

NAXOS

ROMANTIC
PIANO

THEODOR
KULLAK

Piano Works

Grande Sonate • Symphonie de Piano
Ballade • Scherzo • Impromptu-Caprice

Roman Fediurko

Musikakademie
in Liechtenstein



Romantic Piano • 7

Theodor Kullak (1818–1882)

Theodor Kullak was born on 12 September 1818 at Krotoschin, Prussia (now Krotoszyn, Poland) and died in Berlin on 1 March 1882. Kullak's father held the post of Landgerichts-sekretär, and Kullak received his initial piano lessons from Albrecht Agthe (a pupil of Johann Bernhard Logier). At the age of eight Kullak's playing caught the attention of Prince Anton Radziwill, under whose patronage he attended the grammar school in Züllichau (now Sulechów) and continued his music studies. When Kullak was eleven Radziwill arranged for him to perform at the Berlin Court, accompanying the 23-year-old soprano Henriette Sontag (herself previously a child prodigy). The concert was successful, Frederick William IV proved supportive, and a further concert in Breslau was well received.

Nevertheless, at 13, and a child prodigy no longer, Radziwill's patronage was withdrawn, leaving Kullak without regular music lessons for the remainder of his school years. Furthermore, parental pressure then resulted in Kullak relocating to Berlin in 1837 to study medicine. However, Kullak's desire to follow a musical career remained strong. Financial assistance from his friend Count von Ingenheim, plus the acquisition of some wealthy pupils recommended by von Ingenheim, allowed him to take theory and piano lessons from renowned Berlin musicians Siegfried Dehn and Wilhelm Taubert. Kullak completed his academic studies in Berlin (Dr Phil) in 1842, and following the active support of Hermine von Massow (Gräfin von der Schulenburg), Frederick William IV donated 400 thalers for Kullak to undertake a year's advanced musical studies.

Kullak opted to study piano in Vienna with the pre-eminent teacher Carl Czerny, Beethoven's pupil, while studying composition and harmony there with Otto Nicolai and Simon Sechter. Kullak undertook some concerts in Austria during this time, but on returning to Berlin in 1843 he was appointed piano teacher for Princess Anna of Prussia, Prince Karl's daughter, through the recommendations of Fräulein von Hellwig. It appears that Kullak's ease moving within the upper echelons of society, coupled with a sharp intellect, enabled him to tap into the rich vein of pupils for whom, in that era, piano playing was seen as a desirable social accomplishment. Kullak's talent in this field would help shape his subsequent career and he had soon acquired further aristocratic pupils.

With so stellar a career it was inevitable that Theodor Kullak received a wide variety of honours, such as honorary membership of the Royal Academy of Music in Florence. Equally inevitable was the large coterie of talented, ambitious young pianists who flocked to his door for guidance and help in their own careers. These included Hans Bischoff, Alexander Ilyinsky, Moritz Moszkowski, Julius Reubke, Nikolay Rubinstein and Xaver and Philipp Scharwenka.

The breadth of Kullak's musical and educational interests also extended to his fellow musicians, and in 1844 he founded the Tonkünstler-Verein in Berlin. Now the Tonkünstlerverband, it continues to support its members in their professional work and publicly advocates for their interests with authorities, institutions and other organisations. In 1846, aged 28, Kullak was appointed pianist to the Prussian Court. The position would have consolidated his reputation among the upper circle of Berlin musicians, although not all holders of the title, such as Prince Louis Ferdinand of Prussia (1772–1806) and Alfred Grünfeld (1852–1924), resonate strongly today.

By 1850 Kullak had achieved sufficient influence to found the Berliner Musikschule, together with Julius Stern and Adolf Bernhard Marx. Following many changes over the years it eventually became the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst ('Berlin State School of Music and the Performing Arts') in 1966, merging into the Universität der Künste ('University of the Arts') in 2001. Clearly, self-confidence was not a quality Kullak lacked and five years later, in 1855, following disagreements, he resigned and formed his own school, the Neue Akademie der Tonkunst, taking some of his colleagues with him. This proved a successful venture and was colloquially known as 'Kullak's Academy'. It had a particularly high reputation for training pianists and became the largest private music school in Germany. At its zenith there were approximately a hundred teachers and eleven hundred students.

Kullak's achievement can be measured against the fact that the period was one where conservatories were springing up in profusion across Europe and America. Frankfurt's Hoch Konservatorium, for example, found itself in competition with the city's Raff Konservatorium which had been established by dissatisfied Hoch Konservatorium staff in a similar fashion to the way the Neue Akademie der Tonkunst in Berlin had split from the Berliner Musikschule. From today's perspective it is hard to appreciate the immense popularity of pianos and piano playing worldwide during Kullak's lifetime.

