

STEREO
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SCHUBERT

OPUS 90/ *Four Impromptus*

OPUS 142/ *Four Impromptus*

PAT LILIKRAUS / piano

CARDINAL
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Schubert

IMPROMPTUS, Op. 90 and Op. 142

(Complete)

LILI KRAUS, piano

The eight Impromptus, Op. 90 and Op. 142, were completed by Franz Schubert (1797-1828) near the end of 1827, a year before the end of his lamentably short life. He sent the four now known as Op. 90 to Haslinger in Vienna, who published the first two of them, and meant to put out the other two. But then Schubert died, and they were laid aside until the resurgence of interest in Schubert at about the mid-century. They were published in 1857 or 1858, with the publisher "simplifying" No. 3. Schubert had written it in G flat major, and in long bars of double 4/4. The publisher changed it to G major and simple 4/4. The performance on the present recording follows Schubert's original.

As for the four Impromptus known as Op. 142, Schubert corresponded about them with B. Schott in Mainz, during 1828. Schott, typical of publishers, was eager enough to be sent a number of Schubert manuscripts, since Schubert was becoming a "name," but very timid about actually accepting them. Schott finally returned the Impromptus to Schubert after sitting on them for more than a half year. The odd excuse was that the publisher's Paris outlet had found these works to be not quite the "trifles" that the title had suggested, and that they were really quite complicated and difficult. They were published by Diabelli in 1838, as Op. 142. Schumann, reviewing them, understood them to be a "sonata." The thought is an intriguing one, because of the key relationships of the four pieces and the tempo contrasts. The thought was reiterated in modern times by Alfred Einstein. But Schubert, when corresponding with Schott, had said that they might be published separately or all four together.

These remarkable pieces, as deep as they are long, indicate how fresh and experimental were the musical ideas welling up in Schubert's mind during these last years. He didn't know quite what to call these piano poems. Their parallels are in the more complex Schubert songs, which were a genuinely new art form in their freely evolving melodic lines, continuously shifting harmonies and integration of voice with a colorful and richly evocative piano texture, the whole exploring a new realm of inward sensibility. Chopin, writing such piano works after his own temperament, would be faced with a title problem, and would use either simple titles like a dance name, giving no hint of the fresh sensibility being explored, or vague titles like "Prelude" or "Ballade." Schumann would group together eight such pieces, reflecting his own temperament, as *Fantasiestücke*, and eight others, somewhat more integrated harmonically and emotionally, as *Kreisleriana*. In their various ways, these works reflected the need for a form different from the epic-heroic mold of sonata form, one simpler in outline if equally complex in texture. The starting point could be a dance, or an ABA song form, or a theme with variations, or a scherzo, but full use would be made of the thematic contrasts, developments and transformations and the harmonic freedom, of sonata form.

Side One

1. *Impromptu Op. 90, No. 1, in C minor; Allegro molto moderato, 4/4*

A plaintive melody is heard with the ring of an old ballad, this feeling being intensified by each statement being heard first in single notes and then chords, like a chanting bard echoed by a chorus. The *Impromptu*, while moving as one flowing, integrated piece, is made up of the reiterations of this song, each time different in melodic shape, harmony, rhythmic figuration. Its appearance in A flat major gives the feeling of a "middle section," and at the end the melody seems to be returning in its original shape, but it cannot be what it once was, after its evolution, and so it wavers between C minor and C major, with the closing major mode announcing peace after restless travels.

2. *Impromptu Op. 90, No. 2 in E flat major, Allegro, 3/4*

This is almost, but not quite, in the simple ABA form. The

opening is a whirling triplet arabesque by the right hand, with the left contributing to the agitation by constantly accenting the second beat. The key is E flat major, but the melodic line seems magnetically attracted to the minor. The middle section could be called a waltz in B minor that has turned fiery and declamatory, and constantly modulates. The opening music returns, then the "waltz," which forces the piece to end in E flat minor. The close in a different key or mode from the opening indicates that here, as in other pieces, the key to the form lies in psychological travel, the mind making a decisive change.

