

intangible classics



CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO

PIANO
WORKS

ALFONSO
SOLDANO

(INCLUDES WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS)

MARIO CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO

PIANO MUSIC

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* - world première recording

ALFONSO SOLDANO piano



MARIO CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO (1895-1968) THE COMPOSER AND HIS MUSIC

*“So, among the few things that I have never doubted in the world was
“to be born” to write Music! (for good or bad fate that it was)”*

There is in every musical composition an utopian core, an ideal that can only find its redemption in the future, for the present cannot encompass it: and this holds especially true for the piano works of “Mr. Tedesco”. Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, a sephardic-Jew, was born in 1895 in a Catholic society and the music was “the tool of [his] faith”. “Tempered” man, in every sense, and steeped in the culture of Florence, in 1939 he shared the fate of his ancestors and had to leave his native place due to the racial laws enacted by the Fascist regime. He fled to America and became an American citizen in 1946. He was soon absorbed by the Bedlam of the film industry (he was employee number 11694 with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer) and became “a cog in a well oiled machine”.

His music reflects both his cultured background, (he was an avid reader of Rabelais, Valéry, Shakespeare, Scott and Whitman) and his intense personality. In a way, his musical technique can be said to have been forged by so many trials and tribulations and by his readiness to plunge to the deepest core of the artistic experience. He was sought after by his colleagues, and was the courteous confidante of three generations of musicians. People like Luigi Dallapiccola, the “perfect” Alfredo Casella, Achille Longo and Darius Milhaud, Mario Pilati and the “candid” Nino Rota whom Tedesco looked upon as a brother, indeed, almost an adoptive son. Other names include Andrés Segovia and “dear Maestro Toscanini”, Jacopo Napoli and Jascha Heifetz, Gregor Piatigorsky and Walter Gieseking. Tedesco was one of the main exponents of the avant-garde and the affectionate teacher of a great number of aspiring composers, names amongst which shine stars like Henry Mancini, John Williams, Jerry Goldsmith, Herman Stein and André Previn.

His gentleness extended beyond his professional life, being a devoted husband, father and friend. He had married Clara Forti in 1924 and they had two sons: Pietro (“Petruccio”) and Lorenzo. His circle of friends included Gabriele D’Annunzio (Commander *Ariel*

musicus, “animal of luxury” surrounded by eccentric furnishings in his own “bad taste bazaar”), Giacomo Puccini (drafting the *Turandot* in his pretentious villa), Luigi Pirandello (who wrote *I Giganti della montagna* with the “lightness of a cloud floating over an abyss”), and Arturo Loria (his “most faithful Kurvenaldo”). Tedesco’s talents extended beyond composition: he was a passionate critic, endowed with a sharp intelligence reflected in his contributions to “La Critica musicale”, “Il Pianoforte”, “La Rassegna musicale”, “Letteratura”, “The New York Times” and “Music Journal”. Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, “the Crown Prince” of Ildebrando Pizzetti, matured his musical sensibility through the contrapuntal rigour of his master (“the greatest Italian Master of the choir after Palestrina”) and the surging harmonic atmosphere of the French “Impressionists”. His insatiable musical energy pushed him to create a wide range of compositions: concerts, operas, film music, chamber music and whole repertoires for guitar and above all the piano.

For many years, his solo works for the piano were largely ignored, failing to fill musical halls, which is surprising really, since Tedesco can be considered, in a sense, as the “Italian Ravel”. It is due to the late Aldo Ciccolini who quite recently re-discovered his piano repertoire: “I discovered it by chance, finding his score in a library among second-hand volumes” said the great Neapolitan pianist in an interview. From that fortuitous discovery he felt the restless urge to record over fifty compositions for piano. Unfortunately the project remains unfinished: only half the repertoire was in fact recorded. Now the pianist Alfonso Soldano, one of the last Ciccolini’s pupils, intends to wholly retrace the footsteps his master had marvellously tread. This present volume offers eight luxurious compositions, amongst which two precious world premier recordings stand out. This string of gems is pregnant with a sense of destiny, the destiny of an extraordinary artistic man, moulded by the buffets of life and a cultural sensibility: a man who not merely made music his living, but made music his life.

