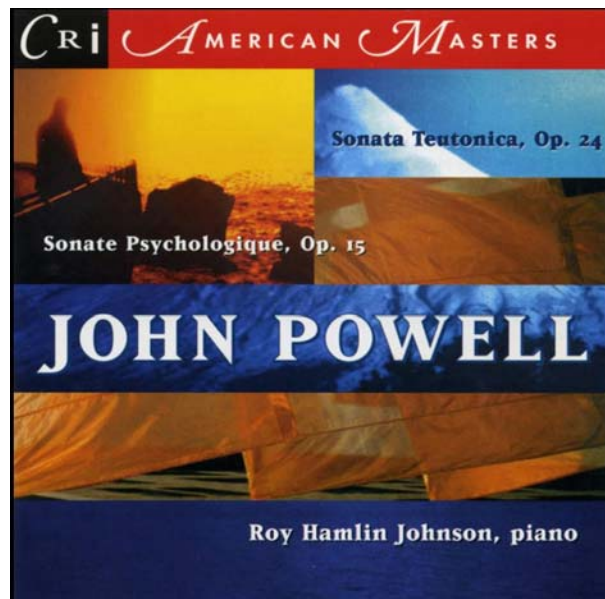


NWCR704

John Powell

Sonata Teutonica / Sonate Psychologique



<i>Sonata Teutonica, Op. 24</i> (1913)	(42:27)
1. I. Allegro, molto sostenuto	(11:33)
2. II. Andante sostenuto [Variations on the German Folksong "O alte Burschenherrlichkeit"] Scherzo; Andante quasi Trio; Tempo di Scherzo; Tempo del Thema	(18:27)
3. III Tempo di Marcia; Meno mosso; Tempo I; Adagio molto con espressione; Tempo I; Molto maestoso	(12:47)
<i>Sonate Psychologique, Op. 15</i> (1906)	(31:21)
"The Wages of Sin Is Death" — <i>St. Paul</i>	
4. I Kampf [Struggle]: Grave, Allegro agitato	(10:02)
5. II Nocturne, Hingebung [Submission]: Andante; Allegro brioso	(6:59)
6. III Scherzo diabolique, "In den Klauen" ["In The Clutches"]	(4:39)
7. IV Thanatopsis [Contemplation of Death]: Tempo di Marcia Funebre, un poco meno mosso	(9:41)
Roy Manlin Johnson, piano	

Total playing time: 74:17

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Notes

John Powell (b 1882, Richmond, Virginia; d 1963, Charlottesville), was a major pianist and a respected composer of, along with many smaller works, a symphony, a violin concerto, a piano concerto, an orchestral suite, two string quartets, two violin and piano sonatas, two collections of folk-song settings for voice and piano, four piano sonatas, three piano suites, and one widely-known work, *Rhapsodie Negre* (1918) for piano and orchestra.

Powell's father was headmaster at a private school for girls; his mother, a staff member there. His sister, Elizabeth Powell Brockenbrough, became his first piano teacher. He later studied with a Liszt pupil, Frederic Charles Hahr, and then, in Vienna, with Theodor Leschetizky, having meanwhile graduated from the University of Virginia in two years as a Phi Beta Kappa.

During the years preceding World War I he centered his career in London, where he numbered many distinguished persons among his friends, including the Lord and Lady Plymouth, the Hon. Arthur Balfour, the Virginia-born Lady Nancy Astor, and the novelist Joseph Conrad.

After the war broke out, Powell returned to the United States to continue his concertizing and composing. Inspired by Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, he completed *Rhapsodie Negre*, which was an instant success, and with which he toured Europe as soloist with the New York Symphony under Walter Damrosch.

In 1936, he and his wife retired to an estate near Charlottesville, where he finished the folksong-based *Symphony in A* (1945). His numerous friends in Richmond purchased for him his former home, so that he could return

there and give lecture-recitals and master classes for the musical community.

Sonata Teutonica, Op. 24 (1913) took four years to compose, but its history goes back to the turn of the century: in one of his lecture-recitals, Powell traced its beginnings to his German literature courses at the University of Virginia. The sonata represents not only a solution to formidable structural problems, but also an epic salute to the Romantic ideal. It was premiered by Benno Moiseiwitsch in London in 1914, where it was termed "a powerful piece ... extremely well constructed, intensely vigorous and—in its last movement—concise, straightforward and virile" (*Sunday Times*). Powell played it in New York in 1917 and several times thereafter, but it was performed by only one other pianist—Aline Van Barentzen (Richmond, 1967)—before Roy Hamlin Johnson's 1975 revision afforded the possibility of reducing its length from more than an hour to around forty-three minutes.

Reviews of Johnson's 1977 CRI recording supported the value of an abridgement aimed at establishing a place for the *Sonata Teutonica* in the modern piano repertoire. The work was praised as "...extremely well written ... quite beautiful" (*The New York Times*, Ericson), "...a winner ... grand in conception and beautifully worked out" (*The New Yorker*, Sargeant), "...reminiscent of Liszt in his more effective moments ... [with] a grandeur and almost orchestral scope and sound" (*High Fidelity Magazine*, Lowens), "...logically and coherently organized, with many moments for dramatic digital display" (*The Baltimore Sun*, Croche), "...a real beauty ... a massive work squarely in the romantic vein and the grand tradition." (*The New Records*, Shupp). The revision was

published by Oxford University Press in 1983.

