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Joseph Martin  
**KRAUS**

**Complete Piano Music**  
**Sonatas**

Scherzo con variazioni • Swedish Dance

Jacques Després



## Joseph Martin Kraus (1756-1792)

### Complete Piano Works

Joseph Martin Kraus may be considered one of the most talented and unusual composers of the eighteenth century. Born in the central German town of Miltenburg am Main, he received his earliest formal education in nearby Buchen and at the Jesuit Gymnasium and Music Seminar in Mannheim, where he studied German literature and music. He studied law at universities in Mainz and Erfurt, and Göttingen, coming under the influence of the last of the remnants of the Göttinger Hainbund, a *Sturm und Drang* literary circle.

In 1778 the composer decided to dedicate his life to music and to seek employment in Sweden at the court of Gustav III. Although promised a position, he found it difficult to break into the cultural establishment of Stockholm, and for the next two years he faced dire economic circumstances as he attempted to overcome the political obstacles. In 1780 he was commissioned to compose a trial work, *Proserpin*, whose text had been drafted by the king himself and versified by the poet Johan Kellgren. Its successful private performance at Ulriksdal in 1781 brought an appointment as deputy Kapellmästare and in 1782 a grand tour of Europe at Gustav's expense to view the latest in musical and theatrical trends. This took him throughout Germany, Austria, Italy, England and France where he met major figures of the period such as Gluck and Haydn.

Kraus returned to Stockholm in 1787 and the following year was appointed First Kapellmästare and director of curriculum at the Royal Academy of Music. For the next several years he achieved a reputation in Stockholm for his disciplined conducting, his activities as a composer, and his rigorous pedagogical standards. He was a participant in the Palmstedt literary circle and contributed much to the establishment of Stockholm as one of the leading cultural centres of Europe. Nine months after the assassination of Gustav III in 1792, Kraus died at the age of 36.

As a composer, Kraus can be seen as one of the most innovative of the entire century. His earliest training brought him the Italian style of the Mannheim

composers, the contrapuntal rigor of Franz Xaver Richter and J.S.Bach, as well as the dramatic style of C.P.E.Bach, Gluck and Grétry. A man with many talents, he was also a theorist, teacher and writer, with a book of poetry and a tragedy to his credit. His treatise, *Etwas von und über Music fürs Jahr 1777* (Frankfurt, 1778), is one of the few examples of literary *Sturm und Drang* aesthetics applied to music. His compositional style features the unexpected, the dramatic, and it is not surprising therefore to find many forward-looking stylistic devices that anticipate music of the next century.

In comparison with many of his contemporaries, Kraus wrote a relatively small amount of music for pianoforte. Only seven works – two sonatas, three sets of variations, and two smaller miscellaneous pieces – survive, although there is evidence that there may have been more. For example, in March of 1779 he composed a sonata for a Countess Ingenheim (*VB 189*) from Mainz, perhaps a potential patron or a family friend, which he sent from Stockholm. This work had a tortuous journey; somehow it was returned to him in June from London, and it was lost after being sent again. Another series of six pieces (*VB 206*) were stolen in 1778 by a Dutch sea-captain. These, however, may not have been keyboard pieces, although the composer did perform them for his felonious customer on the fortepiano. What is left, however, demonstrates that Kraus had a thorough knowledge of the instrument, using its expressive power to craft a series of works that are highly individualistic. Although he was not himself a professional keyboard performer, he nonetheless was often heard in soirées at the Palmstedt Circle or playing for friends compositions by himself and others. On one such occasion in 1787, the Spanish ambassador Miranda wrote in his diary simply: "Kraus played like an angel."

The *Rondo in F major (VB 191)* is one of the earliest surviving works for solo keyboard by Kraus, composed in Stockholm during the period 1778-1780; it

was sold in manuscript form by the Viennese firm of Johann Traeg beginning in 1783, and its stylistic similarity with the works of C.P.E. Bach shows that composer's influence in the ornamentation, fluctuations of intensity and dynamics, and free use of thematic material in each of the four episodes or variations. The main theme is gentle and lyrical, allowing the tension-building contrasts to be resolved, resulting in a smooth flow from one section to the next.

