

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

(1756-1791)

Nadia Reisenberg and Artur Balsam
Piano, Four Hands

Sonata in D Major, K. 381 (10:37)

- 1** I. Allegro (3:22)
- 2** II. Andante (4:20)
- 3** III. Allegro molto (2:55)

Sonata in C Major, K. 521 (23:45)

- 4** I. Allegro (8:56)
- 5** II. Andante (7:13)
- 6** III. Allegretto (7:36)

Adagio and Allegro in f minor, K. 594 (7:32)

- 7** Adagio (1:57)
- 8** Allegro (5:35)

Sonata in B-flat Major, K. 358 (11:02)

- 9** I. Allegro (3:57)
- 10** II. Adagio (4:04)
- 11** III. Molto presto (3:01)

Sonata in F Major, K. 497 (23:45)

- 12** I. Adagio - Allegro di molto (8:49)
- 13** II. Andante (7:41)
- 14** III. Allegro (7:15)

W.A. Mozart: Music for Piano, Four Hands

There persists a spurious belief that Mozart actually invented music for piano four hands. The myth stems from his father Leopold's assertion in a letter that "in London, Wolfgang composed his first piece for four hands. No one has ever composed a sonata for four hands before this." In fact Johann Christian Bach, J.S. Bach's youngest son, had written duo sonatas as early as 1757, and may have even performed them for the 8-year-old Wolfgang when they met in 1765.

Regardless of primacy, the five works on this recording show Mozart's genius at keyboard collaboration. Mozart's instrument was the piano after all, and his compositional legacy remains formidable. The piano concertos are mainstays of the standard repertory, his solo sonatas the de facto litmus test for developing performers. The four-hand literature, sadly, is underappreciated and deserves more frequent programming.

Mozart's first four-hand pieces were written for performances with sister Nannerl. Later sonatas took advantage of the skills of—and occasionally Mozart's romantic intentions toward—his best pupils. Written virtuosically, the sonatas were intended more for performers than for audiences. Succeeding generations have been kinder to four-hand piano performance, as major works by Schubert, Brahms, Dvorak, Debussy, Stravinsky and others have resulted in a radically different appreciation of the genre. Many well-known four-hand specialist duos exist today.

Mozart wrote the *Sonata in D Major*, K. 381, in Salzburg in 1772. Thanks to the previous C major (K. 19d) four-hand sonata and a long European tour, Mozart's reputation was already well established. More facile than the weightier sonatas that would follow, the D major offers unbroken sunny humor and energy. The first movement *Allegro* shares the lead voice between primo and secondo

equally. The *Andante* that follows is by far the most developed movement, with lush counterpoint in the opening theme and a gently caressing second subject. The *Allegro molto* brightens the preexisting sunshine, if that were possible, skipping off to a merry conclusion.

Mozart's final composition intended for piano duo, the *Sonata in C Major*, K. 521, was completed in 1787. It was performed with his student, Franziska von Jacquin, and its virtuosic demands imply that von Jacquin was a capable player. Einstein famously described it as "almost a reduction of an Italian symphony."

A vivacious *Allegro*, its gorgeous opening theme joyously revisited in long repeat, contrasts sharply with a melancholy *Andante*, its melody firmly in primo right hand, secondo accenting it with a gentle rising and falling figure. Both moods get upstaged by the capricious *Allegretto* finale, which opens with a jaunty dotted melody in primo and a humorous ostinato underpinning in secondo. Soon all four hands are scampering up and down the keyboard with classic Mozartean insouciance. After much fun, a well-developed coda rushes to the conclusion.

The *Adagio and Allegro* in f minor, K. 594, first written for mechanical organ; survives, as does a similar work in f minor, K. 608, from a transcription made early in the 19th century. It is the second of three pieces Mozart purportedly wrote for a mechanical clock and pipe organ owned by Josef Count Deym Stritez (1750-1804), a Bohemian nobleman.

The Count himself was a considerable character. He had killed an opponent in a duel, and was using the pseudonym Müller for protection when Mozart met him. His mechanical clock/organ provided entertainment for his wax museum of historic and exotic figures, death masks—eventually to include Mozart's own—and even some erotica. The museum also boasted a mechanical singing canary, two

waxen flute-playing young men, and a life-sized, negligee-clad woman sitting at a player piano.

In a letter to his wife, Mozart claimed disdain for the instrument—"it consists solely of little pipes, which sound high-pitched and too childish for my taste"—but the quality of the K. 594 belies his disregard.

The music was intended to accompany a memorial tribute that the Count staged in the museum daily to honor the memory of a fallen Bohemian war hero. In ABA format, a trancelike Adagio lament leads to a stern march with distinct military demeanor. The fleet fingering of the central Allegro, which was written for a mechanical instrument after all, challenges both players. The lament returns for a somber conclusion.

The *Sonata in B-flat Major*, K. 358, written in 1774, sets the two players against each other in a call-and-response first movement, the right hand primo doubled by the left hand secondo. The doubling continues all the way through to a brief coda. The second movement Adagio, a slow waltz of exquisite classical proportions, evokes Haydn. The staccato third movement, *Molto presto*, hints at a theme Mozart later revisited in the finale of his *Jupiter* symphony.

