

J. K. Mertz

(1806-1856)

Divertissement über Motive der Oper: Der Prophet (Meyerbeer), Op. 32

Flute (Violin), Viola, and Guitar

Edited by Brian Torosian



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Undocumented anonymous portrait of J. K. Mertz.

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Joseph Kaspar Mertz was one of the leading virtuoso guitarists and composers during the middle of the nineteenth century.¹ He was born Casparus Josephus Mertz to poor parents on August 17, 1806 in Pressburg, Hungary (presently Bratislava, capitol of the Slovak Republic).² He began to play the guitar and flute as a youth and was compelled to give music lessons at an early age. The earliest record of his activity as a concert artist is from 1834 when Mertz performed in a Pressburg concert organized by Johann Nepomuk Hummel, himself a native of that city.³ Mertz left his birthplace ca. 1840.⁴ He appeared in a concert at the Hofburgtheater in Vienna in November 1840 under the patronage of the Empress Carolina Augusta. The success of this concert introduced Mertz to the Viennese social, political, and artistic elite. Attesting to his early Viennese triumphs, guitar music by Mertz was first published during this same period by the prestigious Haslinger publishing house of Vienna.

Mertz embarked on a concert tour in 1841, performing in Austria, Poland, and Russia. In Dresden in 1842, he met the pianist Josephine Plantin who was herself on a concert tour. They were married on December 14 of that year in Prague. The couple returned to Vienna where they were both active as teachers, composers, and concert artists, often performing duets of their own composition for guitar and piano. Among the students of Mertz at this time was Johann Dubez (1828-1891).⁵

Mertz was diagnosed with neuralgia in 1846, for which he was prescribed strychnine. Having no familiarity with the drug, Josephine dispensed the entire prescription in one dose and predictably the guitarist's health weakened. After nearly 18 months of convalescence Mertz regained his health and resumed his concert career in February 1848. The composer was apparently able to continue preparing material for publication during his illness. In 1846 and 1847 Haslinger published the first 10 *Hefte* of his *Bardenklänge*, *Op. 13*, the *Schule für die Guitarre*, *Opern-Revue*, *Op. 8*, *Nos. 10-19*, and *VI Ländler*, *Op. 12*.

The Russian nobleman and guitarist Nikolai Petrovich Makaroff (1810-1890) first met J. K. Mertz in Vienna in 1851.⁶ Makaroff provided a brief description of the composer's countenance in his memoirs: "Mertz was a tall man, about 50, neither fat nor thin, very modest and with no hint of a pretense to greatness about him."⁷ Makaroff later added: "What

¹ The essays by the composer's widow Josephine Mertz regarding her late husband, reminiscences of Mertz by Nikolai Makaroff, and the dissertation on the composer's life and works provide most of the composer's biographical information. See Josephine Mertz, "Life of the Late J. K. Mertz," trans. J. M. Miller, *Cadenza* 1, no. 3 (January-February 1895): 4; idem, "Johann Kaspar Mertz," *Mitteilungen* 2, no. 12 (December 1901): 83-85; 3, no. 1 (February 1902): 9-12; Nikolai Makaroff, "The Memoirs of Makaroff," trans. V. Bobri and N. Ulreich, *Guitar Review* 3, 5 (1947): 56-59 and 109-113; Matanya Opee, "The Memoirs of Makaroff--A Second Look," *Soundboard* 9 (Fall, 1982): 226-233; Astrid Stempnik, "Caspar Joseph Mertz: Leben und Werk des letzten Gitarristen im österreichischen Biedermeier" (Ph.D. diss., University of Berlin, 1989); and Brian Torosian, "Mertz In America" (D.M. diss., Northwestern University, 2003).

² There has been some confusion regarding the names that the initials J. K. actually represented. The composer used only the initials J. K. throughout his career. The composer's widow identified Mertz as "Josef Kaspar" in her biographical essays of her late husband, while most German publications in the first half of the twentieth century refer to the composer as Johann Kaspar. According to a baptismal record located by Astrid Stempnik, the composer's name was Caspar Joseph Mertz. The present edition retains the initials the composer used throughout his career.

