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PREVIEW

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Johann Peter Milchmeyer's "Die wahre Art das Pianoforte zu spielen": An annotated translation

Rhein, Robert, D.M.A.

The University of Nebraska - Lincoln, 1993

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PREVIEW

JOHANN PETER MILCHMEYER'S
DIE WAHRE ART
DAS PIANOFORTE ZU SPIELEN:
AN ANNOTATED TRANSLATION

by

Robert Rhein

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

Major: Music

Under the Supervision of Professor Raymond H. Haggh

Lincoln, Nebraska

May, 1993

DISSERTATION TITLE

Johann Peter Milchmeyer's "Die wahr Art das Pianoforte zu spielen":

An Annotated Translation

BY

Robert Clinton Rhein

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JOHANN PETER MILCHMEYER'S
DIE WAHRE ART DAS PIANOFORTE ZU SPIELEN:
AN ANNOTATED TRANSLATION

Robert Rhein, D. M. A.
University of Nebraska, 1993

Advisor: Raymond H. Haggh

J. P. Milchmeyer's *Die wahre Art das Pianoforte zu spielen* [*The True Art of Playing the Pianoforte*] was a keyboard instruction manual published in Dresden, Germany, in 1797. It was addressed to a middle-class audience either of students attempting to learn without an instructor, or of teachers who lacked training and experience. The present dissertation is a translation of the first (and only) edition, "as clear and readable as possible, while reproducing the book in a form as much like the original as practical" (from the Translator's Preface).

There are six chapters:

1. "The Position of the Body, the Arm, the Hand, and the Fingers" (including advice on styles of articulation and on rhythm);
2. "On Fingering" (the longest chapter);
3. "On Ornamentation" (with many written-out examples);
4. "On Musical Expression" (terminology);
5. "On Knowledge and Modification of the Pianoforte" (evaluating pianos and employing the various special-effects pedals);
6. "Several General Remarks."

The manual was the first keyboard treatise in Germany (and possibly in all Europe) to champion the piano exclusively—most authors

still favored or at least seriously considered the harpsichord or the clavichord. Also, Milchmeyer's advice sometimes differs from better-known authorities in ways which may more accurately reveal the actual performance practice of the time.

The original book was seventy-three pages long, with approximately half the total page space taken up by musical examples. The translation runs to 179 pages, with all musical examples converted into clear modern notation and interspersed, as in the original, throughout the text. The translator has added a ten-page introduction and seventy pages of annotations (appearing as endnotes), which provide historical background, stylistic commentary, and comparison with other treatises of the eighteenth century, most notably those of C. P. E. Bach (1753) and Daniel Gottlob Türk (1789).

PREVIEW

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Some friends who know how long this document has taken me may wonder therefore whether I ever received help from anyone. In truth, several very dedicated people assisted generously in getting this project off the ground, keeping it under way, and bringing it to completion. My part, I think, was primarily to extend each stage to its maximum time limit.

My dear wife Sandy, of course, has had to live with this undertaking the most, and has come to understand the expression “terminal degree” in a way that few see it. My three children, too, have put up with a Dad who was, if not absent, at least absent-minded, with always something else on his mind. To all of them, I offer my thanks for their love in spite of it all.

My colleagues and students at Bethel College, in Mishawaka, Indiana, have shown continued interest and encouragement, as well as remarkable patience, putting up with a very distracted professor. I share their hope that my normal self is far more organized and attentive.

My sister Janet has typed the entire translated text, occasionally giving me a gentle prod in the direction of productivity. Her loving help put me in debt long ago—this only increases my balance of payments.

The scholars on my Committee have had the greatest direct influence on the final form of this document, and the value of their input is inestimable. My chairman and piano teacher, Professor Audun Ravnar, instilled in me a concern for expressiveness and an awareness of detail in

performance that was easy to translate into research. Professor Thomas Fritz, my other piano teacher, made me account for any idea I incorporated into either a performance or a paper, giving my intellect a good deal of exercise and challenge. Most of all, Professor Raymond H. Haggh, my good friend and mentor in this translation, who first suggested the topic but may have despaired of ever seeing its completion, was incredibly knowledgeable, giving unstintingly of his time and expertise. In addition, his monumental 1982 translation of the *Türk Klavierschule* has been a model for me. I feel, though, that just as the writing of the rather provincial Milchmeyer is dwarfed by that of the encyclopedic Türk, so does my translation compare with Haggh's masterful volume.