Nocturne in Hollywood

Culver City - Los Angeles 1941. Castelnuovo-Tedesco dons the garb of the ghost-writer giving good looks to a bad game: it is his initiation to the world of CinemaScope which toys between illusions and plot twists and aims at fifteen minutes of fame amidst hours of mundanity and struggles. This is the world of the global market. Castelnuovo-Tedesco had to seek refuge from the artificial court of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, from the mayhem of producers, lyricists and arrangers brimming with self-importance. He found solace in *Lot no. 2*, where outdoor scenes were shot. As he himself put it: “the area was mostly deserted, but mounted next to each other stood an eclectic array of scenarios [...] a kind of ghost town made up of facades that harboured nothing, the *cine-citta* stereotype of the film industry, well, it had a strange fascination upon me”. *Nocturne in Hollywood* is a trace of this deceptive world, a false world that hovers between wake and dream, a world of elusive solitude, a world of disillusion. Seek no more then. Here lies that world, finally unedited, a smooth *andantino* with a detached feel, aloof and unattached. It is a song that seems to prove Castelnuovo-Tedesco’s claim: “music is the art of combining sounds in a logical, harmonious, imaginative and expressive way”.

Alt Wien. Rapsodia viennese Op. 30

Alt Wien (Walzer)

For two years (1922-1923), Castelnuovo-Tedesco spent his summer holidays with Clara at Brijuni. This was the island destination of high society, where the cosmopolitan and carefree, in search for similar company, gathered in their luxurious yachts at the snobbiest island in Europe off the mouth of the port of Pula. Among this curious assortment of aristocrats, adventurers and industrial magnates, promoters of psychotic regression and progressive archaisms, the figure of Winnaretta Singer, widow of Prince Edmond de Polignac, stood out: “of her husband, the princess had grateful and emotional memories. A passionate musician herself, she lamented how the prince, amidst his aphorisms, would have said “that the best music could be written as chamber orchestra or for two pianos”. And as homage to her dead husband, the princess annually commissioned the best contemporary musicians to write music specifically for these two forms” (she ordered for example the *Pavane pour une infante défunte* by Ravel, the *Renard* by Stravinsky and De Falla’s *Retablo de Maese Pedro*). Castelnuovo-Tedesco was destined to be the composer for 1923. He came up with *Alt Wien. Rapsodia viennese*, a composition for two pianos, inspired by the hedonistic life of Brijuni and animated by a century that was at once decadent and faux-naïve. *Alt Wien* is a triptych that describes, not without bitter irony, the “dance history” of Vienna. The style and overall feel has similarities with Ravel’s *La Valse*, but as Castelnuovo-Tedesco was to point out in his autobiography, *Alt Wien* was written a year before. The original score was transcribed for violin and piano by Mario Corti, becoming a favourite for Heifetz; and then also a version for piano solo immediately obtained enormous success, especially in the interpretation of Gieseking.

