

LILI KRAUS
plays **SCHUBERT**

Piano Sonata in B-Flat Major, D. 960



VANGUARD CLASSICS

*Recordings for the
Connoisseur*

Franz Schubert

Piano Sonata in B-flat Major, Op. Posth., D. 960

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| 1 | I. Molto moderato | 19:07 |
| 2 | II. Andante sostenuto | 10:09 |
| 3 | III. Scherzo. Allegro vivace con delicatezza | 3:43 |
| 4 | IV. Allegro, ma non troppo | 8:08 |

Lili Kraus, *piano*

Producer: **Seymour Solomon**

Producer: **Jack Lothrop**

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NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

When **Franz Schubert** completed the *B-flat Major Sonata*, his last important work, less than two months before his death in November 1828, the piano was already far advanced toward the refined and developed state that only a few years later was to make Chopin's mature works possible. Compare Schubert's calm, resonant opening with the typical keyboard music of two or three decades earlier, and the difference will be immediately apparent: here are smoothly attained richness and depth of sonority that were new things in the literature of the instrument but would certainly not go unimitated in the following years.

Much of the credit for this technical development belongs to a handful of expert piano makers, like the Augsburg craftsman Johann Andreas Stein whose instruments Mozart extolled, and his son-in-law and pupil Johann Andreas Streicher who began to make pianos in Vienna in the 1790's and later introduced important innovations under the constant urgings of his exigent client, Beethoven. Thus a direct line may be traced as clearly in the development of the instrument as in the purely musical descent.

In one fundamental respect, however, Schubert did not continue the line taken by Beethoven in his expansion of the Mozartean sonata form. There are roughly speaking two main modes of expression in the handling of composition along sonata principles: one is dramatic and proceeds by strongly delineated contrast, the other is lyrical and is more concerned with expressive flow. Naturally enough, since the treatment of key relations is central to the classical compositional method, each of these distinct preoccupations tends to be associated with its own characteristic approach to tonality. The intense, almost explosive, drama of Beethoven deploys itself through crisp tonic-dominant key relations. Nothing is more fascinating in Beethoven's output than the gradual turn toward more lyrical concerns in the great works of his last period. This shift of emphasis, evident in the late piano sonatas but perhaps best explored so far in Joseph Kerman's brilliant book on the string quartets, equally naturally makes itself felt in a turn away from bald tonic-dominant contrasts to the more subtly interconnected third-related keys. Taking B-flat Major as a starting point, the "mediant"

keys of D and D-flat, and the "submediant" areas of G and G-flat, become the new spheres of concentration. And it was precisely this third-related system of keys that Schubert made one of the articulating principles of his music, and that in turn became the foundation of Brahms's style and harmonic language.

In any really great piece of music, technique and expression work inextricably together. That is why technical explanations, wearisome as they may sometimes appear, are of value - they help us to see more clearly how the music makes us feel, and why it makes us feel that way. Thus the expressive truth that Schubert was in pursuit of new musical ends of his own (rather than failing to realize the middle-period Beethoven's quite different ones) runs parallel to the analysis of the key-contrasts he used in that pursuit.

The various mediant and submediant key centers named above provide, in fact, a map and guide to all the most important harmonic topics touched on in the course of the *B-flat major Sonata*. Sir Donald Tovey penetratingly analyzed the superb passage at the end of the first movement development section - "among the most wonderful feats of draughtsman-ship in all music" — that returns from D minor to B-flat major for the start of the recapitulation. What he did not remark on was that the emphasis on this key of D minor (a major third above B-flat) exactly balances the movement's very first modulation — to G-flat major (a major third below) in the twentieth measure. The key is prefigured even earlier in the mysterious deep bass trill on G-flat that interrupts the previously unruffled lyrical unfolding of the main theme in its eighth measure; and it is inexorably followed up by the appearance of the second subject group in the enharmonically corresponding key of F-sharp minor.

Long-range planning of this order is not content to operate only within the confines of a single movement. The other most striking modulation in the first movement is the gentle yet infinitely distant shift to C-sharp minor for the start of the development section. C-sharp is, again, the enharmonic equivalent of D-flat; and it turns out in due course to be the key of the profoundly expressive minor-mode slow movement — whose consolatory middle section is, in turn, set another third away in A major.

