MUSICIAN WITH A MISSION

Meet the "mesmerizing," "mercurial," and "maliciously genius-like" Robert Levin—Mozart scholar, world-class concert pianist, and holder of Harvard's first professorship in performance studies.

by JANET TASSEL

When Robert Levin '68 moved back to Cambridge in 1993 to become Harvard's first Dwight P. Robinson professor of the humanities, he was greeted by three auspicious omens. First, the phone company offered him exchange number 497, which the pianist and Mozart scholar delightedly recognized as the Köchel number of the F-major piano sonata for four hands. When he was subsequently offered phone and fax exchanges 491 and 492—the C-minor piano concerto and *The Marriage of Figaro*—he knew he was home where he belonged.

Home, bearing 25 years' worth of laurels. In addition to performing all over the world, Levin had been professor of piano at the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik in Freiburg, Germany, since 1986, and before that a professor of music at SUNY Purchase, while teaching at (and in 1979 directing) the American Conservatory at Fontainebleau. Before *that* he was head of the theory department at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia—a post he assumed after his graduation from Harvard at the age of 20.

Christoph Wolff, professor of music and dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, can be credited with bringing home this prodigal son. Wolff, an authority on Bach and Mozart, keeps an apartment in Freiburg.

Photographs by Jim Harrison

He says he never missed a chance to chat with Levin over a glass of wine or a cup of coffee, and so bring up the Harvard Question. What the music faculty lacked, Wolff kept saying, was a world-class performer. Indeed, Harvard was ready to bite a rather historic bullet—if Levin would agree to be considered—and create its first full professorship in performance studies. A performer who, as Wolff says, "is also one of the world's preeminent Mozart scholars and a musical intellectual of such astonishing gifts" would obviously be a prize catch.

So the prodigious and puckish Levin is back in Cambridge, with all signs, like the Köchel numbers, converging harmoniously. His 1847 frame house near Harvard Square rings with the music of one or another of his three Steinway grands, his 1830 Graf or his Wolf five-octave fortepiano, or his Carl Fudge harpsichord. (Another piano, his 1869 Streicher, is in the music department's Old Instruments Room.) Passers-by pause to listen. Sometimes it is Levin practicing; at other times, his fiancée, Ya-Fei Chuang, his student in Freiburg and now a graduate diploma student of Russell Sherman's at the New England Conservatory. Often, at one keyboard or two, it is both.

"It feels great to be home," says Levin. "I've always loved Boston" After Harvard, he notes, while he was at Curtis and then SUNY, he commuted back to Boston for years as keyboardist of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. But as an unabashed Eurocentric, he also misses the "old place." "Living in a town like Freiburg, with its five-hundred-year-old cathedral, did something very important for me," he says. "I have been trained from a European point of view since childhood, and I love being able to connect with that old and complicated culture. It is our legacy, after all."

Despite his appreciation of the status and perks he enjoyed as a *Beamter* in Germany, Harvard's offer came at the right time, Levin says. His performance schedule had become so hectic that the load of a full-time studio teacher—in Freiburg, up to 20 hours a week—was increasingly overwhelming: "You take a week off to play concerts, you face a nightmare of make-up time when you get back." His own practice requirements and research were being neglected. Even his health was showing signs of strain.

Harvard appointed Levin to a new chair endowed by Mary Robinson in memory of her husband, Dwight P. Robinson Jr. '20, M.B.A. '25, a former Overseer who "loved Harvard and music." A two-course load was designed to leave room for concert tours and private piano teaching, while giving Levin a chance to get back to theory, history, and a special mission of his, the "privilege" of creating and influencing future audiences. "They're fully as important as future performers," Levin says. "If we can't get to intelligent young people when they're ripe for it, as Harvard's undergraduates are, someday we may find ourselves performing to empty halls."

This grim vision is fortunately dispelled by the attendance figures for Levin's first course offerings. Literature and Arts B-54, a Core curriculum study of chamber music from Mozart to Ravel, had the College's seventh highest enrollment last fall. Almost four hundred students—ranging from music majors to women's studies concentrators to faculty members and alumni in their sixties—filled Paine Hall for his lectures.

Sean Gallagher, the class's head teaching fellow, says that Levin's lecture-demonstrations at the piano were the major attraction. "Another real draw," he adds, "was the use of students as in-class performers. Harvard is full of great hidden musicians, majoring in economics or political science—or even music! We were able to get a darn good performance of at least one movement of what we were studying in every class.