Vitalba e Biancospino, fiaba silvana Op. 21

The spirit of Castelnuovo-Tedesco was always open to the lure of fairy tales and legends, whether it meant approaching Shakespeare’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream* or simply reading Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Tanglewood Tales* to his son on the transatlantic voyage to the States. As he himself put it “I have always liked fairy tales and will always do: give me poems or fairy tales any day”. The inspiration came from an intriguing source. Castelnuovo-Tedesco was invited to spend his holidays with the painter Ezio Giovannozzi and his wife Rita de Matteis at their house in Forte dei Marmi. Rita’s sister Maria was also there, a painter and celebrated costume-designer for theatre and film and Oscar nominee for the costumes of *War and Peace*. The musician himself narrates the event that sparked his *fiaba silvana* (sylvan fable) written in 1921: “on evening in June we were walking amongst the pine-trees... Rita was telling some tale of a fairy and a wood-elf who lived in the forest. Meanwhile Maria ran among the hedges, picking clematis and hawthorn with which to make garlands. A Tuscan friend from Versilia was singing a popular melancholic song. I recall only these words: “*E come debbo far / a andarla a ritrovar? / Vestito a cappuccino / mi convien andar...*” [And what can I do / to go and find her? Ought I to go / dressed as a friar?]. And so all these elements took hold of my fantasy and *Vitalba e Biancospino* was born”. The track, described as subtle and delicate, is in Rondo form. It has a certain translucent sonority, ranging from extreme refinement to intensive expression. At times the track feels like a distant *rêverie*, taking the listener down a path of sheer vibrant poetry. And as the musical journey ends, there comes a sense of melancholy sealed by the flagrant use of a total C Major chord.

Cantico per San Bernardino Op. 19

Having just graduated from the Conservatory “Luigi Cherubini” in Florence, Castelnuovo-Tedesco won first prize in a competition organized by the magazine “Il Pianoforte”. His contribution was *Cantico per una statuetta di S. Bernardino di Niccolò dell’Arca* Op. 19 (1920). The piece was dedicated to the musician and academic Fernando Liuzzi, his brother-in-law and close friend. The inspiration was the Christian world, as with his *Fioretti di San Francesco* Op. 11 (1919) and later his *Evangelion* Op. 142 (1949); this was a surprise to many, seeing that he was essentially Jewish. But it is imperative to bear in mind that the faith of his fathers had always been enough for the Florentine composer, and music had been the crystallized medium of this faith. And anyway, for such an artist, there was no need for any intermediary to communicate with the “the Augustian presence”. His “communion reached perfection in his music [...]. And better than in the dim light of a church or a synagogue, [he has] always been able to pray in the sunlight or under the starry sky; on a rock by the sea, or on top of an hill, between two rows of cypress trees, as in an aisle”.

Sonatina zoologica Op. 187

The year 1960 was the *year of animals* for Castelnuovo-Tedesco. He composed a cycle of lyrics for voice and piano based on twelve poems by Arturo Loria (*Il Bestiario* Op. 188) and after a *Sonatina Zoologica* for piano on an invitation from Ornella Puliti-Santoliquido (one of the last and most brilliant pupils of Alfredo Casella) that had projected a work inspired by the animal world. Castelnuovo-Tedesco took this on board, and with a refined descriptive approach adopted the animal kingdom to give life to a luxurious feast of music, built on the style of *Histoires naturelles* (1906) or *L’Enfant et les Sortilèges* (1925) by Maurice Ravel. Castelnuovo-Tedesco had experienced enough “the octave of life” of a musician that he could genuinely wallow in his own reminiscences and appeal to his earlier works, a fact noted as well by Luigi Dallapiccola. This world premiere recording takes us to the magical time of his own childhood, running carefree in the countryside of Usigliano di Lari. Music which opens a window in time and we see the fields decked in a festive mood. There are the fickle *dragonflies*, swaying in the quivering air to the rhythms of the midday heat. Light-hearted, but never flippant, as it spirals slowly to a meditative mood, like *snails* after Easter rain (this track is written in the *Rondo* form, with more than a passing reference to Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde* final part of Act III, one of the many allusions in Castelnuovo-Tedesco’s opera); and then we encounter a rapid *lizard*, scuttling over two admirable pages of pure technique from 1916, a musical cameo dedicated to Casella, “one of the most perfect artificer that Italian music can count amongst its ranks” who for the modernists meant “the leavening, the yeast and connective tissue”. Finally march the industrious *ants*: pages of pure virtuosity that run explosively to a belligerent percussive beat.

