
Eugene
ISTOMIN
Mozart
CONCERTOS
No. 21 in C major, K. 467
No. 24 in C minor, K. 491
GERARD SCHWARZ
Seattle Symphony Orchestra
REFERENCE RECORDINGS
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When the 17-year-old Eugene Istomin made his début with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Eugene Ormandy in 1943, he played Chopin's F-minor Concerto; the concerto he played in his New York Philharmonic début just four days later, with Artur Rodzinski conducting, was the Brahms B-flat. Some twenty years later, his reputation solidly established, Istomin recorded both of those works with Ormandy, after recording concertos by Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff and Beethoven with him, and recording the Schumann concerto with Bruno Walter; but his first concerto recordings were of earlier music—the Bach D minor with Adolf Busch and the Busch Chamber Players, and Mozart's Concerto No. 14 in E-flat (K. 449) with Pablo Casals conducting the Perpignan Festival Orchestra of 1951. While the Mozart concertos have always held a special place in Istomin's affections, the present recording, issued in celebration of his seventieth year, is the first he has made of any of them since the one with Casals more than four decades ago.

As with the Beethoven sonatas, Istomin has never felt it necessary to take on an integral cycle of the Mozart concertos to make his commitment clear. "I don't learn pieces from an intellectual point of view alone," he advises; "it's at least as important to me that I learn them from an *impassioned* point of view, from the act of loving them"—and that kind of involvement would seem to mean total absorption in each work for its own sake, in pursuit of its own unique wonders, rather

than as part of a series. There are, in fact, more than a few Mozart concertos Istomin has not yet got round to performing, though he has thoroughly studied them all. One of these is the last of the C major Concertos—No. 25, K. 503—though, curiously, he has provided a cadenza for that work's first movement which his friend and colleague Leon Fleisher not only performed, but recorded with George Szell and the Cleveland Orchestra.

The somewhat earlier and far more familiar C major Concerto recorded here—No. 21, K. 467—is one Istomin has favored for festive occasions, such as the Presidential Inaugural Concert of 1981 (with Mstislav Rostropovich conducting the National Symphony Orchestra at the Kennedy Center). "A characteristic feature of this masterpiece," he observes, "is the use of clichés to make miracles. There is a sense of personal renewal here—something you *know* is going to happen, and when it does it is deliciously surprising, fresh, eternal . . . "

The score of this concerto is dated March 9, 1785, less than four weeks after the completion and premiere of the D minor, K. 466, and its festive spirit provides the sharpest contrasts with that darkly dramatic work. Such contrasts among works in such close chronological proximity are frequent in Mozart's catalogue (and of course were part of the plan when the respective works were presented as parts of a set). In the case of the D minor and C major concertos, as Alfred Orel observed, the latter, "with its perfectly harmonious clarity, is a natural reaction after the spiritual tempests and passionate battles of the D minor."

The first movement is in the form the distinguished Mozart scholar Alfred Einstein characterized as an "ideal march." Einstein felt that after the D minor Concerto Mozart could never again return to quite the sort of concerto he had written earlier. Instead of returning to "normality," Einstein suggested, Mozart

returned to "the proud, triumphant affirmation of himself, once again symbolized by an ideal march," while a subsidiary theme shows "that utmost simplicity of which only great men are capable, men who possess that 'second naïveté' which is the highest achievement of artistic and human experience. And Mozart returns from dramatic dialogue [in the D minor Concerto] to symphonic treatment." The reassertion of the march becomes a little tongue-in-cheek at times, but there is nonetheless a certain majesty underlying the playful element. To Istomin,

> The key to this work is its massive, heroic, yet elegant virtuosity. In a marvel of what might be called a "post-cliché," the movement having powerfully concluded, Mozart tacks on four bars of sublime sauciness. No one else could have matched this remarkable gesture. And, to mesmerize his listeners still further, he introduces under the woodwinds in the passage a triad bass line which immediately begins and underpins the accompaniment to the melody of the glorious *Andante*. But how many listeners, and even accomplished players, realize that this planet-famous tune is itself that same triad! Then, in continuing this immortal sleight-of-hand, the triad recurs yet again in the finale; the Euclidian geometry of the construction is nothing less than a miracle.

