

Fragar made his first concert tour in 1959. In 1963 he played not only in Central and South America, but in the U.S.S.R. for the first (but not last) time. In 1969, he added the Far East to his concert itinerary, and Australia in 1969.

His specialties included Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Chopin, and Schumann, but not at the expense of twentieth-century composers, Prokofiev and Bartók in particular. He spent considerable time in search of original versions of music, unearthing the Tchaikovsky Concerto No. 1 that Nicolas Rubinstein had damned so brutally in 1875, and the 1841 Fantasie in A minor that later became the first movement of Schumann's only Piano Concerto. Frager became interested in eighteenth-century fortepianos on which he played and recorded Haydn and Mozart and wrote scholarly articles in his free time.

Despite tours, recordings, and archival pursuits, Frager never achieved parity with his elder contemporaries, even after Fleischer's right-hand injury (an extreme form of carpal tunnel syndrome, in effect, that also cost Gary Graffman the use of his right hand), and Cliburn's virtual retirement after a decade of international successes. With his curly brown hair, long neck, and ready smile, Frager seemed to lack their demonic concentration on stage (or, in Cliburn's case, an apparent other-worldly communion with "voices"). His artistry was never matter-of-fact, but neither was it charismatic, and therefore, best appreciated sight-unseen on broadcasts and recordings. His death was untimely -- from cancer, one of the music world's best-kept secrets. He played almost to the end, including a Mozart concerto in Baltimore with conductor David Zinman just weeks before his passing. To anyone, however, who had known Frager from the start of his career, he looked stricken and played mechanically -- a brave adieu, but not musically memorable (as Dinu Lipatti's had been in 1950), despite those first prizes and full schedule.

Prokofieff
Piano Concerto No. 2

Haydn
Sonata No. 35

Malcolm Frager, piano

René Leibowitz
Paris Conservatoire Orchestra

There are in fact two versions of this concerto, the first written during the years 1912-1913, the second written in 1923. During the Russian Civil War, the original manuscript score of the Concerto was destroyed in a fire in Prokofiev's St. Petersburg apartment; in 1923, he recreated the score from memory. According to the composer, the two versions of the work are very different; Prokofiev wrote to a friend that "I have so completely rewritten the Second Concerto that it might be considered the Fourth."

The original version of the Second Concerto was dedicated to the memory of a pianist and close friend of Prokofiev's, Maximilian Schmidt. Schmidt committed suicide in 1913, and left a note to Prokofiev that read, in part, "I am reporting the latest news to you. I have shot myself. Don't grieve overmuch. The reasons were not important." The Concerto is a challenging, virtuosic vehicle for pianistic display. It is a work of some excess, as Philip Ramey has noted, with perhaps the "longest, most demanding cadenza (post-Lisztian in its pyrotechnics) in the literature." It looks forward, according to Ramey, to the neo-primitivism of Prokofiev's works of 1915-1918 (including the Scythian Suite and the cantata Seven, They are Seven), and probably, given the years of its genesis, owes something to Stravinsky as well. After being harshly criticized for the superficiality of his First Concerto, Prokofiev sought to create a work of greater substance and depth. The audience at the premiere was, as became usual for this composer, sharply divided between supporters who applauded and detractors who hissed. The Russian critics were vigorous in attacking this work: after the premiere, Prokofiev was vilified in the press as an uncivilized "futurist" who had created a "Babel of insane sounds." The work, typical of Prokofiev, is a forthright, uncompromising piece, with its bombast and "cacophony" tempered by the pervasive lyricism found in most of his music.

It is cast in four movements. The first movement, *Andantino*, utilizes sonata form, with two contrasting themes stated in the opening exposition. The development section consists entirely of the grand cadenza described above, and also spills over into the beginning of the recapitulation, where the opening theme is finally heard again. The second movement, *Scherzo: Vivace*, is very short, with a driving, mechanistic character. The third movement is slow, though it is called *Intermezzo: Allegro moderato*. There is a darkness and malevolence to this movement (another common trait of Prokofiev's music), and it may be the noisiest and least melodic movement of the whole work. The lyricism of the opening movement returns in the finale, an *Allegro tempestoso*. This lives up to its title with sharply contrasting themes, some widely spaced, angular melodies, pounding octave passages in the piano, and a second bravura cadenza. The work ends, after a sudden, unexpected false ending, with a brilliant tutti restatement of the opening theme.

Fragar was a younger contemporary of Leon Fleischer (b. 1928), John Browning (b. 1933), and Van Cliburn (b. 1934). Like them he became a major prizewinner, starting with the Michaels Memorial Award in Chicago, followed by the Leventritt in 1959, and a year later the Queen Elisabeth Competition at Brussels. The Michaels award caused a brief dust-up when it became known that Frager was a relative of the prize giver (whose memorialized parents had been killed in a plane crash abroad), but the Leventritt and QEC validated the voting of Chicago judges.

At the age of 14 Frager undertook six years of study in N.Y.C. with Carl Friedberg, a pupil of Clara Schumann, and during that period was privately educated. He went on to Columbia University, majoring in Russian studies and graduating in 1957. The Leventritt opened doors both in the U.S. and abroad;

Prokofieff Concerto No. 2 **Haydn Sonata No. 35**

Malcolm Frager, piano

Rene Leibowitz Paris Conservatoire Orchestra

Concerto No. 2 In G, Op. 16

1 Andantino 10:44

2 Scherzo: Vivace 2:44

3 Allegro Moderato 6:06

4 Finale: Allegro Tempestoso 10:55

Sonata No. 35 In E Flat (11:30)

5 Allegro Moderato

Adagio

Finale: Allegro

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Producers: Charles Gerhardt, Peter Dellheim

Engineers : Kenneth Wilkinson, Alan Reeve



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