

## ***Two Viennese piano schools: Beethoven and Hummel***

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This research is inspired by a musician, composer, pianist virtuoso of the early nineteenth century who had lessons with Clementi in London, was a one-time pupil of Mozart and lived under the enormous influence of Beethoven, and bonded with him in a stormy friendship Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1778-1837). This musician was born under the luckiest stars and was given the chance to meet the most important musicians of this Globe. It could be easily thought that as a result he managed to summarize all the genius of “The Most Important” and therefore created something of a mix over their legacy. After all, it is hard even to think that there can be anything said after Mozart or Beethoven... and indeed, this is what we all think about the Classical Style, that it was over by the day that Beethoven died. Anything after that must have been a smooth and not so important transition to Romanticism, which of course grew out of Classicism, creating a new style with its new geniuses, cultural needs and historical/social background.

But it cannot be so. The Classical Style in composition cannot be defined only by the Mozartian harmonic development and the early and late compositional style of Beethoven, who often is thought to have come out of the ‘old-fashioned’ school of Haydn. For all the years that I have been busy with Hummel’s oeuvre it remains a task to place him somewhere in this Classical bubble or remain declaring him a secondary composer, a good pianist and performer of his own time. But it doesn’t work, it feels too simple and also not true.

Until I came across the following quote I did not know where to start or what to look for. This is the biggest inspiration of my research, bringing up even more questions than I had before and which has lead me to various sources to build up the puzzle and get a better style-definition than I had before.

Czerny attended a performance where Hummel performed somewhere between 1801-1804 in Vienna. From this description arises my research question: can we define two co-existing styles within the Classical Style?

*“It turned out to be young Hummel, Mozart's one-time pupil and presently returning from London, where he had enjoyed Clementi's teaching for a long time. Hummel's playing was at that time, as far as the instruments then allowed,*

*at the high level that made him so famous later. Whereas Beethoven's playing distinguished itself through enormous power, character, unprecedented bravura and velocity, so was Hummel's performance an example of the utmost purity and clarity, the most ingratiating elegance and tenderness, while the difficulties were always calculated to rouse the highest, most admirable effect, because he unified Mozart's manner with the school of Clementi, so wisely calculated for the instrument. It seemed logical at the time that he claimed precedence as a player in the whole world, and soon two master factions formed which forcibly challenged each other. Hummel's supporters reproached Beethoven that he abused the fortepiano, that he was deficient in purity and clarity, that he, through the use of the pedal, only produced confused noise, that his compositions were far-fetched, unnatural, without melody and irregular. The Beethovenists, on the other hand, asserted that Hummel lacked all real imagination, his playing was monotonous as a hurdy-gurdy, the application of his fingers was like a garden spider, and his compositions were mere arrangements of themes by Mozart and Haydn. Hummel's playing influenced me to the extent that it stimulated me to a higher degree of purity and clarity.”* (Czerny Autobiography, p. 18-19).

Before I annotate this description, I must make clear what the importance was of Czerny and why he appears to be the absolute bases of primary sources for this topic. Carl Czerny was not only one of the most important composers, theorists and celebrated pianists of his time, but also a teacher of many good pianists, most prominently Liszt. Besides all this, he was the most trusted pianist of Beethoven: Czerny started as his child prodigy pupil but according to Czerny himself he premiered all the Beethoven Sonatas on Beethoven's wish. By the time Beethoven died he could play all of them by heart whenever asked. There is no one who understood Beethoven's style better than Czerny. His treatise *Vollständige Theoretisch-Practische Pianoforte- Schule* op. 500 (4 volumes) is the most relevant source - maybe even a bible - for pianists of all times concerning the keyboard oeuvre of Beethoven: it documents crucial performance practice elements about how Beethoven played, taught or liked certain instructions in his keyboard pieces to be understood.

In Czerny's memoir we can read the elements of two styles. He remembers clearly the most astonishing differences between Hummel and Beethoven. This was his and other listeners' impression sometimes in the early 1840s, although the actual concert where he heard Hummel play had happened ca 40 years before. It gives us knowledge about two co-existing styles which were created, welcomed and which flourished under the wings of the biggest geniuses of the musical era.

To summarize, Beethoven's playing is defined by *enormous power, character, unprecedented bravura and velocity*, but Czerny also includes the negative comments of "Hummel supporters", namely that *he abused the fortepiano*, was *deficient in purity and clarity*, that *he only produced confused noise* through his pedaling and that *his compositions were irregular, far-fetched, unnatural, without melody and irregular*. And while we all have "forgiven" Beethoven for all the criticism he got and declare it the "late Beethoven style", we tend to forget that between 1801-1804 we cannot yet talk about the real late Beethoven who breaks all classical forms and harmonic progressions and who turns music upside down shaking the aristocrats out of their well-combed wigs. One can be a genius by always pleasing with an unimaginable quality, remaining within the "wanted" and the "celebrated" category, whose every step is always rewarded and inspired by his biggest talent. That is maybe the case with Mozart. The other type of genius has nothing to do with pleasing anyone, moreover, is driven to create new and unknown by straining and breaking borders and norms. In the case of Beethoven that created an enormous difference between his early and late style. It includes even a rapid influence in the development of pianos, a development larger than happened before him or after him. I tend to think that the positive as well as the negative impressions of Beethoven were not as "okay" as we think today. They were rather reactions to a style which was constantly new and outrageous.

