

Volume 1 Reviews

REICHA *Grande Sonate* in C. *Sonata on a Theme of Mozart* in F. 3 Pieces from *Practische Beispiele*. Étude in e, op. 97/1 • Ivan Ilić (pn) • CHANDOS 10950 (66:47)

The title of this release is *Reicha Rediscovered – Volume 1*, implying more to come. This one presents two larger works—the 27-minute *Grande Sonate* and the 19-minute *Sonata on a Theme of Mozart*—along with several smaller works. Antoine Reicha was a contemporary of Beethoven (both born in 1770) who outlived him by nine years. Their paths crossed briefly in the 1780s when Reicha was playing violin and flute with Beethoven playing viola in the Hofkapelle in Bonn. Reicha turned out to be a highly skilled composer while Beethoven moved musical boundary markers in an almost unprecedented way. Such is life.

The *Grande Sonate* went unpublished but is thought to have been composed around 1805. It's a three-movement work that would fit right alongside of Beethoven's early piano sonatas. I find it to be full of good themes with a good share of pianistic bravura. Those who enjoy early Romantic piano music should find this music very satisfying. Ivan Ilić possesses a sturdy and sensitive piano technique. Dynamic shadings are nicely applied, and his sense of rubato is judicious. At first listen, I thought his tempo for the second movement *Adagio* was a tad slow but on further listening I find that he captures the mood of the movement beautifully with his nuanced touch and carefully applied rubato.

The *Sonata on a Theme by Mozart* was also unpublished and is thought to come from around the same time as the *Grande Sonate*. The Mozart theme is from the March of the Priests from act II of *The Magic Flute*. The first movement is a theme and variations form which is followed by a minuet and trio movement (*à la* Haydn) and finally an *Allegretto scherzando* finale. This is simpler music and, as such, I find it less engaging musically. Still, Ilić plays the piece for all its worth making the best of this less compelling music.

Reicha also wrote on the art of composition throughout his career, and one of the earliest examples was the *Practische Beispiele* from 1803 which contained 24 piano works along with scholarly commentary. This CD presents three of those works: Nos. 4, 7, and 20. The opening track of this release (preceding the *Grande Sonate*) is the No. 20, titled "Harmonie." This nine-minute work is quite exquisite, exploring wonderful, piquant harmonic relationships. It is a highlight of this recital. The Capriccio (No. 7 from *Practische Beispiele*) follows the *Grande Sonate*. This five-minute piece is in a minor key and contains many sudden change in direction, as the title would imply. The No. 4 from *Practische Beispiele* is titled "Fantasia on a Single Chord" and it follows the theme and variations sonata. The four-minute

piece involves piano figurations, all within a single major chord. The last piece on the CD is from a set of 34 Preludes and Fugues Reicha published around 1815 as op. 97. This E-Minor lament closes out the recital on a somber note.

Ivan Ilić performs all of this music with command. The recording, captured in the Ansermet studio in Geneva, Switzerland, is exceptionally full-bodied and dynamic. This is well worth exploring and I look forward to future volumes. **Mark Novak**

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Antoine REICHA (1770-1836) - MusicWeb Review

Rediscovered – Volume 1

Harmonie (1802) [9:13]

Grande Sonate (c.1805?) [26:32]

Capriccio (1803) [4:55]

Sonata on a Theme of Mozart (c.1805?) [19:01]

Fantaisie sue un seul accord (1803) [4:10]

Étude, Op. 97 No. 1 [2:23]

Ivan Ilić (piano)

rec. 2017, Le Studio Ansermet, Geneva

CHANDOS CHAN10950 [66:47]

Think of Antoine Reicha and you will probably have in mind **wind quintets** and other chamber music, and not a great deal else. This first volume of his piano music from the pioneering Ivan Ilić shows that there is much more to Reicha than most of us had previously suspected.

A contemporary and friend of Beethoven, Reicha was a renowned figure in his musical world and much in demand as a teacher. After establishing a strong reputation in Germany he finally settled in France, in later years becoming a professor of counterpoint and fugue at the Paris Conservatoire and counting Berlioz, Gounod and Liszt among his students.

This recording is a collection of previously unpublished music composed in around 1800, when Reicha was branching out into writing theoretical treatises. The startling harmonic content of *Harmonie* and the other pieces from his 'Practische Beispiele' are related to this work. It's worth knowing some of this context otherwise you may just think some of these pieces sound a bit bonkers. *Harmonie* for instance has hints of an Erik Satie sent back in time, investing time in unusual harmonic progressions and eccentric melodic variation while still inhabiting a world of virtuosity at the keyboard. *Capriccio* has an improvisatory feel while being written in strict sonata-allegro form, while the *Fantaisie sue un seul accord* goes in entirely the opposite direction to all of those unusual modulations, literally taking a

single chord for a four-minute tour of stylistic variation and exploring the piano's various registers.

