

80. Quartetto pour 4 cors

Jean Baptiste Édouard Du Puy

(ca. 1771-1822)

ed. William Melton

Du Puy, Jean Baptiste Édouard

(born ca. 1770; died 3 April 1822 in Stockholm)

In just over fifty years of crowded existence Jean Baptiste Édouard Louis Camille Du Puy was by turns a violinist, singer, actor, conductor, composer, theater director, and military hero. Improbably, he excelled at all of these pursuits. A reckless disregard for what was politic and a profligate attitude towards relationships – one biography was titled *Don Juan of the North* – often negated his accomplishments. Even his birth is controversial: older sources maintain that he was born in the village of Corcelles in the canton of Neuchâtel, Switzerland, while the current Grove entry asserts his birthplace was Baigery in Navarre, southwest France.

Whether Swiss or French born, the consensus is that Édouard Du Puy was raised by an uncle in Geneva and given a liberal education influenced by the city's tradition of Freethinkers. The young man left for Paris in 1786 to study violin and piano, the latter with the distinguished Czech composer Jan Ladislav Dusík (Dussek). Two years later he was made leader of Prince Heinrich of Prussia's orchestra in Rheinsberg, occasionally fitting in composition lessons with C. F. C. Fasch in Berlin. But in 1792, according to scholar Klaus Neiiendam, Du Puy 'was banished from Rheinsberg because, in the spirit of Voltaire, he interrupted a Sunday service by riding into church on horseback'. He concertised throughout Germany and Poland before landing in Stockholm, initially engaged as leader of the Royal Court Orchestra, but then as an opera singer (a baritone with a wide range that extended to both bass and tenor) and member of the Royal Academy of Music. He also entered into a affair with Sophie Hagman, the former mistress of Prince Frederick Adolf. In 1799 Du Puy began declaiming republican sentiments from the stage and was exiled from Sweden.

He landed in Copenhagen, where his diverse skills gained him employment. The 1806 premiere of his Singspiel *Ungdom og galskab* (*Youth and Folly*) made him a popular sensation. He served as both stage director and singer of the title role in the first Scandinavian performance of *Don Giovanni* on 6 May 1807 (Constanze Mozart was in the audience and allegedly approved). Du Puy demonstrated personal bravery in joining the free militia to oppose Vice Admiral Nelson's attack on Copenhagen in 1801, and fighting again during Admiral Gambier's bombardment in 1807 (for which the musician earned a battlefield promotion). Unfortunately, a dalliance with Crown Princess Charlotte Frederika (wife of the later King Christian VIII) led to Du Puy's hurried departure from Denmark in 1809.

His first stop was Paris, but his political fortunes underwent an improbable sea change just a year later when Napoleon's Marshal Bernadotte became King of Sweden. Again in Stockholm, Du Puy sang many performances as well as conducting, the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* noting in 1812, 'The appearance of this Kapellmeister onstage came as a surprise for us, but it must be said that Mr D also performs this task splendidly'. He served as an honoured professor of music until he was felled by a stroke on 3 April 1822. Mozart's Requiem was played at Du Puy's funeral at Saint James' Church next to the Royal Opera (it was the work's Swedish premiere), and he was buried at Saint Johannes cemetery in central Stockholm. 'He was a man of true artistic genius', eulogised the *AMZ*, 'high culture, and profound, diverse attainments'. In subsequent years Du Puy was often remembered in the press, a monument was erected in 1866 by the Royal Music Society, a ballet based on his life was produced in 1871, and biographical treatments have been many.

Du Puy's compositions consisted of multiple stage works, incidental music for plays, a Requiem, music for royal coronations and funerals, concerti for violin/woodwinds/and horn (23 November 1816 saw Du Puy's Concerto for Horn played by the virtuoso Hirschfeld in Stockholm), choruses, songs, piano works, and chamber music. The latter included the more typical string quartets and violin sonatas, but also a horn trio and a *Quartetto pour 4 cors* that makes rigorous demands of performers' articulation. The manuscript of Du Puy's *Quartetto* is housed in The Royal Library, Copenhagen (C II, 26, 1915-16.1771), and is displayed online at http://img.kb.dk/ma/ukam/dauprat_st_3_4_6tuors_03-m.pdf

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Text by William Melton