Powell himself wrote the program notes for the first performance (but used the pseudonym “Richard Brockwell,” derived from “Brockenbrough” and “Powell”). He explained that the word “Teutonica” was intended to embrace not so much a race as a type of mind and character (Leonardo, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, Goethe, Beethoven) that was motivated by a “sense of Oneness.” This sense is summed up in the motto on the sonata’s title page: “The Ocean is in the Drop as the Drop is in the Ocean.”

The sonata’s three movements, he continues, respectively handle the subject from the standpoint of the ideal (the “emotional effect of the sense of Oneness”), the temperamental (the “universal Teutonic temperament”), and the actual (“the triumphant result in the world of outer activity of this principle acting upon this nature”). He points out that the thematic material of all the movements “is often fundamentally identical [which] gives great possibilities for unity of the whole.”

The first movement is in sonata form, in which the “Theme of Oneness” resembles the beginning of the folksong “Shenandoah,” and the final portion of the second theme comes from the German folksong, “O alte Burschenherrlichkeit” (also the principal theme of the next movement). A “victory” motive, which interrupts the progress of the development section, forms the basis for the principal subject of the last movement.

The second movement is really three movements (variations, scherzo, and andante); but since all three segments are actually variations on the same theme, “there is no lack of unity, great as the diversity of the treatment maybe.”

The finale is a rondo which introduces a March Theme and a Chorale Theme—based on the motto “Frisch, froh, fromm, frei” (fresh, joyous, pious, free) of the *Turnverein* to which Powell belonged during his student days in Vienna. It also recapitulates the first Oneness Theme and the German folksong, and, with suitable transformations of these, reaches a mighty and majestic close.

“Brockwell” adds that the range and subtlety of this work might have given it symphonic scope; however, when faultlessly played in a small hall, he expects its pianistic sound will “rival the color and power of even a large orchestra.”

Powell began *Sonate Psychologique, Op. 15* in Richmond in 1904, the year his mother died; he completed it in Vienna a year and a half later, after resuming his studies with

Leschetizky. In 1908, it was dedicated “To Warrington Dawson” (a boyhood acquaintance and the founder of The United Press of America in Paris), who had been of great help in publicizing the budding concert pianist’s all-important debut recitals in Berlin, Vienna, Paris, and London. Along with its dedication the piece received its French title, which was originally given in German, as was its motto “On the text of St. Paul: ‘The Wages of Sin is Death’.”

Letters to his mother that Powell wrote from Vienna include discussions about St. Paul, and descriptions of Richard Strauss conducting *Death and Transfiguration* and of Rachmaninov performing his “beautiful new [Second] Concerto.” In addition to these evident influences, we have Powell in 1948 terming *Psychologique* “Lisztian.”

The programmatic movement headings are consistent with Powell’s personal preoccupation with his subject: I. Kampf [Struggle]; II. Nocturne, Hingebung [Resignation] III. Scherzo diabolique, “In den Klauen” [“In the Clutches”]; IV. Thanatopsis [Contemplation of death], Tempo di Marcia Funebre. Particularly striking here are the first movement’s Straussian second theme, the echoes of Rachmaninov in the middle section of the second movement, the pianistic figurations of the Scherzo, and the song-like Trio and brilliant coda of the Funeral March.

Roy Hamlin Johnson (b 1929, Beckley, W. Va.) is a professor emeritus of piano, University of Maryland, College Park. He studied with Walter Bricht at the Mason School of Music in Charleston, with Sandor Vas at the Eastman School of Music where he received an artist’s diploma and a D.M.A. degree, and with Yves Nat at the Paris Conservatory on a Fulbright Award.

Before beginning his teaching career (University of Kansas, Lawrence), he served under Erich Leinsdorf as official pianist for the Rochester Philharmonic. He has appeared as pianist many times on MBS and National Public Radio, has edited and published music by John Powell, and has received recognition as a composer: his first composition for cast-bell carillon (*Summer Fanfares*, 1956) is quoted in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 1980. Much of his research and composing has been supported by awards from the University of Maryland, College Park; the John Powell Foundation; the University of California, Berkeley (he received the Berkeley Medal in 1983); the American Foundation; the National Endowment for the Arts; and ASCAP.

Production Notes

From CRI SD 368:

Sonata Teutonica, Op. 24

Produced by Carter Harman. Recorded by David Hancock in January 1977. Published by Oxford University Press, Inc. 1983.

From CRI SD 505:

Sonate Psychologique, Op. 15

Recorded by David Hancock, New York City, October 1983. Produced by Carter Harman and Eve Beglarian. Unpublished manuscript, facsimile available from the Manuscripts Department, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA 11901.

Original recordings were made possible through a grant from the John Powell Foundation.

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