The *Grande Sonate* is, as its title suggests, something of a virtuoso showpiece. Arpeggios and sweeps over the entire keyboard are part of a first movement that also retreats into utter simplicity at times, moving into unusual keys while retaining its connection with sonata form, at one point progressing into extreme tonal remoteness through successive chromatic shifts. The improvisatory *Adagio* has hints of Beethoven in its stretching of time, and the final *Capriccio* is full of rhythmic quirks and harmonic surprise.

The *Sonata on a Theme of Mozart* uses the March of the Priests from Act II of *Die Zauberflöte*, taking it through four fairly gentle variations in the first movement. This is followed by a minuet and trio that owes something to Reicha's friend Haydn, though the unpredictable nature of its musical content prevents us entirely from confusing the two composers. The actual *Rondo* finale to this piece has been lost, so a substitute rondo from another loose manuscript has been pressed into service here. The final, gorgeously slow moving *Étude* is perhaps the most forward-looking of all of these pieces, predating Liszt in its chromatic movement and unusually intensifying harmonies.

As Louise Bernard de Raymond writes in the booklet, "at one and the same time strangely familiar yet completely original, the piano pieces presented here are a perfect reflection of the unclassifiable style of Antoine Reicha at the beginning of his career." Such a raft of discoveries is rare in a single release of a well-known European 18-19th century musician, and we can only await further volumes with eager anticipation. Ivan Ilić is a superb performer and deserves noisy acclaim for his presentation of these unknown realms in music, and with Chandos' usual high quality standard of recording I can add nothing beyond urging as many of you as possible to join in with this fascinating journey.

Dominy Clements

Ivan Ilić: Reicha Rediscovered - ClassicalMusic (BBC Mag)

COMPOSERS: Reicha Rating: 5*/5*

WORKS: Harmonie; Grande Sonate; Capriccio, Sonata on a Theme of Mozart; Fantaisie sur un seul accord; Etude

PERFORMER: Ivan Ilić (piano) CATALOGUE NO: CHAN 10950

Ivan Ilić's Reicha Rediscovered is infinitely more satisfying than the other Reicha release reviewed here (above), partly because of the colour and drama infused into the music, and partly because Ilić has much more interesting things to play. All the pieces on this disc (and Lowenmark's) are recorded for the first time. Subtitled 'a contribution to the intellectual culture of the composer', Reicha's 24 *Practische*

Beispiele were his application of the theoretical rules he himself had laid down, and Ilić plays three of them. The section entitled 'Harmony' consists of fantasias – in varied tempos and characters – strongly reminiscent of CPE Bach in their surprising modulations and shifts in mood. Capriccio is highly capricious, and Fantaisie sur un seul accord is simply that: it's a tribute both to Reicha and to Ilić that this extraordinary exercise in harmonic self-denial is anything but boring.

Array

Grande sonate is an imposing piece of virtuosity that roams through remote keys, and its spacious Adagio creates a very Beethovenian effect; its final Allegro is rigorously economical, exploring each of its ideas to the limit. The variations on Mozart's 'March of the priests' from *Die Zauberflöte* become another measure of Reicha's invention, while the final Etude tests his powers of expressiveness by dwelling on one simple rhythmic idea. All these pieces deserve to be incorporated into today's recital repertoire.

Michael Church

Volume 2 Reviews

REICHA *Études dans le genre Fugué*, op. 97. Fugue, op. 36/12 • Ivan Ilić (pn) • CHANDOS 20033 (62:35)

As a very amateur and in no way proficient violin student, whenever I see the word "étude," I feel a small amount of dread. For many students of music, the étude (from the French, meaning "study") is of course an exercise to teach a sometimes technically boring, often necessary, concept. Études are not usually fun—again, by necessity—and yet they are important to develop skills and ingrain concepts in the minds and postures of musical students. So perhaps it is fitting that Antoine Reicha, a prominent instructor of counterpoint and fugue in 17th-century Paris, wrote his studies of the fugue as 13 études. But then again, these études are not simply studies of this complex musical and compositional form. Reicha's Études are exquisitely intricate, dynamic, and written with a kind of glowing intelligence that reflects a curious, unconventional mind.