In revising, recasting, rewording, and reworking this document, I have discovered—or, more often, have had pointed out to me—countless errors. Interestingly, they were nearly always errors I had put there myself. I can only assume that any remaining shortcomings are also my own.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

I have endeavored to make this translation of Milchmeyer's *Die wahre Art das Pianoforte zu spielen* as clear and readable as possible, while reproducing the book in a form as much like the original as practical. For instance, I have often preserved long sentences, and reflected the original word order, if the resulting English sentence was not too unwieldy. I have also used numerals and spelled out numbers exactly as Milchmeyer did, even when he was inconsistent. Italian and French terminology occasionally appears in uncommon spellings—whether mistakes of Milchmeyer or antiquated spellings, I do not know. I have preserved them, marking some with [sic], and into others inserting a letter in brackets, such as “*potpour[r]i*.”

The musical examples in the original were printed with movable type, rather than by engraving. The result is rather hard to read and very difficult to reproduce satisfactorily. There are also a few antiquated aspects of the notation, such as sharps being represented by the “x” that is now used for double-sharps. For clarity, then, it was necessary to modernize the notation. The two illustrations, though, which appear in the first chapter, have been taken directly from the original.

The German text was in the *Fraktur* type used in most German publications until well into this century. Text in other languages was set in Roman letters; for these I have generally used italics. Since *Fraktur* did

not have italics, German printers would show emphasis either by **boldface** or by s p a c i n g. I could not detect any consistency in Milchmeyer's use of these two methods, and hence I have used boldface for any text emphasized in either manner.

Square brackets have been used for all interpolations. I have inserted two kinds into the text: If a German word or phrase in the original is either ambiguous or noteworthy, I repeat it in brackets after my translation; or, when the meaning of a passage seems unclear, though the words themselves may not be troublesome, I have sometimes added a word or two in brackets (in English) to clarify what I think Milchmeyer intended.

I indicate the pagination of the original at the point of the page turns. Thus for example [p. 23/24] appears immediately after the last word or example of page 23; the following text or music is on page 24.

The musical examples were not labeled in the original. For reference, I have numbered (in brackets) each group of examples, from [Ex. 1] to [Ex. 75], and if the group consists of several excerpts, I have individually numbered the excerpts [1], [2], and so on. In the annotations then when I refer, say, to "ex. 34.3," this means the third excerpt in the thirty-fourth group.

I have added a table of contents (p. 2 of the translation), which was lacking in the original. On the other hand, I have omitted the list of subscribers, which took up three and a half pages in the original printing. It included no musicians considered today to be significant, and would be of minimal interest to a modern reader. (It lists 279 names—forty of them female—in 109 cities, who had vouched for a total of 535 copies of the

manual. The cities with the most are Dresden, with 131 copies, Leipzig with fifty-seven, and Berlin with fifty-three. The occupation of over half the subscribers was given. Only thirty-one—exactly one-ninth of the total—were professional musicians. An additional nine were instrument makers, and another nine were book or music dealers.)

Milchmeyer included a list of twenty-four *errata*, all of which concerned the musical examples, which of course I have incorporated. As for other mistakes I discovered in the excerpts, I have corrected without comment only the most trivial. Some others I have corrected and noted, and a few have been left in, along with a note of explanation. The text itself was quite free of typographical errors.

The annotations follow the text. Their length made it mandatory that they not appear as footnotes, especially since I wanted to lay out the body of the manual with as few visual intrusions as possible. Note numbers that appear in the musical examples, though, include an asterisk in order to stand out more clearly.

In the Translator's Introduction and in the annotations, I have used the "parenthetical reference" system of the MLA Handbook. If a book is clearly identified in the text, only the page number is noted. Otherwise, the author's name is given with the page. Since I have needed to refer both to the original and to a translation for several historic treatises, I have in these cases included the date of publication. Thus, if Türk is mentioned, (1789: 21) refers to page 21 in the German original, and (1982: 21) is a reference to the Raymond Haggh translation. Any quotations taken from German or French editions are my own translations.