The *Sonata in E flat major* (VB 195) is a three-movement work that had apparently several incarnations during the course of its career. It was first composed as a sonata for violin and piano in Paris in 1785 where, according to the biographer of Kraus, Friedrich Schreiber, it was sent as a gift to Maria Aloysia von Born, daughter of the well-known Viennese freemason Ignaz von Born, with whom Kraus had become acquainted in 1783 during his visit there. It, in turn, may well have been based upon an earlier version for solo pianoforte, if the assertion made by the scholar Hans Eppstein is correct. In any case, this particular version of the work, along with the *Sonata in E major* heard later in this recording, was published by the Stockholm publisher, pianist, and composer (and Kraus's friend) Olof Åhlström as one of the first works printed after receiving his royal privilege in 1788. This work is Kraus's most "Classical" sonata, where in the first movement special attention has been paid to a relatively conventional formal structure and the correct balance of lyricism versus virtuosity. Of particular note is an almost Beethovenian *parlando* development section that devolves into a section of arpeggios in duple and triple rhythm that explore remote tonalities. The second movement is a long set of variations based upon a simple, flowing theme. Included in the seven variations are both technical difficulty and expressiveness. The first has an Austrian folk sound, while the third to the fifth variations are a pair of minuets, followed by a *Larghetto* in B flat minor and an *Adagio*, the theme of which is a quintessential example of lyricism. The finale is a display piece that interrupts the virtuoso fireworks with show-stopping *rallentandos*. The development section would not be out of place in a

Beethoven sonata with its harmonic twists and turns. The work ends with a virtuoso flourish.

The *Scherzo con variazioni in C major* (VB 193) is an unusual set of twelve variations based upon a theme of utmost simplicity, a series of horn fifths and resolutions that later became used as a well-known hymn. It is almost certain that this set was written in London in 1785, while Kraus was visiting the English capital for the Handel Centenary Festival. Later published by Åhlström, it became a favourite work of late eighteenth century Swedish pianists. Additionally, it was published in London with an amateurishly added violin accompaniment under the names of both Pleyel and Joseph Haydn. Throughout the work the composer explores the almost infinite variety of variation technique, providing opportunity for both virtuosity and musical interest. Of particular note are the fifth variation, where the music veers drunkenly from one strange minor key to the next, the tenth, which is based upon a Scotch snap bass-line motif, and the final, which contains a conclusive *Kehraus*, a signal that the work is over and all should go home.

The extremely brief *Larghetto* (VB 194) was probably written in Stockholm about 1787- 1788. While there is no information on why Kraus wrote this lilting gavotte, it most likely represents the theme intended for a further set of variations that for some unknown reason were never completed.

The *Sonata in E major* (VB 196) is the most complex and difficult of Kraus' works for pianoforte. It was probably written in 1788 especially for publication by Åhlström. The unusual opening 3/4 metre and the broad thematic sweeps are an acute foreshadowing of Beethoven in their grandeur. Parallel octaves and forceful thematic statements give the movement a power that is unexpected and progressive, while the composer modulates freely and often. The second movement is a marvel of fluid tempos and expression, drawing its inspiration from the fantasies of C.P.E. Bach, but in style and tone there are hints throughout of later composers; both Chopin and Liszt come to mind. The movement wanders down dark and spectral musical paths, surfacing occasionally into the lyrical world of

classicism with short sections of flowing melody. The march-like theme of the finale heralds a concluding set of variations, calculated to demonstrate both musical diversity and virtuosity. Of particular note is when Kraus suddenly switches to compound metre, forcing the variation melody into a somewhat strange gigue, a humorous antidote to the flashing virtuoso display of the previous variation. Thereafter follows a ghostly *sostenuto* which sounds strangely close to the famous movement from Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*. Finally, the march returns, the marshalling of the musical troops after a varied and difficult march.

The *Swedish Dance* (VB 192) was composed during the first decade of Kraus's time in Sweden, probably closer to 1788 than 1778. Written in C major, it consists of a series of three short variations set to a perpetual motion dance. Why he wrote this is unknown, since the composer normally had no real interest in such national tunes. It may well be, however, that he sought to compete with his rival, Abbé Georg Vogler, who he suspected of trying to usurp his position at the Swedish court. Vogler was well-known for his transcriptions of "folk" tunes (including bizarrely enough some he stated were from Greenland and China), and this short set of variations

may simply have been a means of demonstrating that Kraus too did not find such things beyond his ability.

The final work is a pair of minuets entitled *Zwei neue kuriose Minuetten* (VB 190). According to the sole source, it was written in 1780 as a musical joke and sent to J.S. Bach's biographer, Johann Nikolaus Forkel, with whom Kraus had debated the merits of early music when he was at Göttingen. The works are satirical pokes at Bach. The first minuet is a parody of a work from *Anna Magdalena's Notebook*, replete with odd chromaticism and strange rhythmic twists. The second minuet is a musical joke that implies the work of an incompetent composer (a direct allusion to Forkel). In C minor, it veers suddenly to the dominant of the relative major with a series of repeated quavers (eighth notes). Realising that he has modulated to the wrong key, the composer uses an odd sequence of thirds to wrench the tonality back to the correct place. The misplaced octaves and rhythmic incongruity of the ending are calculated both to annoy the work's recipient and amuse the audience.