³ For the dates and locations of Mertz's known concert activity see Stempnik, "Caspar Joseph Mertz," 92-94.

⁴ Josephine Mertz specifies 1840 as the year of the guitarist's arrival in Vienna, but it is likely that Mertz occasionally traveled from Pressburg to Vienna before 1840, approximately a forty-mile journey to the west from his birthplace. The flooding of the Danube in March, 1838, had catastrophic effects on western Hungary, and may have been a factor in Mertz's relocation. In a letter dated September 12, 1829, Chopin includes the name Mertz in a brief list of Viennese musicians with whom he had become acquainted during this brief stay: "So, in one day, I made the acquaintance with Meyseder, Gyrowetz, Lachner, Kreutzer, Schupanzig [*sic*], with Mertz, with Levi; in a word with all the big musicians of Vienna." There are however no other known reports of Mertz in Vienna until 1840, the time of his first known concert activity and publications. See Henryk Opienski, ed., *Chopin's Letters*, trans. E. L. Voynich (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1931; reprint, New York: Dover, 1988), 65 (page reference is to the reprint edition). It is entirely possible, of course, that the great Polish master was referring to someone other than J. K. Mertz, as only the last name is indicated. Hector Berlioz was most likely not referring to J. K. Mertz in a letter about Berlioz's concerts in Brussels that were to take place in the middle of December, 1842. At this time J. K. Mertz was in distant Prague for his wedding. See Ernest Newman, ed., *Memoirs of Hector Berlioz*, trans. Rachel and Eleanor Holmes (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1932; reprint, New York: Dover, 1966), 248 (page reference is to the reprint edition).

⁵ Two concert solos for 10-string guitar by Dubez were published in Vienna ca. 1853, his *Fantaisie sur des motifs hongrois* and *Fantaisie sur des motifs de l'Opéra: Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Op. 2*. Copies are located in the Rischel and Birket-Smith Collection of the Danish National Library and the Bickford Collection (International Guitar Research Archive in the Music Department at California State University, Northridge). Manuscripts of Dubez are preserved in the Boije Collection of the Statens Musikbibliotek, Stockholm. He is identified as harpist of the Countess Jeanne Esterházy on the title page of his *Op. 2*.

⁶ The date of this meeting is identified in Matanya Opee, "The Memoirs of Makaroff - A Second Look," *Soundboard* 9 (Fall, 1982): 231 [recte 230].

⁷ Makaroff, "Memoirs," *Guitar Review* 3 (1947): 8 (page 58 in *Guitar Review* bound volume).

DIVERTISSEMENT ÜBER MOTIVE DER OPER: DER PROPHET (MEYERBEER), OP. 32

J. K. MERTZ (1806-1856)

Maestoso

FLUTE (VIOLIN)
VIOLA
GUITAR

p *cresc.* *sf* *p*

Detailed description: This system contains the first seven measures of the piece. The Flute/Violin part starts with a rest, followed by a melodic line with dynamics *p* and *cresc.*. The Viola part has a similar melodic line with dynamics *p* and *cresc.*. The Guitar part features a rhythmic accompaniment with dynamics *ff*, *p*, *cresc.*, *sf*, and *p*. Fingerings are indicated for the guitar part.

Andantino non troppo. (Romanze: O gebt!)

8
14
21

p *sf* *p* *cresc.* *dolce* *cresc.* *3* *dolce* *p* *cresc.* *3* *rallent.* *stringendo* *rallent.*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 8 through 24. Measure 8 is the start of the 'Andantino non troppo' section. The Flute/Violin part has a melodic line with dynamics *p* and *cresc.*. The Viola part has a similar melodic line with dynamics *p* and *cresc.*. The Guitar part features a rhythmic accompaniment with dynamics *sf*, *p*, *cresc.*, *dolce*, *p*, *cresc.*, and *rallent.*. Triplet markings (*3*) are present in measures 14 and 21. The section concludes with *stringendo* and *rallent.* markings.