



Figure 1. Photograph of a Viennese orphica from the late eighteenth century (the instrument is framed in mahogany, has a three-octave keyboard with bone "white" keys and stained fruitwood "black" keys, and a Viennese action with the hammers rising through a slot in the soundboard; photograph from Sotheby's, London, *Catalogue of Good Musical Instruments*, July 1, 1976)

Beethoven as a Composer for the Orphica: A New Source for WoO 51

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IN AN UNPUBLISHED LETTER TO ANTON SCHINDLER, Beethoven's childhood friend Franz Gerhard Wegeler wrote that he could supply him with letters from Beethoven for Schindler's planned Beethoven biography and also made the following offer: "Further, two little pieces for the orphica, which Beethoven composed for my wife" ("Ferner, 2 Stückchen für die Orphica, die Bhven für meine Frau componirte").² Wegeler had married Eleonore von Breuning, who also had belonged to Beethoven's circle of friends in Bonn, in 1802. In the letter Wegeler referred to the two pieces, WoO 51, an *Allegro* in C Major and an *Adagio* in F Major, the latter of which remains incomplete.³ The last eleven measures were added by Ferdinand Ries, a pupil of Beethoven and a friend of the Wegeler family. The completed version was published in 1830 by the publishing house Franz Philipp Dunst in Frankfurt-am-Main under the title "Sonate pour le Piano-forte composée et dédiée à M^{lle} Eleonore de Breuning par L. van Beethoven."⁴ (See Figure 2.) Later, the work was titled "Leichte Klaviersonate."

From the letter quoted above, it can be deduced that the title of the first edition did not come from the composer but was an unauthorized addition by the publisher, presumably resulting from business considerations intended to

heighten the value of these short pieces. It is certainly out of the question that Wegeler gave Schindler false information since he would have had no reason to do so. Besides, the assertion that it is a fortepiano sonata is implausible, since it would mean the sonata would begin in C Major and end in F Major—an extremely unusual occurrence. Kinsky-Halm's catalog raisonné therefore made the presumption that "the entire last movement" (in C Major again) was missing. Wegeler's letter disproves any such speculation: Beethoven did not compose a third movement (or rather, a third piece).

According to recent research by Douglas Johnson, WoO 51 was composed around 1798,⁵ three years after the invention of the orphica, and is in fact written for an instrument with a remarkably small compass. (For an example of such an early instrument, see Figure 1.) The first piece has a range of only three octaves, from c to c³. In m. 14 of the second piece, one single G is required, and the ending added by Ries extends the required compass to C, making four octaves. Fortepianos of the 1790s normally had a compass of five octaves, usually from F₁ to f³—a range that Beethoven generally made full use of, as one can see in his fortepiano compositions of this decade. Why didn't WoO 51 similarly utilize the same range?

The inventor of the orphica, Karl Leopold Röllig (c. 1754-1804), was born in Hamburg and first became known as a traveling glass harmonica virtuoso. He settled in Vienna in 1791, obtaining a post as a servant in the Court Library the following year. He invented the orphica—a small portable fortepiano shaped like a harp—in 1795. Pro-

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duction of the instrument was protected for eight years by a license from the Austrian emperor.⁶ As an inventor, Röllig also further developed the *xänorphica*, a stringed keyboard instrument that was played with violin bows. In addition, he published compositions and theoretical writings and was employed by the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* in Leipzig. On March 4, 1804, Röllig died of old age (*Entkräftung*) in the Bürgerspital in Vienna.

Röllig promoted the orphica in a widely-circulated pamphlet, illustrated with three engravings, which even Beethoven's teacher Joseph Haydn owned.⁷ According to the booklet, the instrument was supposed to imitate the sound of a lute and received its name "because of the shape, which has some resemblance to the lyre of Orpheus." It is important to note that, in order to perform Beethoven's pieces correctly on the modern piano, they should be played an octave lower, since the orphica sounds one octave lower than written—similar, in fact, to the guitar. The compass of the pieces would thus correctly be specified from C₁ to c². Furthermore, the instrument also has so-called modifying crooks (*Modificationsbogen*), comparable to the *capo tasto* of the guitar, that make it possible to tune it up either a semitone, a whole tone, a tone and a half, or two whole tones. Röllig also observed that the orphica was tuned to church pitch (*Kirchenton*), which was one tone higher than the chamber pitch (*Kammerton*) at that time.⁸ As this difference disappeared in the early nineteenth century, this detail is no longer of any significance.

