

JOHANN BAPTIST
CRAMER

10 Piano Sonatas



SIMONE PIERINI
FORTEPIANO

Johann Baptist Cramer 1795-1818

10 Piano Sonatas

Sonata in B flat Op.50 M.2.091 *

- | | |
|---|------|
| 1. I. Allegro con spirito | 7'10 |
| 2. II. Rondo. Allegro moderato
con espressione | 5'26 |

Sonata in E flat Op.25 No.1 *

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|----------------------------------|------|
| 3. I. Moderato con espressione | 8'10 |
| 4. II. Choral. Grave e Sostenuto | 3'10 |
| 5. III. Rondo. Moderato assai | 6'19 |

Sonata in D Op.25 No.2

- | | |
|----------------------------|------|
| 6. I. Allegro spiritoso | 6'28 |
| 7. II. Andantino con moto | 4'19 |
| 8. III. Rondo quasi Presto | 3'54 |

Sonata in D Op.25 No.3 *

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|--------------------------------|------|
| 9. I. Moderato con Espressione | 7'21 |
| 10. II. Allegretto non troppo | 2'34 |
| 11. III. Rondo an Carillon | 4'18 |

Sonata in D Op.20 *

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|--|------|
| 12. I. Largo assai (attacca) | 1'35 |
| 13. II. Allegro quasi Presto | 3'00 |
| 14. III. Aria con Variazioni.
(Thema. Moderato) | 2'15 |
| 15. Variation 1 | 1'38 |
| 16. Variation 2 | 1'08 |
| 17. Variation 3 | 2'37 |
| 18. Variation 4 | 1'32 |
| 19. Variation 5 | 1'42 |
| 20. Variation 6 | 1'18 |
| 21. Variation 7 | 4'13 |

Sonata in A flat Op.23 No.1 *

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|----------------------------|------|
| 22. I. Allegro non molto | 9'27 |
| 23. II. Adagio (attacca) | 3'29 |
| 24. III. Rondo. Allegretto | 4'59 |

Sonata in C Op.23 No.2 *

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|-------------------------|------|
| 25. I. Largo assai | 1'51 |
| 26. II. Allegro agitato | 5'41 |
| 27. III. Allegretto | 5'13 |

Sonata in A minor Op.23 No.3 *

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|--------------------------------|------|
| 28. I. Allegro moderato | 4'03 |
| 29. II. Adagio con Espressione | 4'48 |
| 30. III. Allegro quasi Presto | 3'02 |

Sonata in A minor Op.53 "L'Ultima"

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|---|-------|
| 31. I. Grave (attacca) | 2'35 |
| 32. II. Moderato. Energico ed
espressivo assai | 12'11 |
| 33. II. Andantino quasi Allegretto | 4'39 |
| 34. III. Rondo. Più tosto moderato | 6'31 |

Sonata in C Op.57 "Les Suivantes" *

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|---|-------|
| 35. I. Allegro brillante | 11'18 |
| 36. II. Andantino | 3'47 |
| 37. III. Rondo alla Polacca.
Allegro non tanto | 6'32 |

* First recordings

Simone Pierini original fortepianos

Conrad Graf, 1830 (tr. 1, 2 & 31-37)

Johann Haselmann, first decade of 19th century (tr. 12-30)

Matthias Müller, 1822 (tr. 3-11)

Property of: Romeo Ciuffa (Haselmann), Giuseppe Accardi (Müller, Graf)

Recorded: 23-25 August 2021, Palazzo Annibaldeschi, Monte Compatri, Italy

Recording: Marco Vitale

Editing and mastering: Simone Pierini

A=430 Hz, temperament Young 2 (1800), for all the instruments

Cover, artist and fortepiano photos: © Romeo Ciuffa

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The Sonatas for fortepiano solo by the German-born English composer **Johann Baptist Cramer** (1771-1858) occupy a prominent place in the catalogue of his compositions, although until now it is largely unexplored. The total number of sonatas he composed is still the subject of some debate, but thanks to the efforts of scholars such as T.J. Milligan, who compiled a catalogue of J.B. Cramer's works in 1994, we are able to estimate the total count in around 200 piano sonatas, including both those published and those still in manuscript. The purpose of this set is to offer a first step in the exploration of this *mare magnum*.

