

Piano Productions Press launched for multi-pianists

John Kozar, founder and editor

BY JANE LENEL

Pianist John Kozar has performed in over 20 countries on five continents as recitalist, concerto soloist, and as conductor of opera and dance performances. He is a specialist in works by American composers, has taught at several US, UK, and Chinese universities, and has recorded for many radio stations abroad. He also presents PianoTalk master classes and lecture-recitals. He makes his home in Philadelphia.

John Kozar got tuned into “monster” piano concerts — multiple hands on multiple pianos — back in the 1960s and ’70s when he attended a couple of monsters in New York and London. He was particularly taken by a performance involving two freckle-faced artists dressed in dirndls and pigtail wigs, playing four hands of a 1 piano-6 hand piece. “It was so delightful and the audience was so enchanted that as a pianist and conductor I began giving serious thought to making this kind of event more readily available to everyone,” he says.

Thus in 1990 he formed Piano Productions, Inc. (PPI), a not-for-profit corporation, with his business associate, Elizabeth Carder, with the sole mission of fostering interest in the acoustic piano through performance, recording, and publishing. Now celebrating its 20th anniversary, PPI has launched a publishing wing, Piano Productions Press (PPR), for the publication of new editions of music originally created for PPI’s A GRAND TIME, *Grandissimo*, and the piano quartet Piano4, to be made available to all piano-playing enthusiasts.

A GRAND TIME productions, the first of many by PPI since 1990, are community-based monster piano concerts. For these, artistic director and conductor Kozar and his team work with local pianists preparing spectacular evenings of piano music to be performed by members of communities, in and for their communities. “There is no limit to the number who may participate,” he says. “We’ve had as



A GRAND TIME, Grandissimo

Handwritten musical score for First Piano Quartet. The score consists of six staves of music, heavily annotated with dynamic markings such as *ppp*, *pp*, and *mf*. The notation is dense and includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and phrasing slurs. At the top right, the number '288-C-3' is circled, and '65' is written above the first staff. A 'Coda No.' marking is present on the fifth staff. At the bottom left, there is a small printed notice: 'PASSANTINO BRAND No. 1, 12 Stave-Medium 250 West 49th St., New York, N.Y.'. The bottom of the page is filled with handwritten scribbles and notes, including '36000' and 'vee'.

First Piano Quartet hieroglyphics: say what? play what?

many as 300 pianists of all ages in a single concert. Complete with full percussion (PPI's contribution to the monster concert tradition), A GRAND TIME has been a consistent sell-out with its repertoire from Bach to Schickele.

Grandissimo, showcasing the virtuoso pianists of PPI's Grand Piano Orchestra, lives up to its name as a professional multi-piano extravaganza with a minimum of 12 grand pianos, five timpani, full percussion, and a brilliant stage production. Its first

appearance was on a 1994 tour of Shanghai and Nanjing, China, with 25 grand pianos! 50 pianists! and a dozen percussionists in 12,000 seat venues, "packed to the rafters." Their "grandest" production to date took place as the closing attraction of the Tsingdao (China) International Festival. The outdoor production, again with 25 grands, featured laser bounces, smoke effects, and played to an audience estimated at 80,000 people.

In researching the multi-piano repertoire for A

GRAND TIME, the Grand Piano Orchestra, and Piano4, senior editor and publisher Kozar says that much of what they found was either a manuscript or an out-of-print edition — often all but unreadable. “In order to have performance-worthy scores, we embarked on a project to create modern editions. These and Piano Productions’ original commissions form just a part of the new catalogue. Thanks to an historic collaboration with the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, PPR now also has the rights to publish the legacy of the First Piano Quartet (FPQ) of early NBC Radio fame, and to make this historic archive available to the public for the first time.”

The First Piano Quartet was the first-ever ensemble of this configuration, Kozar explains. During its 12 years of weekly radio broadcasts during the 1940s and ’50s, and its tours and recording for another 10, the group arranged and transcribed over 400 well-known and original works for 4 pianos-8 hands. In tribute to them, in 2000, Kozar formed Piano4 and toured with them until 2007 when he resigned to establish Piano Productions Press.

Featured in PPR’s first catalogue (*see advertisement inside front cover*) is the humorous, “Classical Cocktail” No. 5, created by the FPQ. Like all the other “Cocktails,” Kozar says, it is a short, witty fantasy incorporating several tunes by several composers. Other



The First Piano Quartet

publications include music for solo piano “Streetsyncs”: Eleven Ragtime Pieces by the late Indiana composer Garland Anderson; a new version of “Amazing Grace” arranged for 2 pianos-4 hands by New Jersey composer Tony Finno; and Shane Cadman’s “The Noise of a Multitude,” for 1 piano-18 hands.



John Kozar

“Editing the First Piano Quartet music presented a special editorial problem in that we had parts only, no scores,” Kozar explains. “We received most of these in only fair condition with cross-hatching everywhere, arrows slashed across the page, extraneous numbers everywhere indicating cuts that FPQ had taken, or a note saying ‘see other side.’ Our favorite notation, on the usual black and white page, has penciled in the upper left hand corner: ‘see red notes.’

“Working with these was a long and involved process. First, the original copies were readied, thanks to PPI’s president, Elizabeth Carder, who spent hundreds of hours poring over FPQ hieroglyphics and producing first drafts of everything.” Then came the initial input into the computer; then multiple editings back and forth to catch anomalies; then, when they had scores, pulling the parts out and editing those; and finally creating digital files to be sent to the printer. “More hours than you would credit have been lavished on all our editions; months go into creating each one.”

Along with Elizabeth Carder, Kozar also thanks Justin Zepp, “the sine qua non of Piano Productions Press, without whom our catalogue would not have seen the light of day.”

And now, multi-pianists will thank first the monsters that originally “seized” John Kozar, and then Kozar himself, without whom there would be no Piano Productions, the Grand Piano Orchestra, A GRAND TIME, *Grandissimo*, or the Piano Productions Press. More thanks will be due when the next catalogue appears in six months.

For information, call 215-732-4300, or email pianoproductions@comcast.net 🎵