J. L. Dussek

Jan Ladislav Dussek was born into a musical Bohemian family in 1760. His father, the organist and cantor Jan Josef Dussek, taught him the harpsichord, organ and clavichord from the age of five, and according to Charles Burney, "had in a small room of his house four clavichords with little boys practicing on them all: his son (…) was a very good performer. ". Dussek became a chorister in Jihlava and later served as organist of the Santa Barbara Church while studying at the Jesuit Gymnasium in Kutnà Horas; he also attended the Prague Gymnasium and spent one term at the University of Prague.

In 1779 Dussek accompanied his patron, Count Männer, to Mechelen, where he stayed on as a piano teacher. This event marked the beginning of his unsettled life as a traveling teacher and performer. He next went to Holland, where among other appointments he spent about a year in The Hague giving lessons to the children of the Stadtholder, William V. During this period he also composed - mainly for the keyboard - and earned a brilliant reputation as a performer.

A number of rumours regarding Dussek's whereabouts, activities and relationships during the next few years have survived to the present day: it is likely that he met and received advice from C.P.E. Bach in Hamburg, where he gave a concert in 1782. The following year he was in St. Petersburg, "where it is quite possible that (he) met Hessel, the inventor of the glass harmonica, and was impressed by this new instrument". He may have fled Russia after being implicated in a plot against Empress Catherine II; this story would explain his arrival in Lithuania, where he spent 1783-84 as Prince Karl Radziwill's *Kappelmeister*. Certain sources report that he also had a liaison with the wife of Prince Radziwill (or with « a princess from the North ») during this period.

Over the next two years Dussek toured Germany, performing to great acclaim on both the piano and glass harmonica. He then traveled to Paris, where in 1786 he played before the court and was particularly noticed by Queen Marie Antoinette, who is said to have made him « generous » and even « seductive » offers. Giacomo Ferrari, an Italian composer living in Paris at the time, described him as "*le beau Dussek*, the most amiable man in the world, always cheerful and joyous, (…) a great performer with a natural and subtle genius for composition". The Bohemian musician Tomasek (a little v above the s in Tomasek) credited Dussek as "being the first pianist to play with his right side to the audience, so that his hearers could also get the benefit of his attractive profile".

Dussek's aristocratic connections forced him to leave Paris at the time of the French Revolution, and he soon established himself in London as a fashionable

and highly-paid piano (and harp) teacher. The Broadwood piano firm recorded in 1793 that it began building instruments with an enlarged compass of five and one-half octaves « to please Dussek », and many of his compositions from the time included two versions for the right hand, one for a five octave piano, the other for an instrument « with additional keys ». In 1794 Dussek influenced Broadwood to build an even larger piano, and launched this new six-octave instrument in its first public concert. He made numerous appearances on the London stage - in Solomon's subscription series, for example, where he played his own concertos and chamber music - often performing with Sophia Corri, the pianist, singer and harpist who subsequently became his wife. Joseph Haydn, with whom he often collaborated in Solomon's concerts, wrote a glowing letter of praise to Dussek's father : "I (…) consider myself fortunate in being able to assure you that you have one of the most upright, moral, and in music most eminent of men, for a son. I love him just as you do, for he fully deserves it. Give him, then, a father's blessing, and thus will he be ever fortunate, which I heartily wish him to be, for his remarkable talents. ". Mrs. Papendieck, assistant keeper of the wardrobe for the Queen, described one of Dussek's performances in her diary: "The applause was loud as a welcome. Dussek, now seated, tried his instrument in prelude, which caused a second burst of applause. This so surprised (him) that his friends were obliged to desire him to rise and bow, which he did somewhat reluctantly. He then, after re-seating himself, spread a silk handkerchief over his knees, rubbed his hands in his coat pockets, which were filled with bran, and then began his concerto.".

Dussek and his father-in-law, Domenico Corri, became partners in a music publishing business around 1792, and in December of the following year, barely two months after Marie Antoinette's execution, the firm of Corri, Dussek and Company issued the composer's Opus 23, *The Sufferings of the Queen of France*. The business was successful for a time, and the librettist Casanova, who had also become involved with the firm, wrote in his memoirs that "(Dussek's) beautiful sonatas sold very rapidly and at high prices in Corri's shop". But both Dussek and Corri "were loaded with debt and it seemed as if neither of them had sense enough to manage things properly ". The company went bankrupt in 1799, obliging Dussek to flee to Hamburg, leaving his family and the imprisoned Corri behind. Though he corresponded with his wife, he never saw her or their daughter again.

