

1992nd Concert

January 20, 1991

MICHAEL PONTI, *pianist*

PROGRAM

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart Sonata in F Major, K. 332
(1756-1791) (1779)

Allegro
Adagio
Assai allegro

Sergey Prokofiev Sonata No. 7 in B-flat Major
(1891-1953) (1939-42)

Allegro inquieto
Andante caloroso
Precipitato

INTERMISSION
(*Twelve Minutes*)

• Frédéric Chopin Variations on "La ci darem la mano", Opus 2
(1810-1849) (Based on the aria from Mozart's *Don Giovanni*)
(1827)

Franz Liszt Reminiscences de Don Juan
(1811-1886) (Concert Fantasy on Themes from *Don Giovanni*)

Mr. Ponti has chosen this program as a tribute to the 200th anniversary of the death of Mozart and the 100th anniversary of the birth of Prokofiev.

MICHAEL PONTI was quite literally at the threshold of his career when he played at the National Gallery in June of 1955. That recital came just at the end of the period of his life when he lived in Washington, D.C., and distinguished himself as one of the city's most promising young pianists. He returned that fall to Germany, where he had been born, to study in Frankfurt-am-Main under the eminent German pedagogue, Eric Flinsch, who had himself been a pupil of Emil von Sauer, Liszt's protégé. He achieved international success in numerous piano competitions, including those of Naples, Geneva, Munich, Brussels, and Bolzano, which he won in 1964. In addition to his solo career, Mr. Ponti has distinguished himself as an accompanist and chamber musician, having accompanied Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau in his Deutsche Grammophone recordings of the fiendishly difficult songs of Charles Ives, and having performed regularly with his piano trio, Ponti-Simansky-Polasek, which recently celebrated its tenth anniversary.

Mozart's *Sonata in F Major, K. 332* is one of six which later came to be known as the "Paris" sonatas, as they were either written while he was in that city or grew out his experiences with music that he heard there. This sonata goes far beyond the other five in expressive detail and fullness of texture, and breaks new ground in that it begins in ternary rhythm, rather than duple, which was the norm up to that time for piano sonatas. The *Assai allegro* makes such a stirring finale that it can be said to herald the approach of romanticism in piano music.

Prokofiev's *Seventh Sonata* received its first performance in 1943, with Sviatoslav Richter at the piano. The work was very well received, and was awarded a Stalin Prize almost immediately. The simple yet lush harmonies of the slow movement are unusual for Prokofiev, but in the final movement, the composer returns to the dynamism for which he was justly famous.

The *Variations, Opus 2* were included in Chopin's repertoire for his first concert tour of Vienna. The audiences were enthralled, due not only to Chopin's virtuosity at the keyboard, but also to the charm of the compositions he presented. The characters who participate in the scene in which the aria is sung, Don Juan, Zerlina, Leporello and Masetto, are cleverly characterized as the variations unfold.

Liszt's *Don Juan Fantasy* enjoys the reputation of being the finest opera transcription in all piano literature. Its importance, however, goes beyond its ingenious use of the piano to present an experience every bit as vivid as the opera itself; it is a summing up of all the ideas that prevailed about Don Giovanni in the Romantic period. By twentieth century standards, some of the passages in this work may seem ruthless or even vulgar. For Liszt, this was an unabashed response to the opera and its ideas, some of which he perceived as highly erotic and even demonic: Liszt is here revealed at the height of his pianistic and dramatic imagination, making this one of his most original and impressive works.