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Sigismund von
NEUKOMM

ELÉGIE
HARMONIQUE

PIANO
SOLO

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Inhaltsverzeichnis

Preface

Vorwort

Elégie Harmonique

Marche Funèbre

Textual notes

Preface

It is likely that Neukomm first met the Czech pianist and composer Jan Ladislav Dussek (Václav Jan Dusík) through their mutual acquaintance, the Prince Vaudemont Talleyrand, a powerful political figure in pre and post revolutionary France. Neukomm was to enjoy a long friendship with Talleyrand but there can be no doubt that his friendship with Dussek was cut short before the friendship could be allowed to mature. After many years of study and travel Neukomm had made a brief sojourn to Paris in 1809, but he was not to settle there until 1810 where, with the exception of a few provincial trips he was to stay until 1814. It was during these years that Neukomm first made the acquaintance of the Prince Talleyrand and, we can safely assume, it was during this time that he was first introduced to the virtuoso Dussek. Dussek's relationship with Talleyrand stretches back to 1807 where he entered the prince's employ.

Indeed by the time that Neukomm appeared on the scene, Dussek had already established for himself an enviable reputation as a superstar piano virtuoso who was as important in the development of the instrument as in the advent of virtuoso piano music. The composer enjoyed great popularity during his life with many works having to be reprinted to meet demand. It is somewhat ironic that today, Dussek's music has fallen into practical oblivion. It is entirely feasible that Neukomm knew more of the composer by reputation and through his compositions than by personal acquaintance.

It is a remarkable coincidence that Neukomm should entitle his work on the death of Dussek the '*Elégie harmonique*' as this was the title ¹ that Dussek had used in memoriam of his friend Prince Louis Ferdinand, a fellow composer, career soldier and important figure in the Prussian court who had been killed in 1806 battle of Saalfeld against the French. There is a tenuous but persistent association that Neukomm would use this particular form of address for his homage to his friend. As always however, Neukomm was entirely original and apart from the title and the grave setting, his work, like his voice, is entirely his own.

The Elegie was entered into Neukomm's catalogue journal on the 19th April, 1812, as number 90, barely a month after Dussek's death on 20th March 1812 and was subsequently published by Breitkopf and Härtel in Leipsic. This was the version used as the source for the modern piano edition and it included the piano version of the processional march referred to below. Neukomm had kept a catalogue journal since 1804 and at the time of his death it would contain close to 2000 works which was by no means exhaustive, the excess being made up by forgotten works such as his major opus, the '*Symphony Heroique*', opus 19. Another month later, the '*Marche funèbre*' (number 93) was entered on the 14th May. This speed of composition is entirely characteristic of a prolific composer such as Neukomm. The quintet version of the '*Marche funèbre*' for 2 violins, viola and 2 cellos published by Simrock in Bonn is recorded in the journal along with the ("chronological" catalogue number 93).

The style of these works shares an affinity with Dussek's works with the break from the classical tradition and the elegiac nature of the works prefigures the highly developmental nature of later Romantic forms. This is music of its time however and the instruments of the day would