Röllig described the character of the orphica as follows: "By its nature, it is created for calmness and gentle feelings—for the night, friendship, and love." In addition, he recommended playing it "on the sofa, the chair, or sitting in the grass." It could be constructed either double-strung with wire strings or single-strung with gut strings, thus producing a wide variety of tone quality between different instruments. Apparently, the individual demands and financial standing of the buyers were considered in its production. The mechanics were amazing! Hubert Henkel, a specialist in historical keyboard instruments, remarks: "All orphicas I know have Viennese action (*Prellungenmechanik*), and thus are state-of-the-art in this respect. The simple ones have no dampers, while those of higher quality have a lever over-damper for each key and occasionally a flageolet stop, where a tapered piece of felt touches the middle of the string and thereby makes the higher octave sound."⁹ Other models are equipped with a lute stop. The orphica was not built by its inventor Karl Leopold Röllig himself, but by the Viennese fortepiano maker Joseph Dohnal and others.

In order to establish a larger following for the instrument, Röllig composed pieces for it himself, publishing these in volumes that also included arrangements by Mozart and Johann Friedrich Reichardt.¹⁰ The instrument also

became known outside Vienna. For example, a certain Stierner appeared with the "quite new and still too little known orphica" in a concert of the local society of music in Riga/Russia on January 30, 1798, and again in the theater of Riga on February 8.¹¹

According to Röllig's writings, he planned to make instruments with a compass of up to five-and-a-half octaves, although there is no evidence for the existence of orphicas of that size. Only individual instruments of two to four octaves have survived; no standard compass was adopted, and great variety exists between the lowest and highest tones from one particular instrument to another.¹² Unfortunately, none of the nine extant orphicas that were made during Röllig's lifetime has the compass required for Beethoven's WoO 51. However, if the F and the single C in the last measures of the second piece that were added by Ries are changed to higher notes, the orphicas in the collections of instruments in Nuremberg,¹³ Poznan,¹⁴ and Trondheim¹⁵ could be used. They have a sounding compass from G₁ to c² (Nuremberg) and from G₁ to f² (Poznan and Trondheim) respectively.

However, it is possible to play the works on several orphicas by fortepiano maker Joseph Klein, who was active in Vienna from 1813 to 1838. An orphica in Budapest has a label with the inscription "Joseph Klein in Wien."¹⁶ Other orphicas are so similar to this one that they can also be attributed to Klein. These are currently in the possession of museums in Boston,¹⁷ New York,¹⁸ Salzburg,¹⁹ and Vermillion.²⁰ With a compass of four octaves from C to c³, they are perfectly suited to Beethoven's pieces, including the additional notes added by Ries. In some important respects, however, they differ from the earlier orphicas from Dohnal's workshop, especially in that these instruments don't sound an octave lower than notated.

Röllig's pamphlet contains a section on the musical possibilities of his instrument, which reads like a manual for potential composers: "With regard to the choice of its pieces, the orphica is a cross between a lute and a fortepiano. Broken chords and arpeggios sound excellent, assisting the instrument's sustaining powers, and associate it with the lute, whereas the precision and melodiousness of its passages, mordents, trills, turns etc. make it close to the fortepiano." Further, it says: "The reason why pieces for orphica are easy to learn lies in the elastic vibrations of its strings: the sonorous bass tones suffice without the aid of multi-voiced chords. The keyboard writing is mostly divided between both hands, which support each other alternately, by means of which the arrangements acquire a brilliant quality, and are artistically intricate yet easy to perform." This is clearly demonstrated by Beethoven right at the beginning of the first piece (see the music example below and Figure 3).



SONATE

POUR LE

Pianoforte

composée et dédiée

à *Mlle Eleonore de Breuning.*

PAR

L. VAN BEETHOVEN.

Propriété de l'Éditeur.

Oeuvres Complètes de Piano.

1^{re} Partie N°64.

FRANCFORT s/M.

chez Fr. Ph. Dunst.

Figure 2. Title page of the first edition of the two pieces for the orphica composed for Eleonore von Breuning, published first as a sonata for the fortepiano by Dunst (from the collection of the Ira F. Brilliant Center for Beethoven Studies)

The image shows the first page of a musical score for a sonata movement in C major. The tempo is marked 'Allegro'. The score is written for piano (p) and includes various dynamic markings such as 'p', 'cres.', 'mf', 'f', and 'decres.'. The music is in 2/4 time and features a variety of rhythmic patterns, including sixteenth and thirty-second notes, as well as rests. The page is numbered 167 at the bottom center and ends with a double bar line and the initials 'K.S.' at the bottom right.

Figure 3. First page of music for the movement in C major of the "sonata" from the first edition (from the collection of the Ira F. Brilliant Center for Beethoven Studies)

Orphica

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Wegeler's remark that WoO 51 was composed for orphica now reveals these pieces in a different light.

