

CD Review by Patrick Rucker

MOZART Piano Sonatas: in c, K 457; in C, K 545; in B?, K 333. Rondos: in F, K 494; in D, K 485; in a, K 511 • Marcia Hadjimarkos (fp) • AVIE 2138 (76:29)

The best compass, it seems to me, for successful traversal of Mozart's piano music is constant reference to and evocation of his operatic style. If some gesture cannot conceivably be accomplished by the voice, accompanied by a late 18th-century pit orchestra, chances are it is an anachronism and has no place within Mozart's keyboard textures. Listening to Avie's remarkable new release of three sonatas and three rondos by Mozart, played superbly by Marcia Hadjimarkos, the imagination repeatedly roams to the operatic stage where, of the generations after Monteverdi and prior to Verdi and Wagner, the Austrian master reigns supreme.

A native of Oregon, Hadjimarkos earned degrees at the University of Iowa before pursuing her studies at the Paris Conservatoire with Jos van Immerseel; she has specialized in performing on the fortepiano and clavichord since the 1980s. One of the more appealing aspects of Hadjimarkos's interpretations is her exploitation of the richly varied registers of her instrument (in this case a replica of a 1793 Sebastian Lengerer fortepiano by Christopher Clarke). Mozart himself was keen to mine this expressive potential on the pianos of his day; this tendency constitutes a veritable hallmark of his style that unfortunately is all but lost on modern pianos. Hadjimarkos never neglects expressive nuance in melodic inflections and her varied strategies of attack and release result in a realm of beautifully realized legato and detached effects. The lavishly applied variants—to the repeat of the exposition of the C-Major Sonata and indeed to each thematic repetition in the D-Major Rondo, to cite but two examples—seem both appropriate and inevitable. Nor does Hadjimarkos shy from engaging the *una corda* mechanism of her fortepiano: witness its highly effective use for long stretches in the F-Major Rondo and in the Andante of the C-Major Sonata.

As a player, Hadjimarkos remains rooted “in the moment,” lending her performances a refreshing emotional immediacy. Inevitably, one comes across the curious interpretive choice. At the beginning of the development in the first movement of the C-Minor Sonata, for instance, Hadjimarkos lifts the dampers in the ascending triad, the central thematic material of the entire movement, which she plays (appropriately) secco elsewhere in the exposition and recapitulation.

The recording was made in Chenôves, France, in August 2004. The parish church there has a sweet, flattering acoustic for the Clarke fortepiano. The engineers have done a marvelous job and the sound is dimensional and clear. Brian Robins wrote the engaging booklet notes, to which Christopher Clarke contributed information on his fortepiano.

This is living, breathing Mozart interpretation of a very high order, simultaneously innocent of “received wisdom” or “tradition” (which, as Artur Schnabel was fond of saying, is nothing but a collection of bad habits) and constantly informed by obvious immersion in the music of earlier masters, including C. P. E. Bach and Haydn. Those who still prefer their Mozart on the modern concert grand will no doubt continue to enjoy the performances of Schnabel (Music & Arts Programs of America 1193) and what perhaps remains the all-around best complete recording of the sonatas, that of Lili Kraus (Sony 88808). But those with an ear for the manifold beauties of the instrument that Mozart knew and loved—the late 18th-century Viennese action piano—are not likely to find more imaginatively realized, full-blooded, or loving readings than these presented by Marcia Hadjimarkos. Very highly recommended. Patrick Rucker

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