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MOZART PIANO CONCERTOS

No. 12, in A No. 18, in B-Flat

LILI KRAUS
BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
PIERRE MONTEUX conductor

MOZART { CONCERTO No. 12, IN A, K. 414
CONCERTO No. 18, IN B-FLAT, K. 456

RADIO STATION WMS

79 { CONCERTO No. 12, IN A, K. 414 24:00
Mozart { CONCERTO No. 18, IN B-FLAT, K. 456 28:54

An incident in the life of Beethoven was once told by the widow of John Cramer, a celebrated pianist and friend of Beethoven, to A. W. Thayer, who included it in his famous biography of the great composer. Beethoven and Cramer came unexpectedly upon a performance of Mozart's Piano Concerto in C Minor (K. 491) at an Augarten Concert in Vienna. "Beethoven suddenly stood still and, drawing his companion's attention to the exceedingly simple but equally beautiful modulative changes first introduced towards the end of the piece exclaimed: 'Cramer, Cramer! We shall never be able to do anything like that!' As the theme was repeated and wrought up to a climax, Beethoven, swaying his body to and fro, marked the time and in every possible manner manifested a delight rising to enthusiasm."

This anecdote is not dated, but it must refer to the turn of the century when Beethoven still had his hearing, at which time he had composed his first two concertos. When Beethoven said, "We shall never be able to do anything like that," he must have been vividly aware that the art of this particular form had reached in Mozart a peak of limpid simplicity which could never be repeated. While new and different purposes were already stirring in Beethoven, he still clung with affection to the old way. Alfred Einstein wrote: "Mozart said the last word in respect to the fusion of the concertante and symphonic elements — a fusion resulting in a higher unity beyond which no progress was possible, because perfection is imperfectible."

Probably no true musician would contradict the late Mozart scholar. In no other instrumental form, not even in his symphonies, did Mozart so completely master his style from the start and master it at so high a level — and this applies to his twenty-three piano concertos, even the D major work of his seventeenth year (K. 175). Early in Mozart's century the harpsichord had been used as a supporting, a "fulfilling" instrument in concerted instrumental groups. Haydn, Mozart's only formidable contemporary, missed the chance to concentrate upon the piano and lift it to a brilliant and outstanding position in relation to the surrounding instruments. Mozart, who could do miracles upon the piano and was often called upon to do them in music of his own, found the secret of a balanced interchange between solo and orchestra where each would set off the other, where every line, every color, would be transparently etched, every measure a delight of wit and grace. These special qualities were doomed to be forfeited when Liszt would release the hard glitter of his virtuosity, Beethoven his imperious thunders, and Brahms his grander, more symphonic concepts. Mozart's Concertos are not without their dramatic pages, even their touching pathos (as in the slow movement of the Concerto No. 18, K. 456). The

Lili Kraus

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Orchestra

Pierre Monteux

Conductor

style, the emotional, personal qualities come subtly through without distortion of the basic "galant" style which his eighteenth-century audiences expected.

SIDE 1

Concerto No. 12, in A, K. 414

This is the second of the concertos Mozart wrote for publication by subscription in Vienna in 1783. No description of them is better than Mozart's own. Writing to his father on December 28, 1782, he tells how giving lessons and such duties take up most of his day and leave only the evening for composing. Nevertheless, the three concertos (K. 413, 414, 415) are well in hand. He writes: "These concertos are a happy medium between what is too easy and too difficult; they are very brilliant, pleasing to the ear, and natural, without being empty. There are passages here and there from which connoisseurs alone can derive satisfaction, but these passages are written in such a way that the less learned cannot fail to be pleased."

Indeed, Mozart's particular genius was of the sort to delight the less discerning with music of direct, elementary simplicity, which was also graced with the subtlest shadings, delicate details glowing with the indefinable fervor of his own rare spirit.

This A Major Concerto (the earlier of two in that key) has just these qualities. With only oboes and horns to double the strings it is transparent throughout, with the special verve and charm of the youthful Mozart. The later and more mature Concerto in B-Flat sacrifices some of this crystalline quality for a richer play of color con-

trast with a fuller wind choir of flutes, oboes, bassoons and horns.

SIDE 2

Concerto No. 18, in B-Flat, K. 456

The first Allegro with its long orchestral exposition proposes an inspiring quasi-martial tattoo rhythm which is to carry the whole. (The cadenzas in this and the last movement are Mozart's own.) The slow movement consists of five variations on a plaintive theme in G minor which has been more than once compared to the pathetic air of Barbarina at the opening of the last act of *Figaro* which Mozart was soon to compose (the resemblance is mostly one of mood). Indeed, the choice of G minor for the slow movement of a concerto was unusual for Mozart and recalls his special dark uses of this key in the early and late symphonies, K. 183 and 550, and in the poignant String Quintet, K. 516. The theme is first stated by the orchestra and then elaborated by the piano solo. The third variation is in the major mode and there is an elaborate and beautiful coda. The third movement is in a typical 6-8 rondo rhythm. An extraordinary feature is a sudden incursion of B minor (characteristic of this concerto are the many unexpected modulations). In this passage Mozart makes the innovation of a 2-4 beat in the piano against a 6-8 in the orchestra. Arthur Hutchings in his *A Companion to Mozart's Piano Concertos* finds a "toy character" in the themes of this concerto, a remark which the listener is free to take as he pleases.

Notes by JOHN N. BURK

LILI KRAUS

Lili Kraus was born in Budapest, in 1908, of a Czech father and a Hungarian mother. She studied there and in Vienna with Kodály, Bartók, Steuermann and Artur Schnabel. After making concert tours in Europe and the Orient, she was on her way to New Zealand (where she was later to be naturalized as a British citizen) when she was caught by the war in 1940. She was held in a prison camp in Java for the duration. Although she suffered for lack of food, the circumstance that she was well-known in Japan was in her favor. After the war she returned to Europe. She made her North American debut in 1949.

ABOUT THE ALBUM COVER

The unfinished portrait on the album cover was painted in Vienna early in 1791 by Joseph Lange, Mozart's brother-in-law. Though the work of an amateur, the features are faithfully and characteristically depicted. The portrait shows the signs of Mozart's illness which was to cause his death later that same year.

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These two Mozart concerti were recorded in Symphony Hall,

Boston, in April, 1953. A single microphone pick-up was used, the RCA ultra-directional microphone being suspended approximately 16 feet above the podium. This produced the exact balance maintained by the conductor between piano and orchestra, and also resulted in maximum clarity in the various instrumental choirs.

For best reproduction, High Fidelity phonographs should be adjusted to the "New Orthophonic" characteristic. Where it is

not designated on the instrument it can be obtained by selecting the "A.E.S." position and then, using the tone controls, boosting bass and reducing treble, each by a small amount. Alternatively, the "LP" characteristic with the bass and treble each boosted by a small amount may be used.

Detailed technical information about the "New Orthophonic" characteristic may be obtained from the Engineering Sec., Record Dept., RCA Victor Div., 501 N. La Salle St., Indianapolis, Ind.

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