

Memories of Friedrich Kuhlau

Friedrich Kuhlau is remembered in many ways in his hometown, the Hanseatic city of Uelzen. The Kuhlaustraße can be found in the city center as well as the Kuhlau sculpture by artist Georg Münchbach. The text of the bronze sculpture at the Old Town Hall in the Veerßer Straße reads:

Friedrich Kuhlau, geb. am 11.9.1786 in Uelzen – gest. am 12.3.1832 in Kopenhagen – Komponist, Mitbegründer einer dän. Musikkultur – Königl. Dänischer Prof. der Musik

Also the Uelzen artist Georg Lipinsky has repeatedly incorporated Kuhlau into his collages and presented him on a terracotta tile at the St. Gertrudenskapelle in the Gudestraße. The Chamber Music Festival *Holdenstedter Schlosswoche* has already dedicated the festival's programme to Friedrich Kuhlau and his time twice. On initiative of the local cultural association, the KULTURKREIS UELZEN, in 2014 the Theater für Niedersachsen semi staged Kuhlau's opera *Lulu*. For this event a group of members of the International Friedrich Kuhlau Society from Japan travelled to Uelzen.

Every two years, the *International Friedrich Kuhlau Flute Competition* is held with young musicians from over 20 different countries. In 2020, the renowned competition, which places a special emphasis on Kuhlau's chamber music repertoire, celebrates its 50th anniversary. An important foundation for the success of the competition is the Uelzen Kuhlau edition of the Syrinx publishing house, which is supported by the Hanseatic city of Uelzen. The complete edition of Flute Works by Friedrich Kuhlau comprises 62 volumes. For his work on the edition, the flutist and publisher Prof. Dr. Richard Müller-Dombois was awarded the Ehrennadel of the city in 2017. In addition to the sheet music edition, the city has supported varied publications on Kuhlau, most recently the comprehensive biography by Jørgen Erichsen.



Hansestadt Uelzen

→ Friedrich Kuhlau and Uelzen

Friedrich Kuhlau – "Beethoven of the flute"

Friedrich Kuhlau (1786-1832) was a contemporary of Beethoven, Weber, Schubert, Rossini and Goethe and musically moved between classicism and romanticism. In literature, he is repeatedly referred to as the „Beethoven of the flute“ to emphasize the importance of his compositions for this instrument. He also composed successful Singspiele and operas, piano music and chamber music works - a total of 560 compositions. Especially his music for the play *Elverhøj* made him unforgettable in Denmark.

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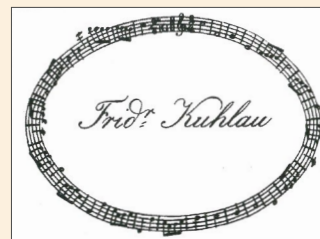




Birthplace, drawing by Martin Ottens; St.-Marien-Church;



Kuhlau terracotta tile by Georg Lipinsky; Kuhlau's business card;



relief sculpture by Georg Münchbach; drawing by Emil Baerentzen.



Friedrich Kuhlau - composer from Uelzen

As the youngest son of five siblings, Friedrich Kuhlau is born in Uelzen in 1786 and baptized in St.-Marien-Church. The church register with the entry was burned during the Second World War, so that only the transcription of Kuhlau's first biographer Carl Thrane from 1886 is preserved:

Den 13. September hat der Hauptboist bei dem 12. Infanterie-Regiment von Linsing, hiesiger Garnison, Johann Carl Kuhlau den von seiner Ehefrau Anna Dorothea Seegern am 11. September 1786 ihm geborenen Sohn Friedrich Daniel Rudolph taufen lassen.

Friedrich Kuhlau comes from a family of musicians - seventeen city musicians, organists, music teachers, conductors and composers can be proven in his pedigree. His father was a military musician and as a „Hauptboist“ he played the oboe, flute and a string instrument.

In the 1780s Uelzen was a city with about 2200 inhabitants, with trade, commerce and markets for the city and surrounding area and a secondary school. The medieval garrison town belonged to the dominion of the Kurfürsten of Brunswick-Lüneburg, who were also kings of England.

The simple house of the Kuhlau family stood on the corner of Herzogenstraße and Schuhstraße in the city center of Uelzen. Herzogenstraße ran between Veerßer Straße and Schuhstraße. It was destroyed at the end of World War II and not rebuilt. The place where Kuhlau's birthplace used to stand is located on the back of the houses, which now face the town hall at the Herzogenplatz. According to various letters, family life was intimate and friendly and little Fritz (as he was called at home) led a normal middle-class life.

Through his father, who improves his pay as a military musician with flute lessons, Friedrich Kuhlau comes into contact with this instrument in his early childhood. Later he composed especially for the flute, which was very popular at the time. These compositions also brought him the most money, because the much sought-after works were sold by various publishers.

Between 1793 and 1796, the family moves to the nearby city of Lüneburg. Here Friedrich Kuhlau as a 9-year-old falls into the broken fragments of a bottle and loses his right eye.

To distract him, his parents put a small piano across the sick bed and quickly become aware of his special musical talent. After recovering from his tragic accident, he receives lessons in flute and piano playing and begins to compose his first pieces.

After living and studying in Brunswick and Hamburg Friedrich Kuhlau in 1810 flees to Copenhagen for fear of convocation in Napoleon's army. In Denmark, he achieves fame with his operas, the king honours him with the title of professor and with the Singspiel *Elverhøj* Kuhlau composes the first Danish national music. Even today, with more than a thousand performances, the opera is still one of the most successful pieces of the Royal Theater in Copenhagen.

Kuhlau dies in 1832 after illness at the age of 45 in Copenhagen as a celebrated composer. He is buried on the assistance cemetery, which is under monument protection today. Friedrich Kuhlau's piano works are still being reissued to this day. His flute compositions are among the finest ever written for this instrument, and he is arguably the most important composer of early Danish national music.

Additional Information

- *Friedrich Kuhlau – Ein deutscher Musiker in Kopenhagen*, Biography by Jørgen Erichsen (2011)
- *Der deutsch-dänische Komponist Friedrich Kuhlau*, reader and reference book by Richard Müller-Dombois (2004)
- *International Friedrich Kuhlau Flute Competition*, www.kuhlau.de
- *International Friedrich Kuhlau Society (IFKS)*, www.kuhlau.gr.jp
- *Uelzen Kuhlau Edition (UEKE)*, Syrinx Verlag