

Fortepiano Music Around the Congress of Vienna¹

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Wherever you go in Vienna these days, you can't escape this year's most prominent anniversary in town. It was exactly 200 years ago that Vienna was the stage for a conference of ambassadors of European states chaired by Austrian statesman Klemens Wenzel von Metternich. The objective of what history recognizes as the Congress of Vienna was to provide a long-term peace plan for Europe after the Napoleonic Wars. And indeed, the settlement that was worked out between September 1814 and June 1815, despite later changes, formed the framework for European international politics until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914.

But Vienna, the stage for the Congress, was also the city of which Mozart had already written 30 years earlier that “this must surely be keyboard country!”² Indeed, in no other place and no other period in music history did the piano undergo such a rapid and fundamental development as in those decades. And equally unique was the instrument's popularity in the salons of Vienna's citizens. Only a few years after the Congress, the Austrian writer Carl Anton Pastl, also known as Charles Sealsfield as American immigrant, will write about Vienna: “Whatever family of the middle class you enter, the pianoforte is the first object which strikes your eyes; you are hardly seated, and a flagon filled with wine, another with water, and Pressburg biscuit placed before you, when the host will tell Caroline to play a tune to the gentleman.”³

It comes as no surprise that in such a thriving fortepiano culture, the news and politics of the day also impacted the production of fortepiano music. And it is from this repertoire that I would like to present three prominent examples.

¹ The following text is the spoken part of a lecture-recital. The musical selections are indicated where they occurred. The instrument used was a fortepiano by Paul McNulty (Divišov, Czech Republic) after Anton Walter & Sohn, Vienna c. 1804.

² “hier ist doch gewis das *Clavierland!*” Wolfgang Amadé Mozart to Leopold Mozart, 2 June 1781. *Mozart Letters and Documents – Online Edition*, published by the Internationale Stiftung Mozarteum, Salzburg (<http://dme.mozarteum.at/letters/>, 1 September 2015).

³ Sealsfield, Charles. *Austria as It Is: Or, Sketches of Continental Courts*. London: Hurst, Chance, and Co., 1828: 202.

Bohemian composer Adalbert Gyrowetz was already a well-travelled composer when he was appointed vice kapellmeister of the Vienna Court Theatre in 1804. The creator of an impressive oeuvre that includes 30 operas, over 60 symphonies, 60 string quartets and 40 piano trios was an important figure in Vienna's music culture well into the 1820s. As such he officiated as musical history painter, as it were, when he published a "characteristic fantasy for the fortepiano." It serves as a musical depiction of the celebration of the first anniversary of the Battle of Leipzig. On the 18th of October 1813, the coalition armies of Russia, Prussia, Austria, and Sweden, decisively defeated the French army of Napoleon. Exactly one year later the allied monarchs gathered in Vienna to celebrate the first anniversary of what had turned out to basically be the beginning of the end of the Napoleonic wars. Official court records show that at 8 o'clock in the morning 14.000 soldiers marched towards the Prater, the gigantic park South of the old town of Vienna. At 11am Emperor Franz and the other monarchs arrived and attended a Solemn Mass that was celebrated outdoors. After the Service, all the allied military troops present in Vienna marched past the monarchs after which everybody was invited to lunch. According to the records, each soldier received soup with dumplings, a pound of boiled beef with sauce, 0.75 pounds of roast pork, 3 doughnuts, 3 kaiser rolls, and 2.5 ounces of wine. The monarchs proposed 4 toasts and then, at four in the afternoon, everybody returned back to their quarters.

Gyrowetz' fantasy is constructed almost like musical proceedings of the celebration. Programmatic titles inspired by the most important scenes of the celebrations hold together a chain of otherwise musically rather unrelated component parts. Music and titles together, however, invoke, as it were, a 19th-century silent film experience, albeit with the movie playing in the imagination of the audience ...

Music Example

Adalbert Gyrowetz (1763–1850)

Sieges- und Friedens-Fest der verbündeten Monarchen gefeyert im Prater und dessen Umgebung am 18ten October 1814, als am Jahrtage der Völkerschacht bey Leipzig. Eine charakteristische Fantasie für das Piano-Forte. [1814]

The Victory and Peace Celebration of the Allied Monarchs Celebrated at the Prater and its Surroundings on 18 October 1814 as the Anniversary of the Battle of the Nations at Leipzig. A Characteristic Fantasy for the Piano Forte. [1814]