Reicha (1770–1836) was Czech-born, but later became a naturalized French citizen after he settled permanently as a private instructor and then became a renowned professor of counterpoint and fugue at the Paris Conservatoire. He was a friend and contemporary of Beethoven. But without Beethoven's aristocratic patronage, Reicha supported himself, working on composition and teaching. He is perhaps best known for his wind quintets, *Six Quintets*, op. 88, and for being the counterpoint and fugue instructor of several famous pupils, including Franz Liszt, Hector Berlioz, and César Franck. He was a well-respected and sought-after

instructor and he was also a student of composition theory. His most notable writing on theory of counterpoint and fugue is his *Treatise on Advanced Musical Composition* (*Traité de haute composition musicale*) published in 1824–26. With a tremendous performance by pianist Ivan Ilić, this album is an excellent introduction to Reicha's fugues. His *Études* are not mere exercises. As Ilić describes them in his highly detailed and exceptional album notes, Reicha's fugues "often have a dense, compact quality, motivic echoes reaching a feverish pitch." They are exquisitely detailed with preceding preludes, complex patterns of composition, and unconventional fugal shapes. **Jacqueline Kharouf**

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Antoine REICHA (1770-1836) - MusicWeb Review
Études dans le genre Fugué, Op. 97 Nos. 1-13 (1815-17) [61:05]
Fugue, Op. 36 No. 12 (1803) [1:25]
Ivan Ilić (piano)
rec. 2018, Potton Hall, Dunwich, Suffolk.
CHANDOS RECORDS CHAN20033 [62:35]

Volume 1 of Ivan Ilić's *Reicha Rediscovered* series was an eye-opener for myself ([review](#)) and many others, and these titles are proving to be a hit with a surprisingly wide audience. Once again we are treated with superbly produced and annotated première recordings of music that was unfashionable in its day and neglected since, but can now be heard with ears freed of prejudicial crust.

The *Études dans le genre Fugué* or Studies in Fugal Style were intended as pedagogical exercises for keyboard players and trainee composers. The typical pattern of these is a fugue preceded by a prelude, though Reicha is not always consistent in this. Reicha's mantra for teaching composition was counterpoint, of which the fugue is the greatest test of a composer's skill. In his booklet notes, Ilić points out the myriad ways in which Reicha was able to make his fugues into "an intense cognitive experience", bringing in hints of other composers such as Schumann or Mendelssohn, and allowing himself latitude with the rules of the fugue as generally set out by J.S. Bach. Partial entries of the subject or overlapping them in *stretto* to raise the musical temperature and, as in some of the preludes, intervening with surprise changes of one kind or another. Reicha favours major keys in these pieces, lending them an up-beat feel to a set of pieces that already has plenty of *joie de vivre*.

All of this said, the opening *Poco Andante* in E minor is a rather funereal start to the collection, but you get the flavour of Reicha's deceptive simplicity, a quality

that leads you to expect one thing, when what you get is something different enough to make you sit up and take notice. Without going through every *Étude* it's worth pointing out some favourite moments. The variations of the third prelude have the suggestion of being able to go on into infinity despite the simplicity of the theme, and the *Air* of the fourth is a substantial *Lento* that has the effect of having almost no variation at all. The fugues are often a swifter answer to their prelude, the *Allegretto* of the fifth being a Bach-like chase around the keyboard while the sixth has a lyrical flow that invites a feeling of endless possibilities, the response to a prelude that goes through "a succession of rigorously prepared and resolved double suspensions" – the kind of cycle satirised by Victor Borge when lampooning Bach, but one which in this case leads to "a new plaintive section reminiscent of Schubert, [bringing] the piece to a melancholy close."

In short, there is variety and fascination enough in this collection, which brings us 1-13 of a set that runs to 34, so there is plenty more to expect in future volumes. Listening to these pieces requires a certain openness of attitude, with ears prepared to find the interest in Reicha's subtle treatment of apparently almost naïve material, as well as being prepared to share his sometimes unconventional journeys in counterpoint. Reicha wrong-foots us in all kinds of ways but, from my point of view at least, in no way as to irritate the listener. The educational aspects of this music can be borne in mind but are also easy to ignore while revelling in amusing corners such as the teasingly playful dotted rhythms of the *Andante Maestoso* tenth prelude, followed by the music-box effect of its partner piece, which is by no means a fugue.

This edition is being shadowed somewhat by another 'Complete Piano Works' on Toccata Classics played by Henrik Löwenmark. Other than sampling the first two volumes from their website I have no real qualitative remarks to make, other than noting that Ivan Ilić seems more secure on a purely technical level. It will be interesting to see how this battle of world premières pans out, though the two labels have avoided treading on each other's feet so far.