Czerny describes Hummel's performance an example of *purity and clarity, elegance and tenderness*, where *difficulties were always calculated* on the highest level, played with a beautiful tone and who unifies Mozart's manner with the school of Clementi. Czerny also mentions the opinion of the "Beethovenists", who criticized Hummel by *lacking of real imagination*, playing *monotonous* (= "hurdy-gurdy"), that his compositions are mere arrangements of themes by Mozart and Haydn, and last but not least that his fingers were on the piano like *garden spider*. Why the latter is important – besides shocking and maybe witty - I will detail later.

This memory by Czerny gives us a clear idea of Beethoven's and Hummel's compositional style, technique, character as a performer and it indicates a lot about each styles. But there is something more important to read between the lines. He clearly admits the co-existence of the two schools by saying: "It seemed logical at the time that he [Hummel] claimed precedence as a player in the whole world, and soon two master factions formed which forcibly challenged each other." And he nicely admits how he was taken by Hummel's playing: "*Hummel's playing influenced me to the extent that it stimulated me to a higher degree of purity and clarity.*"

This is the starting point to proof how important it is to admit the two Viennese Piano Schools within the classical style. In this research I have tried to find historical evidence of the creator's importance in Vienna and internationally and

their personal relationship to support this. At the same time it lead me to think what were the influences from outside. Certainly, the different pianos in Europe and in England must have played an important role. We know that when Haydn left for England, he left behind his Wenzel Schantz fortepiano with its Viennese mechanism and was provided with the totally different, robust Broadwood fortepiano with English action. As a reaction he started to compose like a different composer in his old skin. It is not the aim of this research to go into detail about Haydn's situation, but in the whole picture it is unavoidable to talk about the instruments and how they inspire and what do they stand for.

Nor can be ignored the educational roots of Hummel and Beethoven: not only about how they treat counterpoint, or their composing style, but from the aspect of basic piano technique, their approach to the instrument and what they might have looked for as the ideal sound.

These elements are the biggest influences of a style of a composer or performer, which results in their compositions and/or concerts which is their artistic output, their legacy which makes them eternal even hundreds of years later. Therefore, comparing their music could be another never ending research, but I dare to come up with examples I find important to support this research.

## **Educational background, historical evidences**

Hummel, who was born eight years after and passed away nine years later than Beethoven was much more of a contemporary to him than Mozart or Haydn. Their social background is not in my focus since their educational development shows the most interesting details for this topic. The following list displays the similarities in their musical education:

### **The learning background of Hummel and Beethoven**

#### **HUMMEL**

Mozart (1786/87-1788)

Haydn (1791 London-1803 protégé)

Clementi

#### **BEETHOVEN**

Neefe (organ)

Haydn

Salieri

Despite of the similar roots, it is exciting to look into this a little. We do know that Beethoven wished to study with Mozart, but when he moves out of Bonn in order to relocate to Vienna and finally to have lessons, Mozart dies. It will always stay an enormous question, what if Beethoven could have developed under the most respected master's guidance... but instead, he goes to study with Haydn. There are enough popular stories about their stormy relationship but it is more real to acknowledge that there was always enormous respect towards each other besides the unbridgeable difference in their musical tone and artistic temperament. Simply, they were not the apple and its tree. On the other hand Haydn is not only Hummels master but Hummel was his real protégé. During the period of 1791-1803 Haydn doesn't only believes in the talent of Hummel but supports him in the musical scene. Haydn is therefore the strongest parallel in their musical development, however, his effect could not be more different in each case.

Albrechtsberger and Salieri did not have an intense impact on the education of both. Especially Albrechtsberger was a famous music theory teacher and it is interesting to see that Beethoven approached him at a time when he already found his own "voice" and style, but he thought he lacked of theoretical background and because of his perceived incompetence in polyphony – according to himself.

So far so good, but let's see the difference. For Beethoven it was an eternally painful spot that he could not study with Mozart; Hummel did. Certainly this had a miraculous impact on Hummel, not only on his style and his writing but on his piano technique as well. Here is a letter from Mozart to Hummel, written after Hummel's performance in Dresden on 10 March, 1789 where Mozart was in the audience:

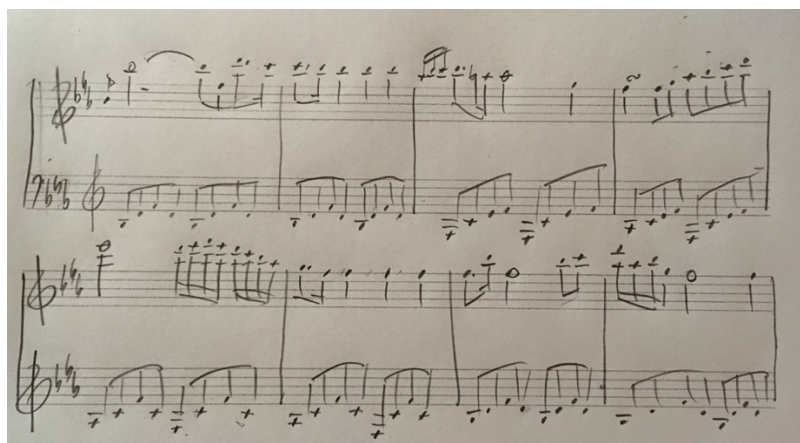
- *"Listen, Hansl, you draw out of the instrument everything that I have tried to do in vain. You will blaze a new path for all those who hear you, and who want to dedicate themselves and their art to this instrument, because you already handle it [the instrument] like a tender loving mother treats her beloved child. They will all avoid the bumps in the road and everything will be bathed by [your playing] as the bright rays of the morning sun do as a soft, melting breath on an Indian topiary garden. You will treat your instrument like Raphael has done for his art. You will enchant your listeners and transport them to higher planes. So keep going, my son, avoid the all too common tinklings and barrell organ playing that sounds like a blacksmith hammering on nails, all the overpowering thrashing and throwing about of the hands and fingers, that silly critics unfortunately call art. Because of this, one can justly say aloud: Lord, forgive them, they know not what they do! Remain true to your innermost feelings, my Hansl, because they will never lead you astray."*