Johann Baptist Cramer composed most of his sonatas between the 1790s and the 1820s, after which his interest in producing them seems to have declined in favour of compositions of lesser scope, such as new cycles of etudes, rondo and short pieces. The sonatas for fortepiano solo were composed in different places, for different occasions, and for an impressive number of publishers: suffice to say that many of the sonatas offered here have come down to us through several editions, from different places (typically, apart from London, the second city he was involved in the printing business was Paris: but often, many sonatas were printed in Vienna, or Leipzig). The great publishing success of Cramer's compositions can be attributed to his reputation as a virtuoso, combined, however, with a subtle and sharp business sense. Born in Mannheim to a violinist and orchestra conductor, Wilhelm Cramer (1745-1799), who in 1772 was invited to London by the well-known composer Johann Christian Bach (1735-1782), the city where the family was to settle permanently, the young Johann Baptist took his first steps into the world of music presumably through his father, and continued his education through the best musicians who were settled in the English capital: above all, Muzio Clementi, with whom he studied for two years between 1782 and 1784, but also Carl Friedrich Abel for composition (although we know that the study of composition took place for him essentially as an autodidact, through the study of Kirnberger's and Marpurg's treatises), as well as J.D. Benser, J. Schroeter, and around 1788, he also studied with Hélène De Montgeroult in Paris. It was in this year that the young Cramer decided

to leave for continental Europe to undertake a tour in order to make himself known to as many people as possible. One of the most fruitful sojourns of this period in terms of the development of his relationships with musicians took place in Vienna, where he made the acquaintance of Franz Joseph Haydn, with whom he maintained a very good friendship. He returned to London in 1791, only to leave again for Vienna, Germany and The Netherlands in 1799. On this trip he consolidated his relationship with Haydn and made the acquaintance of Ludwig Van Beethoven, who repeatedly declared his esteem for the English pianist. He later moved back to London, while continuing to travel throughout his life, albeit more occasionally. Cramer made acquaintances with all the major musicians of the period (including the Romantic generation: Czerny, Mendelssohn, Moscheles, Chopin, Kalkbrenner, Liszt). A plausible reason for the decrease in his travels can be found in the opening of his publishing house in 1805, the Cramer and Keys. His activity as a publisher had a rather troubled history, as was usual for many publishing houses of the time. As early as 1811 he affiliated himself to Chappel & Co, only to leave it in 1819 and to join Addison & Beale from 1824. From this year the house was officially named Cramer, Addison & Beale, and after more than a century, in 1931 it also began producing and selling pianos, having acquired Metzler and Co. The publishing house remained in existence throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, only to be taken over, for the part that produced pianos, by Yamaha-Kemble, which moved production to Eastern Asia. The Cramer Music Ltd company, however, still operates in Watford, Hertfordshire, UK. Cramer himself left the company in 1833, but the publishing house itself played a significant role within the London musical scene. Besides publishing works by Beethoven, Ries and Hummel, J.B. Cramer & Co also published works by E. Elgar and S. Coleridge-Taylor in the early 20th century.

From 1832 until 1845, Cramer settled in Paris, giving piano lessons and continuing to compose at a much more moderate pace. A valuable testimony of how the composer conceived the art of playing is offered to us in the important essay *Die grossen Pianoforte-Virtuosen unserer Zeit aus Persönlicher Bekanntschaft* [The Great

Piano Virtuosos of Our Time, from Personal Knowledge], by the distinguished pianist Wilhelm von Lenz (1809-1883). He offers us a portrait of an aging musician who struggles to understand the *impetus* of the Romantic generation and who himself finds it difficult to play properly and expressively. Despite this, Lenz's esteem remains very high, especially for the work for which he is still known today, namely the *Etude for the Piano*, in 80 exercises, which was the most successful and admired set of piano studies of its generation. In 1845 Cramer returned to London, where he further diminished his activity as a composer and teacher, before dying in 1858, at a time when almost all the major Romantic composers had already died.