"When students see their peers performing Mozart and Schubert and Beethoven, this all becomes a living tradition,"

Full house: Levin holding a pre-exam review session for his Core curriculum course on chamber music. Future audiences, he says, are as important as future performers: "If we can't get to intelligent young people when they're ripe for it, as Harvard undergraduates are, someday we may find ourselves performing to empty halls."

says Gallagher. "Levin got a lot of people hooked on chamber music this way." Levin's students, says the manager of the HMV record chain's Brattle Square branch, "bought the shelves empty" of chamber music CDs recommended for supplementary listening.

Professionals stand by, too. Peter Zazofsky, first violinist of the Muir Quartet, has offered Levin the services of his chamber group to illustrate lectures in B-54. Says Zazofsky, "Any musician grabs at a chance to work with Levin." They first met when Zazofsky was a 16-year-old student of Levin's at Curtis Institute. "Here was this guy teaching keyboard harmony, not that much older than we were, and he'd sit down at the piano and play Mahler symphonies and Strauss tone poems," Zazofsky recalls. "We all had the feeling we were going to be a big disappointment."

Conductor Benjamin Zander describes Levin as "the greatest Mozartian of our era—since Mozart himself. . . . Levin has successfully gotten into Mozart's mind."

Composer John Harbison '60, a junior fellow at Harvard when Levin was an undergraduate, says Levin's power as a teacher goes beyond dazzling everyone from the piano. "He is mesmerizing," says Harbison. "Once, when I sat in on a class, he talked about one note for half an hour—and what an exciting half-hour! The students all sat with their instruments poised, like statues."

For a specialist in the Classical period, as Christoph Wolff and others have observed, Levin has an extraordinarily open heart for twentieth-century music. Professor of mathematics (and pianist) Noam Elkies has taken and retaken Levin's Music 180, and has been coached by Levin in Shostakovich and Harbison, along with Bach. He found it "very, very exciting" to have observed as Levin illuminated, with affection and conviction, the prickly Schoenberg string trio.

Yehudi Wyner, A.M. '52, professor of composition at Brandeis, says many contemporary composers are in Levin's debt, not only because he performs their music widely, but because he's introduced them to music "they should have known before he did. For instance, once at a New York recital he played an early suite by Paul Hindemith that was truly revelatory for me. I'd never played it, never even heard it—and Paul Hindemith was my teacher!"

Nevertheless, to most music lovers Levin means Mozart. When conductor Benjamin Zander said recently that Levin "is the greatest Mozartian of our era, since Mozart himself," he was referring not only to his performances but also to the fact that "Levin has successfully gotten into Mozart's mind."

Besides his numerous publications and program and liner notes, Levin has completed about a dozen of the works that Mozart left unfinished. An important completion was the symphonie concertante in E-flat major for flute, oboe, horn, bassoon, and orchestra, K. 297B. His book on this work—*Who Wrote the Mozart Four-Wind Concertante?*—reads like a detective novel.

His list also includes the allegro of a concerto in D major for piano, violin, and orchestra, K. 315f; and the allegro of a quintet in B-flat major for clarinet and strings, K. 516c. These two pieces represented two thirds of his Harvard honors thesis and in turn half of his senior recital (with Levin and Rose Mary Harbison among the soloists, and a freelance orchestra conducted by John Harbison). The recital, rounded out by the violin sonata in B-flat, K.454, and the piano concerto in C major, K.503, seems to have been a highly irregular affair, presented not at the music department's Paine Hall but at Sanders Theatre, with a clamorous audience of 1,200. Levin's undergraduate performing career at Harvard, which began when he won the Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra's concerto competition in his freshman year, ended with fitting glory that heady night.

But best known is Levin's completion of the great Requiem in D Minor, K. 626. This project too had its inception at Harvard, forming the third part of Levin's senior honors thesis. Left unfinished at Mozart's death, the Requiem was completed by his student Franz Xaver Süssmayr—not entirely satisfactorily, as evidenced by the number of musicians and scholars who have tried their hands over the years at a more convincing completion. But in 1965 the New Mozart Edition, issued by Bärenreiter, published an autograph sketch leaf that had been found in 1962, with two of Mozart's own ideas for the Requiem: a sketch for the *Rex tremendae* and a fugue on the text *Amen*. Levin refers to this publication as a "capital event" for Mozart scholars, including, of course, himself.

