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Alexandros Kapelis in impressive performance in SF

Music review by Jaime Robles

Alexandros Kapelis' San Francisco recital debut at Herbst Hall this past Tuesday was entitled "The Greek Myth and the Piano." And while the mythic theme paid homage to the Greek community, who were presenting the recital as part of their national celebration, what it served finally was to showcase the prodigious talents of this 30-year-old pianist.

The program featured works from the 18th to the 20th century, and opened with Clementi's Sonata in G minor. Clementi was one of the 18th century's foremost piano virtuosos, a man skilled enough to compete with and draw the envy of Mozart, who described Clementi's playing rather waspishly as "mere mechanicus."

But this early romantic sonata, first presented in 1823 and based on the tragic love story of Queen Dido, is filled with a passionate flood of notes that conjure up not only the emotions of the abandoned Dido but the fury of the sea into which her lover Aeneas escapes.

Kapelis approached this piece with a directness of attack and a dynamic control in which even the softer piano parts, like the love of Dido, seemed insistent. His focus on directness and clarity manifested itself interestingly in his interpretation of a set of pieces by Rameau. Originally meant for harpsichord, *L'Entretien des Muses*, *Les Tourbillons* and *Les Cyclopes* require extraordinary deftness at the keyboard; in *Les Cyclopes* the left hand constantly moves over the right to alternate between bass and treble in short, rapid, disjointed passages.

Kapelis was able, through a light, fleetness of touch, to conjure up the demurely vibrant and precise quality of the harpsichord's plucked string sound.

Kapelis made two excellent



Greek pianist Alexandros Kapelis made his local debut a glorious one on March 20 at Herbst Hall in San Francisco.

program choices with the work of 20th century Greek composers Yannis Kostantinidis and Manos Hadjidakis. Using the exotic sound of ancient Greek modes along with a hefty dash of French modernism, Konstantinidis' *Huit Danses des Îles Grecques* is nothing short of absolutely charming with its repeating dance motifs and occasionally bumptious bass line.

Hadjidakis' first piano composition, *For a Little White Seashell*, picks up the dance theme with a madcap Syrtos, and follows with a group of witty musical dialogues with composers such as Prokofieff. Hadjidakis' comments are to the point: "*For a Little White Seashell* must be performed with a strict awareness of rhythm and with the feeling defined by its actual written form. Everything beyond the prescribed limits is both useless and harmful ... Every exaggeration

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in interpretation and every arbitrary choice of rhythm ridicules the interpreter and ruins the musical essence of the work."

Kapelis has taken his countryman's words to heart, for there is in all his playing a precision of rhythm, a dedication to clarity and a clear attentiveness to form — one can almost see him listening to the composer's voice. This was especially obvious in

the concluding piece of the program, Rachmaninoff's *Études-Tableaux*, Op. 33.

Closest to Kapelis' essence as a musician, these miniature tone poems require dramatic expressiveness, but it is an expressiveness best served by containment and control. These studies demand that the pianist use a full range of technique in rendering the total palette of keyboard colors. Kapelis engages that challenge with a driving energy, under which must beat a passionate heart.