The selection proposed in this set, although not exhaustive, aims to shed light on part of the work of Cramer, whose name is still inextricably linked to the form of the *Etude*, offering as much stylistic variety as possible. However, taking into account the instruments on which this recording was proposed, all three of which are important examples of Viennese mechanical fortepianos, it was decided to favour, as much as possible, sources related to the city of Vienna, or at least from German-speaking countries. In some cases, as will be seen below, some sonatas were composed directly during the author's frequent stays in Vienna.

The first sonata that opens the selection we present (published as Op.50, but whose opus number is also shared with a set of etudes), is also the most peculiar within Cramer's compositional output, because it is intended as a parody of a piece by another composer. It is precisely the title *La Parodie* with which the composer consecrates it to the press. What, in this case, does Cramer mean by the term parody? The question is a difficult one, for although some sources (including a reprint of Cramer, Addison & Beale, 1825, used as the main source for this recording) clearly indicate that this is a parody of the Sonata for piano, violin and cello Op.24 No.3 by Jan Ladislav Dussek, the features it really shares in common with this composition are rather few. They are limited to the division into two movements, the tonality, and a certain similarity in the melodic movement, especially in the second movement (itself, a set of variations from Paisiello, in Dussek's original). One can, however, formulate a

hypothesis: Cramer probably only wanted to vaguely evoke the Bohemian composer's trio in some way, as if trying to recall it without succeeding. The result is a fully original and typically Cramerian composition, with a delicate and slightly ironic taste.

The Three Sonatas Op.25, followed here in the Falter edition, published in Munich in 1801, are immediately presented as more demanding and ambitious works. All three sonatas consist of three movements, in which the first, again in typical sonata form, is the longest and most elaborate (this is particularly evident in the first sonata, in E flat major). The second movement, which in Sonata No.1 is an obscure chorale in the key of E-flat minor, takes on a more relaxed character in the other two sonatas in similar keys (in Sonata Op.25 No.3, the second movement is an Allegretto, almost minuet-like in flavour). The final movement, in all the sonatas, is always indicated as a Rondo, with a different character in all three sonatas: with a distinctly Beethovenian taste in the first (the whole of the first sonata actually bears echoes of Beethoven); whirling and dancing in the second; delicate, *en Carillon* in the third. The first sonata from this collection to be published by Cramer is also one of the most extensive, if we exclude the sonatas from the later, on average longer, period.

The Sonata in D, Op.20, published by several editors at the same time around 1800 (for this recording we used as main source the engraving by Johann André, in Offenbach am Main), is a composition that Cramer himself probably esteemed as remarkable in proportions, bearing in mind that all editions bear the appellation 'Great' Sonata. The piece is dedicated to his former teacher Muzio Clementi. The division of movements is somewhat unusual: the opening *Largo* in D major is followed by an *Allegro quasi Presto* in a minor mode, in the usual sonata-form. Then follows an imposing set of theme with variations, the true core of the sonata, which replaces both the central slow movement and the finale. Curiously enough, the theme takes up the rhythmic aside of the opening *Largo*, thus giving the sonata a sense of cyclicity that is truly peculiar to this period.

Another set of sonatas dedicated to an illustrious colleague follows with the three Sonatas, Op.23 (in the English edition, which was published later than the others,