The *Andante*, as songful in its way as the celebrated *Romanze* of the D minor Concerto, is a true instrumental aria, with what Istomin describes as "a moonlit, magical quality" and not a single earthbound gesture. The finale, providing another appropriate contrast within the work, is a rollicking—if not altogether earthy—*buffo* piece, with no pretensions beyond the amiable objective of reaching a cheerful and witty conclusion.

Mozart completed his C minor Concerto on March 24, 1786, and gave its first performance exactly two weeks later; it was one of the three piano concertos he composed while at work on *The Marriage of Figaro*, and one of only two he composed in minor keys. It is noteworthy in other respects as well: the orchestra specified in this score is the largest Mozart called for in any of his concertos (with a pair of clarinets added to the flute, oboes, bassoons, horns, trumpets, timpani and strings indicated for K. 467); it is the most symphonic in character of the lot, with especially important roles for the winds; it is also the most individual in its design, and it stands out in this exalted series, even more than the D minor, as what Einstein called "an explosion of the dark, tragic emotions." Beethoven expressed profound admiration for this concerto on more than one occasion, and its direct influence on his own concerto in the same key, begun in 1800, is inescapable. Istomin observes that

> the whole of K. 491 is related to "wrong notes." In the outer movements, minor scales turn major and return to minor, and in general Mozart enjoys the play of the minor second, as well as his extension of the fifth that Beethoven liked to point out—here a half-step higher, there a half-step lower . . .

The turbulent first movement, symphonic in scope to an unprecedented degree and (uncharacteristically in 3/4), is dominated almost entirely by the fierce theme with which it opens, and instead of the usual ceremonial coda, it "waltzes to a close"(Istomin's phrase) with a dark minimal gesture.

In contrast to the storms of the opening movement, the *Larghetto*, in Einstein's words, "moves in regions of the purest and most affecting tranquility,

and has a transcendent simplicity of expression." Trumpets and drums are silent here, but the woodwinds are given passages of almost soloistic prominence. This slow movement is a rondo, a form traditionally reserved for the finale—but tradition plays no part in this work. The finale itself, Einstein wrote, "is an uncanny, revolutionary quick-march consisting of variations with free 'episodes' (actually anything but episodes) which represent glimpses of Elysian fields—but the conclusion is a return to the inevitable."

Mozart left no cadenzas of his own for either of the concertos recorded here. Eugene Istomin composed cadenzas for both, but has modified them over the years to incorporate portions of those by various colleagues. The one he plays in the first movement of K. 467 is an amalgam of one by Paul Badura-Skoda and one by himself; the one in that work's final movement is by Lillian Kallir. In K. 491 the first movement cadenza is made up of contributions from Claude Frank (Miss Kallir's husband), Leopold Mannes and Istomin, who also supplied ornaments in this work's second movement and "cadenzettas" in both of the outer ones.

Istomin is especially pleased that he and Gerard Schwarz recorded the C minor Concerto in Seattle. It was with the Seattle Symphony Orchestra that he first performed this work, with Milton Katims conducting, during the World's Fair of 1962. Istomin and Gerard Schwarz, close friends as well as colleagues for more than twenty years, have during that time collaborated in several performances of both K. 467 and K. 491, in several venues. Both concertos as presented here were recorded in one day, in what amounted to little more than single takes, preserving the continuity and momentum of real performances.

**—Richard Freed**

**Gerard Schwarz and The Seattle Symphony** constitute one the most celebrated musical marriages of our time. They have earned awards from *Ovation, Musical America* and *Stereo Review* magazines, eight Grammy® nominations, and two Grammy® awards. Often referred to as "the most recorded orchestra in America," The Seattle Symphony now boasts more than fifty titles in its catalogue. In 1994, the orchestra was honored by ASCAP for its adventurous programming of contemporary music.

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**Engineer:** Keith O. Johnson
**Executive Producers:** Marcia Martin / JTH
**Piano:** Steinway CD383, #495436-P-0998
**Piano Tuner:** Tali Mahonor
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# Mozart

## Concerto No. 21 in C major, K. 467 *(28:01)*

1. [Allegro maestoso] *(14:54)*
2. Andante *(6:12)*
3. Allegro vivace assai *(6:47)*

## Concerto No. 24 in C minor, K. 491 *(31:25)*

1. Allegro *(14:47)*
2. Larghetto *(7:26)*
3. Allegretto *(9:06)*

*Total Time 59:34*

EUGENE ISTOMIN, piano
Gerard Schwarz
The Seattle Symphony Orchestra

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