



EMI
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Aldo Ciccolini

Thessaloniki State Symphony Orchestra

Myron Michailidis

Ludwig van Beethoven

Piano Concertos Nos. 3 & 4

A black and white photograph of Aldo Ciccolini, an elderly man with short hair, wearing a light-colored, textured sweater. He is resting his head on his right hand, looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. An open book is visible in the foreground, partially obscured by the bottom of the frame.

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Since his victory in the Marguerite Long Competition in 1949, Aldo Ciccolini has been a luminary of the piano world. Over a period of more than 40 years he has built an exceptional catalogue for EMI, revealing the true richness of the French piano repertoire: his advocacy of Satie in particular has brought him worldwide recognition, but he has also made definitive surveys of the complete piano works of Massenet and Déodat de Séverac, and -- in a crowning, landmark achievement -- Debussy.

Aldo Ciccolini continues to perform great masterpieces in public, such as these two Beethoven concertos recorded in Greece with the Thessaloniki State Symphony Orchestra. Unlike many musical doyens, he shows no signs of slowing down in a bid for supposed profundity, but retains a youthful vigour that is even more inspiring in a man born in 1924.



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Depuis sa victoire au concours Marguerite Long de 1949, l'éclat de la carrière d'Aldo Ciccolini n'a jamais faibli. Pendant plus de quarante ans, il a construit chez EMI une discographie exceptionnelle, révélant avec constance au monde musical les trésors de la musique française ; Satie, bien sûr qu'il a rendu mondialement célèbre, mais aussi la musique pour piano de Massenet, de Déodat de Séverac dont il a donné des intégrales définitives, parachevant sa collaboration par une intégrale Debussy qui fait référence.

Aujourd'hui Aldo Ciccolini continue de donner en concert les grands chefs-d'œuvre du répertoire, tels ces deux concertos de Beethoven enregistrés en Grèce avec l'Orchestre de Thessalonique, non en ralentissant les tempos et en les accablant de profondeur comme font tant de vieux sages, mais au contraire en en prodiguant toute la vigueur et la sève, comme un vrai jeune homme que ce pianiste à nul autre pareil, né en 1924, est toujours resté.



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Myron Michailidis

Myron Michailidis is one of the most talented and important Greek conductors of his generation.

He has conducted several important orchestras in Germany, Israel, Italy, Czech Republic, Mexico, Slovakia, Poland, Portugal and Taiwan (Berlin Symphony Orchestra, Roma Symphonic Orchestra, Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra, George Enescu Philharmonic Orchestra, Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, Mexico State Orchestra etc.), as well as all the major orchestras in Greece. He has also been a regular guest at the Greek National Opera.

Maestro Michailidis has conducted at various festivals in Greece and abroad. In December 2007, he conducted the Thessaloniki State Symphony Orchestra (TSSO) in Beijing, China, in one of the major celebration events of the Cultural Year of Greece in China. Other engagements include visits at the Teatro Verdi in Florence and Milan, Prague's Rudolfinum and Smetana Hall, Berlin's Konzerthaus etc.

He has collaborated with many distinguished soloists, such as Paul Badura-Skoda, Salvatore Accardo, Aldo Ciccolini, Cyprien Katsaris, Lars Vogt, Shlomo Mintz, Misha Maisky, Martino Tirimo, June Anderson, Cheryl Studer, Fazil Say and others.

Past and future recording projects include CDs for Naxos, as well as recordings for Greek labels and the Greek Radio.

His latest CD with the TSSO includes works by Ildebrando Pizzetti (some of which are World Premiere Recordings) and has received excellent reviews (Five Diapasons in "Diapason", Honorable Distinction from the Greek Critics Association for Music and Theater in December, both in 2009). TSSO's first CD was issued for NAXOS in 2007, a production that inaugurated the new "Greek Classics" series of the well-known label. This CD contains world premiere recordings of works by Greek composers, under the baton of Myron Michailidis and with renowned saxophone player Theodore Kerkezos as soloist. The recording received the "Supersonic Award" by Pizzicato Classics in Luxembourg (February 2007) and earned two Grammy® nominations for NAXOS.