The *Sonata in F Major*, K. 497 is by far the longest and most substantial of Mozart's works for piano duo. Einstein goes so far as to call it "the crowning work of its kind." The sonata was completed in August, 1786 during a remarkably fecund period for Mozart that included composition of *The Marriage of Figaro*, the Haydn quartets, the Kegelstatt trio and the two piano quartets.

A noble Adagio opening gives way to an imposing section marked Allegro di molto, primo elaborating the melody with secondo filling in the counterpoint. The symphonic complexity of this movement certainly shows the hand of a seasoned opera composer. An intimate and elaborate Andante follows, striking a more

judicious balance between the players. The rondo finale, a heavily accented Allegro, expands the musical partnership, with melodic material passed back and forth right through to the final notes.

~ Keith Powers

Keith Powers covers classical music for the Boston Herald, and is a frequent contributor to Chamber Music, Bolshoi, Portfolio, the Quarterly Review of Wines, and the Improper Bostonian. He also contributed notes to the complete symphonic recordings of Arthur Berger and the wind quintets of Karel Husa (both New World Records).



Ruth Balsam with Artur Balsam, London, 1956, recording Mozart Concertos for the BBC



Georges Enesco, Richard Tucker, and Nadia Reisenberg

Nadia Reisenberg

A Remembrance by Robert Sherman

Nadia Reisenberg - or Mother as I called her for short - attracted friends like a welcoming magnet. When I was growing up, there were always people in the apartment - students taking time before or after lessons to imbibe the ever-present milk and cookies, often while unburdening themselves with tales of romantic woe; colleagues representing a wide swath of the cultural scene in New York; famous artists enjoying gossip; savoring Russian tea (in a glass), and making music together just for fun. None of this seemed remarkable, of course. I just assumed that most families sat around listening to Dodger games with Paul Robeson, or went backstage to greet Josef Hofmann after a "Telephone Hour" broadcast, or listened to rehearsals in the living room with the Budapest Quartet.

By the time I was a teenager, I began to realize how lucky I was, and I guess I started paying a little more attention to the music at home. Not to mention some of the musicians. I developed a crush on the gorgeous cellist Raya Garbousova, I loved listening to Boris Goldovsky's hilarious opera stories, and I recall many delightful hours hearing Benny Goodman play the classics with Mother - she teasing the clarinetist about the little warm-up riff with which he invariably prefaced the Brahms or whatever else they were working on - he equally bemused at her total inability to get the hang of jazz. Other musician friends were members of the New York Philharmonic, like first cellist Joseph Schuster (or Yusia, as we all called him), whose family connections extended to our respective Scotties: the summer romance of Tommy Schuster and Bonnie Lassie Reisenberg-Sherman produced seven puppies, which Mother duly named Do, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, La and Ti. Another favorite was Simeon Bellison, the Philharmonic's courtly first clarinetist, from whom I actually took a few lessons, and whose exuberant wife



In February 1948, Nadia Reisenberg sent her autographed publicity photo, inscribed: 'To my dear friends Ruth and Artur Balsam, Affectionately, Nadia Reisenberg, Feb. 1948.' Artur Balsam was clearly taken with the photo, and produced this pencil drawing of it.

was known equally for her fabulous cooking and delicious malapropisms: "I thank you from my bottom to my heart," she told us once.

As much as Mother loved chamber works with strings or winds, she had an especial fondness for four-hand piano music, perhaps the most intimate of performing associations. The aforementioned Boris Goldovsky was a favorite partner ("Oh how I loved playing four-hands with Nadia," he recalled in 1985; "she was a wonderful artist and such a charming woman...") Another was Rudolf Firkusny, who shared Mother's joy at the close-knit give and take of the keyboard ensemble ("we are having such a marvelous time," he said during a 1980 Schubert birthday broadcast on my Listening Room program on WQXR); and most pertinent to the recordings at hand, the wonderful Artur Balsam, a warm friend and devoted colleague who participated in so many chamber sessions in our apartment. To give you an idea of his generosity of spirit, he even agreed to perform with me once. At the end of a pops concert at the Queens Symphony, with Artur and Mother as soloists in Saint Saens' *Carnival of the Animals* and yours truly narrating the Ogden Nash verses, we conned him into doing a round-robin encore of Milhaud's *Scaramouche*. The first movement was too hard for me, so the real pianists did that; Artur then suffered patiently through the slow movement with me, after which Mother and I zipped through the finale (using our secret edition, where she played most of the difficult passages). Yes, he was a real gentleman.

Unlike most distinguished soloists, Artur enjoyed a thriving parallel career as an accompanist. "Accompanist" was a word that would send Mother up the wall when some unthinking critic used it to refer to the pianist playing sonatas with a more famous violinist or cellist, but it didn't seem to bother Mr. Balsam, probably because he- and the rest of the musical world- knew that his peerless keyboard partnership was both highly cherished and greatly in demand. Mother would

often point out the Celebrated Artists who toured the country and beyond with their regular accompanists, but invariably called upon Balsam when it came to an all-important New York recital.

