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JOSEPH MARTIN  
**KRAUS**

COMPLETE PIANO MUSIC  
COSTANTINO MASTROPRIMIANO



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# JOSEPH MARTIN KRAUS 1756-1792

## COMPLETE PIANO MUSIC

- |    |  |       |
|----|--|-------|
| 1. | <b>Zwei Neue Kuriose Minuetten</b> VB190 | 2'03  |
| 2. | <b>Rondo in F</b> VB191                  | 8'17  |
| 3. | <b>Svensk Dans</b> VB192                 | 3'46  |
| 4. | <b>Thema con Variazione</b> VB193        | 11'08 |
| 5. | <b>Larghetto</b> VB194                   | 0'48  |

### Sonata in E flat VB195

- |    |                                   |      |
|----|-----------------------------------|------|
| 6. | I. Allegro Moderato               | 8'27 |
| 7. | II. Andante con Variazione        | 9'20 |
| 8. | III. Allegro ma non troppo presto | 7'46 |

### Sonata in E VB196

- |     |                                   |       |
|-----|-----------------------------------|-------|
| 9.  | I. Vivace                         | 7'13  |
| 10. | II. Adagio                        | 4'17  |
| 11. | III. Allegretto - Adagio - Arioso | 5'53  |
| 12. | IV. Andante con Variazione        | 10'43 |

**COSTANTINO MASTROPRIMIANO** *fortepiano*  
*Stein 1781, copy by Monika May*

Total time: 79'48

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Regarded during his lifetime as one of six most original and ingenious composers, **Joseph Martin Kraus (1756-1792)** has, like many others, fallen under the historical shadow of Mozart. An almost exact contemporary, Kraus was hailed by a person no less important as Joseph Haydn as Mozart's equal in terms of creativity and genius, a label he often refused to apply to himself. Kraus, though, had a career more akin to Haydn than Mozart, and moreover was more of a polymath. Born in central Germany, his father was a city assessor, and he learned music composition in Mannheim, Mainz, Erfurt, and Göttingen. In the first, he was trained at the Jesuit Gymnasium and Music Seminar, and was talented enough to sit in as an extraluminal student in the famed orchestra there, while in the other three cities he attended university in both philosophy and law. In 1778 he decided on a career in music and emigrated to Sweden, where he became Vice-Kapellmeister at the court of Gustav III in 1781. In 1782 he embarked on a four-year grand tour of Europe, meeting with colleagues in Berlin, Vienna, Venice, Rome, Naples, Paris, and London, all the while observing in his copious correspondence the trends and sights of his day. In 1788 he became Kapellmeister in Stockholm, where he was instrumental in reforming the Royal Academy of Music's curriculum. All too soon, his life was cut short in 1792, a few months after the assassination of his employer, King Gustav III, at a masked ball.

Trained as a violinist (who, like Mozart, preferred the viola), he nonetheless was a talented pianist. Francisco de Miranda, a nobleman on a grand tour in 1787, described Kraus playing the fortepiano "like an angel." Surprisingly, the composer left relatively few works for the keyboard, though at least one sonata composed in 1779 for Countess Ingelheim in Germany has been lost, and there may have been others that those on this disc. These, however, give a good cross section of works, from the satirical to the sublime, from the expansive to the perfunctory. Probably one of the earliest is a pair of keyboard dances entitled *Zwei neue kuriose Minuetten* (VB190), which were written and sent to Johann Sebastian Bach biographer and Kraus fellow student in Göttingen, Johann Nikolaus Forkel, with whom he had a number of esthetical debates. These two pieces, probably meant never to be performed in public, are deliberate glosses on some of the simple works from the *Anna Magdalena Notebook*, yet are filled with all manner of deliberate mistakes. This makes them something akin to Mozart's *Musical Joke*.

Kraus biographer Fredrik Silverstolpe combined three occasional works into a single manuscript volume. The first, a *Rondo in F major* (VB191) was composed probably between 1778-1782 and represents a long and varied work that incorporates a number of contrasting sections. The lyrical bipartite theme is gentle and lyrical, but there are moments of flashy virtuoso display and even some non-sequitur unisons that provide alternate moods. The style of Emanuel Bach is evident in

