

First Concert by Lili Kraus in New Zealand

ON June 20 Lili Kraus played at the Auckland Town Hall in a concert directed by the National Broadcasting Service. In the week before she had broadcast three times from 1YA, and had played at a lunch-hour concert, and at the Auckland University College and the Teachers' Training College. This was her first public performance in New Zealand.

I had heard all of these other recitals. They were generous programmes, played the only way she seems to know how to play—that is, generously, withholding nothing. If the halls and the pianos were by no means what her audience thought she should have had, she seemed unaware of it herself. The evening before the Town Hall concert she played at the Training College: Mozart's Sonata in A Minor, Schumann's "Carnaval" and a posthumous sonata of Schubert. There is still discussion in Auckland as to whether anything she played at the Town Hall outshone her Schubert sonata the night before, or the Mozart sonata in the University Hall, or the Beethoven Opus 109 at the Tower Studio. In all these places I had seen

her dwarfing other people who had played there. At the Town Hall I knew I could see her in perspective against other pianists who had played there in the last twenty years.

The National Anthem was a Prayer

Lili Kraus opened her Town Hall concert by playing "God Save the King" as if it were a prayer and not a call to arms. Before she could continue she had to leave the platform to borrow a large handkerchief to clean the piano, because the keys were damp. The applause for this, which may have bewildered people listening in, was for the way she did it. This was not the fidgeting and flicking of a nervous pianist. It was a demonstration of how to clean a piano.

When she began to play Bach's Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue in D Minor, I think the first impression—something that comes fresh and startling every time she begins a concert—was of vitality of tone. This brings a sudden awareness of the strings of the piano, of the structure of the instrument and its purpose. The dynamic range of the Fantasia showed at once that this quality is in every note she plays, in the swift and gentle ones as much as the solitary

powerful ones. The Fantasia was rich and warm and coherent, perfectly played. The Fugue was constructed on a subject with a marked diminuendo towards the end, so that in the inner parts it melted into the whole rather before the end of the phrase. The whole Fugue was faster and less rhetorical than I have thought of it before. There are probably at least twenty grand ways of playing this Fugue—Bach is the most arguable of composers—and this was certainly one of them. I didn't feel, as I do when Lili Kraus plays Mozart or Schubert, that there is no other possible way but the one she is revealing. What I did feel was that there was no other possible way of playing the piano but the way she played it. She doesn't play on her instrument, she plays with it; there isn't a bar where the music is diverted from its own shape into pianism. It is the same with her technique—it is used for the music, and if one watches to see how she will manage a passage of known technical difficulty, all that one learns is that one was quite mistaken in thinking it a difficult passage. Long before the Bach was finished I had forgotten my irritation at the fitful and ill-adjusted spotlight which was being thrown down on the pianist, and my fears of

the large, malignant cellophane flowers that were glowering from pots on either side of the stage.

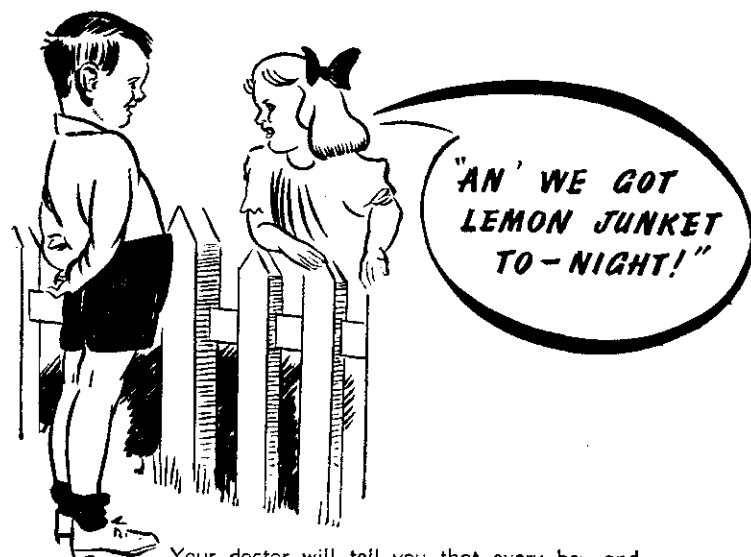
A Welcome for Mozart

Lili Kraus then played a Mozart Piano Sonata, K.333, in B Flat. She took the first and third movements with that almost reckless brilliance that I feel Mozart is often asking for, though it is no use offering it to him without this sureness and clarity as well as speed; the second movement, too, was perfect, and I still cannot understand how the tone she gave to this could be so gently lyrical in effect and yet so rich in a large hall. Mozart's Piano Sonatas have not, I think, been played in the Town Hall before, though they are widely known and devotedly studied in humbler places; and in the applause for K.333 there was a welcome for Mozart as well as for this interpretation.

The Brahms that followed reaffirmed what the Mozart had revealed—the clarity of her transitions from movement to movement, from phrase to phrase, from *forte* to *piano*. There are no aimless or perfunctory bars and she is never caught resting in that no-man's-land of *mezzo-forte*. If she is there she is on her way somewhere else, the path clear in her mind. In the same way she



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