Myron Michailidis studied piano in Athens with Dimitris Toufexis and conducting at the Berlin Music Academy with Hans-Martin Rabenstein, Miltiades Karydis and Simon Rattle. From 1999, until 2004, he was Permanent Conductor at the Opera of Eastern Saxony in Germany. He also holds a law degree from the University of Athens.

From July 2004, until January 2011, he was Artistic Director of the TSSO. During this period, he implemented a qualitative and elaborate artistic program, and succeeded in raising the orchestra to a higher artistic level. Since January 2011, he is Artistic Director of the Greek National Opera.

He has been getting rave reviews for his operatic and symphonic conducting in newspapers (*Sächsische Zeitung*, *Berliner Morgenpost*, *Der Tagesspiegel*) and magazines (*Das Orchester*, *Opernwelt*, *Fanfare*, *Gramophone*, *Pizzicato*, *Allmusic.com*, *Classicstoday.com*) and has been awarded several honorary distinctions.

Website: www.myronmichailidis.net



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Thessaloniki State Symphony Orchestra

The Thessaloniki State Symphony Orchestra is one of the leading symphonic orchestras in Greece. The orchestra's extensive repertoire includes works from the baroque to the avant-garde.

The TSSO was founded in 1959, by the Greek composer Solon Michaelides. In 1966 it became a state orchestra. Many important Greek musicians became directors of TSSO: First in line was the founder, followed by Georgios Thymis, Alkis Baltas, Karolos Trikolidis, Kosmas Galileas, Konstantinos Patsalides, Leonidas Kavakos, Mikis Michaelides and Myron Michailidis. Today TSSO numbers approximately one hundred and twenty musicians.

Besides the scheduled symphonic concerts, TSSO covers a wide range of artistic activities performing opera, ballet, music for silent films, educational concerts for children and young people etc. These activities have contributed to the increase of the audience in the last few years.

The main aims of the TSSO are to promote the Greek music heritage, including giving many Greek and world premieres performances, as well as promoting young artists, many of which today are renowned in the Greek and international music scenes. A pioneer artistic institution of Greece, TSSO records for international labels such as BIS, NAXOS and EMI Classics. Among orchestra's most important recent productions is the recording of the *Concertos No 3 and No 4 for piano* of Beethoven with the famous soloist Aldo Ciccolini (EMI Classics).

The list of Greek and foreign conductors and soloists who have collaborated with TSSO includes a large number of famous artists: Plácido Domingo, José Carreras, Luciano Pavarotti, Salvatore Accardo, June Anderson, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Paul Badura-Skoda, Lazar Berman, Bruno-Leonardo Gelber, Natalia Gutman, Jascha Horenstein, Aram Khatchaturian, Leonid Kogan, Edmund Kurtz, Mischa



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Maisky, Shlomo Mintz, Igor Pogorelich, Ruggieri Ricci, John Nelson, Mstislav Rostropovich, Gil Shaham, Yuri Simonov, Vladimir Spivakov, Victor Tretjakov, Odyseas Dimitriadis, Cyprien Katsaris, Leonidas Kavakos, Theodoros Kerkezos, Kostas Paskalis, Dimitris Sgouros, Martino Tirimo, etc.

TSSO appears at the Thessaloniki Concert Hall and every year at the Athens Megaron Concert Hall. The orchestra also performs at the most important festivals of Greece and abroad (Athens Festival-Herode Atticus Odeon, Demetria, Philippi, International Festival "Cypria" in Cyprus, International Festival "Zino Francescatti" in Marseille-France, Eclectic Festival in Valencia-Spain, etc.).

