

It is amazing that Theodor Kirchner did not compose more for piano four hands. Indeed, he was a master in this field: between 1873 and 1888 he published 24 volumes with works by Beethoven, Brahms, Dvorák, Grieg, Stephen Heller, Joachim Raff, Anton Rubinstein and Schumann that he had set for this combination. Further transcriptions appeared for two pianos and four or eight hands. Kirchner always enjoyed the intimate interaction of playing such works with pupils and friends such as Mathilde Wesendonck and Clara Schumann, and yet he left us only a few original works for piano duo. In addition to the present “Twelve Original Compositions for the Pianoforte four hands” first published by Peters in Leipzig as op. 57 in 1881, we have only the Marches op. 94 (BP 1379) and the Waltzes op. 104 (BP 1266), in addition to various arrangements of his own works, such as the String Quartet op. 20, the Waltzes op. 23 and the Piano Quartet op. 84. In addition, Kirchner also composed works for two pianos, namely the Variations op. 85 and the Waltzes op. 86 (BP 2211).

Shortly after publication, on 27 March 1881, the pianist and composer Elisabeth von Herzogenberg, wife of the composer Heinrich, wrote to Brahms about the new work: “Kirchner has written highly graceful and pretty piano pieces that are truly for four hands, naturally another shock. He does them like a rabbit: over and over little cute bunnies keep appearing; nevertheless everything that he does has such grace and is so wonderfully musical that it does good, compared with all the dilettante trash.”

Arnold Niggli’s review of Kirchner’s “Most Recent Compositions” was printed in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* of 27 September 1882: “The compositions op. 57–61, all published in the frame of one year, are introduced by a work for four hands: Kirchner enters this field of graciously social art with exceptional success. [...] Let us first examine the 12 Original Compositions for four hands, which C. F. Peters published as op. 57. Combined with blossoming freshness of invention is a meticulousness of composition, which renders the stamp of artistic perfection upon the simplest structure. Already No. 1 (*Moderato*, E Major 3/4) is a piece

full of euphony, each note so to speak illuminated by mild sunlight. A Scherzo movement in e minor follows in a succinct two-four rhythm, its humour somewhat snippy. No. 3, a march-like *Allegro ma non troppo* (E Major 4/4), reveals a more expanded form. The sharply marked main section is contrasted with a C Major trio, which deploys a song that is as tender as it is haunting. Number 4 (*poco vivace*, 2/4 G Major) is pulsated by a perky love of life. Only in the middle section does a deeper sensation attain the following melodic form [music quotation of bars 33–40]. Numbers 5 and 6 act in opposition to each other. In the former everything is evenly slurred, pervaded with calm gravity; in the latter the notes bounce away, soaring with uncontrollable high spirits. The second volume opens with a song melody (*Andante espressivo*, D Major 4/4), which in its saturated expression is reminiscent of similar passages by Robert Schumann. Nos. 8 and 10 are Scherzo movements, the first in b minor, the second in G Major, both nearly always staccato, full of sparkling life. Another songlike movement with beautiful expression intervenes between them as No. 9 in b minor. Over the first part of number 11 (e minor, *poco lento* 2/4) lies a trace of melancholic mourning, which the E Major middle part cannot completely assuage. Capriciously humoured is No. 12, a conversation bestowed with a contentious touch by harsh accents and dynamic escalations. All the more directly does the final movement, a farewell song that again could have been written by Schumann, address the heart of the listener.”

The present new edition is based upon the original edition in two volumes (Plate-Nos. 6457–6458, Edition Peters No. 2057a–b). Kirchner arranged several pieces from op. 57 for one player, but did not publish them. This autograph, preserved in the Brahms Institute of the Musikhochschule Lübeck, Hofmann Collection, was consulted, yet in respect to phrasing and dynamics it sometimes contains other solutions. A few divergences of the original edition pertaining to slurs, which in Kirchner’s handwriting are often unclear, were corrected by analogy.