prominent themes, interspersed with virtuosic orchestral passages. Magical horns lead into the opening recitative and aria *Chi mai saprà spiegar* for the hero and tenor Beaufort, *Adagio* initially. It has memorable melodies and exquisite orchestration and gets the opera off to a great start. Next comes a *Terzettino (Trio)* for La Baronne (whom the Duke wants to marry off to Beaufort) and Nicolas, the gardener. Concise, witty and sparkling. A chorus of peasants enters with a swinging tune that demands dancing then other characters enter the scene. After an orchestral march the number accelerates, developing a great ensemble. A sublime duet between Mathilde and Beaufort *Mi fà felice amor* and becomes a trio when they are joined Beaufort's valet. The *Finale to Act 1* is thrilling as the drama unfolds - the Duke announcing his dynastic plans, and giving his blessing to the engagement of Beaufort's valet, Valentin to Claudine. The music takes us through all the emotions and the number of participants builds until everyone is involved in the concluding *Allegro vivace*, with blazing trumpets and a high C from Mathilde ringing out in the final bars. *Act 2* opens optionally with a delightful love duet for Valentin and Claudine before a magnificent *Scena and Aria* for Mathilde *O ciel, che intensi mai?* One of the high spots of the opera, vocally very demanding, it ought to be well known. Next comes a *Trio* for the Duke, Mathilde and Beaufort, fast and furious, orchestra brimming with additional contributions to the voices. The following *Scena and Aria* for the Duke is another tour-de-force, with a gorgeous triumphant orchestral postlude. A lilting *Trio* with Mathilde, Beaufort and La Baronne opens up the possibility of marriage, the conclusion of this number is as if Mozart still lived. *Act 2* concludes by celebrating the marriage of Valentin and Claudine, and the future proposed Royal marriage, with *Viva il nostro buon signor*, with bucolic horns prominent – the pace gathers, chorus and soloists climax, they stop and Hummel catches us out by having an orchestral reprise. *Act 3* opens with a *Vaudeville: Venite tutti quanti*, the swirling peasants choir celebrating. Next comes Mathilde's *Larghetto Romance, L'ombrosa notte, vien*. It has two cellos for a highly individual accompaniment, chords of sombre horns and trumpets as if in a *Dona nobis pacem* of a Mass. Fabulous effect! A truly joyful duet for Mathilde and Beaufort *O ciel! Resistere non posso* is the climax of the opera. Their marriage is then depicted by a church choir (including sopranos and contraltos) singing an unaccompanied hymn, *Padre nostro, gran Signor*. The Duke's outrage is overcome in a penultimate highly dramatic number as Mathilde and Beaufort go head to head with him – much dissonance and a fast and furious ending. The brief *Finale*, after the intervention of the King of France has ennobled Beaufort, brings the curtain down on a wonderful experience, trumpets and all. What other treasures may exist in Hummel's other opera scores?

*Recording on original instruments due 2009 on Brilliant Classics, cond. Didier Talpain 🎵 Editions Symétrie, Lyon, France*

We should not forget Hummel's *Serenades* and *Potpourris*, in which Hummel creates chamber music works using his arrangements of other composers' music – typically from operas such as Mozart's *Magic Flute*, plus some of his own, with a wide variety of instruments including guitar. This is light music from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, a rarity to us today, and as always with Hummel, it's a delight. *Recommended recording, Consortium Classicum, MDG 301 1344-2 🎵*

Finally, note that Hummel fulfilled numerous commissions to transcribe works of Mozart (Piano concertos and Symphonies) and Beethoven (Symphonies and some overtures) for chamber ensemble and the home entertainment of the day. These are particularly interesting as it is rare to have such work done by an august composer. For those interested try Mozart's *Piano Concertos 20 & 25 Recommended recording: \*\*\* Shiraga & Ensemble, BIS CD1147* and Mozart Symphonies 35 & 36 Mark Kroll & Ensemble, Skyline Records BSD144

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**Note:** Star ratings for recommended recordings, where given, relate to the review in the Penguin Guide to Recorded Classical Music *\*\*\*\* is a really exceptional issue on every count, \*\*\* is an outstanding performance and a recording of the calibre we now take for granted.*

**Acknowledgements:** The main source of information has been Mark Kroll's book *Johann Nepomuk Hummel – A Musician's Life and World*, published by Scarecrow Press, Inc. with additional information from several sources, principally Hummel scholar Joel Sach's contribution to the current *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. I give them my thanks. Whilst owning many recordings of Hummel's music myself, I also subscribe to [www.naxosmusiclibrary.com](http://www.naxosmusiclibrary.com) where a modest monthly subscription allows one to listen to a vast library of recorded music including the Chandos and Naxos catalogues, which are the primary labels for Hummel. (Regrettably Hyperion are not represented.) To discover the music of Hummel economically (and see if you agree with my assessments of his music) I thoroughly recommend this source, which can be trialled. Log on, click on free trial, put in "Hummel Sappho" and select track 12 then click play. They have a 7-day trial period. I would also like to thank my good friend (and best festival client) David Barker, who memorably was interviewed by me (Desert Island Disc style) in a coach on a Festival day visit to Châteaux Haut Brion and Lafite-Rothschild some years ago and talked memorably about Hummel's *A-minor Piano Concerto* to my guests, restimulating my own dormant interest.

My assessment of *Hummel – The Person* is my current perception and I take full responsibility for it. My assessment of his music is also personal and you will have to decide whether it tallies with your own. I recognise that writing about music is a second-best and I hope shortly to be on line with downloadable excerpts to let the music speak for itself.

In the meantime I hope this document will play a little part in resurrecting the music and reputation of Johann Nepomuk Hummel and lead you to much pleasure,

My Festival, *Hummel & his Celebrated Colleagues* takes place between 2-9 May, 2009, and I intend to make it an annual event. Full details on [www.orpheusandbacchus.com](http://www.orpheusandbacchus.com) A pdf file of this, and a Weber/Mozart festival (April 9-15), is available in English and German. Visits to the great wine châteaux of Bordeaux do justice to Bacchus during the day, as always. Contact [ian@orpheusandbacchus.com](mailto:ian@orpheusandbacchus.com)

This review of Hummel follows the same structure as reviews of forty other great composers contained in a series written by me called *Discovering Classical Music*, price £7.95, 9.95 Euros, 11.95US\$ plus postage, payment by Paypal. These chapters will shortly be available as downloads on my website. Recommended recordings, a rapidly changing data base, are not given, but the Penguin Guide and Gramophone Classical Guide cover this need.

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**About the author:** Ian Christians has a degree in Natural Sciences from Cambridge University, where he was at Clare College, and an MBA from Stanford Graduate School of Business. His corporate career took him to positions of Chief Executive of Ellerman Travel and Strategy Director of Thorn-EMI, at that time owners of EMI Music and the HMV retail chain. Since then he has worked as an independent consultant and as a business mentor to young entrepreneurs, whilst building a holiday business in France, near Bordeaux, with his wife. His *Orpheus & Bacchus* business was founded in 1987 and now has a portfolio of holiday houses which provide the venue for his residential Spring and Autumn Music Festivals (or Classical House Parties!) which have developed a reputation for providing exceptional experiences for performers and guests alike. Artists who have appeared include the Chilingirian Quartet, Barry Douglas, Julia Fischer, the Florestan Trio, David Geringas, Stephen Hough, Steven Isserlis, Freddy Kempf, Yakov Kreizberg, Louis Lortie, Dimitri Sitkovetsky, Alexander Sitkovetsky, Yevgeny Sudbin, Volker Wangenheim and the Wihan Quartet, to name just some.