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Webpage of the orchestra: www.tssogr

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programme notes

Recent research is inconclusive as to whether preparatory work on the sketches for the C minor Concerto had begun between late 1799, and early 1800, or in the second half of 1802. We can only be sure that Beethoven worked seriously on this piece and committed to paper all but the solo part in the few months preceding its first performance on 5th April 1803, at the Theater an der Wien. Along with it, two other major works were presented for the first time: the Second Symphony (Op. 36) and the oratorio *Christ on the Mount of Olives* (Op. 85). The composer had been awake for a good part of the previous night copying parts. Furthermore, as was typical also of Mozart when presenting one of his new piano concertos, Beethoven did not have adequate time to write down the solo piano part and had to play it virtually from memory. Ignaz von Seyfried, the musical director of the theater, was asked to turn pages and left a telling account of his experience: "I saw almost nothing but empty leaves; at most, on one page or the other a few Egyptian hieroglyphs wholly unintelligible to me were scribbled down to serve as aids to his memory."



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combine meaningfully the two musical forces into play (solo and tutti)? How to secure unity and contrast within a movement, or even between movements?"

In his book *Concerto Conversations*, Joseph Kerman has left a useful road map for dealing with such issues, offering also the most lucid codification of the two cardinal concerto principles: polarity and reciprocity. His insights will enlighten our analysis.

Beethoven's Third and Fourth Piano Concertos inhabit different worlds, dominated by their central tonality: C minor and G major, respectively. Especially in the first movement of Op. 37, the minor key certainly has a bearing on the character of the opening *ritornello*: threatening and agitated, with military undertones, it is a self-contained theme pregnant with all the elements that will propel the movement forward: a rising triadic gesture, the second half of a descending scale and the drum motif that will ultimately trigger the coda. Beethoven does not hesitate to use the simplest means of the tonal system as his primary material, for he is confident in the originality of his language and the forcefulness of his rhetoric.





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Commentators agree that holding up the Third Concerto against the light of its predecessors reveals the persistent shadow of Mozart's Concerto No. 21 (K. 491), also in C minor. That work was published in 1800, and Beethoven is known to have admired it as an unsurpassable paradigm, drawing inspiration from its daring rhetorical devices. Regarding the specific affinities between the two works, aside from the unison of the initial theme, one could definitely mention the coda of the first movement: there, Beethoven's soloist claims an uncommonly active role in the final moments of the drama by offering arpeggiated commentary that emulates the "disquieting shadows" (Robert Levin's words) from the corresponding section in K. 491. However, Beethoven's coda leads to a stormy and electrifying *fortissimo* ending, whereas

Mozart's music disappears mysteriously in a mist of *pianissimo*. One should also mention that both the finales of K. 491 and Op. 37 conclude with a coda in 6/8 meter. But even here the overall affect is so antithetical, when one compares the sublime pathos of Mozart's C *minor* final segment with the exuberance and youthful power of Beethoven's triumphant C *major* conclusion.

What sets Mozart and Beethoven further apart is the middle movement, where the younger composer transcends his model. The Largo of Op. 37 is set in E major, a startling major third apart from the surrounding C minor movements. One of Beethoven's more sensitive and profound creations until then, this slow movement provides a temporal oasis – a haven of refuge after the storm – and transports the listener to subliminal depths. Carl Czerny has remarked that "the whole [opening] theme must sound like a distant, holy, unearthly harmony". According to him, this is why Beethoven resorted to the *una corda* pedal here to achieve this effect, although he does not call for it in the score. (A true *una corda* effect cannot be achieved by the action of the left pedal on modern pianos.)

The transition from the Largo to the Rondo finale is carried out with a decisive grounding motion. The G sharp of the slow movement's final E major chord still sounds in our ears when it is changed enharmonically into an A flat to kick off the brilliant last movement. Unity and contrast, continuity and interruption – all in one compact gesture!

Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto in G major, Op. 58, belongs to an extraordinarily prolific five-year period (1803-08) of groundbreaking masterpieces, such as the "Waldstein" and the "Appassionata" Piano Sonatas, the Symphonies Nos. 3-6 and the Triple Concerto, among other important works. It was first performed at a private concert held in March 1807, at the Viennese palace of Prince Lobkowitz, Beethoven's patron. Although the composer had completed the work during 1805-06, he kept it to himself. In August 1808, it was finally published and dedicated to Beethoven's friend, pupil and patron, Archduke Rudolph. Four months later the Concerto received its public premiere at the four-hour-long Academy of 22nd December 1808, where the Fifth and the Sixth Symphony, the aria "Ah, perfido", sections of the Mass in C major and the Choral Fantasy were also performed.



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The first movement of the Fourth Concerto reveals Beethoven's bold and innovative solution to the problem of "how to begin a concerto". Breaking with established tradition, it opens with the solo. Its gentle chordal theme ends in the dominant (D major) and is based on the same four-note rhythmic motif heard in the violent opening of the Fifth Symphony, only here it appears in an entirely different guise. Five bars later the strings reciprocate with an even softer entry and the orchestral *ritornello* is under way. Beethoven's unorthodox strategy will naturally have further ramifications for all three movements.

Johann Friedrich Reichardt, Capellmeister at the court of the King of Prussia, attended the December 1808, concert. Impressed with what he heard, three days later he wrote in a letter about a "new concerto for fortepiano, terribly difficult, which Beethoven played astonishingly well in the fastest possible tempo. The Adagio [*sic*], a masterpiece of beautiful sustained melody, he actually sang on his instrument with a deep melancholy feeling which awakened its response in me".

Aside from mistaking the Andante con moto for an Adagio, Reichardt's comment that the composer "sang on his instrument" brings to mind Leonard Ratner's perceptive observation, that "the slow movement is in the style of a *recitativo obbligato* and thus functions as an interlude or an introduction to the finale, creating an extremely sharp contrast between its pathetic mood and the contredanse of the finale".

Cast in E minor, a minor third below the main G major tonality, the middle movement of the Fourth Concerto creates a unique new dimension full of poetry and emotion. In the two centuries of its life it has inspired various extramusical associations, the most imaginative and powerful of which is the narrative of Orpheus confronting the Furies at the Gates to Hades and taming them. The composer reverses the procedure of the first movement, dramatizing the thematic, stylistic and timbral polarity of the two antagonists: strings and piano (entering in that order). On this imaginary theatrical stage, the harsh utterances of the orchestra are gradually softened by the dignified pleading of the soloist. Only in the trill cadenza does Beethoven briefly allow for a visceral outburst, but the soloist's goal has already been achieved. Ultimately, it may be better to leave the protagonists anonymous and their exchanges open to interpretation. It is worth noting, however, that here is the first documented instance where Beethoven specifically asks for *una corda* throughout the Andante con moto (with the exception of the cadenza). Complemented by his atmospheric use of the damper pedal, the sound acquires a wonderful eerie quality

Beethoven wished for the Rondo to follow immediately after the last E minor chord of the piano in the Andante. As he had done in the corresponding place of the Third Concerto, the return to reality is rather abrupt – and now also "wrong": the finale begins with the strings in C major (*not* G major). In its reciprocal entry the piano seems to correct the harmonic mistake. But the C major will return unscathed at prominent formal junctions. The orchestra is enriched here with trumpets and drums to punctuate the finale's contrasting character. The music is witty, rhythmically bouncy and joyful. Following the short cadenza, the soloist is soon engaged in the closing Presto, partaking in the joy of arrival at a stable G major version of the opening motif – at long last!

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J'ai été impressionné et ravi de jouer avec
la collaboration de cet orchestre, magnifiquement
dirigé par Monsieur Myron Michailidis
qui sait ce qu'il fait ... une rencontre dont
je me souviendrai
longtemps. Merci!



Myron Michailidis
Myron Michailidis
conductor

Aldo Ciccolini
piano

Solonique - 12 Mai '06.

"I am impressed and happy to have collaborated with this orchestra, brilliantly conducted by Myron Michailidis, who knows what he is doing... A partnership that will remain in memory for long. Thank you!"