



LILI KRAUS

The composer's music has been recreated

can make a lightning transition from one composer to another without bringing anything of one to the next, or trailing even a wisp of that purely personal quality by which some pianists make one almost more conscious of who plays the music than who has written it. Hard on the heels of the Mozart came a Brahms Rhapsody, an emotional and technical *volte face*, which was grandly dramatic. When the Town Hall clock failed to check the Brahms, two fire engines were called out, but even then the pianist seemed to stop more for her audience's sake than for her own. She replayed the Intermezzo and then dealt with that defiant Rhapsody in E Flat Major in such a way as to send these disturbances from our minds, utterly routed.

When the interval came I began to regret that I had undertaken to write about Lili Kraus' playing. I had seen in the past few days what happened to people when they tried to find words for it—the seasoned concert-goers of Auckland had been going round saying that they were walking on air, that they had drunk the milk of Paradise, and so on; and indeed that is what they looked like. They had started out to write to friends in the south to tell them why they must on no account miss hearing Lili Kraus, and found that in the end they had a page of truly wonderful adjectives in front of them, and a literary effort unfit even for a school magazine. It is easy enough to say what is wrong with a person's playing, but when it is right—in the complete sense that hers is—there are no words.

Some explanation had to be found to satisfy the people who hadn't heard Lili Kraus and were wondering what was wrong with us all—and some explanation too for those of us who had been hearing her play and wondering why everything seemed suddenly to have come right. It might be this way—people who work with music daily, either listening or playing, find a great deal of pleasure in it, but they are looking beyond this all the time and working towards those moments where there is joy of quite a different quality, a conviction that the composer's music has been re-

created as he heard it when he wrote it down. This conviction is unqualified when it comes, but in ordinary musical life it comes only in short, rare moments—just enough to keep people working hard hoping for more. What Lili Kraus does is simply to deliver such moments nearly all the time she is playing far more continuously than any other musician I have heard. When she plays Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert—the three to whom her understanding has perhaps brought her closest—they seem to reach us through the clearest channel a human being could make for them. These Auckland audiences have been put into this state of exhilaration and amazement by the full force of the music itself.

#### A New Lili Kraus?

Great musicians do not often come to New Zealand while they are in their best years. When they do, when we know that we are having an evening that might make us the envy of any city in the world, it is strangely exciting. Nobody who had heard all that Lili Kraus played in Auckland in one week could imagine that her vitality, her technique, her repertoire—those things that her internment might have taken from her—are less than they were before. As a human being, as a musician, she cannot have stood still during this time. The excitement of the Town Hall concert was unique—perhaps we heard a new Lili Kraus, one that the other side of the world does not know yet.

After the interval the audience returned with a look of hope that I have never seen before at a piano recital. Usually by this time there is a feeling that the main dishes have been carried out and that there is nothing to look forward to but a few saucers of nuts and raisins. This evening there was still a lordly dish to come—the Waldstein Sonata. Chopin had been remembered in the way he himself is said to have asked to be—by the playing of Mozart's music instead of his own.

As the lights went out after the interval I began to think about the Waldstein Sonata. I had often wondered what might be heard in the last movement, the Rondo, if it were played by a pianist whose technique was equal to it but not an end in itself, by a musician who had noted Beethoven's suggestion *Allegretto Moderato* and had thought about the mood that might lie behind it, and the full possibilities of the relationship of those first few bars to the final *Prestissimo*. Now I thought I might know. As Lili Kraus slowly explored the depths of the *Molto Adagio* she seemed to be in the very closest touch with Beethoven's intentions. As she moved up to the Rondo there was a pause—and then it was like seeing a seaplane taking off from the water almost out of earshot, watching it and now hearing it, too, coming closer, gathering speed without haste, the sound coming in louder gusts until with a sudden roar it was right overhead. When I came to myself I marshalled up other performances I had heard of the Waldstein. Beside this they were like the noise of a motor-cycle when a young man starts it up and rides it round and round the block. Wrapping them all up in this simile, I threw them overboard for ever.

—D.F.T.

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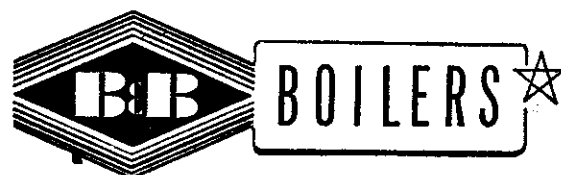
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