From 1800 to 1807 Dussek traveled widely in Europe as a concert artist. He continued to compose, though less prolifically than during the London years, and also acted as an agent for the English piano firm Longman, Clementi and Co. In 1805 he became the *Kappelmeister* and teacher of the musically-talented Prince Louis Ferdinand, partaking of high society entertainments and in Clementi's words, "wallowing at Prince Louis's near Magdebourg". In 1806

Dussek accompanied Louis, a Prussian, as he fought against Napoleon's troops, and the night before the Prince's death the two men performed Dussek's concerto for two pianos. Dussek was with Louis when he died on the battlefield, an experience that moved him to write the *Elégie Harmonique* in memory of the Prince. He next surfaced in Paris, where he secured an appointment as chief chamber musician to Talleyrand. By this time he "was no longer handsome; in fact, he was quite obese, besides being heavily alcoholic in his habits". His last years were spent giving lessons, attending the opera, participating in Talleyrand's soirées, and performing in public to rapturous reviews. He wrote sonatas (including one entitled *Le Retour à Paris*), waltzes, a concerto, and four-hand works, as well as inventing an Aeolian Harp, which he described in great detail in a letter to Pleyel. Dussek's last public appearance took place before Napoleon Bonaparte's court and included excerpts from his third concerto and a sonata. Napoleon is reported to have said, "And you, Mr. Dussek, you *sing* on the pianoforte; the instrument produces under your fingers an entirely different tone.". Towards the end of his life Dussek's obesity caused him to spend almost all his time in bed, and "to make immoderate use of wine and fermented liqueurs as stimulants, which finally altered his constitution and brought on his death ". He died of gout in Saint-Germain-en-Laye in early 1812.

As Dussek was primarily a pianist, most of his works were naturally for (or included) the piano. His compositions "were remarkably popular in his lifetime; most were reprinted at least once, and some as many as ten times". His nearly 300 works include almost twenty concertos (including the 'Military' Concerto, which was immensely popular in late eighteenth-century London), dozens of accompanied sonatas, forty solo piano sonatas and a variety of chamber works as well as an opera, a mass, songs, and a theoretical work entitled *Instructions on the Art of Playing the Piano Forte or Harpsichord*. Much of his program music, such as *The Naval Battle and Total Defeat of the Dutch Fleet by Admiral Duncan* (for piano trio and percussion) and *A Complete Delineation of the Ceremony from St. James's to St. Paul's,* carries highly descriptive titles and was probably written for commercial reasons. He also wrote quantities of rondos and variations on popular tunes such as *O dear what can the matter be* and *Partant pour la Syrie*.

Dussek's earlier compositions were written in the classical style of the day, while those of his last twenty years were " ahead of their time " and "often brilliant and virtuoso in character (…), with definite Romantic characteristics in the expression markings, the use of full chords, the choice of keys and the frequent modulations to remote keys, and in the use of altered chords and non-harmonic notes". All his keyboard music, from the simple program pieces to the complex sonatas, bears his unique and unmistakable rhythmic and harmonic stamp, and the Marie Antoinette piece is no exception. Dussek is remembered

today as a composer whose music foreshadowed the Romantic era, and whose nomadic lifestyle was equally ‘romantic’.

Marie Antoinette

Music is a theme which can be traced throughout the life of Marie Antoinette, Queen of France. Indeed, one of her biographers calls music the only art she truly loved. The daughter of Empress Maria Theresa, she was born in 1755 as the Archduchess Maria Antonia and raised in a court where music played an essential and daily role. Josef Antonin Stefann, a Bohemian composer, was appointed *Klaviermeister* to Antonia and her sister Maria Carolina in 1766; Gluck was another of her keyboard teachers. She also met Mozart at her mother’s court, and jested with him about the possibility of their marrying one day.

Music was an element of many ceremonial occasions in the Dauphine’s life, as when she watched fireworks « accompanied by the fashionable strains of Turkish music » on her way to France in 1770, and again during an incomparable firework display at Versailles accompanied by hundreds of musicians on the Grand Canal. It was omnipresent during her marriage to the future Louis XVI as well as during Louis’ coronation; it accompanied the celebrations following the birth of the royal couple’s first child as well as those resulting from the proclamation of peace with England in 1783. Marie Antoinette attended the opera innumerable times and is often described as dancing there until five in the morning; she also took in classical plays « with additional music and choruses especially writtten or taken from operas » and ballets. Nor did she have any difficulty imposing her own taste - she prefered music and ballets to classical plays - on the Menus-Plaisirs du Roi.

In more intimate settings she often played her Taskin harpsichord and « her dear harp », and sang Mozart, Grétry (whose daughter was her godchild) and Gluck in a voice which, although « only just true, was pleasant ». She felt most at home in her innermost room, which contained « her writing desk, her workbasket and her harpsichord ». Next to her bed stood her « wonderful musical clock » which delicately played *Il pleut, bergère*. When the Grand Duke of Russia and his wife visited, Marie Antoinette herself made sure that the Grand Duchess’s quarters were outfitted with a harpsichord and bouquets of flowers; when Gluck arrived at Versailles in 1773 she welcomed him into her private chambers and listened as he played *Iphigénie en Aulide* on her instrument. She championed the composer in his struggles with French opera singers and the Piccinists, and was almost single-handedly responsible for the work’s spectacular success : « Guards had to be called out to restrain the crowds. The call for the composer went on for ten minutes. The Dauphine had triumphed. (…) German music – ‘music, simply’ – took its place thanks to Marie Antoinette. » The Queen made a habit of encouraging and acting as

patroness to young French musical talent, as well as warmly welcoming German musicians who came to Versailles. A square pianoforte reputedly made for the Queen in 1787 by Sébastian Erard is now kept in the Cobbe Collection of keyboard instruments in East Clandon, England.