Besides the clear message and description, this letter gives a very important detail about what Mozart thought of a crucial element of piano technique: “all the overpowering trashing and throwing about of the hands and fingers”, a certain type of heavy organ playing which “sounds like a blacksmith hammering on nails”. This is not the only information in the Mozart’s letters concerning technique. There are passages where he writes about a pianist to his father explaining how important to have a “calm” hand and position changes, which is only possible when there is more intensity in the work of the fingers than playing from the hand. [This is also the biggest difference in technique on a historical piano which keys are shallower than our modern keyboards, where it is unavoidable to use the arm more than the fingers.] Nevertheless, Mozarts preferred technique must have been inspired by its pure musical result as the above mentioned quote shows that.

Exciting experience can be to play around with a theme of Hummel which is already “Mozartian” in style with its detailed slurring and rhetorical expression. This fragment is from the Piano Trio in Eb major op. 93:



... and rework it in a “Mozartian” way:



The melody would be less repetitive, the left hand has a stable Alberti bass instead of a driving (early romantic) chord repetition, the rhetorical content is more diverse in the 'Mozart' version. However, since their composing technique is in many aspects similar, even only changing the left hand figuration makes this theme already an absolute Mozart style.

Parallel in time Anton Schindler, Beethoven's autographer, writes in his memoirs that Beethoven was playing his Variations on *Vieni Amore* to the then famous pianist Johann Franz Xaver Sterkel (1750-1817). In order to convince the doubtful Sterkel that these variations were really his own he added some variations. Schindler emphasizes that in these extra variations Beethoven "imitated the light and pleasing touch of Sterkel, whom he had never heard till then; whereas his own usual way of playing the pianoforte was hard and heavy, owing, as Beethoven declared, not to his want of feeling, but to his practicing a great deal upon the organ, of which instrument he was very fond."

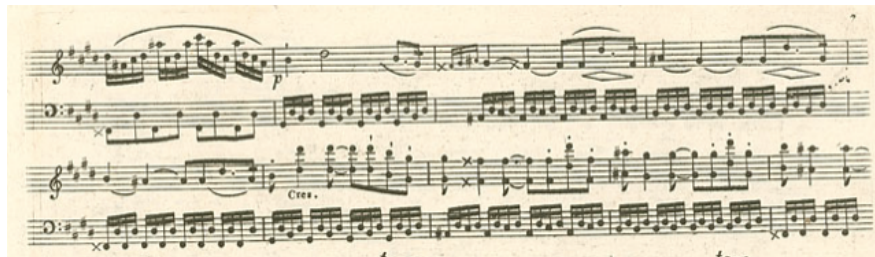
Comparing the lighter Hummel style with the heavier Beethoven style,



Hummel Sonata no 1, op 2 no 3  
First movement second theme

This theme (starting in m. 3 of this example) is harmonically very simple; the first four bars do not leave the key of the dominant at all. The melodic material

is repetitive and very classical with appoggiaturas, ornamentation, arpeggios and generally extremely light figurations.



Beethoven Sonata in C# minor op 27 no 2 “Moonlight”  
Third movement Presto Agitato, second theme

Beethoven’s second theme is accompanied by an agitato Alberti bass, which is developing harmonically. In spite of the piano indication the playing is heavy and vigorous, with great dynamic differences.

And indeed, during all the “Bonn-years”, Beethoven’s childhood in music was around and with the organ. Neefe, his first and life-long prominent teacher was not only a composer but an important organist as well. It is well known that Beethoven received all his lessons on the organ and that over the time he was allowed to play in the services on Sunday’s. He grew up in poverty, raised by his very strict father who supposedly had only a clavichord at home as a keyboard instrument.

To demonstrate this difference in technique (especially the light hand which Mozart describes) and in the approach of the instrument, the beginning of the C minor Fantasy by Mozart and the opening of the Beethoven’s Pathétique Sonata could give an insight, rather with the usage of dramatic musical gestures and keyboard technique.



Mozart. Fantasy in C minor, K 475 (NMA)





Beethoven. Sonata in C minor op 13, Pathétique (Henle)

The following description from Czerny gives some sharp details about technique and again makes it clear that the two ways/schools by Hummel and Beethoven and their existence was known at the time.

