

One hand to play concerto

THE sound of one hand clapping is a familiar Zen conundrum, but the sound of one hand playing the piano is a very different matter. Hongkong audiences will be able to hear it for themselves when Spanish pianist Leonora Mila plays Ravel's Concerto for the Left Hand in City Hall Concert Hall performances with the Hongkong Philharmonic tonight and tomorrow night.

One of the commonest boasts is a claim that one can tie shoelaces, make a pot of tea or play tennis with one hand tied behind one's back. For this particular concerto the pianist has special problems, as Mrs Mila explained.

"I keep my right hand just resting on my knee, but by the end of the performance it is as tired as the left hand. As a pianist your instinct is always to use both hands together. If one hand has a problem, the other is there to help out.

"For the pianist to use only one hand is like being naked. Everything shows. Suddenly instead of 10 fingers on the keyboard you have only five and this is a shock, especially as Ravel wrote for an orchestra of 70 players. The question of balance is always dangerous in this work."

This is by no means the first time Mrs Mila has played the left hand concerto. She has recorded it with the Monte Carlo Orchestra and also played it with the Suisse Romande Orchestra.

"It may seem surprising to find a Spanish pianist playing French music, but after all we have only one de Falla for ourselves."

Ravel wrote his concerto for an Austrian pianist, Paul Wittgenstein, who lost his right arm during World War

I. Several other composers wrote for the same performer and the technique of composing for one hand has continued to fascinate composers from time to time. Mrs Mila herself has written a concerto for the left hand among her own considerable number of compositions.

Composing and performing are complementary activities for Mrs Mila, although she writes music which does not involve the piano. She started playing the piano at the age of six, when she opened the lid to try out one of her own compositions.

"My father was a musician - for 10 years he played the cello in Casals' orchestra in Barcelona. He saw immediately that I was serious about music and sent me to very good teachers from the beginning for both the piano and composition.

"I played my first concerto when I was seven years old and I never had any doubts about becoming a musician when I grew up. Nobody had to push me or encourage me - the responsibility was mine alone from the first time I opened the piano."

Mrs Mila's one regret is that her busy life leaves no time for teaching. "I always feel I should like to teach, but for the moment any spare time I have is for my composition."

The philharmonic will be conducted by Alun Francis. The programme will open with Vaughan Williams' overture *The Wasps*. Also included will be Haydn's Symphony No 98 in B flat and Arnold's *English Dances*.

Some tickets for both concerts are still available at the City Hall Box Office.

- JR.

Children's fun session

TOMORROW afternoon is Book Bang time for seven to 11 year olds.

The highlight of the fun session in St John's Cathedral New Hall will be a showing of the film "The Three Lives of Thomasina."

Patrick McGoohan, Susan Hampshire and Karen Dotrice star in Paul Gallico's story of an unusual cat who is granted three lives.

The Book Bang is organised by the Children's Book Group, but all are welcome to attend.

Tickets for the film will be on sale at the hall, price \$4.

- JR.