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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

The last part of the eighteenth century saw great changes in European culture. Politically, of course, there was transition and turmoil: in 1775, across the Atlantic, the American Revolution cast the seeds of idealism and change, and by 1800 these had ripened into the chaos of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. The United States had been formed without need for an aristocracy, but in France people tried to reform their country by eradicating theirs. Most aristocrats outside of France still retained their positions of privilege, but they had reason to be shaken. A new middle class was rising.

There were related changes in the world of music. In the 1770s, Haydn was a well-treated but nonetheless subservient employee of Prince Esterházy in Austria, while the young Mozart was just beginning his ill-fated attempt at fashioning a career independent of such dependency on the nobility. By the century's end, in contrast, the elder statesman Haydn owned a reputation that no longer depended on his Prince, and the young Beethoven was well on his way to becoming the *factotum* of European music, blazing a trail as the first real free-lance composer in history.

Even more so than the lives of the major composers, though, the rising middle class—the *bourgeoisie*—was instrumental in transforming the place of music in the community, and in “sound[ing] the keynote for the rest of society” (Loesser 51). Some people who had never set foot in a

royal court found that they could afford “culture,” and for many of them music became a way of showing their advancement. There were professionals, of course, but in an economic sense the market formed by thousands of aspiring young pupils—primarily keyboard pupils, most of whom were female—drove manufacturers, publishers, and merchants to produce harpsichords, clavichords, pianofortes, and printed music in heretofore unknown numbers.

Such a sudden increase in quantity, however, brought with it an inevitable thinning of quality, as myriads of dilettantes in England, France, and Germany took music lessons, often from rather poorly prepared teachers. This situation, then, opened up yet another market—that of instruction books.

Keyboard teaching manuals had been around for a long time, of course, at least since the 1500s (Türk 1982: xi), but they multiplied in the eighteenth century and abounded by the end of the century. For instance, one study of eighteenth-century keyboard instruction books (Bostrom) investigated sixteen from the years 1702 to 1797, listing some eight more, while another research paper (Holland) studied twenty-three such books from just the years 1780 to 1810, mentioning also over a dozen others. In many ways, then, a student of the time—or an inexperienced teacher—could draw on the ideas of a master.

Several of the treatises were indeed the ideas of masters. Perhaps the first significant manual, *L'Art de toucher le clavecin* (*The Art of Playing the Harpsichord*) of 1716, contained a systematic explanation of

embellishments—the very essence of French elegance—by a leading French composer of the time, François Couperin. Midway through the century, the oldest son of J. S. Bach distilled the considerable wisdom he had acquired from his father (as well as many of his own ideas) into his *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen* (*Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*), adding a few years later a second part devoted to the disappearing skill of figured bass accompaniment. At about the same time, Johann Quantz, the most celebrated flautist in Germany, and Leopold Mozart, violinist and future father of Wolfgang Amadeus, published definitive treatises on their own instruments. And in 1789, Daniel Gottlob Türk wrote the most extensive textbook of all, his *Klavierschule* (*School of Clavier Playing*).

These books and others were reprinted and disseminated all over Europe. They systematized and explained the performance traditions of the time, giving also much practical advice on the making and teaching of music. They were, however, primarily addressed to professionals—to the musical elite, the artistic equivalent of the nobility. The authors were venerated authorities who composed music of the type that they discussed, and naturally they had strong opinions as to its execution.

In this context, the appearance in 1797 of *Die wahre Art das Pianoforte zu spielen* is of interest. The author, Johann Peter Milchmeyer, is undeniably a minor character in music history. His compositions are negligible, his teaching produced no notable performers, and he appears not to have been personally acquainted with any of the major musical

figures of his time. His literary talent was modest, and the organization of his book suffers greatly in comparison with the treatises of Bach, Quantz, Türk, and many others. He wrote, though, for an audience quite different from the professional readers of the major treatises. Türk, for example, specified that his work was “intended for three classes of readers,” namely, for students, for teachers, and for “the researcher in music material for further thought about this or that subject” (1982:6). Similarly, Quantz stated that, although he had “applied [his precepts] specifically only to the transverse flute, they can be useful to all those who make a profession of singing or of the practice of other instruments,” and that he was “endeavoring to train a skilled and intelligent musician” (1985:7). Milchmeyer, on the other hand, addresses his preface “to amateurs and beginners of pianoforte-playing,” and says that his occasional words to teachers are only meant for “those music teachers in towns and villages, who for the most part are far removed from the perfection of artistic cultivation” (3-4). If the major treatises represent the musical nobility, then Milchmeyer represents the musical *bourgeoisie*.