Now it happened that Levin's friend, former Harvard choral director F. John Adams '66, Ph.D.'72, was planning a student performance of the Requiem. "So here is this newly discovered fugue," recalls Levin, "and F. John says, 'Look, you're interested in Mozart. This fugue is interesting. Why don't you finish it up?' "

At the time Levin was contemplating a change in his field of concentration, from French to history and literature. He had been composing music since he was six and had a number of chamber pieces already under his belt. His family's home in Queens had always been filled with music. Levin's father, a dental ceramist, smuggled 150 Mozart albums into the house at a time when what the family really needed was food. His mother, an elementary school teacher, was a trained pianist. But his guardian spirit, his Leopold, was his mother's brother, uncle Benjamin Spieler. It was Spieler, a public school music teacher and a bachelor, who advised the young Levin, cosseted him, traveled with him, and paid for every step of his education—from piano lessons in childhood, through a year in France with Nadia Boulanger, through his graduation from Harvard.

Thus it was that by the time Adams proffered his challenge, Levin had studied ear training and piano with Louis Martin and composition with Stefan Wolpe in New York, with Boulanger at Fontainebleau, and with Leon Kirchner at Harvard. He had also explored applied musicology at radio station WHRB, where his on-air feats included an exam-period Mozart orgy that lasted a record 48 hours. (As chief producer and program director in his senior year, Levin trumped it with a 96-hour Bach-Mozart orgy that left him voiceless.)

"Sure, I had done some composing, and I guess I was an au-

dacious kid, but even so, the Mozart Requiem? That was a pretty scary thing," says Levin. "I felt fear and trembling."

The Mozart/Levin *Amen* fugue had its international debut in a student performance of the Requiem conducted by F. John Adams at St. Paul's Church, Cambridge, on a very cold night in the winter of 1967. That concert marks the start of Levin's long-term relationship with the Requiem.

Toward the end of his junior year he switched concentrations once more, this time to music. His thesis topic would be Mozart's unfinished works. "My plan was to do the research to try to discover why they were unfinished," says Levin, "and then to do a completion for the practical musician, which I hoped would be stylistically correct." His researches took him to the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, where he studied manuscript fragments of the D-major double concerto and the B-flat major clarinet quintet, and to the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna, where he examined the Requiem.

"I have no idea what made me so sure I could do it, but I took the task very seriously," says Levin. "And I did get to look at the manuscripts. I got microfilms. I spoke to Leopold Nowak, the editor of the New Mozart Edition volumes of the Requiem. He kept the manuscript on his desk, and nobody could see it without his permission. He wouldn't allow me to go into another room and work on it alone. But he showed it to me and talked with me at length about various peculiarities in the manuscript. And that's the kind of luck I had."

Levin would later reedit the *Hosanna* fugue, but in other respects his work on the Requiem was suspended for two decades once his thesis was done. Then in 1987, when he was at Freiburg, conductor Helmuth Rilling invited him to participate in a series of seminars on the Requiem at the International Bach Academy in Stuttgart. To illustrate a point in his presentation, Levin "smashed through" his 20-year-old version of the *Amen* fugue on the piano. Two weeks later Rilling called and invited him to complete the Requiem for a performance and recording in the Mozart bicentennial year, 1991.

Again, doubt and reluctance. "I struggled with Rilling for a year and a half. I said, No, I can't do this. You know the expression, I may not be able to lay an egg, but I know a good one from a bad one. I had by then done quite a few instrumental completions, but the Mozart Requiem can strike the fear of God into the bravest. This is not just a piece of sacred music. It is one of the central works of our civilization. And then there's the very sticky situation that I have encountered plenty of times: an American doing work in German culture tends to run into resistance from his German colleagues. You know, Mozart is their cultural property and how can somebody from New York, and a Jew no less, have any idea how this stuff is supposed to go?"

But Rilling was just as obdurate. Puffing on his cigar, he said, "I have not performed the other completions, because they give evidence of their modernity, and I don't feel comfortable with them. The Süssmayr has many flaws, but it is a piece of Austrian church music from the end of the eighteenth century and it belongs there. And you essentially respect the tradition. Hearing you say all these things only convinces me more than ever that you're the one who can do it right." And so it went, for close to two years, until Levin accepted the commission.