Most of the Congress' diplomatic negotiations were conducted in informal settings connected with music—salons, banquets, and balls. This led one

attende, Charles-Joseph de Ligne, to characterize the Congress with the famous mot: “Le congrès danse beaucoup mais il ne marche pas.”⁴—The congress dances a lot, but it doesn’t make progress. The daily newspapers reported the latest gossip from the court entertainments and already a few days later piano arrangements of the dance music was available through Vienna’s numerous music publishers. One such collection were *The So Very Popular Redout-Parée Polonaises, Quadrille, Eccossoises [and] Waltzes, Which Were Performed During the Presence of the Highest and High Monarchs in Vienna at the Imperial and Royal Court Festivities*, composed by Joseph Wilde. In 1814, Wilde had become capellmeister of the Redoutensäle, Vienna’s prime venue for balls and banquets. As such he rose to be one of the official dance composers of the Congress. Together with Joseph Lanner and Johann Strauss Senior he was one of the fathers of the Viennese waltz. An indeed, the waltz was the most popular dance in those days, probably because other than in polonaise, quadrille, and ecossaise, the couples got to dance in close hold. Needless to say that this was also subject of criticism by more conservative contemporaries. Moreover, they warned about possible serious health risks stemming from 20 minute non stop turns typical for the Biedermeier Waltz.⁵ Musically, the early Waltz is very simple: a chain of melodies of 8+8 measures, each of the two parts repeated. Also the harmony is comparatively simple. In fact, Wilde only uses two chords, the tonic and the dominant. The subdominant only appears once in the 6 waltzes. However, the arrangement is unbelievably charming. Wilde found countless variations of the typical “Ooom-pa-pa” and added very refined phrasing and articulation to his melodies.

Music Example

Joseph Wilde (1778–1831)

Die so sehr beliebten Redout-parée Polonaises, Quadrille, Eccossoises [sic] Walzer, welche während der Anwesenheit der höchsten und hohen Monarchen in Wien bey den k.k. Hoffesten gegeben wurden. [1814]

The So Very Popular Redout-Parée Polonaises, Quadrille, Eccossoises [and] Waltzes, Which Were Performed During the Presence of the Highest and High Monarchs in Vienna at the Imperial and Royal Court Festivities. [1814]

Walzer 1–6

⁴ Egloffstein, Hermann Freiherr von (ed.). *Carl Bertuchs Tagebuch vom Wiener Kongress*. Berlin: Gebrüder Paetel, 1916: 69.

⁵ Litschauer, Walburga, and Walter Deutsch. *Schubert und das Tanzvergnügen*. Vienna: Verlag Holzhausen, 1997: 16 and 81.

Bohemian pianist Ignaz Moscheles came to Vienna in 1808 to study with Albrechtsberger and Salieri, but he also established important connections with Beethoven and Spohr. That he was among the chosen composers from whom the Court commissioned music for public spectacles such as the Caroussel in 1814 or the Sleigh Ride in 1815 shows that the young piano virtuoso was indeed a rising star. For both occasions Moscheles composed pieces for wind ensemble, but again piano transcriptions were available at the music stores only days after the official event.

Moscheles' "characteristic sonata" *Vienna's Emotions at the return of his Majesty Franz I.* on the 16th of July 1814 is an impressive example for how not only arrangements, but even the most serious of all contemporary genres of fortepiano music made reference to the politics of the day. Each of the three movements bears a programmatic title. The first movement, is in sonata form and the "Expression of the Most Joyful Feelings on the Glorious Return of His Majesty." The second movement is a set of free variations on the melody "Freut euch des Lebens" or "Enjoy Life," a very popular folk song in German speaking countries at the time. Its message: *Carpe Diem* and even if things get tight, never lose hope. You will hear how Moscheles in these variations introduces the more brilliant writing style for piano that will dominate much of the Viennese piano music to come in the following decades by composers such as Hummel and Czerny. The last movement, a rondo, is entitled "Rejoicing of the Happy Austria." Of course, from today's perspective it is no wonder that Austria's rejoicing would be musically represented in 3/4 time and Waltz tempo. But it was exactly 200 years ago and probably in connection with the Congress of Vienna that Austria adopted the Waltz as the musical emblem in its quest to establish itself in the new European order.

All in all, I hope to have shown how contemporary fortepiano music reacted vividly and in manifold ways to the political developments during the Congress and that this repertoire played a prominent role in early Biedermeier fortepiano culture.

Music Example

Ignaz Moscheles (1794–1870)

Wiens Empfindungen bey der Rückkehr Seiner Majestät Franz des Ersten, Kaiser von Oesterreich u.u. im Jahre 1814. Eine charakteristische Sonate für das Piano Forte, op. 27

Vienna's Emotions on the Return of His Majesty Franz I., Emperor of Austria, in 1814. A Characteristic Sonata for the Piano Forte, op. 27

II. Andantino espressivo.

*Über das Thema: Freut euch des Lebens
[Variations] on "Freut euch des Lebens"*

III. Rondo. Tempo de Valse. *Freudenjubiläum des beglückten Oesterreich*
Rejoicing of the Happy Austria