For the student of historical performance practice, there are some advantages to considering his middle-class viewpoint. For one thing, he may reflect more accurately what was popular in his day. For instance, of the five composers he mentions by name in the book, only one—Clementi—could be considered today to be important. But three of the others—Steibelt, Pleyel, and Kozeluch—were tremendously popular in their day, and were probably felt by many at the time to be worthy rivals of

Haydn and Mozart. Similarly, Milchmeyer was interested in several fads and innovations, such as special effects pedals or certain genres of composition, that were condemned outright by other authors. Perhaps he reveals more of what was appealing to audiences of the time.

Reading his book, one sometimes gets the feeling that he was rather provincial, out of touch with the mainstream, with pet ideas destined to be short-lived. One who obviously thought so was the author of the review appearing in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* the following year. Signing his name merely as “K...” (Kahl cites research that ostensibly establishes the author to be H. J. Knecht; I have accepted this conclusion), he had little good to say about the book, comparing it several times to those of Bach and Türk, and sarcastically commenting on Milchmeyer’s interest in innovative gimmicks.

Not all innovations are short-lived, though, nor are all lasting ideas dictated from above by the experts. Milchmeyer’s performance advice just might represent more how music *was* performed than how it *should* be performed. Though his rhetoric does not always suggest this, his advice may in fact be accurately *descriptive* where the recommendations of Türk et al are mostly *prescriptive*. This, in fact, is the viewpoint of several modern scholars who have depended on Milchmeyer. A good example is Frederick Neumann, who has challenged the ideas of performance practice scholars in recent years. In his 1986 study of ornamentation in Mozart, he cites Milchmeyer frequently, making comments such as: “Very important is the documentation of Milchmeyer in 1798 [1797] because his principles

make such eminently good sense" (11); or: "Milchmeyer, in his important treatise of 1797..." (84); or: "...the ever perceptive Milchmeyer..." (148). Sandra Rosenblum, in her valuable *Performance Practices in Classic Piano Music* of 1988, is likewise dependent on Milchmeyer, citing *Die wahre Art* nearly three dozen times, referring to it as "little-known but important" (75). While it seems to me that at least Neumann sometimes overestimates Milchmeyer's intellect, this does not necessarily negate the veracity of much of his information (nor, by extension, of Neumann's conclusions).

Perhaps the greatest significance of Milchmeyer's book, though, is in its support of the most lasting musical innovation of his time: the development of the pianoforte, and its gradual replacement of both the harpsichord and the clavichord in solo, ensemble, and private music-making. Milchmeyer's manual may be the first in print to deal with the piano alone, rather than piano *and* harpsichord or clavichord. A French manual might be a bit earlier—Dusseck and Pleyel's *Nouvelle Méthode de Pianoforte* appeared the same year in Paris—but *Die wahre Art* is certainly "the first German pianoforte school, or in fact the first keyboard school in Germany to be exclusively based on the new instrument" (Kahl 235). Throughout the book, Milchmeyer praises the instrument and extols the virtues of a well-built model, while denigrating both the harpsichord and the clavichord. This earned him the remonstrance of Türk, who quotes Milchmeyer quite unsympathetically in his 1802 edition of *Klavierschule* (Türk 1982: xv-xviii). In his choice of instrument to champion,

Milchmeyer proved to be the more prophetic, even though he was obviously the lesser musician, and is all but forgotten today.

The details of his life are indeed quite sketchy. Works that mention him generally derive from just a few early sources, recycling the same bits of information (or misinformation). The first mention of him in a reference work appeared in Gerber's *Historisch-biographisches Lexikon der Tonkünstler* in 1790, in an entry that depends heavily on an earlier journal article that probably made his name known for the first time. Here is Gerber's account:

Milchmeyer (P. J.) Court artisan [*Mechanicus*—literally, mechanic] at Mainz, as well as member of the Musical Academy of Munich; was earlier in Paris, from 1770 to 1780, as keyboard- and harp-master. After his return to Mainz he invented a new mechanical harpsichord with 3 keyboards and 250 stops [*Veränderungen*], which was however not much larger than an ordinary harpsichord. The lower keyboard can be screwed out if 2 persons want to play on this instrument at the same time. The increase and decrease of the tones [volume?] is supposed to have been able to be expressed very well on this instrument. The stops imitate the flute, the bassoon, the clarinet, and the harp, etc. An extensive description of this instrument can be found in Cramer's Magazine [*Magazin der Musik*], first year of publication [1783], p. 1024. (1: 942)

The original article in Cramer's *Magazin* does describe a rather remarkable instrument, though it must be pointed out that the "250 stops" were formed by just ten or so different timbres, one on each keyboard at a time, with various combinations formed by the sound of two or three keyboards together.

