

The Jupiter Symphony: A Personal Experience
by Christa Rakich

My father died on February 19, 2014, at age 86. His parents had been immigrants from Serbia and Montenegro, and Pa was raised rather harshly but with an appreciation for education and classical music. We had a piano in our home, and lessons were a matter of course.

When I reached adulthood, he took pleasure in ordering up piano recitals from me: "I'm inviting some friends over and we'd like to hear K. 545 (he loved referring to Mozart pieces by their Köchel numbers; I always had to look them up) and the Moonlight Sonata. Can you do it next Tuesday? And we'll end with some Scott Joplin." And so a date would be agreed upon, he would have the piano tuned, and I would drive the hour to his house where an audience of 7 or 8 people awaited me.

Pa took particular joy in the post-concert voicemail. "That last movement should have been faster." There was a surly pride in these remarks, and I understood the humor in his intent. How many parents can make such demands on their offspring? Overt appreciation was not part of his emotional vocabulary. But in his later years, after a command performance, he would slip me \$300 "for gas." This impressed me, as I knew how reluctantly he parted with cash. And I grew to appreciate his unexpressed pleasure as well as the gift of his audience, which had been a consistent presence since I was five years old.

His requests were not limited to piano music. K. 525 was a favorite (*Eine kleine Nachtmusik*), and Sousa marches made frequent appearances. One email directed me to a YouTube video of Horowitz playing *The Stars and Stripes Forever*. I explained that if I practiced 4 hours a day for a solid month I still wouldn't sound like that. "Are you trying to give me tendonitis?"

Three years after his death, I found myself thinking obsessively of the Jupiter Symphony. It had been part of the background music of my childhood: Mozart, Beethoven, and the very occasional Elvis. It was as if Pa were ordering up another concert. "Play the Jupiter" was my earworm. A concert date for the BCS was on my calendar. I played through some Mozart sonatas. "Play the Jupiter," I kept hearing. I looked at the score. Could I make a transcription of this? Maybe just the first movement. Well, maybe just the Minuet. The last movement is the big thrill, though, with all that counterpoint.

Poking around on line late one night, I came across Otto Singer's transcription for 2 pianos. The puzzle pieces clicked into place. This was playable, and I knew just the person. I had heard Erica Johnson play a Bach partita on her Dietrich Hein unfretted clavichord after Friederici and been impressed. She was an Oberlin grad, class of '99, as am I, class of '74. Though we knew each other only professionally, I felt free to impose with a mildly crazy scheme. I called and asked, "Would you play the Jupiter Symphony with me? I'm emailing you a pdf. I'll come up next week and we can see if it's feasible." Erica lives in Walpole, MA, and I in Bloomfield, CT, so I packed up my 1972 Tom Wolf Schiedmayer, drove up, and we sight-read through the piece. It was not horrible, Erica was game, and we had the whole summer before us.

In addition to being an outstanding clavichordist, organist, and church musician, Erica is also mom to two girls, ages 4 and 6. A thunderstorm passed through as we were practicing, and her younger daughter, frightened by the noise, interrupted us. "When there is thunder you have to be someplace safe," she explained, "like Walpole."

We were most fortunate to have an occasion to preview the concert at the lovely, quiet home of BCS member Ed Clark and his wife Joan Pritchard. It was also a good opportunity to rehearse the logistics of moving and tuning two instruments. Some days before the BCS concert, however, Erica's husband Dan Davis slipped while jogging and fractured a rib. This necessitated a little extra outside help with moving. As their 4-year-old explained, pointing to her own rib, "Daddy fell and broke a string."

The concert began with Mozart's Variations on *Ah! Vous dirais-je, Maman*, K. 265, then the Sonata in B-flat, K. 333. The Jupiter (or K. 551, as Pa would have it) was the grand finale. It was a smash hit. Of course; who doesn't love it? But to the keyboardist, all the hearing and analysis in the world cannot yield an equivalent insight to holding it in one's hands. Add to that the excitement of interaction with another musician in bringing it off the page. On two clavichords, the piece becomes delightfully clear. The dynamics and shading of the orchestral version are retained. And with 2 players, there is plenty of give and take, of dialog. And without the presence of 20+ players, the counterpoint is much more transparent. To the listener in a small hall, action passing from one clavichord to the other can be much more engaging than the wall of sound that emanates from an orchestra in a standard concert hall.

Thanks, Pa. K. 551 was a good idea. Hope you thought so, too.