The final track here is the startling *Fugue, Op. 36 No. 12*. Reicha was freer with the rules in his *Op. 36* set of 36 fugues, and this little coda to the programme jabs us with pointy rhythms and accents, the counterpoint soon dissolving into cadences that take us in to seven different keys in all. Ivan Ilić ends his booklet note with a quote from Berlioz, "...no other professor showed himself as prompt as Reicha in recognising an innovation, even if it went against all the accepted rules, if the result was successful and if he observed in it the seeds of progress."

Dominy Clements

Reicha Piano with Ivan Ilić - ClassicalSource - Rating: 4*/5*

Thirty-Four Études dans le genre Fugué, Op.97 – I-XIII

Thirty-Six Fugen für das Piano-Forte, Op.36 – XII

Prague-born Antonín Reicha (1770-1836) moved to Paris in 1799 and became a French citizen, thereafter he was generally known as Antoine. This is the second volume of Chandos's Reicha Rediscovered series with Ivan Ilić; the first featured music from between 1803 and 1805 and the two Piano Sonatas give interesting evidence of Reicha's individual approach to compositional construction. This current issue gathers music mostly from 1815-17 and features the first thirteen of the Studies in Fugal Style, "For the Use of Young Composers". These Études take the form of a prelude and fugue. Each of the former finds Reicha writing miniatures that greatly vary in mood and style, and presumably the fugues are intended mainly for academic study but each has melodic and tonal links to its relation. Variation form appeals to Reicha, notably so in the commencing section of III where the melody consists of four brief phrases followed by twelve variations and a coda, and similarly Étude IX includes a complex if concise group of them. There is a surprising link to Ilić's first Reicha collection in which the brief final item was the Étude that also begins Opus 97. It is in a style involving unusual hesitations – an element to be found in Reicha's music. Ilić plays it expressively and as a companion to the bright fugue it makes good sense.

The thirteen-part sequence of academically-inclined compositions might seem daunting but it is all very listenable. Tempo and style vary widely, and occasionally Reicha is disarmingly basic, with the simplest of minuets, for example. The bonus (very short) Fugue, from Opus 36, may have been chosen by Ilić because of its quaintness. It starts in A, ends in G, and is full of harmonic swerves and unexpected pauses – a study in quirkiness. I'm sure Reicha enjoyed providing audiences with light-hearted moments.

Chandos's sound quality is pleasingly natural and there is both richness and clarity, every detail brought out, aided, I feel, by the pianist's economical use of the sustaining pedal.

Volume 3 Reviews

REICHA: *L'Art de Varier* / Ivan Ilić, pno / Chandos 21093

This, Vol. 3 in pianist Ivan Ilić's projected series of the music of Anton Reicha, focuses entirely on his long set of theme and variations entitled *L'Art de Varier*. Written in 1804, it is clearly based on the sort of extended variations that J.S. Bach had written more than a half-century earlier, yet both the melodic material and its development sound so much like Schumann that it's uncanny. To the best of my knowledge, there is only one other recording of this piece

available, by Italian pianist Mauro Masala on the Dynamic label, one of my favorite “indies” in that they do a superb job of recording offbeat repertoire—mostly operatic, but sometimes instrumental—in generally first-rate performances. Interestingly, Ilić’s performance is considerably longer than Masala’s, running nearly 87 minutes rather than 75. How on earth Chandos managed to fit this onto one CD baffles me; the most I can burn on a disc is about 82 minutes and 15 seconds. The reason this baffles me is that Ilić plays it faster than Masala, and with considerably more energy. The music practically leaps out of your speakers; it has energy and emotional involvement whereas Masala plays it cleanly but somewhat coolly. Perhaps the fact that Ilić is Serbian has something to do with this. It has been my experience that Eastern European musicians (which includes Russians, Ukrainians, Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, Hungarians etc.) tend to play, as a rule but not always, with more passion. Whatever the reason, I can say without doubt that this is clearly the better recording of this work.

I’ve discovered that Reicha was an early friend of young Beethoven, and this makes sense, too. Some of these variants put you in mind of the Beethoven of the early 1800s, when he was really spreading his wings and developing his own highly dramatic style of writing. Indeed, some of the variations played here, such as No. 6, sound remarkably like Beethoven. FYI, E.T.A. Hoffmann, who wrote his own music in a relatively conservative style but also praised Beethoven highly, also admired Reicha, as did Hector Berlioz.