From this account, it can be seen that Milchmeyer was intrigued by mechanical matters, and that he was intensely interested in the

possibilities of an expanded palette of sounds. Both these matters will later on figure prominently in *Die wahre Art*.

Gerber's new edition of 1812-14 adds very little new information, aside from mentioning that he identified himself as Court Musician to the Elector of Bavaria, and listing two published works, *Die wahre Art* and *Piano-Forte Schule* (also 1797), a progressive anthology of "the best pieces written for this instrument. Selected from the works of the most famous composers..." (3: 428-29). The article does give his full name, though, "Joh. Peter," thereby correcting the order of his initials in the first edition (though it is certainly possible that Milchmeyer himself sometimes interchanged them).

The *Biographie universelle* of Fétis (1835-44; 2nd ed. 1860-65) fills in a good deal more information, though it gets enough of it wrong to be suspect. Fétis gives his name as "Philippe-Jacques," for instance, and says that the review (by Knecht, mentioned above) was "*une analyse favorable*." In addition, he comments that the description of Milchmeyer's three-manual harpsichord in Cramer's magazine is "rather obscure" and "very hard to believe." However, if we can believe Fétis, then Milchmeyer was born in 1750 in Frankfurt am Main, son of a watchmaker (from whom he inherited his mechanical interest?). Fétis also tells of Milchmeyer's last decade:

Around 1803 Milchmeyer moved to Strasbourg, as a piano teacher: he had been stricken with apoplexy and could no longer walk when he arrived in this city. He gave lessons at home, seated in an armchair on castors, and had the reputation of being a good master, particularly for the position of the hand and fingering. M. Parmentier, who has done

research on this artist in the municipal records in Strasbourg, has found that he died in this city on the fifteenth of March, 1813, at the age of sixty-three years. The compositions of Milchmeyer are not known today. (6: 142)

Later books—Eitner, Riemann—add nothing new, and neither *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* nor *The New Grove* has an entry for Milchmeyer (though he is mentioned in three articles of *MGG*). Therefore, a more detailed chronology is impossible, and it cannot be said exactly when he lived in Lyon, nor when he moved to Dresden, nor just what his relationship was to the Elector of Bavaria, for whom he was supposedly court musician when he wrote his book. The Elector at that time was Karl Theodor, who had previously, from 1742 to 1777, been Elector of the Palatinate, during which time he was known as a patron of the arts. (One of his accomplishments was developing the Mannheim orchestra into the most celebrated in Europe.) After the Palatinate was reunited with Bavaria in 1777, he had to move from Mannheim to Munich, and “it was like a journey into exile for him” (Hubensteiner 318). Presumably he appreciated the work of Milchmeyer, who probably lived for a time in Munich in the 1780s, since he is first identified as *Hofmechanicus* [Court Artisan] to the Elector in the 1783 article on his three-keyboard harpsichord, but more exact dates are impossible to ascertain. In 1790 Gerber identified him as a member of the Musical Academy of Munich, though he then lived in Mainz, some 200 miles away; and in 1797 he was still Court Artisan for the Elector, though he then lived in Dresden, even farther away, and in another electorate.

At any rate, the misinformation concerning Milchmeyer has proliferated, with the result that the 11th edition of Riemann's *Musik Lexikon* can call him "Philipp Jakob" (2, pt. 1: 1179), and the 12th edition "Johann Peter" (2: 221); and a book as well researched as Rosamund E. M. Harding's *The Piano-Forte* can mention "Milchmeyer of Mainz" on page 91 and "Milchmeyer of Dresden" on page 99.

Such mistakes are trivial, of course, and do not detract from the value of *Die wahre Art das Pianoforte zu spielen* as a window into middle-class music practice at the time of Mozart, Haydn, and the young Beethoven. It is my hope that this translation of Milchmeyer's book will be of some benefit to scholars trying to learn more about this incredibly rich period in the history of music.