After a year of carrying the score with him wherever in the world he went, working on the *Recordare* while on a tour bus, scoring the *Dies irae* backstage at a summer festival; after months of computer programs failing and software crashing, Levin finished the score, more or less, three weeks before the premiere, though still making changes an hour before the concert. But the performance did happen, in Stuttgart in August 1991, with uncle Ben Spieler present as an invited guest. It was "the emotional peak of an emotional guy's life," Levin says. "Rilling called me up to the stage after the second bow, and all

When Süssmayr Ran for the Exit

Robert Levin on the formidable challenges of completing Mozart's Requiem: "[Franz Xaver] Süssmayr finished the *Lacrimosa* movement by setting the word *Amen* with two chords, a simple IV-to-I plagal cadence of the kind always found at the end of Protestant hymns. But the fugue sketch discovered in 1962 shows that Mozart had another idea for how this section should end.

"That this sketch was designed for the Requiem was clear. First of all, it was in the same key, and secondly, the place it was intended for was a place Mozart didn't get to in his draft score—the *Lacrimosa* breaks off before it gets to the *Amen*. But also, the tune of the fugue is the musical inversion of a tune found throughout the Requiem, at the beginning of the Requiem movement, in the Kyrie fugue, and elsewhere. So the evidence seemed overwhelming, and yet, for reasons we don't know, Süssmayr chose to write those two chords instead of setting this intricate fugue.

"One must not forget that the part of the piece closed by the *Amen* fugue and the *Lacrimosa* is the Sequence, which begins with the *Dies Irae*, thereby invoking the torment and agony of those who are judged and condemned. The kind of fugue used here would be different from the fugue to the subject of *Hosanna* or a fugue to the subject of *Quam olim Abrahae*, in which the Lord is beseeched to keep his promise in the covenant with Abraham, and to save us."

As to the *Hosanna* fugue: "The play begins when the prime characters have begun to speak. But in Süssmayr's *Hosanna* fugue, as soon as the four main characters—soprano, alto, tenor, and bass—have made their appearance, he runs for the exit. The whole thing takes about thirty seconds.

"A fugue is not just a fugue. It's a vessel of expression."

Conductor Helmuth Rilling calls Levin to the stage after the first performance of his completion of the Mozart Requiem, in Stuttgart, August 1991.

PHOTOGRAPH, SUSANNA KERN / PRESSEFOTO KRAUFMANN & KRAJFMANN, STUTTGART

absolute hell broke loose. And I just hugged him and stood there with the tears rolling down my face."

Rilling recorded the completion in 1991 with the Bach-Collegium Stuttgart. And in May 1994 the Boston Baroque, conducted by Martin Pearlman, gave Levin's most current version its American premiere using period instruments. Telarc's recording of this performance is scheduled to be released this summer (see page 39). Pearlman says he much prefers Levin's completion to others because, like Rilling, he values Levin's respect for the two-hundred-year-old tradition adhering to the Requiem. At the same time, he says, "it's amazingly brave in the way it breaks new harmonic ground." *The Boston Globe*'s Anthony Tommasini regards Levin's completion as perhaps "too scrupulously faithful to Mozart's idiom" but credits him with "more lucid" orchestrations and "more varied and imaginative" accompanimental patterns. In all, "the results are remarkable . . . a major achievement that could become the preferred performance edition."

It must be noted that the fundamental idea of completion has its critics. Composer Earl Kim, Harvard's Ditson professor emeritus and Levin's thesis adviser, remembers being skeptical. "And I'm just as skeptical today," says Kim. "My question is: what's the point? Why not just play Mozart's fragments and say this is what the composer left behind? I'm sorry, but I have never heard a completion that makes me think it is a worthwhile undertaking, unless it is used as a kind of exercise. As a composer, I would hate it if I left a composition unfinished and somebody came along and finished it."

Levin and Ya-Fei Chuang, his fiancée, playing a Mozart sonata for four hands on one of his three Steinway grands. They met in Freiburg, Germany, when Ya-Fei became Levin's conservatory student, and often converse in German.

Levin encounters such misgivings with some frequency, particularly on the lecture circuit. "Well, let's just confine ourselves to Mozart. Do we have the right to complete what Mozart left unfinished?" he asks. "There is in these fragments some music more beautiful than anything he ever did. He would leave unfinished stuff of such magnificence it takes your breath away; tragically for all of us, he had to stop to write something that would put food on the table.