What impressed me the most was how *varied* Reicha’s variations were, as well as how much chromatic movement there is in several of them, such as No. 11. He apparently had an endless fund of ideas to draw on. It would be nice to say that this work may have influenced Beethoven’s own *Eroica* and *Diabelli Variations*, but as I said earlier, the resemblance here is more that of Schumann, who came much later, than of his contemporaries. After a while, you almost stop listening to Ilić’s dazzling technique and focus entirely on the music itself. It almost takes on a life of its own, as well it should. In Variation 14, Reicha pretty much states the theme “straight” but constantly shifts the underlying harmonies, sometimes dipping into the minor. Variation 15 is explosive and, here again, resembles Beethoven; when changing into the minor in this one, he pulls the melodic line towards the minor as well.

My sole complaint about this work was that Reicha really did not change the theme enough from variation to variation; it is always in the forefront and always the same note-sequence, which made it somewhat predictable for me as the variants continued. This was a trap that neither Beethoven nor Schumann, later on, fell into; they changed their themes around so much that by the fourth or fifth variation, you’re in a different world. Yet Reicha could be more playful than Beethoven, i.e. in Variation 32 where he keeps returning to a four-note rhythm with pauses in between.

My assessment of this disc is that it is a real gem. Great music played with a perfect touch, tone and feeling that you’ve probably not heard before, with near-perfect recorded sound. Go for it!

Antoine REICHA (1770-1836)

***Rediscovered* - Volume Three**

L'Art de varier ou 57 variations pour le piano, Op 57 (1803-04) [86:50]

Ivan Ilić (piano)

rec. 23-25 February 2020, Potton Hall, Dunwich, UK

CHANDOS CHAN20194 [86:50]

Antoine Reicha's *L'Art de varier ou 57 variations pour le piano, Op 57* - the number of variations and the opus number are not coincidental - is a mammoth work that stretches the limits of what can be put on a single music CD these days. Size and duration need not be daunting however. Ivan Ilić has made a little [YouTube video](#) which points out aspects of the theme and some of the ways in which Reicha uses it in his variations, and even without some advance tuning of your ears this is a piece that inhabits comparable breathing space with Beethoven, applying the antique compositional techniques of J.S. Bach while at the same time being "a dazzling and visionary forerunner of Chopin, Schumann, Alkan, and Liszt."

Marc Vignal's booklet notes give us background and context for *L'Art de varier*, being composed after Reicha had withdrawn from performing and focussing entirely on composition. He had already met Haydn and Beethoven in the 1790s, and discussions between the latter and Reicha show that variations on a 'grand' scale were very much in the air in the early 1800s. Unlike Beethoven, Reicha's variations tend to stick largely to a twelve bar structure, indeed demonstrating the art of variation, rather than embarking on more extended voyages of fantasy. The range of these variations is however all the more remarkable for this framework. Reicha's own writings outline a technical approach that embraces varying of the theme itself, transposition into different keys, using different registers, tempi, time signatures, accompaniments, in using augmentation, diminution, decoration, rhythmic and harmonic changes, as well as transforming the theme into dance forms and fugues, while "always allowing it to be recognised." Such a list might sound dry and academic, but Reicha's limitless inventiveness takes us by the hand and leads us through his creation in ways that always stimulate the ear and the mind, contrasting textures and techniques in ways both unexpected but also considerate of our ability to concentrate. He can spread one variation in front of us like a carpet-seller, "see - you can do this...", and then create something that could be a cadenza plucked from a concerto: "this one is harder, but you hear where it comes from?" Our answer more often than not will be, "wow, yes..."

The theme and 57 variations are bundled into nine access points on the disc. Most are not given expression markings, but there are a few variations that have some additional information, such as a centrally placed *Marche funèbre*. It's tricky to

pick out highlights, but if demonstrating the work to a newcomer I would certainly play *Variation 7* at the start of track 2, which sounds disarmingly simple but draws us into a quite intricate counterpoint which twice leads to an inevitable but Erik Satie-like cadence - a confluence that still has the power to inspire over two centuries on from its invention. Talking of Satie, also take a listen to the opening of *Variation 22*, a tiny three-note sequence worth stealing if ever there was one. Hearing *Variation 27* or indeed *Variation 38* and others blind I can imagine most people identifying these as Schumann, and if the rich chord voicings and repose of *Variation 29* don't make you melt then the jocular *Variation 30* won't make you laugh either.

There seems to be just one other recording of this work available, with Mauro Masala on the Dynamic label released in 2000. This is also a fine recording, but Ivan Ilić's more subtle touch and wider variety of approach is represented in a timing from Masala that packs the whole thing into just over 75 minutes. Recorded with Chandos's usual impeccable high standards and performed with superlative musicianship, this is an addition to Ivan Ilić's *Reicha Rediscovered* edition that will always be one of its crowning achievements, whatever comes next in the series.

Dominy Clements