Kullak's brother Adolph (1823–1862) taught at the Neue Akademie der Tonkunst for some time. He had studied philosophy in Berlin and, at the same time, studied music with Adolf Bernhard Marx. He authored three significant volumes: *The Art of Touch* (1855), *The Musically Beautiful* (1858) and *The Aesthetics of Piano Playing* (1861). Their historical significance lies in Adolph Kullak's allusions to the use of relaxed arm weight in playing. At the time this ran contrary to the then prevalent emphasis on the development of finger strength above all else but was later adopted very widely. In *The Art of Touch* Adolph Kullak writes: '...nothing is for the pianist of greater importance than legato passage playing and everything else is built on this foundation... Often the whole power of the arm is required to influence the tone production supported by the wrist and fingers.'

Given their closeness in the same institution, it is highly likely Theodor Kullak shared some of his brother Adolph's views concerning piano technique, including relaxed arm weight. Four didactic works by Theodor Kullak are considered significant in this context: *Schule des Oktavenspiels*, Op. 48 (1841), *Schule der Fingerübungen*, Op. 61 (c. 1850), *Ratschläge und Studien*, Op. 74 (c. 1852) and *Materialien für den Elementar-Klavier-Unterricht* (c. 1859). Kullak also edited and annotated many piano compositions, including most of Chopin's and Mendelssohn's piano works. Often appearing in publications by Schirmer and Peters, these works and editions are still encountered frequently today, a lasting tribute to his enduring legacy.

Theodor Kullak's son Franz (1844–1913) received his musical education at his father's Neue Akademie der Tonkunst and completed his studies with Karl Wehle and Henry (Charles) Litolff in Paris. He soon grew to dislike giving concerts, and instead taught at the Neue Akademie der Tonkunst where he succeeded his father as director upon his father's death. In 1900 health reasons prevented him from continuing with another school, the Akademie für höheres Klavierspiel, which he had founded in 1891 after closing the original Neue Akademie der Tonkunst in 1890.

Sir George Grove, a contemporary of Kullak and famous for his *Dictionary of Music and Musicians* wrote of the composer: 'He has devoted his attention principally to the "drawing-room" style of composition and has published many transcriptions and arrangements for the piano, which are very popular.' Furthermore, with his sharp intellect, society connections, burgeoning music school and pupils eager to forge pianistic careers, it is unsurprising that Kullak's compositional style was middle-of-the-road for his time. Nevertheless, brilliantly assembled and eloquently expressed, the music contains an abundance of persuasive pianistic colours, well worth hearing today. Although Grove goes on to mention Kullak's *Piano Concerto in C minor*, Op. 55 and his *Trio for Piano and Strings*, Op. 77 the remaining works he cites are entirely for piano solo. Kullak's opus numbers rise to Op. 126, indicating immense compositional industry, considering all his other commitments. Doubtless an ambition to maintain the role of pianist-composer, then seen as the height of musical attainment, would also have played a part.

Grande Sonate in F sharp minor, Op. 7 (c. 1842)

I. Allegro

A short introduction, including a menacing rising angular motif, heralds the first subject in F sharp minor. This is unsettled, turbulent material replete with octave writing, and distinctly dramatic. The music subsides for the entry of the second subject in A major, a thoughtful, lyrical theme with some attractive accompanying harmonies and triplet decoration. The development section neatly juxtaposes the two subjects producing conflicted mood changes and some colourful key modulations. The initial introduction, with its angular motif, and first subject then return in F sharp minor followed by the second subject, now glowing with confidence in F sharp major. A reflective coda finishes the movement, which has followed traditional sonata form to the letter.

II. Adagio

Simple ternary A–B–A form binds this movement together in a direct but restrained appeal to the listener's emotions. The first section theme, reminiscent of Mendelssohn's *Songs without Words*, comprises a pensive cantabile melody in D major. The modulatory, rather troubled, middle section contains references to the first movement's angular motif, as if reminiscing, before the first section returns.

III. Finale: Allegro

In Kullak's day it was well-nigh impossible to escape Beethoven's influence and the initial, exposition section of this agitated sonata form movement contains two main subject areas, both with strong allusions to the finale of Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*. In particular, listeners would have recognised Kullak's repeated chord material in the second subject which also makes its presence felt in the development and recapitulation sections. Such a comparison would have done Kullak's work no harm, and might have helped listeners to better empathise with the drama Kullak wished to create.

Symphonie de Piano, Op. 27 (pub. c. 1848)

I. Allegro

This work has symphonic proportions with four movements rather than the three customarily allotted to a sonata. The first movement brims with high spirits redolent of Schumann when in energetic 'Florestan' mood. The final movement of Schumann's *Piano Concerto* and first movement of his '*Rhenish*' *Symphony* come to mind. Indeed, Kullak's work predates the '*Rhenish*' *Symphony* by two years. The first subject is driven forward by insistent triplet accompaniment rhythms while the second subject is marked *dolce e semplice* ('sweetly and simply').