*"In the first lessons Beethoven occupied himself exclusively to scales in all keys, and he showed me the (to most players at that time unknown) only **correct position of the hands**, the fingers and in particular the **use of the thumb**, rules I understood the importance of only long afterwards. After that he went with me through the exercises belonging to this method and made me particularly **aware of the legato**, which he had in his power in such an unsurpassable way and which at that time all other pianists held to be impossible to execute on the fortepiano, as then the (belonging to Mozarts time) **choppy and staccato performance** was still the fashion. Also, in later years Beethoven told me that he had heard Mozart perform several times and that he, since at that time the development of the fortepiano was still in its infancy, on the then usual grand pianos had to develop a way of playing which was in no way suited to the fortepiano. Indeed, after that I made the acquaintance of several persons who had received instruction from Mozart, and I found this comment confirmed in their playing ".*



Hummel Sonata no 1, op 2 no 3 first movement Allegro Spirituoso, development

The development opens with this innocent melody structured as an A and B section in which the B is lengthened and develops towards a new key (Ab major, the Neapolitan). A bass melody is then set against an right hand Alberti bass, much like Haydn in his late Eb major Sonata Hob XVI/52 first movement:



Haydn Eb major Sonata Hob XVI/52, first movement

This is in both the Sonates by Hummel and Haydn a typical classical figuration, only possible with a light tone and a lightly played right hand.

By comparison Beethoven uses a left hand bass melody and its right hand accompaniment both in the bass register.



Beethoven Sonata op 14 no 2, first movement end of the exposition:

Two of the most important treatises describing the classical style are C.P.E. Bach's *Versuch über die Wahre Art das Klavier zu spielen* (1753/1762) and Daniel Gottlieb Türk's *Klavierschule* (1789). Both describe the 'normal touch': the length of a tone which is not marked by a specific articulation, like staccato or legato. Bach keeps a quarter note half its length; Türk, depending on the context,  $\frac{3}{4}$  or a little bit longer. In either case notes will not be played legato in absence of an actual slur: the basic touch is non-legato. But this difference between Bach and Türk shows that a development had started which eventually lead to legato as a basic touch more or less two decades after 1800.

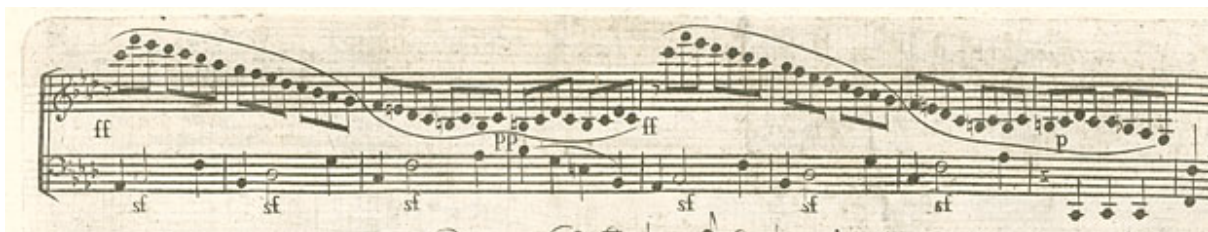
Like Mozart, Hummel played lighter and more or less with the type of non-legato that Bach described. Czerny mentions in his Autobiography that

Beethoven called Mozart's style 'choppy' ('kurz gehackt'). Czerny's assertion that Beethoven played with a type of legato which was 'unknown on piano's of that time' must be seen in that light. It is one of the defining differences in their piano technique, which must show in their compositions.

The cantabile theme of the development in the first movement of Hummel's first Sonata in C major op 2 no 3 shows how Hummel uses a type of articulation which is very close to Mozart. Rhetorically very detailed, based on harmony (never slurring over a harmony change or over barlines), a string-like way of using the slurs, depending on the effect of the bow-strokes. Beethoven, on the other hand, requires a broad and full context with spectacular long legatos from his earliest works, as shown in Sonata op 2 no 1 from 1793. These two ways of using the slur creates the differences mostly in the result of rhetorics: Mozart as well as Hummel remain in the expressivity within the slur, Beethoven uses them more for creating musical effects and he is very specific about them.



Hummel Sonata in C major op 2 no 3 (1792), first movement



Beethoven Sonata in F minor op 2 no 1 (1793), first movement



Beethoven Sonata in F minor op 2 no 1 (1793), second movement

To focus on this aspect a little more, I would like to put the spotlight on Czerny's comparison of Beethoven's and Hummel's playing, within the same

quote. In order to highlight this, I use blue coloring for Beethoven's, red for Hummel's references:

*"Seine Finger waren sehr kräftig, nicht lang, und an der Spitze vom vielen spielen breit gedrückt [...] Er hielt auch beym unterrichten sehr auf schöne Fingerhaltung (nach der Eman. Bachischen Schule, nach der er mich unterrichtete). Der Gebrauch der Pedale war bey ihm sehr häufig, weit mehr, als man in seinen Werken angezeigt findet".*  
(Czerny Über den richtigen Vortrag, p. 22)

"His [Beethoven's] fingers were very powerful, not long, and at the top broadened because of playing so much [...] Also in teaching, he was very keen on a beautiful finger position (after the school of Eman. Bach, on the basis of which he taught me). The use of the pedals was very much by him, much more than one finds indicated in his works".

*"... da sein Spiel so wie seine Compositionen der Zeit vorausgeeilt waren, so hielten die damaligen noch äusserst schwachen und unvollkommenen Fortepiano (bis zum 1810) seinen gigantischen Vortrag oft noch gar nicht aus. Daher kam es, dass Hummels perlendes, für jene Zeit wohlberechnetes brillantes Spiel dem größeren Publikum weit verständlicher und ansprechender erscheinen musste".*

"...as his [Beethoven's] playing as well as his compositions were ahead of his time, the then still very weak and imperfect fortepianos (until 1810) did not endure his gigantic performance at all. It is because of this that Hummels pearly, for that time well-calculated brilliant performance must have seemed much more understandable and appealing to the larger audience."