During the tumultuous times of the French Revolution, music continued to punctuate the events of Marie Antoinette's life. Revolutionary mobs were often preceded by groups of musicians, the chapel orchestra « played the *Ca ira !* when the King and Queen entered », and during the supper before the royal family was imprisoned in the Temple, « the Marseillais attended to the musical side of the evening ». A harpsichord was eventually brought to the Queen's room, and she accompanied herself every day singing songs « which were nothing less than sad ». And finally, during the trial which sentenced her to death in 1793, Marie Antoinette is described, while listening to the eight pages of her indictment being read, as moving her fingers on the arm of her chair « with seeming inattention, as though over the keyboard of her pianoforte ». A square pianoforte reputedly made for the Queen in 1787 by Sébastian Erard is now kept in the Cobbe Collection of keyboard instruments in East Clandon, England.

The autograph of the song included in this edition is attributed to Marie Antoinette, and was undoubtedly written during her years at Versailles. An inscription on the score's first page specifies that it was « Donated by Mr. Béché to……*maître de chapelle* of the Queen». According to the Catalogue of Manuscript Music in the British Museum, Mr. Béché was one of three brothers of that name attached to the King's band, about 1750-1774, and the recipient may have been Louis Joseph Francoeur, who was made Maître de la Chambre du Roi in 1776. Today the score is kept in the Music Collections of the British Library. The song is mentioned in Barbara Jackson's book *Say Can You Deny Me: A Guide to Surviving Music by Women from the 16th Through the 18th Centuries*. Though relatively unambitious in terms of composition and poetry, it is a touching reminder of Marie Antoinette's lifelong passion for music. It may also corroborate Horace Walpole's comment about the Queen's sense of rhythm (« They say she does not dance in time, but then it is wrong to dance in time. ») : the words of the song do not always match the rhythm of the music, and have been slightly adjusted here to allow the work to be comfortably sung.

The Edition and Performance Suggestions

The present score of the Dussek piece is based on the Corri edition (London, 1793), and attemps to preserve the characteristics of the original insofar as possible.

The following changes have been made: the barlines have been extended from the treble to the bass staff. Some chords have been divided differently between

the hands. Precautionary accidentals have been eliminated. The numbers 3 and 6 have been added to indicate triplets and sextuplets. Obvious errors have been corrected. All editiorial suggestions are indicated in parentheses.

The indication *rf* (for *rinforzando*: 'strengthening', 'reinforcing') occurs throughout the score, and is also extremely common in other piano works by Dussek. When applied to a single note, as is most often the case here, it calls for an accent, though a weaker one than *sf* or *sfz* would demand; when applied to a brief passage it requires an increase in volume and intensity.

The term *mezzo* (or *mez.*) appears in the *Marie Antoinette* score and throughout Dussek's works. The word is consistently situated between indications for soft and loud playing, and seems to call for a dynamic midway between the two.

The score also contains the abbreviations *ppmo* and *piani*° as well as *pp*. Though they are used inconsistently, all would seem to call for *pianissimo* playing. By the same token, *ffmo, fmo* and *ff* may all be played *fortissimo*.

In the Corri edition, No. 3 is entitled 'They Separate her from her Childern', and the *Andante* at the end of the same section is labeled 'The Farewell of her Childern'. This eighteenth-century spelling of the word *children* has been retained.

No. 9, 'The Queen's Invocation to the Almighty just before her Death', contains an *acciaccatura* in bar 10, as does No. 10, 'The Apotheosis', in bar 30. This ornament, which was common in eighteenth-century keyboard music, is indicated by a stroke through the stem of the chord. It consists of 'an accessory note adjacent to the main note (commonly a semitone below) sounded at the same time as the main note and released as soon as struck'.

The Corri edition specifies that the '*music* (is) *adapted for the Piano Forte, or Harpsichord'.* The modern piano and the clavichord are two otherinstruments on which the piece can be performed to good effect. The work gains in dramatic impact when the titles of the different sections and the texts that occur within several of the pieces are spoken by a narrator or by the performer himself.

The present score of the undated Marie Antoinette song is based on the British Library manuscript Add. MS 33,966. Barlines have been extended from the treble to bass clefs, and the number 3 added to indicate triplets. Grammatical errors in the text have been corrected, and, as mentioned above, the words have in certain instances been adjusted to match the rhythm of the music.

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