**Bertil van Boer**

## Jacques Després

The widely acclaimed pianist Jacques Després has dazzled audiences for nearly two decades in his native Canada and the United States with his sensitive yet powerful style and sympathetic interpretations of a broad range of composers. He has collaborated with internationally renowned pianists Radu Lupu and Nicolai Petrov, and has appeared as soloist with the symphony orchestras of Montreal, Quebec and others under the baton of conductors including Otto-Werner Müller, Franz-Paul Decker, Jens Nygaard and Simon Streatfield. His tours have included numerous recitals in Canada aired on CBC radio, and performances at summer festivals in North America. His prestigious awards include: the Frank Kopp Memorial Prize at the University of Maryland International Piano competition, first prize at the Montreal Symphony Orchestra Competition; the Musical Academy of Quebec Prix d'Europe Competition, and the doctoral concerto competition at SUNY, Stony Brook. He studied under many of the great masters including Gyorgy Sebok, Gilbert Kalish, Adele Marcus, William Masselos and Christiane Senart, and has established a solid reputation as a leading lecture-performance artist on both period and modern instruments, including a series on the Chopin *Ballades* at New York's Juilliard School, and the early sonatas of Beethoven at the yearly Friends of the Arts Beethoven Festival on Long Island. He also was the musical director of Summer Serenades, a lecture-concert series at the University of Stony Brook's Staller Center. Jacques Després is the recipient of many grants from the Juilliard School, the Quebec Ministries of Education and Cultural Affairs, and the Canada Council. He recently completed his doctorate at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, and holds a Masters degree from the Juilliard School of Music. He received with High Distinction the Artist Diploma from Indiana University, and was awarded a unanimous first prize from the Conservatory of Quebec. Jacques Després is currently professor of piano at the University of Alberta, Canada.

*The scores of the following works are available from:*

ARTARIA EDITIONS LTD  
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*Sources*

**Rondo in F major (VB 191);  
Scherzo con variazioni (VB 192);  
Swedish Dance (VB 192);  
Zwei neue kuriose Minuetten (VB 190);  
Larghetto (VB 194)**

as *Miscellaneous Pieces for Pianoforte*

ed. Bertil van Boer  
Uppsala, Instrumentalmusik i handskrift Caps. 51,  
(VB 193) Musikaliskt tidsfördrif 1793, (VB 190)  
Stockholm, Svenska Riksarkiv, Näs herrgård  
deposition.

**Sonata in E-flat major (VB 195)**

ed. Bertil van Boer - Uppsala, Instrumentalmusik i  
handskrift, Caps. 50a; Due Sonate Per il Forte Piano  
composte dal Sigr. Giuseppe Kraus, Maestro di  
capella all'attuale Servizio di S. M. Il Re di Svezia,  
published by Olof Åhlström ca. 1788.

**Sonata in E major (VB 196)**

ed. Bertil van Boer - Uppsala, Instrumentalmusik i  
handskrift, Caps. 50a; Due Sonate Per il Forte Piano  
composte dal Sigr. Giuseppe Kraus, Maestro di  
capella all'attuale Servizio di S. M. Il Re di Svezia,  
published by Olof Åhlström ca. 1788.



The German composer Joseph Martin Kraus, spent much of his working life in Stockholm and may be considered one of the most innovative and unusual composers of the eighteenth century. In comparison with many of his contemporaries, Kraus wrote a relatively small amount of music for pianoforte as represented on this recording. However, what he lacked in output he made up for in sheer quality. While absorbing the numerous popular styles of the time, Kraus' unique output features many unexpected and dramatic stylistic and harmonic devices that anticipate music of the following century.

Joseph Martin  
**KRAUS**  
(1756-1792)



|           |   |              |
|-----------|---|--------------|
| <b>1</b>  | <b>Rondo in F major (VB 191)</b>            | <b>9:00</b>  |
|           | <b>Sonata in E flat major (VB 195)</b>      | <b>19:52</b> |
| <b>2</b>  | <b>Allegro moderato</b>                     | <b>5:14</b>  |
| <b>3</b>  | <b>Andante con variazione</b>               | <b>9:43</b>  |
| <b>4</b>  | <b>Allegro ma non troppo presto</b>         | <b>4:54</b>  |
| <b>5</b>  | <b>Scherzo con variazioni (VB 193)</b>      | <b>11:59</b> |
| <b>6</b>  | <b>Larghetto (VB 194)</b>                   | <b>0:42</b>  |
|           | <b>Sonata in E major (VB 196)</b>           | <b>32:07</b> |
| <b>7</b>  | <b>Vivace</b>                               | <b>8:02</b>  |
| <b>8</b>  | <b>Adagio</b>                               | <b>11:44</b> |
| <b>9</b>  | <b>Andante con variazione</b>               | <b>12:20</b> |
| <b>10</b> | <b>Swedish Dance (VB 192)</b>               | <b>3:47</b>  |
| <b>11</b> | <b>Zwei neue kuriose Minuetten (VB 190)</b> | <b>1:51</b>  |

**Jacques Després**

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 (Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, Sweden / Bridgeman Art Library)

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