"Nobody who completes a Mozart piece would have the hubris to say, 'This is the way Mozart would have done it.' At best it is something that may not be totally unrelated to how he *perhaps* would have done it, on an off day. But on the other hand, you can't get across a bridge that stops in the middle of a river. If the first part of the bridge is made of marble, and the second part is made of planks, it doesn't look so hot, but it does take you to the other side. If it allows you to have the experience of treading on the marble, it has accomplished something.

"My hope is to be invisible, inaudible," Levin adds. "In the case of the Requiem, I would hope that somebody who is not familiar with Süssmayr will listen to my completion and say, 'So where is this Levin?' And I don't want the people who are familiar with the Süssmayr to be sitting there waiting and listening for Süssmayr. My idea was to change what I must but retain what I could. This is not what the other completers have done. They have done things that are much cleaner philologically, but they run the risk of throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

"Of course, what we're all doing is a kind of forgery, or fakery, or restoration, depending on how you look at it. I think the crucial criteria are ethics, integrity, morality. And a very deep humility. My own feeling is that these completions render a service, if only as a way to get people to experience that marble bridge."

Levin began his voyage into what he calls Mozart's "language and system of reasoning, his uncanny control of proportions" a little before F. John Adams's challenge. In the summer of 1966 (and again in 1967) he studied conducting with Hans Swarowsky at Nice. Swarowsky suggested that if Levin was in fact as eager to understand Mozart's concertos as he seemed, he would have to learn to improvise his own cadenzas and embellishments. As a first step he advised Levin to buy the recording of Mozart's concertos in C major, K. 467, and B-flat, K. 595, that Swarowsky had made with pianist Friedrich Gulda.

"That recording," Levin recalls, "was a revelation. But how was I ever going to learn to do this? Well, slowly it became clear that if I were to improvise with any authority on Mozart out in public, I needed to immerse myself in his vocabulary, his grammar and syntax, his diction—by which I mean articulation, dynamic scales, pedal, vibrato, dozens of things—and learn to speak clearly in that language. One way to test myself was to try to compose in his style. If I could write it down, then

gradually I could start taking the risk of composing it publicly, without premeditation, so to speak."

Which brings Levin, after 28 years of burrowing and questing, to the point where observers note that he has seemingly erased the boundary between what is improvised and what is reproduced. Conductor Roger Norrington says, "To hear Levin improvising is like being at the very birth of some Classical works. One can see the sorts of choices composers took, one can hear the risks and wit which were involved." Says Benjamin Zander, "He is capable of composing on the spot. We rehearsed the C-major piano concerto last year, and he came up with five different cadenzas in one morning, without one of them using a single bar of another. This man is so inventive, so mercurial, so maliciously genius-like that he makes you think of no one so much as Mozart himself."

Levin, who has written cadenzas for most of Mozart's concertos for instruments other than the piano, improvises different cadenzas each time he plays a Mozart concerto—including recorded versions. Christopher Hogwood, conductor of The Academy of Ancient Music, with whom Levin is recording all of Mozart's piano concertos, says he has no idea what the cadenzas will sound like, from first run-through to actual recording. "This is learned and impressive, all right," says Hogwood, "but above all, it is fun." Which is the whole idea, says Levin. After all, Mozart himself triumphed at improvisation.

"Mozart was deeply respected for his compositions, lionized for his piano playing, but adored for his improvisation," Levin reminds us. "My goal is to try to recreate some characteristics of his performances." Thus, in addition to the free-fall cadenzas, he plays along with the orchestra during the *tutti*s and commonly reinstates the eighteenth-century practice of facing the audience, with the piano lid removed. Roger Norrington maintains that "Levin knows more about historical performance practice than anybody."

Levin is a performer with nerves of steel, or maybe none at all; he never experiences stage fright. But still, this business of going out not knowing what one is going to be playing has to be a little frightening? "Oh, sure," Levin admits. "When I first started doing this, I had to have road maps in my head: I can start here and from there I can go left and then right. Even though I hadn't practiced it, I did have some thematic ideas and blueprints. But more often than not my fingers would slip and take me right instead of left, and the blueprint didn't do me any good and I was hanging by my thumbs anyway.

"Nowadays, it's quite an amazing feeling; there's the orchestra, and the deadline is coming, it's two minutes to midnight. Now there are eighteen seconds of music left and now seven seconds and there's the orchestra stopping on that chord and it's time for me to go, and believe me, I have no idea of what I'm going to do. None. But then the right hand starts to play, and suddenly I am off. All jazz players know how to do this; there is a lot of vocabulary there, even if you're not thinking. At the least imaginative level, all you're doing is what the Germans call '*Leerlauf*,' which is a kind of virtuosity with the motor running in neutral. Sometimes, of course, it's anarchy; your left hand is pounding one harmony and your right hand another. Your mind or your fingers are ahead of you. But the fact is, at any given moment you have many acceptable options."

