

FrameWork 9/14

Henry Adam Svec on Arnaud Maggs

Kisses for Köchel

He begins work on his *magnum opus* in his leisure time: the compilation of a canon so prodigious, so clearly touched by the Creator Himself, yet currently sprawling out into a void of far-flung fragments and gathering dust. The task will occupy over eleven years of an already-old man's life.

"There are things we know, things we don't know, and things I know we don't know that we know," says Ludwig Ritter von Köchel. Thus with pens and postage stamps and good spirits, he heads for darkness, eyes glowing like little compasses, heart steady as a metronome. *Das Köchelverzeichnis!*

Köchel carves days out of night. He catches wild and impetuous virtuosity with crisp, clean labels; tags masterworks and minor ones alike. Slowly he builds a monument.

Pages upon pages fill with inscriptions, enabling generations of connoisseurs, critics, and poor graduate students. Compositions with absolute integrity and coherence are brought out of disarray: their entrails pinned onto heavy stock, placed into cabinets, and given arbitrary names. He makes very few mistakes.¹ In the eyes of a select few, the worlds of both God and Man are made for discovering and framing—for allotting signs. After the slow, sustained flowering of a most methodical desire, Köchel stands among them, with giants.

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He dies in 1877, the same year that Thomas Edison's phonograph is introduced. Just another music-writing machine, if less discriminating than our Köchel's finely latticed production, if more vulgar in its technics.

Had Köchel lived in a different age, had he been an American, he might have built a similar contraption: a tube through which to push the grunts of the masses, a box in which to store the buzzing of the arcades, a pedestal on which to place the impossible dreams of vagabonds. A screen for the dark fantasies of young aristocrats.

Perhaps he would have started a jazz label, releasing high-end LPs featuring copious and detailed liner notes. Or he might have dealt in meta-data, selling tags and preferences to curious, insatiable capitalists.

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Each spring a small group of committed followers gathers at Köchel's grave to offer gifts and tokens. A few place tiny pebbles on the tombstone; others leave delicately folded works of origami: ducks, bears, trees, dinosaurs...models of the natural world—with which, in addition to Mozart, Köchel was also fascinated.

Yet, some Köchelites prefer to revere from afar, to render greater honours than stones and paper dolls. They offer tributes in portraiture, not of a person but of his network. They plant kisses for a system.

¹ Konrad, Thomas Edmund. *K for Köchel: The Life and Work of Ludwig Ritter von Köchel, Cataloguer of Mozart*. London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2001.