This attribution also raises questions that are more difficult to answer. Unlike the fortepiano, there were no standards for constructing the orphica. Before Beethoven was able to compose anything for Eleonore, he would have had to ascertain the compass of her instrument. But how exactly did she come into possession of an orphica in Bonn at all? The orphica was built exclusively in Vienna and protected for eight years by Austrian emperor's license.²¹ Its reproduction was forbidden on pain of punishment. There is a printed warning attached to several instruments with the following text: "Whosoever copies the orphica or any of its constituent parts without the inventor's knowledge will violate the exclusive privilege to sell the orphica, granted to the inventor by his Majesty the Emperor and announced in the *Wiener Zeitung* on August 26, 1795, and will be liable not only to the loss of the copied instrument but also to a fine of one hundred ducats." ("Wer die Orphica ohne Mitwissen des Erfinders ganz oder in ihren wesentlichen Theilen nachmacht, verfällt zu Folge des von Sr. K.K. Majestät dem Erfinder für den Alleinverkauf erteilten, und am 26. August 1795 durch die Wienerzeitung bekanntgemachten Privilegii, nebst dem Verluste des nachgemachten Instruments noch in eine Geldstraffe von Hundert Kaiserlichen Dukaten."²²)

It seems natural to suppose that Beethoven himself recommended the instrument to Eleonore. Perhaps he also arranged its purchase and then composed two pieces for it. That, however, would presuppose that he considered the orphica worth recommending, which indeed it is not. Owing to its weight, it would not be advisable for a woman, at least, to use it like a lute; the specimen in Salzburg weighs 19.4 pounds (8.8 kg). The fact that the keys are narrower than those of a fortepiano is even more problematic. Koch's *Musikalisches Lexicon* describes it thus: "The keyboard is so small that it is only suitable for children, or at most for the hands of a lady."²³ The autograph itself does not indicate that Beethoven attached much importance to the instrument. It is neither carefully written nor clean, but seems rather to be the outcome of spontaneous inspiration. Both pieces are sparsely phrased and contain almost no performance markings. In this respect, the first edition of Franz Philipp Dunst was somewhat revised.

Perhaps a more plausible explanation is that Eleonore came to Vienna for a visit in 1798 and bought an orphica there herself. Naturally, she may have shown it to Beethoven, who then wrote these two little pieces for her. After all, Wegeler does not say that their composition was preceded by correspondence. Had there been any such letters from Beethoven, they would probably have been preserved and still be available today in the Collection Wegeler at the Beethoven-Haus. The supposition that Eleonore received the pieces directly from Beethoven's hands is also supported by the revision of the first edition by Gottfried Weber, who mentions that she was given the manuscript as a present in

the year 1796 (!) from the maestro himself, who was a close friend of her family.²⁴

While there is no proof that Eleonore von Breuning made a journey to Vienna, there were various relationships between Bonn and Vienna during these years, which make such a visit conceivable. Her brother Lorenz studied medicine in Vienna from 1794 to autumn 1797. Furthermore, one of his letters to Eleonore reveals that they had a female cousin living in Vienna at that time, although her name is not known: "Beethoven sends you many regards. He composes very beautifully and is held in great esteem here. He lives with a prince [Lichnowsky], who treats him quite like a friend. He shares the table with him, servants, a horse, etc. I often encountered him at my cousin's, where he, and the others, meet, and where we are never bored then." ("Beethoven läßt dich vielmahl grüßen. Er komponirt sehr schön, und steht hier in großem Ansehn. Er wohnt bei einem Fürsten, der ihn ganz als Freund behandelt. Er hat die Tafel mit ihm, Bedienten, ein Reitpferd, u.s.w. Ich traf ihn oft bey meiner Baaße, wo er, und die übrigen, hinkömmt, und wo wir dann nie lange Weile haben."²⁵) This cousin could even have been involved in the composition of these pieces, although it is unlikely that further information will be discovered on this point.

One further question remains, which will surely interest the reader most of all: what does an orphica sound like? The quest for a music example has thus far remained unsuccessful. There do not seem to be any recordings of this unusual instrument available. This was confirmed by Mats Krouthén, curator of the Ringve Museum in Trondheim, and also by musicologist Benjamin Vogel, who describes its sound as "reminiscent of another famous romantic instrument—the glass harmonica."²⁶

The lack of interest performers have shown in these pieces up until now is most likely due to an absence of literature for the orphica. However, the fortepianist Tobias Koch, a specialist in historical keyboard instruments, is now planning to record Beethoven's works for the orphica, making it a double premiere: the first ever recording of an orphica and the first "correct" recording of Beethoven's WoO 51.