"Believe me, I have no idea of what I'm going to do. None. But then the right hand starts to play, and suddenly I am off."

Levin gives 50 to 60 concerts annually. Major recording projects currently include the 27 Mozart piano concertos with Christopher Hogwood, and Beethoven's five with John Eliot Gardiner. Works of Mozart are central to many of his concert performances, but unlike most professional soloists, Levin varies his programs adventurously. Given some advance warning, he says, "there are no practical limits to my repertoire."

Levin freely refers to performing as his "schtick"—another aspect of which is his trademark interactive composing game. He will invite the members of an audience to write down a few bars of music, from which he will choose three or four of the most stylistically appropriate and then improvise a fully developed fantasia. This gambit, he says, engages the audience and makes them part of the process—a principal goal of Levin's crusade to share the adventure of Mozart.

Sometimes he seems less the crusader and more the vaudevillian, sporting a Mozart baseball cap, miming or joking with the audience. In his classroom lectures he can segue from Beethoven to Bruce Springsteen, Michael Jackson, and Snoop Doggy Dogg without missing a beat. To Levin, *show biz* is not a pejorative term. But as Christopher Hogwood says, "This relaxed chatter and playfulness, I think it's all to a point: to break down the barriers. The audience probably expects someone with a mind like his to be rather remote and distant."

To purists and monitors of decorum, Levin rhetorically asks, "How can we convey to the audience the unpredictability of Mozart's music, its restless shifting from teasing to mocking to longing, its freshness, its insouciance, its sheer wickedness? Sure, sometimes this music makes you cry, but other times it

EUTERPE AND EROS

"Levin plays the piano with the ease of a Gov-jock ranting about Enlightened Realism. And that's not all—he explicates the music as he plays, voice-over style, with such lucidity and grace that it appears his words are somehow part of the score.

"But that's not even half the story. Levin employs a technique more powerful than his raw virtuosity in teaching packed houses in Paine Hall—Eros. [He] unabashedly covers the erotic content of the music being studied. His lectures are peppered with overt references to sex and seduction, affairs and adultery. . . . Levin doesn't purport to master this force, only to channel it. By invoking seduction, Levin's lectures become seductions unto themselves.

"Not every professor can break into Bach in the middle of lecture. But more might strive to enliven their pedagogy with this most potent of forces."

—*From an editorial comment, titled "Levin's Magic Flute," in* The Harvard Crimson *of October 1, 1994.*

THE TWO (RECORDED) SIDES OF ROBERT LEVIN: A SELECTIVE LISTING

As a keyboardist Robert Levin has made almost 40 recordings on American and European labels, with more on the way. His completions of unfinished Mozart works are preserved on another dozen recordings. A sampling of Levin on disc:

BRAHMS: Liebeslieder Waltzes, Op. 52; Four Quartets, Op. 92; with Monteverdi Choir, John Eliot Gardiner. Philips 432152-2 PH.

BRITTEN, CARTER, GLAZUNOV, KODALY, LISZT, VAUGHAN WILLIAMS, and VIEUXTEMPS: Romances and elegies for viola and piano; with Kim Kashkashian. ECM New Series 78118-21316-2.

DANZI and MENDELSSOHN: Sonatas for clarinet and piano; WEBER: Grand Duo Concertant for Clarinet and Piano, Op. 48; with Charles Neidich. Sony Classical SK 64 302.

HAYDN: Trios for piano, violin, and cello (Hob. XV: 27-30); with Vera Beths and Anner Bylsma. Sony Classical SK 53 120.

HINDEMITH: Sonatas for viola and piano (Op. 11/4; Op. 25/4; 1939); with Kim Kashkashian. ECM New Series 78118-21330-2.

MOZART: Piano concertos in E-flat major (#9), K. 271, and A major (#12), K. 414/385p; Academy of Ancient Music, Christopher Hogwood. L'Oiseaux-Lyre 443328.

Piano concerto in G major (#17), K. 453; New York Philomusica, R. Johnson. Philomusica NYPm 10023-1-2.

