



XWN 18267

Mozart

piano concerto no. 24 in C minor (k. 491)
piano concerto no. 27 in B flat major (k. 595)

BADURA-SKODA, PIANO

VIENNA SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA
conducted by

Felix Prohaska

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MOZART: *Piano Concerto No. 24 in C Minor, K. 491* *Piano Concerto No. 27 in B Flat Major, K. 595*

PAUL BADURA-SKODA, Piano
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THE MUSIC

In 1786 when Mozart wrote his *C minor Concerto* he was—though only thirty years of age—in his full maturity. This was the period of great virtuosity in his career—the period of increasing power and waning fortunes. Once Mozart enters into a minor key, it has been said, his mood borders on the sublime. So different is the *C minor Concerto* from *The Marriage of Figaro*, it is difficult to believe that it was written while he was placing the finishing touches on that opera.

There have been many conjectures on the mental and emotional state of Mozart when he conceived the *C minor Concerto*. It is at once the most spacious, the most powerful and daemonic piano concerto he has written. It has the epic range which only Beethoven was to achieve in the classical concerto form.

In the *C minor*, there is not only the implication of a profoundly moved spirit of an artist, for whom music was a spiritual haven and outlet, but a new expressive force in its valiant anguish. One wonders what the listeners of his time thought of this wonderful opus which—as A. Veinus says in his book on concertos—has "the rocklike grandeur that one expects more readily from a Beethoven or a Michelangelo." Beethoven, in his sixteenth year at this period, was not yet the recognized musical genius, and it is not recorded that listeners of Mozart's day ever related Michelangelo to Mozart or any other heroic artist. Beethoven's homage to this concerto is well known; to a friend he said much later that it was doubtful if he would ever get an idea like it.

The originality of Mozart, his ever-amazing ingenuity, is demonstrated in the opening movement where the material with the entrance of the piano is new, not derived from the orchestral *tutti* or prelude. This *tutti* is one of Mozart's longest but of its melodic material only its heroic opening theme figures prominently in this amazing movement. One might almost call Mozart prodigal with some of his thematic invention. Almost immediately the listener, who knows any of his previous concertos, becomes aware that this one is the most richly scored and an advance in symphonic style over all the others. The scheme of this movement with its altered recapitulation is a daring use of sonata form. The majestic drama of the development section and the recapitulation are magnificently unified passages, and deeply moving.

The slow movement is a rondo which opens with a gentle, tranquil melody. Contrast is provided in the subsequent florid passages wherein the music becomes more impassioned. But the mood is definitely one of poetic tranquility, a respite from the dramatic grandeur and seriousness of the opening movement. From Mozart's letters we read of his admiration for true singing style, the attainment of tonal beauty. His contemporaries commented on his sensitivity of touch and his tonal nuance, which he surely must have exploited to fullest advantage in this *Larghetto*.

The finale is Mozart's finest movement in the variation

form. It is based on a tune that has been rightly labelled as sublime. "If tunes really can be portraits, as Couperin wished them to be," writes Eric Blom, "this would be one of a well-dressed and perfectly mannered widow who let the world guess her grief, without conscientiously showing it." There is a rhythmic buoyancy to this finale—at times almost bordering on an impish carefreeness. But the listener cannot fail to feel the deeper implications beneath this rhythmically alive *Allegretto*.

The *B flat Concerto, K. 595* was the last and certainly one of the finest of Mozart's piano concertos, though it is more reserved in its dramatic qualities than the great *C minor*. One of the truest expressions of respect for creative art is the mature artist's understanding of his power in restraint. The *B flat* came three years after the "Coronation" concerto, five years after the *C minor*. It was written in 1791, the year of Mozart's untimely death. "He played it on March 4, 1791—but not in an 'academy' of his own, which the Viennese public would not longer support," writes Einstein. The occasion was a concert by the clarinetist Joseph Bahr; the place was the concert hall of the Court-Caterer Jahn situated in the Himmelpfortgasse (Gate-of-Heaven Road). Einstein says the concerto indeed stands "at the gate of heaven," at the door of eternity. . . . It was not in the *Requiem* that he said his last word, however (as most would have us believe), but in this work. . . . This is the musical counterpart to the confession he made in his letters that life had lost attraction for him. . . . He no longer rebelled against his fate, as he had in the *G minor Symphony*, to which, not only in key, but in other ways as well, this concerto is a sort of complement."

There is potency as well as restraint in this work. There is the wisdom of maturity that holds the artist firmly in line—"every stirring of energy is rejected or suppressed; and this fact makes all the more uncanny the depths of sadness that are touched in the shadings and modulations of the harmony" (Einstein). One who lives intimately with a work like this develops a deeper appreciation with each repeated hearing for Mozart's reserved use of his contrapuntal art, especially in the opening movement. This *Larghetto* is again a rondo, seemingly based on a folk melody, though the mood created is one of religious tranquillity. The *cantilena* style prevails with no dynamic exaggerations. It is a mood of "peaceful grandeur."

There is gaiety in the finale—"a veiled joyfulness," says Einstein. Perhaps so, for contrasts are not broadly conceived. The form is once again a rondo but a far more experimental treatise has come before. One cannot but wonder had Mozart lived longer—what wonders his experiments in form would have produced. In this music, the artist's poise suggests relaxation in which is recognizable the smile of resigned cheerfulness.

PETER HUGH REED

Editor, *The American Record Guide*



THE ARTIST

PAUL BADURA-SKODA was born in Vienna in 1927, and began to study piano at the age of six. His teacher was Viola Thern, with whom he began his studies in 1939. He entered the Vienna College of Music in 1945, and in 1948 passed his finals for piano and choir conducting with special mention. In 1947 he won first prize at the Austrian Music Competition, and he was awarded further prizes at the International Music Competitions in Budapest (1948), and in Paris (1949). In the summers of 1948 and 1950 he studied with Edwin Fischer, attending his "Meisterklasse" in Lucerne. Mr. Badura-Skoda has played with all the major symphony orchestras in the Western Hemisphere, toured South and Central America, given more than 100 concerts in the United States alone since 1952, and concertized twice throughout Australia.

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NATURAL BALANCE



MOZART

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PIANO CONCERTO No. 24 IN C MINOR,
K. 491

1. Allegro
2. Larghetto
3. Allegretto

PAUL BADURA-SKODA - Piano
Vienna Symphony Orchestra
Conducted by FELIX PROHASKA

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MOZART

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2

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PIANO CONCERTO No. 27 IN B FLAT MAJOR,
K. 595

1. Allegro
2. Larghetto
3. Allegro

PAUL BADURA-SKODA - Piano
Vienna Symphony Orchestra
Conducted by FELIX PROHASKA

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