Czerny was not the only one who - without bad intentions - compared Beethoven and Hummel as pianists, performers or composers. Ignaz von Mosel (1772–1844) who was an Austrian court official, composer and music writer and very well informed about music life of Vienna, was clearly commenting on their compositional style in 1808:

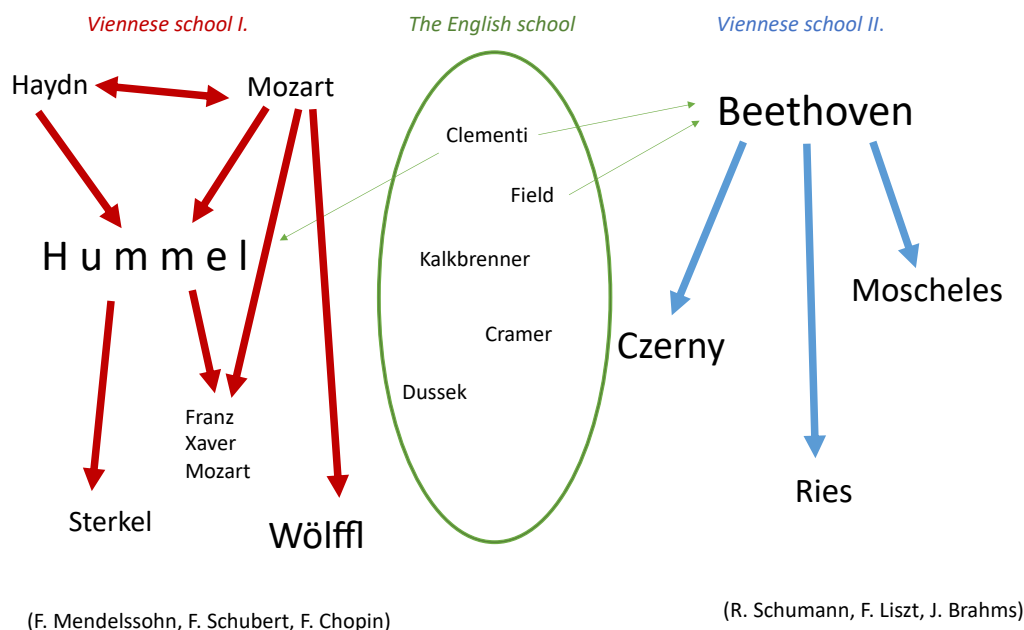
*"Herr Louis van Beethoven, whose playing is marked by velocity, power and precision, even more by his compositions, while Herr Joh. Nepomuk Hummel's is recognized by it's order, clarity and grace."*

(Vaterlandische Blätter für den österreichischen Kaiserstaat-Übersicht des gegenwärtigen Zustandes der Tonkunst in Wien- Clavierspieler, Künstler, Professoren, May 1808)

At another occasion in Vienna Beethoven competed with Joseph Wölfl (1773-1812). Ignaz von Seyfried reports that Wölfl's playing, who originated from the school of Mozart, was "more accessible to the majority" of the audience:

*“In his improvisations even then Beethoven did not deny his tendency toward the mysterious and gloomy... it was the mystical Sanskrit language whose hieroglyphs can be read only by the initiated. Wölfl, on the contrary, trained in the school of Mozart, was always equable, never superficial but always clear and thus more accessible to the multitude. He used art only as a means to an end, never to exhibit his acquirements. He always enlisted the interest of his hearers and inevitably compelled them to follow the progression of his well-ordered ideas. Whoever has heard Hummel will know what is meant by this.”*

It seems clear that the two schools developed further and of course were not only determent by two names, but also by artists and composers who consciously belonged to either one of the two styles. This quote by Seyfried is golden evidence for this. And if that is so, the image of the classical style is already not so simple. Giving the important English school its due, I would like to draw the following imaginary panel about the coexistence of the two Viennese Piano Schools within the Classicism. The effects and influences are demonstrated with the arrows:



Haydn and Mozart mutually influence, respected and inspired each other. Hummel, who was - as said before – often criticized for producing compositions which are basically arrangements of the works of both, certainly was a successor in the Mozartian school. From the evidence we also know that



Sterkel and Wölfl as well as Franz Xaver Mozart (Mozart's son, who studied with Hummel briefly) were gladly belonging to the Mozartian style. At this point it is maybe worthwhile to say that at this time there was almost no difference between composers and performers. All performers mastered the instrument on a high level were naturally able to improvise. Moreover, a large part of their performing outcome were improvisations. One good example. When Mozart gave a solo recital in Vienna, Gluck happened to be in the audience. While bowing after the successful performance Mozart spotted Gluck in the theater and as an encore he improvised a set of variations on one of the main themes from Gluck's new opera ("Unser dummel Pöbel meint"). Later he wrote it down (K.455) as he himself found it a good composition. So, improvising was equal to performing: there was basically no difference.

On the other hand I would line up Beethoven and his followers: mostly his students, colleagues who represent the same artistic line. The strongest name in this is Czerny who studied with Beethoven and remained a life long friend and colleague. The same applies to Moscheles and Ries, who both built their career on an around the artistry of Beethoven. Moreover, Beethoven's works were so successful and wanted that both Ries and Moscheles created innumerable arrangements of the works of the master, for instance symphonies in different chamber music settings, overtures or even solo piano transcriptions, of pieces which were so popular (e.g. the Ninth Symphony) that they needed to be available for smaller ensembles and solo instruments as well.