The subtleties of the explicitly "delicate" scherzo and trio, centered respectively in B-flat major and B-flat minor, may seem at first to be principally melodic and rhythmic rather than tonal. Notice, particularly, how the little three-note figure is tossed from register to register in the middle of the scherzo proper and manages, by executing an elusive side-slip of pitch (premonitory shades of Prokofiev!), to extend the reprise of the main theme as if it were one measure backwards in time. But even within the strictly limited proportions of this two-page movement, there is still room for exploration in a number of keys, among which D-flat major and D minor are again predominant (no pun intended).

The sonata-rondo finale begins with yet another wonderful tonal touch. Though its home key is B-flat major, the main theme is ushered in and punctuated by a curiously enigmatic and oblique-sounding octave G. This time the submediant is treated as the dominant in a quite foreign tonal world: the opening phrase of the theme persists in entering in C minor, turning at each appearance to B-flat major only in its fourth and fifth measures. Once again, as at so many turns in Schubert, we are brought face to face with ambiguity — ambiguity of the most poignant and emotionally personal kind. Thus the pattern begun by that confrontation between the lyrical tranquility of the very first B-flat major theme and the seditious G-flat trill is unerringly carried through to the final movement. Very rarely in Schubert — and this is a characteristic he shares with Mozart — do we encounter an emotional state that is not shadowed, or illuminated, by its opposite. And thus, in the coda, it would take a bold analyst to declare unequivocally whether the concluding Presto dash to the last emphatic cadence is a triumphant rounding-off or an impatient, almost hectically dismissive, one. What is not surprising is to discover, from Schubert's sketches, that he took unusual trouble over this masterly finale, actually completing it in essentials before turning to the first movement. The result was a work of the rarest and most profound unity.

— Bernard Jacobson

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Hungarian pianist **Lili Kraus** was born in Budapest in 1903 to an impoverished Hungarian mother from an assimilated Jewish Hungarian family and a Czech father. She entered Budapest's prominent Franz Liszt Academy of Music as a piano major at age 8, and at 17 entered the Budapest Conservatory, where she was taught by composer Zoltán Kodály and composer-pianist Béla Bartók. She graduated in 1922, with top honors. She then attended the Vienna Konservatorium to study with Severin Eisenberger and Eduard Steuermann, and late in Berlin where she participated in master classes conducted by Artur Schnabel.

In the 1930's, Kraus toured both as soloist and as the recital partner of violinist Szymon Goldberg, with whom she recorded Beethoven and Mozart sonatas for British Parlophone in 1935 and 1937, along with solo repertoire. By this time she was considered a specialist in both composers, though her other specialties included the music of Chopin, Haydn, Bartók, and Schubert.

When Lili Kraus married philosopher Otto Mandl, they converted to Catholicism, living in Italy until the cloud of Nazism compelled them to move to the Dutch East Indies. While touring in 1942, Kraus, her husband, and their two children were arrested in Indonesia, and sent to separate prisoner-of-war camps on Java for nearly three years. Their survival appears to have been the result of Japanese officials having known her name and her recordings, and it is rumored that a Japanese conductor provided food as well as musical scores until they were liberated by British forces in October 1945. For two years Kraus toured in Australia, New Zealand (where she became a citizen), and South Africa, before returning to England in 1948 to tour.

In 1949, she made her American debut. She also resumed recording in Vienna, for Vox. In the succeeding decades she made recordings for many independent labels - Les Discophiles Français, Ducretet-Thomson, Concert Hall, Educo, and Selmer - along with affiliates of HMV and UK Columbia. During the 1966-1967 season, she performed 25 of Mozart's 27 concertos in New York City on a single series, and the next season played his complete keyboard sonatas. Texas Christian University at Fort Worth appointed her artist-in-

residence in 1968, and she became a regular juror at the Cliburn International Competitions. It was at this time that she began to record for

Vanguard, ultimately making five recordings, which included major late works of Schubert and a survey of Bartók's miniatures for piano.

In 1978, the Austrian government bestowed Cross of Honor for Science and Art on Kraus. She remained a British subject, and taught in Texas until her retirement in 1983. She maintained a home in Asheville, North Carolina, where she died in 1986.

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