Bridge Records' decision to re-release these Sonatas, originally issued on the Musical Heritage label, is tremendously gratifying, not only because of the personal connections involved, but because it gives the first evidence on commercial CD of Mother's lifelong passion for Mozart. She played the charming, though possibly spurious *Pastoral Variee* on her very first American recital (Aeolian Hall, February 6th, 1924), the K. 310 *Sonata in A minor* at her last solo program (Carnegie Hall, November 21st, 1947). In between, and thereafter too, of course, came a long parade of sonatas, trios and other chamber music. And most importantly, during the 1939-1940 season, the historic series of which she was most proud: the consecutive performances of all the Piano Concertos in a weekly series of live, coast-to-coast broadcasts conducted by Alfred Wallenstein. Never before had the complete cycle been performed in America (Saint-Saens apparently had been the only one to accomplish it in Europe), nor would it happen again until Lili Kraus' superb Town Hall concerts some thirty years later. Mother called it "my private year with Mozart, the most rewarding experience of my career. Of all the composers, perhaps with the exception of Bach," she said, "I find Mozart the most satisfying. He does not allow mediocrity, not even one false note; his kind of divine inspiration must be crystal clear. The purity of form, the loftiness and melodic wealth are enthralling..."

The clarity, purity, and deep musicality of these Reisenberg-Balsam performances speak for themselves; but it has been gratifying to speak again here about Mother and Artur and a few of the other great artists whose legacies must not be allowed to fade.

~ Robert Sherman

Nadia Reisenberg & Leonard Bernstein



Artur Balsam was born in Warsaw, Poland in 1906. Balsam's early studies were at the Conservatory at Lodz, and later at the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin (1928-31). He won the International Piano Competition in Berlin in 1930, and received the Mendelssohn Prize in Chamber Music, with violinist Roman Totenberg in Munich (1931). Balsam left school to accompany the 14-year-old violin prodigy, Yehudi Menuhin in 1932, touring Europe and North America. By 1938, he was touring the world as partner to the violinist Nathan Milstein. Balsam and his wife Ruth escaped Europe just before the Nazi Holocaust, and settled permanently in the USA in 1940.

Artur Balsam performed with many of the great musicians of the 20th century. In addition to Francescatti, Menuhin and Milstein, he partnered with violin virtuosos Szigeti, Kogan, Oistrakh, Fuchs, Shumsky, Goldberg and Stern, as well as cellists Rostropovich, Fournier, Nelsova and Parnas. In the 1940s, he was pianist with the NBC Orchestra under Toscanini. In the 1950s Balsam appeared as a soloist with the Royal Philharmonic, the London Symphony, the Philharmonia of London, Milan and Warsaw, the radio orchestras of Berlin, London, Zurich and many others. In 1956 he was invited by the BBC to play six piano concerti for the Mozart bicentenary. During the same period he was a frequent guest with the Budapest and Juilliard String Quartets. He toured in the 1960s with the Albeneri Trio, and was engaged by The Concerto Soloists in Philadelphia, The Beethoven Society, The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and Mostly Mozart in the 1970s. His last public appearance, at age 87 was with The Music Project at Carnegie Recital Hall in February, 1993.



Nathan Milstein & Artur Balsam

The Balsam discography comprises over 250 works, including the complete solo works of Haydn and Mozart, ten Mozart piano concerti, the Hummel A minor Concerto, the Beethoven violin and cello sonatas, and the violin sonatas of Mozart, Brahms, Schumann and Prokofiev. Balsam had a significant influence on several generations of young musicians, including pianists Murray Perahia and Emanuel Ax. Balsam performed and coached chamber ensembles at festivals including Banff, Aldeburgh, Music Mountain, Orono and for 35 seasons, Kneisel Hall in Blue Hill, Maine. In addition, Artur Balsam taught at the Eastman School of Music, Boston University and the Manhattan School of Music (1965-1992). In a 1971 New York Times review, Harold Schonberg wrote, "It is not for nothing that Artur Balsam is generally recognized as the best (as well as the dean) of American accompanists."



A photo taken inside the Balsam apartment at 23 West 75th Street, New York City. the revelers are identified on the photo as: Artur, Eiger, Miriam Solovieff (vn), Gimple (sitting) Kassern (composer).

Producer: Dr. Michael Naida
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Photographs courtesy of the Artur Balsam Foundation and the Nadia Reisenberg/Clara Rockmore Foundation. Cover painting: Mozart's sons at the age of 7 and 14; portrait by Hans Hansen, 1798.
The back cover portrait of Nadia Reisenberg was painted by J. Campbell Phillips in 1932 and photographed by Nadia Reisenberg's grandson Steve Sherman in 1985.
Inside tray painting: Leopold Mozart with his daughter and son and portrait of wife painted by Johann Nepomuk de la Croce, 1780-81.
Traycard and page 10 photographs of Nadia Reisenberg by James Abresch.
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