The names and contemporaries are not ending here, but next to focusing on the roots, the progress and the existence of this two styles it is also captivating to speculate how the two styles developed onwards. I must stress that this is not part of this research, nor supported by historical documentation: it is just a line of thought where this two styles could have gone. Thinking as a pianist who has been trying to find the truth about what the composers we play might have wanted by the detailed signs and instructions in their music, and by practicing and performing them on the most historically correct instruments, I think that this two styles flourished on in the romanticism. It would take another research to find evidence for this speculation, but it seems to me that judging by composing and performing styles there is also a presence of these two schools existing and developing later in the century. According to this line of thought Felix Mendelssohn, Franz Schubert and Frederic Chopin could be the successors of the Mozartean Viennese School, while Robert Schumann, Franz Liszt, and Johannes Brahms further developed the Beethoven side. Just to mention a few.

## Keyboard Instruments around 1800

After Bartholomeo Christofori's invention (*clavicembalo col pian e forte*) the keyboard instruments with hammer-mechanism rapidly took over the role of harpsichord all over Europe. The new pianoforte gained popularity first of all in England. However, the evolution of the Viennese and English pianos with their very different mechanisms was quite different. From the 4 octave ranged Christofori and Silbermann instruments the compass of the Viennese fortepianos generally grew to 5 octaves FF-f'' by 1800. On this keyboard basically the keyboard oeuvre of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven (until around 1800) fits. These instruments were in a wooden case, with a wooden pin-block, hosting parallel strings. That made this type of pianos very characteristic, since (unlike on the modern pianos) the registers between the 2 meter long bass strings and the 20 cm long highest treble strings could not be equalized. The damping system of these instruments was simple, but very precise: a hardened block of felt falls onto the string to mute the sound at the very moment the finger leaves the key. This damping system works together naturally with the hammerhead which is covered by two or three layers of leather. As a result, the life of a sound on a Viennese fortepiano is short and develops like a  $\wedge$ , with a clear and rapid high point and a fast decay. The sustain function (i.e. taking off all the dampers) was often operated with a hand stop at the middle or to the side of the instrument above the keyboard, or with a knee-leaver which is situated under the keyboard (the same system for the moderator). Anton Walter was the most popular builder of the Viennese fortepiano before 1800 (see picture), besides Andreas Stein, Wenzel and Johann Schantz, Johann Andreas Streicher, just to mention a few.

In the last decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which is the decade in which according to Czerny the two Viennese piano schools came into existence, there were two types of Viennese pianos to be distinguished.

The first school was based on the pianos of Stein, which was favored for a long time by Mozart. Mozart wrote an enthusiastic letter to his father about the piano of Stein to his father from Augsburg (17 October 1777):

*Mon très chère Père!*

*Let me start right off with Stein's Piano forte. Before I had seen Stein's work, I favored Späth's Claviers. But now I must give Stein's Claviers preference because they have a much better damper than the Regensburg instruments. [...] the sound stops the instant I produced it [...] the effort and care he puts into the instruments is beyond any price. What distinguishes his instruments from all others is that they are built with an escapement.*

*(Mozart's Letters, Mozart's Life: Selected Letters Edited and Newly Translated by Robert Spaethling. W.W. Norton & Company, New York (2000))*

Stein's daughter Nanette took over the company after her father died. After she married the pianist Johann Andreas Streicher in 1793 they moved to Vienna and established one of the most important piano building companies in the capital under the name of Streicher. The specific light tone and light touch of the Streicher piano was valued by many and was typical of the Hummel-school. The second school was based on the pianos of Anton Walter, who was the favorite builder of pianos of Mozart's late years and Beethoven early years in Vienna. They had a darker sound than the Stein/Streicher pianos and in particular also a heavier touch. This is the topic of two letters from Joseph Haydn to his pupil and dedicatee Marianne von Gensinger in 1789. Haydn had composed the Sonata in Eb major (Hob XVI/49) for her. After receiving the manuscript she asked him which instrument he advised her to buy, now that the Sonata turned out to be not a harpsichord piece. The first letter by Haydn dates from June 20, 1790:

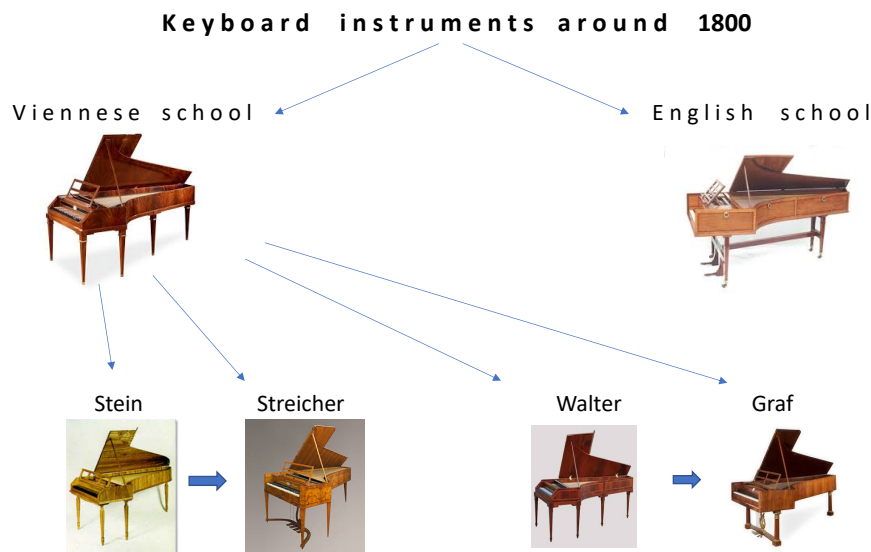
*"I take the liberty of sending you a new clavier sonata with the accompaniment of a violin or flute.... what a pity that you do not have one of Schantz's fortepianos, for them you could produce twice the effect."*