II. Andante con moto

This march-like movement has operatic touches reminiscent of the Italian style of the period. The bell-like highest registers of the piano are effectively exploited in the G major first subject while a more chordal second subject in D seamlessly returns to the repeat statements of both first and second subjects, with a surprise key change to E major for the latter.

III. Scherzo: Allegro vivace

The driving energetic quality of Beethoven's symphonic scherzo and trio movements is reflected here. There is a calmer C major trio middle section with more static harmonies based on a tonic pedal which contrasts with the outer two sections that capture the essentially rhythmic nature of Beethoven's scherzos. A two-quaver-and-crotchet rhythmic motif forms a memorable hallmark of this movement.

IV. Finale: Allegro con fuoco

Catchy motifs and energetic forward momentum building to the close of the whole work characterise this sonata-form movement. Kullak's first subject contains a jaunty trill and turn motif that plays an increasingly important role alongside the bell-like second subject motif, which appears first in G flat major and towards the end returns in B major. Kullak's key scheme is quite adventurous and really comes alive in the lengthy development section where the two motifs and other material move through a wide variety of keys and are treated contrapuntally at times.

Ballade, Op. 54 (pub. c. 1849)

Informed listeners would likely have recognised similarities with Chopin's earlier well-known *Ballade No. 4 in F minor*. Kullak's work, however, would have been more accessible for better than average pianists of the day to play while still giving plenty of fantasy and colour. A whimsical first subject in G major precedes the dramatic and brilliant second subject in E minor, leading to a development and recapitulation in the usual manner of sonata form.

Scherzo in G minor, Op. 96 (pub. 1856)

This showy piece would have been rewarding to play for many pianists of Kullak's time, being well laid out for the keyboard and sprinkled with brilliant pianistic effects. Kullak's penchant for short dotted rhythmic motifs adds to the vigour and panache. The structure follows sonata-form pattern without a development section.

Impromptu-Caprice in E flat major, Op. 97 (pub. 1856)

There are Mendelssohnian echoes in this graceful piece of drawing room music, as Sir George Grove would have called it. Simple tripartite A–B–A form allows for the first section material's E flat major elegance (Kullak asks for *Il basso arpeggiato con somma eleganza*) to be contrasted with the middle section's darker, more serious mood in C minor.

Rodney Smith

Roman Fediurko



Photo: Evgenii Evtiukhov

Roman Fediurko (b. 2004, Kyiv, Ukraine) completed his early musical education with Galina Kotsyuba in 2021, and has since been studying at the Kunstuniversität Graz with Milana Chernyavska. A scholar of the Internationale Musikakademie in Liechtenstein, Fediurko's career has been marked by a string of First Prize wins in international competitions, including the Bösendorfer and Yamaha USASU International Piano Competition and the International Robert Schumann Competition. At just 18 years old he won the Gold Medal and five special prizes at the prestigious Horowitz Competition, and this success has led to an international career, establishing him as one of the most promising artistic personalities of his generation. Fediurko has appeared at the Sommerliche Musiktage Hitzacker, DMZ OPEN International Music Festival, Schumannfest Düsseldorf, Bachfest Leipzig and Bolzano Festival Bozen, and has performed on prestigious international stages, including the Elbphilharmonie Hamburg (Steinway Prizewinner Concerts series), Konzerthaus and Musikverein in Vienna, Salle Cortot in Paris, Steinway Piano Gallery Stockholm, Beethoven-Haus Bonn, Kunsthaus Zürich, Victoria Hall in Geneva, Goyang Aram Nuri Arts Center, NDR Konzerthaus in Hanover and TivoliVredenburg in Utrecht.

The German pianist and teacher Theodor Kullak, a piano student of Carl Czerny among others, enjoyed a stellar career. His transcriptions, arrangements and studies have proved enduring, while his lesser-known original works contain an abundance of persuasive pianistic colours. The pensive and dramatic *Grande Sonate in F sharp minor* reveals the influence of Mendelssohn and Beethoven, and the *Symphonie de Piano* displays elements of Schumann as well as Kullak's fondness for Italian models. Virtuoso panache and drawing room grace are also represented in the smaller works in this selection.

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	Grande Sonate in F sharp minor, Op. 7 (c. 1842)	23:33
1	I. Allegro	11:07
2	II. Adagio	6:45
3	III. Finale: Allegro	5:41
	Symphonie de Piano, Op. 27 (pub. c. 1848)	29:19
4	I. Allegro	7:36
5	II. Andante con moto	9:13
6	III. Scherzo: Allegro vivace	4:12
7	IV. Finale: Allegro con fuoco	8:18
8	Ballade, Op. 54 (pub. c. 1849)**	6:32
9	Scherzo in G minor, Op. 96 (pub. 1856)*	6:17
10	Impromptu-Caprice in E flat major, Op. 97 (pub. 1856)*	5:55

***WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING **FIRST COMMERCIAL RECORDING**

Roman Fediurko, Piano

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