



Lili Kraus: Hungarian Pianist, Texas Teacher and Personality Extraordinaire

Steve Roberson

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A talented pianist and a woman of great vitality and charm, Lili Kraus was one of the most extraordinary musicians of the twentieth century. Born into extreme poverty in Budapest, she showed such musical talent that by the age of seven she was admitted to the Royal Academy of Music as a piano major. Eventually she studied with Bartók and Schnabel, the great apostle of the Viennese classicists, and became one of the leading interpreters of the Mozart piano repertoire. Her long and distinguished performing career included appearances with the world's major orchestras and more than one hundred recordings.

Kraus' life was as fascinating as her music. As Nazism hovered over Germany, she and her husband, Otto Mandl, converted from Judaism to Catholicism and finally fled to the Dutch East Indies where they and their two children were interned by the Japanese in separate prisoner-of-war camps. Kraus turned that grim and bitter experience into an opportunity for personal and professional reflection and growth.

Charmingly charismatic, brilliant and beautiful, she spoke seven languages, designed her own gowns, and was on intimate terms with the rich and famous of the musical and political scenes of two continents. An intriguing world figure, she became an American by association when she moved to Texas to accept a position with TCU in Fort Worth. In her later years, she divided her time between Texas and her home in North Carolina.

This, the first full biography of the late Madame Kraus, is based on extensive interviews with Kraus, her associates throughout Europe and the United States, and her family. Roberson collected hundreds of recital and concert reviews, published or broadcast interviews with the diva, and a number of articles written by Kraus. The manuscript includes an exhaustive discography and an extensive bibliography.

The general reader will find here a portrait of an intriguing world figure. Musicians will value the explanations of her ideas on technique, interpretation, and performance. All will be impressed with the nobility and strength of her spirit.

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