The other one was written two weeks later:

*"I am delighted that my prince will be buying you a new fortepiano, all the more so since I am somewhat responsible for this — having constantly asked Mademoiselle Nannette to persuade her husband to get one for you. [...] It is true that my friend Walter is very well-known, and I receive many kind regards from him each year, but, between us, candidly, only one out of ten [of his instruments] is truly good, and besides, he is especially expensive. I know von Nickl's fortepiano; it is wonderful, but too heavy for your hand; one cannot play everything with all the necessary lightness. I would like you to try one of Schantz's; they are especially light and have a pleasing touch."*

Haydn says that he tried to convince Nanette Stein to build an instrument for her. He clearly is not in favor of the pianos by Walter, thereby implicitly admitting to the different styles of building already apparent in 1789. He recommends once more the builder Schantz, whose instruments are 'especially light'. The lighter touch and lighter, more silvery tone of the Stein/Streicher school to which the famous builder Schantz belongs and the heavier touch and darker sound of the Walter/Graf school, to which a less famous builder as Von Nickl can be counted, neatly illustrate the differences between the technique of Hummel and Beethoven as defined by Czerny.



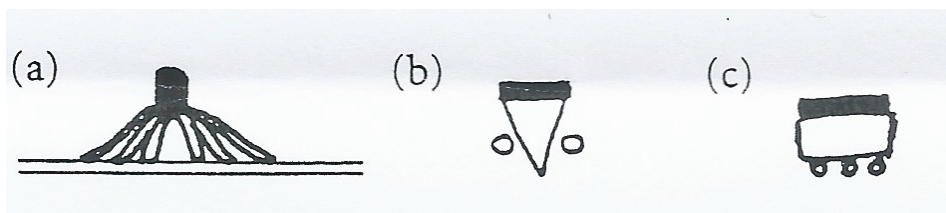


The English piano originated, like the Viennese, from Christofori's invention but the actions different in a structural way, giving the English piano specific sound characteristics which made them less suited for Viennese repertory. For this research the English piano is not relevant, as the English piano was practically unknown in Vienna until after 1800. It is true that Hummel was in England in 1790 and 1791 on his five year child prodigy tour which started in 1788, when he was 10 years old. He arrived in London in 1791 just in time to meet Haydn, who composed a sonata for Hummel. Both Haydn and Hummel played on English pianos while in England.

However, English pianos are not relevant for the description of the two types of *Viennese* pianos, which in turn fueled the difference between the members of the Viennese piano schools. Therefore they will not be described in detail here. It is important to say that the English pianos were more romantic in sound even before romanticism appeared; perhaps one can say that they partly paved the way for romanticism. It is interesting to note that Beethoven, who started as a classical composer but who composed by the end of his life music which we recognize as romantic, choose that Viennese type of piano which was heavier in sound and heavier to play, namely the Walter/Graf type. [As Clementi did when he came to Germany, as we will see further down in a quote from Härtel. Clementi was of course completely used to the English piano.] The sound and touch of the Walter/Graf type was more like the English pianos than the

Stein/Streicher type. We will see that Beethoven corresponded with Streicher on his pianos, in particular after Streicher modified his pianos to make them louder and richer in sound.

In Beethoven's and Hummel's late years the differences between Viennese pianos became less pronounced. It is due to the fact that the development of the Viennese pianos inspired composers and performers (as we see from the examples above) but it is also true that composing style or a wish of a composer/pianist can inspire major changes and even evolution in the development of keyboard instruments. The best illustration to this is when Friedrich Wilhelm Michael Kalkbrenner (1785–1849), who was a famous pianist and composer in England gave a tour of concerts in 1823-1824 in Europe. In Vienna he was provided with the Graf fortepiano of Beethoven for his concert. Surprisingly, he was very unhappy with the instrument which was celebrated for its quality and tone in Vienna, simply because he was used to the damping system of the English instruments. As a solution he placed a cork under both sides of the damper house. As a result the sound was not damped the moment he took off his hands, but when the strings stopped resonating by themselves. One does not have to be a specialist in order to imagine the effect of it or to understand the enormous difference of taste and style between the Viennese and English instruments and their players.



a, damping system of the English pianos: little stripe of leather, “hair-alike” falling on the string. Not accurate, the resonance of the string is not stopped, only slowed down.

b, damping system of the Viennese pianos in the bass and middle register: a wedge made of felt falls between the two strings, as a result the resonance of the strings are immediate.

c, damping system of the Viennese pianos in the treble: a block of hardened felt falls onto the strings, as a result stopping its resonance instantly.