they are referred to as Opus 22), dedicated to the illustrious Franz Joseph Haydn. These three sonatas were first printed in Vienna in 1799 by Artaria, and it is likely that the negotiation for the publication of these sonatas took place during one of the composer's Viennese sojourns: one can, in fact, assume that these sonatas were actually conceived in Vienna in their entirety. The structure of these three sonatas is different in each of them, unlike the three Opus 25: in this case, to a first movement (once again, of evident Beethovenian inspiration) of great conception in the first sonata, in A flat major, we find in opposition a Grave (major) and Allegro (in a minor mode) in the second, and a sonata-form of brief proportions (whose rhythmic movements seem to be at once reminiscent of Clementi and premonitory of certain Schumann writings) in the third. The slow movement, which is missing in Sonata No.2, takes on a more elegant and frivolous character in the first sonata, while in the third sonata it seems closer to some Romantic elements. The three final movements (two rondos in the first and third sonata, a sonata-form in the second) follow in a certain sense the Viennese fashion of the period, and are comparable to similar compositions by other composers, while retaining a certain Beethovenian aura.

We then arrive to a sonata to which Cramer affixed the appellation *Ultima* [the Last one], Op.53, the most extensive composition of those presented in this collection. The sonata earned the composer great success, to the point that Friedrich Kalkbrenner recommended its study in his Pianoforte-Schule, Op.108. This famous method was sold with a stick meant for developing the correct position and the independence of the fingers, the guide-mains. Kalkbrenner considered *l'Ultima* to be one of Cramer's most beautiful compositions: he himself states that '*le premier morceau ... est rempli d'une chaleur qu'on rencontre rarement dans les autres sonates de Cramer*' (the first movement ... is filled with a warmth that is rarely encountered in Cramer's other sonatas). The name *Ultima*, by which Cramer appoints the Sonata Op.53, is difficult to interpret. I would like to give two plausible hypotheses here: it could suggest either a planned halt by the composer from writing other sonatas (since other pieces in various forms immediately followed this sonata), or an epithet that pays homage to

the truly tragic character of this sonata, as if we were dealing with a romantic hero.

However, this sonata is followed by many others, and in particular three of the are named *Les Suivantes* and have been published under separate opus numbers 57 to 59. Again, is the appellation *Suivante* to be considered in relation to the Last Sonata, or because the three sonatas are published close together? I propose here the light-hearted Sonata in C major, Op.57, probably the most virtuosic of the entire set. In this sonata, some of the most technically demanding figurations prevail, which seem more reminiscent of Czerny's writing than that of the English composer: nevertheless, Cramer's artistry remains easily recognisable in the elegance and *cantabile* that do not let the virtuosic figuration be just a mere show-off, and demonstrate the incredible artistry of a *virtuoso* composer who certainly was immortalised by his Etudes, but could be capable to express the widest range of colours and emotions from his instrument.

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Translation: BC

Born in Rome in 1996, **Simone El Oufir Pierini** began studying music at the age of eight. Aged eighteen, he graduated in piano at S. Cecilia Conservatory of Music, Rome, with highest honours, and consequently took part in masterclasses and post-graduate courses. Later on, his interest turned mainly on the harpsichord, studying harpsichord and basso continuo with A. Coen, G. Togni, E. Baiano. He obtained a master degree cum laude in Musicology in 2022 at Sapienza University of Rome, writing and discussing a dissertation about the transition from harpsichord to fortepiano in keyboard literature. He is particularly interested in informed piano practice as well, studying at courses and masterclasses led by A. Lubimov, A. Staier, T. Koch. He also has performed contemporary music, recording pieces specially composed for fortepiano by R. Perugini (b. 1996). He performs regularly on the fortepiano both as a soloist and a chamber musician, especially in repertoires concerning Viennese classicism, late 18th century music and early romantic French music. As a harpsichordist and continuo player, he performed for such institutions as Associazione Musicale Karl Jenkins, Roma Festival Barocco, Roma Sinfonietta, Associazione Musicale Muzio Clementi, Reate Festival, Progetto Syntagma, Fermo Vocal Fest, Contrasto Armonico, Musica Antiqua Latina, and performed in Italy, UK, Germany, Canada, China.



*Fortepiano Johann
Haselmann, 1800-10 ca*

*Fortepiano Matthias Müller,
1822*

*Fortepiano Conrad Graf,
1830*

*Thanks to:
Romeo Ciuffa, Giuseppe Accardi*