3. *Impromptu Op. 142, No. 1, in F minor, Allegro moderato, 4/4*

This is the longest and most complex of the Impromptus. As for its being the first movement of a sonata that Schumann took it to be, it could be such formally, if we take it as sonata form without a development section; an extensive exposition transformed in its recapitulation. The first subject is a graceful dotted-note melody, in statement and answer form, that seems to act as a curtain-raiser or introduction to the drama. This begins with the second subject, which is like a Schubert song that moves through three phases. It is first heard as a melody wrapped in light, agitated rhythms. Then it becomes passionately declamatory, with the rhythmic figure, of hammering, repeated eighth notes or chords, dominating it. One thinks of Schubert's use of this hammering rhythmic figure in the piano accompaniment to songs like *Liebesbotschaft* and *Trock'ne Blumen*. The last phase is a more tranquil resolution of unrest, still employing the rhythmic figure. The third subject is a lovely, plaintive melody employing hand-crossing, with treble and bass phrases echoing one another. Then this entire "exposition" is repeated, but harmonically changed, and the very opening subject serves as a short coda.

4. *Impromptu, Op. 142, No. 2, in A flat major, Allegretto, 3/4*

If this were the second movement of a sonata, it could be the slow movement, with its gravely beautiful melody such as only Schubert could write (one thinks of *Du bist die Ruh*), and somewhat more poignantly agitated middle section. Or it could be the Minuet and Trio, for that is its starting form. But the rhythmic impulse is neither that of minuet, nor of *ländler*, which it also suggests. It is a distillation of both into something new, with its suspended beat or expressive "silences" that Schubert used with compelling effect elsewhere, as in the slow movement of the Piano Sonata in D, Op. 53, of 1825.

Side Two

1. *Impromptu Op. 142, No. 3, in B flat major, Andante with Variations, 4/4*

The melody is that of the B flat *Entr'acte* in *Rosamunde*, of 1823. Schubert used it again in his A minor String Quartet, Op. 29, in 1824. He now gaily explores what can further be made of it in five variations, with a touchingly reharmonized, curtailed version of the theme as a coda. One could listen to this for sheer delight, or write a volume on the Schubertian process of making new melodies from old. The mood is the uniquely Schubertian one of seriousness and laughter always hand in hand.

2. *Impromptu Op. 142, No. 4, in F minor, Allegro scherzando, 3/8*

A tuneful excursion into Czech folk dance, full of whimsical rhythmic play, this starts with the dance itself, has a middle section like a free, mercurial and rhapsodic improvisation, including glittering runs, returns to the dance, and moves to a bravura *più presto* finale. With nothing Chopinesque about it, it could yet be said to do for the Czech folk dance what Chopin did for the Polish mazurka and waltz, and it also looks forward to Dvorak's Slavonic Dances.

3. *Impromptu Op. 90, No. 3, in G flat major, Andante, 4/4*

A lovely slow song, wrapped in tremulous rhythmic figures, constantly changes its mood and character with each reappearance, shifting into the minor and back to major, finally arriving at a different shape from that with which it started, but all proceeding as one unbroken flow.

4. *Impromptu Op. 90, No. 4, in A flat major, Allegretto, 3/4*

The rippling opening figure, answered by chord passages, is in A flat minor, and only as the whimsical unrest continues, does a tender melody rise in the bass, affirming the major. The middle section is an impassioned, proclamatory, protesting melody in C sharp minor. The first section is repeated. There is a hint of again moving into the protesting middle-section music, but the decision is not, and the tender bass melody brings peace of mind.

Notes by Sidney Finkelstein

LILI KRAUS

Of all the great pianists of today, there is none like Lili Kraus, for the subtle inflections of tone and rhythm that make the piano "sing" in what one knows in one's heart is the authentic voice of Schubert. (One could say the same for her Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven and Bartok.) Born in Budapest in 1908, she studied with Bartok, Kodaly, Steuermann and Schnabel, and became at the age of twenty, professor of piano at the Vienna Conservatory. To many American music lovers, she first became known in the middle 1930's, through imported phonograph records that became the most cherished of collector items. Her uncanny insight made even a familiar work sound fresh, alive, newly-created.

Extending her tours in the late 1930's, Lili Kraus was in the Dutch East Indies when the Second World War broke out, and she was interned for the duration of the war in a Japanese prison camp. She emerged from this ordeal untouched and undefeated in spirit. A frequent visitor to the United States now, as well as to centers of music over the world, she has the stature of one of the magisterial pianists and musicians, whose performance of every work is a revelation.

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