

Title: Franz Schubert,
Sonatas & Dances,
Performer: Marcia Hadjimarkos
Recording Company: Arabesque Z6830
Reviewed by Charlene Brendler

There is much to commend in this fortepiano recording. The playing delivers Schubert's extroverted grandeur, light-hearted delight, and gentle melodies with Viennese grace and charm.

The central work is the virtuosic and technically demanding D Major Sonata D850, full of repetitive passagework that demands vision to deliver. Surrounding the Sonata are two sets of Dances: The 16 German Dances, D783, and the Six German Dances, D820. The lovely and appropriate fortepiano is a replica by Christopher Clarke of an 1814 Viennese model by Anton Fritz. Schubert provides ample opportunity to show off the clear, resonant treble register and beautiful tone, often rare in pianos of this era.

The instrument comes to the party complete with its rhythm section options of bassoon, drum, cymbal and bell!

The accompanying notes are poetically delivered, with many cross-references that reflect comprehensive reading and thought. Specific descriptions and details of form are absent, in favour of describing the shifting musical moods and emotions in the music.

This is refreshing to those not wanting or needing excessive technical explanation.

Hadjimarkos is a facile and exuberant player who knows her instrument well. She chooses to use the Janissary sounds quite early in the recording (b. 2). Employment of these special "stops" is at the player's discretion, and we are treated to the

drum and cymbal to emphasize a *sforzando* within a double forte. This immediately challenges the listener's sensibilities (as well as the player's coordination of hands and feet). The shorter set of German Dances —played with a sensitive approach and lovely spirit — might have been a preferable opening.

The more delicate dances are to be savoured. Beautiful sonorities that caress the ear are created with damper, *due corde*, and moderator pedals. One hears lovely phrased arcs in dances 10 and 13. However, other dances sound forced. In the longer set of 16 dances, D783, it might have been effective to group dances by character, contrast, or key, rather than presenting them de-facto.

Hadjimarkos plays shimmering triplets in the brilliant and dramatic first movement of the Sonata, but sometimes the passagework is mechanical; it is difficult to maintain the magic with so many notes at that tempo and without some gestural freedom. Pianistically, her releases allow space, and the chords are beautifully shaped, with a precise left hand adding clarity. However, the rhythmic reading of the opening to the second movement undermines the sense of four and eight bar phrases. This is fortunately remedied in the re-cap before the coda. Overall, dynamics are enthusiastically loud and dynamic range is left wanting, with the soft pedal or moderator being called upon for dynamic change, rather than colour or inflection from the fingers. This is problematic throughout the recording. Perhaps it is a problem caused by the engineering or microphone placement; the bass register generally sounds muffled and unclear.

The highlight of the sonata is the *Scherzo* movement, which opens with just the right tempo for the wonderfully energetic rhythms. Dynamic and sectional

contrasts, harmonic emphasis, and sense of timing are also convincing. The spontaneous, "just created" sense is at its strongest here as well. One wants the same to be consistently present in all movements. Overall, this is a valuable recording that represents the sensibilities of Schubert's music, played on an instrument reflecting the Viennese tonal ideals of the times, by a fortepianist sympathetic to the parameters of the genre.