

FRANZ SCHUBERT: Sonata and Dances
Marcia Hadjimarkos, fortepiano
Arabesque Z6830 (compact disc)

Contains:

16 German Dances D. 783

Sonata in D major D. 860

6 German Dances D. 820

Here is another example of how everything Marcia Hadjimarkos touches turns to gold. In several live performances and in recordings, she has never failed to delight and entertain this reviewer. Her performances are always stylish and interesting, with seemingly effortless technical facility, albeit always at the service of the music. This recording is no exception.

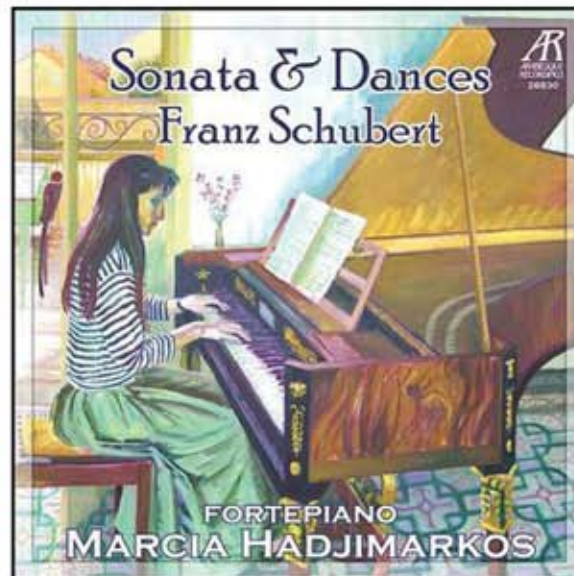
For this outing Hadjimarkos turns to piano music of Franz Schubert, and an instrument that suits it perfectly. Franz Schubert was one of those miraculous composers from whose very pores music seemed to flow. Like Mozart, Schubert died at a very young age, but, also like Mozart, he left in his wake a vast quantity of beautiful music. If his piano music has never quite achieved the popularity of his symphonies, chamber music, and song cycles, it is not due to any inherent shortcomings.

The centerpiece of this recording is the D major sonata, a massive work in four movements comparable in size and duration to the largest of Beethoven's sonatas (over forty minutes). Yet the sheer inventiveness of Schubert—the sudden shifts of modality, the abrupt changes in style or rhythm, the marvelous flair for melody—allows the work to never become tiresome. Credit must also be given to the pianist, whose keyboard technique (no doubt aided by her considerable experience as a performer on the clavichord) is both subtle and nuanced.

Surrounding and contrasting with this dramatic piece of high art is a more down-to-earth and folksy music, in the form of two sets of German Dances. While the big so-

nata would have appealed to the dilettante and the intellectual, these dances would have had a universal appeal. Country dances of this type were extremely popular at the time, with the likes of Mozart and Beethoven also composing them for the piano. These dances are all waltzes reminiscent of the landler, and in them I see the seeds of the Opus 39 waltzes of Brahms and the many magnificent waltzes of Chopin.

One senses that Schubert was in high spirits when he composed these works, and that Hadjimarkos is having great fun with them. In the first set she unabashedly makes use of this fortepiano's janissary stops, which I'd guess to be drum, cymbal, and triangle, as well as the bassoon stop and moderator. At times this ends up sounding like a one-man band, and is quite shocking if you are not expecting it!



A word about the fortepiano: It is a modern replica by Christopher Clarke of an original by Johann Fritz from about 1814, with Viennese action and six octave compass. It sounds absolutely wonderful in this music, with an almost snarly bass, a mid-range that sounds—how to describe it? "papery?", "woody?"—I'm not really sure what adjective is appropriate! And, a ringing (but not piercing) treble. The extra effects heard in some of the dances are just frosting on the cake! In short, this instrument is vastly different from the modern concert grand piano, and far more

interesting and satisfying in this music, which seems to demand a rustic, earthy sound. The modern piano, while beautiful in its own right, is simply too sterile and homogenized to project this music in its best light.

Kudos also must be extended to engineer Jean-Claude Gaberel, who provides a warm, realistic, and very pleasant soundscape. Highly recommended.

This review first appeared in the Iowa Early Keyboard Society Newsletter.