As noticed, the differences between the English and Viennese instruments are not crucial for this research. However, it is important to mention the English piano because of the further development of the Viennese instruments via the influence of their English machines. In this respect the following letter from publisher and piano dealer Härtel in Germany to Streicher - who was making the lighter type of Viennese pianos what Hummel preferred - on 7 December in 1804 doesn't come as a surprise:

*"...those amateurs who want to play to a bigger accompaniment often prefer English, French, other German or "Schanz-Müller'sche" instruments because they "insist on a stronger tone than that of your instruments." ... Clementi had been my private guest for two months and had chosen the "strongest instrument with the most difficult [i.e. heaviest] touch "*

And Streicher's answer:

*"Your letter contains one single remark of which I cannot approve, concerning the heavier and deeper keyboards, which Clementi demands... Certainly the English pianos gain an advantage over ours if we make our keyboards [i.e. action] according to their principle, and this appears to be Clementi's intention. On the other hand the fortepiano will then certainly cease to be the universal instrument, since nine out of ten klavier amateurs will have to stop playing. Beethoven is certainly a strong player, yet he still is unable to treat his Fp. adequately, which he got from Erard in Paris, and he has already had it changed two times without the least improvement, because its construction is not suited for any other action."*

Nevertheless, the wish for a bigger, richer sound, for a more singing instrument and the growing preference for strong and expressive playing style pushed Streicher to make major changes in his instruments already a year later, in 1805. These changes consisted of improving the hammer checks, heavier stringing (3 strings per note, instead of two), increasing the thickness of the strings, which automatically resulted in a need to enlarge the hammers and to choose another type of leathering on the hammer-heads. In 1805 Streicher says in a letter: *"... my instruments were no longer softer than those of other builders."* And in 1806 he describes how he tried to combine the lightness of the mechanism which he is convinced of with a stronger sound:

*"You ask me about my opinion about the English and French Pf., and I may assure you in advance that I have always preferred the tone of these instruments to all others; I still do – I agree with Clementi and Dussek in finding this tone most suited for a grand and especially a public performance; on the other hand, the construction of the keyboard [i.e. the action] is so completely at odds with the structure of the hand, that one hardly can think of anything less suitable,*

*and the whole action is also so short-lived as to be unfit for a true performance. The future will convince you that I am certainly not biased, but that my judgment about these instruments is more justified than anybody else's. I have done even more: I sought to combine this tone with our ordinary action, and if I may trust the judgment of the best clavier-players and amateurs here, I have been quite successful. "*

And why is this important? Not only in order to find out whether the egg or the chicken was first, ie did the rapid development of pianos play a role in the birth of different styles or the other way around? There is something very mysterious in the fact that during Beethoven's life pianos went through such a rapid and large development, not seen before or after his lifetime. Basically, looking at modern pianos of today - with the changes that had happened between 1780-1880 in mind – we can safely say that the instruments of our time are outdated and old fashioned machines because they were not innovated for more than hundred years now. Beethoven himself exerted a great influence on piano building, not only because of his hearing problem but also because of his taste, his wish for new effects and sounds. Johann Friedrich Reichardt (1752–1814), a German composer, writer and music critic, says in 1809 that *"Streicher had built a piano that sounded "like an orchestra... this development of Streicher's pianos was due to Beethoven's influence."* The changes that Streicher made in his instruments were also applauded by Beethoven who declared in 1817: *"...even though I did not always have one of your pianos, I always preferred them to others after 1809."*

## **Conclusions**

In the last decade of the 18th century two schools of playing on the fortepiano existed in Vienna. The schools were based on the performance styles of Hummel and Beethoven. Hummel's playing (and that of the Hummel school - Czerny calls them the 'Hummelists') was described as light, articulated and refined; his music was organized and his melodies were 'Mozartean'. Hummel's hand was on the keys 'like a garden spider'. Beethoven's hand was broad and his fingers flat on the keys; his playing was heavier, more legato, his music more complicated, wilder and full of changes in ideas and dynamics. Sources from the time confirm this and regularly place pianists from around 1800 in either school.

It is striking that exactly at the time when Czerny puts the existence of the two Viennese piano schools, there were also two competing Viennese schools of piano building. The characteristics of these two rivalling types of pianos match the description of the characteristics of the two performance schools. It can not be a coincidence that the pianos preferred by Hummel are described as light of

touch, light and refined of tone, not too loud, while the pianos preferred by Beethoven are described as full of tone, heavier to play, loud and very dynamical.

The characteristics of each school are described in terms of physical shape of the hand; lightness or heaviness in touch; refinement or wildness; complication of musical ideas and texture; use of the pedal or clarity. It seems therefore logical to extend the investigation of the influence of these characteristics beyond the description of musical performance, to the actual compositions. It is possible to a certain extent to confirm that the style of playing has led to a style of composing as well. Complicating factor is that Beethoven's revolutionary compositions can not easily be compared to those of his contemporaries, and that there are no composers in his time who fall into the same style category or who composed with the same genius as Beethoven.

The two schools of playing and the two schools of building grew closer together with the development of the classical style towards the romantic style. It is tempting to simplify the existence of either two schools by calling them 'classical' (and hinting at 'old-fashioned') and romantic (implying 'modern'). But in fact one can see traces of these two schools in Viennese and German pianists and compositional styles until at least the middle of the 19th century, when the romantic period was at his highpoint. It is beyond the scope of this research, but I propose that one may think of the difference in style between for instance Mendelssohn and Schumann or Thalberg and Liszt.