the sometimes abrupt changes. The Swedish Dance (*Svensk Dans*, VB192) dates from his return to Stockholm, composed probably for performance in the Palmstedt literary salon of which Kraus was an honored member. The idea behind this lay in his colleague Abbé Volger's interest in folk music, though the exact tune cannot be determined. Kraus creates a perpetual motion dance with a couple of simple variations, an intimate social occasional work for his intellectual audience. The more extensive *Theme and 12 Variations* (VB193) was composed probably in London in 1785, when Kraus attended the Handel Centenary Festival. The simple hunting theme including horn fifths, later used in a famous hymn in expanded form, expands out to include some impressive virtuoso rhythmic and thematic display. Among his variations can be found one with a Scotch snap, a moody and dramatic minor key, and running scalar passages that challenge the keyboardist. Finally, there is a short single movement (*Larghetto*, VB194) in gavotte rhythm that seems more like a hymn than a complete piano piece. Most likely, it was the opening theme of a set of variations that have either been lost or were not pursued by the composer for some reason.

The real tours de force are the two fortepiano sonatas, both published in 1788 by Swedish publisher Olof Ålström. The *E-flat Sonata* (VB195) is a revision of a work originally composed in Paris as a violin sonata in 1785. This work was proposed to have been written for Maria Aloysia von Born, daughter of freemason Ignaz von Born, though documentation of this is lacking. The formal structure of the work is clear and straight-forward, balancing the lyrical themes with displays of virtuosity. There is a parlando section, after which the first movement erupts with arpeggiated statements and juxtaposition of duple and triplet rhythms as it modulates into some remoter tonalities. The second movement is a set of extensive variations based upon a simple, yet flowing tune. As with most variations, there is a wide variety of formulations within, ranging from a simple Austrian-flavored folk-like tune in the first to a pair of minuets (variations three-five). A soft and pensive *Larghetto* in B-flat minor, and complex rhythms before the return of the main theme. The finale is a sprawling display of virtuosity, replete with abrupt rallentandos and harmonic twists and turns.

The *E major Sonata* (VB196) is probably the most complex and difficult of the two surviving piano sonatas, not only in terms of key, but also in terms of technical requirements. It was probably composed in 1788, possibly just prior to its publication by Åhlström. The opening movement contains broad thematic sweeps that use parallel octaves and dynamic contrasts that would not be out of place in a Beethoven sonata. The triple meter movement modulates frequently and easily into some of the more remote key centers, fluidly balancing lyrical moments with virtuoso fireworks. The second movement offers a distinctive contrast and is couched more as a free-movement

fantasy than a rigid structure. The easy flow and rhythmic-melodic variability foreshadows early Romanticism in its tone and mood. The modulations often lead to dark, moody sections, lightened by reiterations of lyrical melody. In the finale, Kraus begins with an easy if jaunty march, which itself heralds a set of extremely complex variations in both tempo and virtuosity. Included in these is a lilting arioso and a compound meter gigue that is quite angular and off center, an anodyne to the rather lyrical variation that precedes it. There is even a dark and ghostly *sostenuto*, foreshadowing the liquid Beethoven opening of the *Moonlight Sonata* before the jaunty march returns as a final bookend.

Though limited in number, these works for solo piano (almost certainly meant for the fortepiano from the outset) represent a variety and originality that is one of Kraus's musical trademarks. The two sonatas, especially, are at the technical limits of the instrument, requiring both dexterity and interpretive ability, often foreshadowing piano music thirty years later in content and scope. It is indeed a pity that more keyboard music by Kraus either has not survived or was never written.

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**Costantino Mastroprimiano** studied piano and chamber music with M. Marvulli, Guido Agosti and Riccardo Brengola, and then moved his focus to the study of the fortepiano.

He has recorded for the Tactus, Brilliant Classics, Dynamic and Aulicus Classics labels. His recording of the complete sonatas of Muzio Clementi (18 CDs for Brilliant Classics) has become a point of reference in the genre.

He has performed to great acclaim at festivals and concert seasons in Italy (Accademia Filarmonica Romana, I Concerti della Normale di Pisa, Società del Quartetto di Milano, Accademia Cristofori di Firenze etc) and Europe (Les Nuits de Septembre – Liège, Noites de Queluz, Uni Mozarteum – Salzburg, Salle Cortot - Paris, etc.)

He is Professor of early piano at Perugia Conservatoire, and visiting professor at the Koninklijk Conservatorium Den Haag, Universität Mozarteum Salzburg, and the Moscow State Conservatoire.



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Cover: The only surviving portrait of composer Joseph Martin Kraus (1756-1792), dated 1775 and attributed to Jakob Samuel Beck (1715-1778)

Artist photo: © Romina Zanon, at the Recital in Smarano Organ Academy on Fortepiano

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