

Maria Tipo, Vol. 1 – Piano Music of Beethoven, Chopin, Scarlatti – Yves St-Laurent

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Maria Tipo Vol. I = BEETHOVEN: Piano Sonata in C Major, Op. 2/3; Piano Sonata in C Major, Op. 53 “Waldstein”; Piano Sonata in E Major, Op. 109; CHOPIN: Étude in F Major, Op. 10/8; SCARLATTI: Sonata in E Major, K. 20; Sonata in E Major, K. 381 – Yves St-Laurent YSL T-1686 (78:06) [www.78experience.com] ***:**

Neapolitan piano virtuoso Maria Tipo (1931-2025) deeply impressed me when I heard her in concert in Atlanta, somewhere in the 1980s, and we subsequently struck up a tender conversation on several musical topics and Italian musical personalities, like Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli and Pietro Scarpini. A pupil of Ersilia Cavallo, herself a Busoni acolyte, Tipo went on to win the major prize at the 1949 International Geneva Piano Competition and third prize at the 1952 Queen Elisabeth Competition. Serving as a juror at the Queen Elisabeth Competition, Artur Schnabel characterized Tipo as “the most exceptional talent of our era,” and her many later accolades cited her talents as beyond those of Martha Argerich. Tipo became known as “the Horowitz from Naples,” given her command of a repertory similar to that of the Russian master. This issue from Yves St-Laurent, a recital from La Roque-D’Anthéron, France (15 August 1987) complements an earlier issue from the 1999 Ermitage label (ERM 150ADD) of her recital in Lugano, Switzerland from 5 March 1970, in which she plays the Beethoven *Op. 109* at a broader tempo for the outer movements than she realizes in France.

Tipo opens with Beethoven’s *Sonata in C Major, Op. 2/3* from 1795, which pays only brief homage to Haydn before embarking on its own paths into minor tonalities. Certain virtuosic obstacles, like double-third trills, syncopes, and octave shifts inhibit Tipo not all as she phrases the *Allegro con brio* with studied ideas of the movement’s almost symphonic structure. The tensile combination of light grace and propulsive motor power commands our attention, while Tipo’s sense of the lyric impulse allows even her staccato passage to sing. The movement ends with a cadenza which Tipo quite relishes before she brings us to a rousing coda. The *Adagio*, in E major, 2/4 follows a parlando course that defines a rondo, but its studied, leisurely progression becomes so periodic that we forget the classical nature of the work because Tipo mesmerizes us in meditation, especially in the tonic minor. Easily, we could predict Robert Schumann’s personal attachment to the ethos of the moment. The third movement offers one of Beethoven’s early true *Scherzos (Allegro)*, here in minuet form. Tipo brings out some learned polyphony in the course of the music’s humorous rusticity. The middle section arpeggios quite swirl in plastic motion, here in the relative A minor. A few passing harmonic jokes inflict a bit of damage, even as the movement concludes. The last movement, *Allegro assai*, is pure homage to Haydn, in sonata-rondo format. Tipo imposes a robust sonority and girth to the scampering motives in 6/8, and suddenly we find ourselves in a declamatory G major. Tipo maintains a fine, singing line through the development section, the underlying pulse not forsaken. The presence of inversions of the theme and the appearance of audacious trills pass by in a liquid spirit that seems to laugh,

even as Beethoven the iconoclast has made a defiant bow before us. The bravos that ensue have been well deserved.

Follows Tipo's masterful rendition of the 1804 *Waldstein Sonata*, here played in a most "aeolian" presentation. Beethoven had received a new Erard piano that allowed greater octave range and freer dynamic action, especially in the pedals, and Beethoven took mighty advantage of the improvements. Tipo now asserts her claim as "the Neapolitan Horowitz," sure in her command of forces that deliver lyricism and potent drama. The sonorous girth of Tipo's projection reminds us both of Horowitz and a female contemporary, Gina Bachauer. The dynamic attacks, multi-hued chords, and sudden explosions of tempo occur so fluently we become convinced we audit a larger ensemble than one keyboard. We are reminded that the *Waldstein* had been Aaron Copland's favorite Beethoven sonata, given its inevitable effect on all piano music that succeeded it.

Perhaps the second movement, *Adagio molto*, subtitled *Introduzione 6/8*, remains the most experimental of the three movements, and Tipo exploits its sense of improvisation, the sequential melody's groping towards the dominant, in order to effect the plastic transition to the wonderful *Rondo: Allegro moderato*, achieved by Tipo with a luxurious sonority, pearly play, and a vibrantly rich trill that soon enters into resounding cascades. We might compare her performance here with that on *Youtube* from 1979 to witness the flexibility of her conception. The latter half of the movement increasingly resembles a toccata, rife in theatrical and lyrically audacious gambits that often traverse any number of modulations in C minor, A-flat, and F minor. Tipo's strettis remain clear and transparent, and her trills assume a grandeur indicative of the spirit that created them, inspired by the new freedom of his chosen instrument. I place this exquisitely etched performance high among my favorites, that include at least two separate renditions by Rudolf Serkin.

The last of the Beethoven triptych, the 1820 *Sonata No. 30 in E Major, Op. 109*, allows us another moment of comparison, since it is among the sonatas Tipo plays in Switzerland 5 March 1979, offering there broader second and third movements in a work pianist Jonathan Biss terms "metaphysical." In his late style, Beethoven had accomplished a remarkable capacity for economy and compression of form. Tipo addresses the dual-themed first movement, *Vivace non troppo – Allegro espressivo* in a lyrically direct manner, her sonority rich in bell tones and gurgling, emphatic bass harmonies. The more declamatory impulses find quick, if fragile, resolution, especially in the upper registers. Just before the coda, the music enters a brief parlando episode somewhat wracked by grief. The second movement, *Prestissimo*, proceeds in a state of near panic, the alternate aggressive and reflective ideas toppling upon each other, breathless.

The sense of emotional concision suddenly leaves us, since Beethoven in his last movement opts for a hymnal tune which he subjects to intensely expansive, studied variation. What first appears an Austrian folk dance soon transforms into a lullaby, then a playful, even martial, assortment of permutations that become polyphonic. Beethoven had opted for the German expression of his

intentions, emphasizing the songful nature to be maintained throughout. Tipo builds a resonant structure that flows and breathes with grace and transparency. We feel what Schumann would inherit from this piece, its inwardness (*innigkeit*), even in antics of its irreverent, visionary moments of refined humanity that virtually exhaust the limits of the piano. Here, I am tempted to compare Tipo not so much with Horowitz but with Myra Hess, who no less expressed wondrous glory in her realizations of Beethoven.

Tipo concludes with a bit of Chopin, his flowing, brilliant *Study in F major, Op. 10/8*, sturdy and vehement without undue percussion; then, two Scarlatti sonata in the same key of E major. Hear her landing at the conclusion of the Chopin! The Scarlatti *K. 20* is a little dazzler in staccato periods, almost a toys' march with fervent scalar passages and quirky leaps. One could imagine Tchaikovsky's orchestrating it. Scarlatti's *K. 381* proves even more expansive, but in a totally different affect. Lyrical, nervously modal as it evolves, the piece could be a mask for the later Scriabin. The layered, almost canonic elements seem to breathe aspects of the French *clavécinists*, especially Rameau. The fluid, tender transparency of the occasion has not been lost on this Gallic audience, which glows in its appreciation of this gifted artist. Piano sound exemplifies the St-Laurent 78experience.

—Gary Lemco