Concerto for 2 pianos in E-flat major (K. 365/316a); with Malcolm Bilson; **concerto for 3 pianos in F major (K. 242);** with Bilson and Melvyn Tan (fortepianos). English Baroque Soloists, John Eliot Gardiner. Archiv 427317-2 AH.

Music for two fortepianos: Sonata in D major, K. 375a/448; Fugue in C minor, K. 426; and Larghetto and Allegro in E-flat major (fragment, completed by Levin); with Malcolm Bilson. Nonesuch 78023-4.

Trio for piano, clarinet, and viola in E-flat major ("Kegelstatt"), K. 498; with Charles Neidich and Jürgen Kussmaul. Sony Classical SK 53 366.

POULENC: Sonata for flute and piano; with Paige Brook. Philomusica NYPm 10023-2-2.

SCHUBERT: Sonatas for piano in A minor (D. 537) and D major (D. 850). Sony Classical SK 53 364.

SCHUMANN and KURTAG: Works for clarinet, viola, and piano; with Eduard Brunner and Kim Kashkashian. ECM New Series 78118-2150-2 *(to be released next fall).*

SHOSTAKOVICH: Sonata for viola and piano, Op. 147; with Kim Kashkashian. ECM New Series 78118-21425-2.

Waltzes for flute, clarinet, and piano; with András Andorján and Eduard Brunner. Tudor 727.

COURTESY, ROBERT LEVIN

Mozart maven he may be, but Levin's recordings of Baroque, Romantic, and modern music attest to dazzling eclecticism.

Recordings of Mozart Completions

Symphonie concertante in E-flat major, K. 297B; Academy of St. Martin's in the Fields, Neville Marriner. Philips 411 134.

Concert rondo in E-flat for horn and orchestra, K. 371; horn concerto No. 1 in D major, K. 412/386b+514; Ab Koster, Tafelmusik, Bruno Weil. Sony Classical SK 53 369.

Clarinet quintet in B-flat major, K. 516f/Anh. 91; Michele Zukovsky, Sequoia Quartet. Nonesuch 79105.

Requiem in D minor, K. 626; Oelze, Danz, Weir, Schmidt, Bach-Collegium Stuttgart and Gächinger Kantorei, Helmuth Rilling (1991). Hänssler Classic 98.979. Ziesak, Maultsby, Croft, Arnold, Boston Baroque, Martin Pearlman (1994). Telarc *(to be released this summer).*

makes you want to laugh out loud, and at most of the concerts I go to, I don't see people laughing. I hear lots of jokes: Beethoven is making jokes, Haydn is being hilarious, and the audience is sitting there as if they were in church listening to a sermon. Something is terribly wrong here. That atmosphere embalms the music instead of reawakening it. I'm not suggesting that we work something into these pieces that isn't already there. That would be insolent. The music has it all, but we have to rediscover its capacity to make us gasp, to make us feel cornered, but also to make us burst into laughter."

Yet Levin's larger crusade goes beyond Mozart. It is to treasure and propagate the European artistic heritage. "I have no problem with people studying Australian aboriginal music or Indian music or Gagadju. I am an enthusiastic supporter of ethnomusicology at Harvard," he says. "But my own struggle has to be to keep alive and to renew the legacy that defines this society. European culture is in danger; it needs all the boosters it can find. I mean, if we don't establish a professorship of gangsta rap, I don't think gangsta rap will cease to exist."

He tells a story: Last winter he played and conducted a series of Mozart concerts in Klausenburg, Romania (for which he received $125—in nonexchangeable Romanian currency). At the final concert, which included four of his completions and reconstructions and the audience-participation game, the Romanian Mozart Society's director, Dr. Ferenc Laszlo, presented Levin with honorary membership in the society—one of only five such memberships ever conferred. The last artist on that stage to have improvised on themes invented by the audience, said Laszlo, had been Franz Liszt, in 1846.

That Friday-night concert was another emotional high for Levin; another occasion when Mozart, through him, as it were, forged enduring cultural and personal bonds. Directly after the concert Levin caught a night train to Bucharest. He flew on to Zurich on Saturday afternoon, and boarded a flight for Boston early Sunday morning. When students filed into Paine Hall for Levin's one o'clock Core class on Monday, he was waiting for them at the lectern, showing no signs of jet lag.

"My class and Romania are exactly the same thing," says Levin. "Don't forget, I have a mission." ▽

Based in Lexington, Massachusetts, Janet Tassel is a regular contributor to this magazine. Her "Viva I Tatti" appeared in the issue of March-April 1994.