2 Film Studies Op. 67 - “Charlie” (Charlot), “Mickey Mouse” (Topolino)

Before his immersion in the landscapes of Hollywood, like Stravinsky and Schonberg, or Malibu, like Thomas Mann and Frank Sinatra, Castelnuovo-Tedesco wanted to give a glimpse of what would be his cinematic style, a lithe and loose style, distant from conventional formalities. Thus in 1931 he came up with two *Film Studies*, which became an instant success. But why *Charlot* and *Mickey Mouse*? Because as the composer himself said in his essay *Music and Movies* Charlie Chaplin and Walt Disney are for him “undoubtedly the largest and most complete personalities of the cinema [...] even from a musical point of view”. He portrays both characters vividly. A wistful Charlie, paradoxically desolate yet vivacious, nonchalant yet dreamy and tragic; and then the amiable and transparent Mickey Mouse with his jarring laugh depicted in the rapid chromatic scale. Here we have pure characterization translated into music, veering from tumultuous to languid but always fantastic in its brilliance. Listening to this track links one with the delightful world of reworked melodies, tunes already crowned with immortal glory: listen again. It’s now time for the theme from treader (*Votre toast* by Bizet) and the immortal *Vissi d’arte* by Puccini.

Cielo di Settembre Op. 1

According to the composer “This piece, which appears “officially” as op.1, was written long before I had any formal training! (I started studying composition with Pizzetti in 1914). It was part of a Suite *Feuilles d’automne* (which is lost). I orchestrated it (under Pizzetti’s supervision) in 1915; and it became my first orchestral piece”.

Cielo di Settembre can be considered to be his first “official” work: Castelnuovo-Tedesco had written some pieces before, such as the *Piccolo Walzer* for his father Amedeo when he was nine and an *English Suite* for harpsichord or piano in 1909. *Cielo di Settembre* was written in 1910 when he was studying harmony and counterpoint with Gino Modona, a distant cousin of his mother. Modona, who first introduced his student to the magical sound world of Debussy and Ravel, at that time mostly considered in Italy as “extravagance”. Thanks to *Jardins sous la pluie* and *Miroirs*, Castelnuovo-Tedesco would “develop his personality, a personality which remained essentially unchanged throughout”. *Cielo di Settembre* is thus influenced by French “impressionism”, undoubtedly characterized by a burning desire to explore the depths of emotional music through a focus of tonal colours and constantly shifting harmonies (in the style of Ravel). The track is intense in every shade of its dynamic soul, an enigmatic mixture of soft and tender atmospheres. At times, *Cielo di Settembre* echoes sometimes *les sanglots longs des violons de l’automne* of Paul Verlaine (the poet closer to Debussy); it stands out with unrelieved sadness to the languid rhythm of the waters of the Arno tumbling towards the shores of desire under a leaden sky that deflects the light to the plaintive cry of Cathedral bells. *Cielo di Settembre* heaves like the sobbing of a child’s heart, a hymn to life which whispers in its final chord “Let me dream!”.

Piedigrotta 1924. Rapsodia Napoletana Op. 32

Tarantella Scura, Notte e Luna, Calasciunate, Voce Luntana, Lariulà

Naples, Spring 1924. Picture the scene. On a terrace at the top floor of *Hotel Vesuvio*, Castelnuovo-Tedesco decided to compose a Neapolitan Rhapsody in five movements, borrowing the poem titles *Ariette e Sunette, Canzone, Canzone Nove, Voce Luntane* by Salvatore Di Giacomo, the poet narrator so dear to his master Ildebrando Pizzetti. Tedesco's honeymoon was proceeding magically and the starlit nights quivered to the rhythm of the festive north-wind. Listen. There in the gulf of Naples, where the days are woven by cries of street vendors and the passionate singing of passers-by and soft swirls of salt essay to sing a melancholy serenade. And just as Di Giacomo drew all that his sharp eye could glean of Naples' daily life, so did Castelnuovo-Tedesco in this multi-hued rhapsody. Naples conceived it but other influences are felt: Stravinsky's *Histoire du soldat* (1918) and Ravel's *Gaspard de la nuit* (1909). The three-tempo'd core of this rhapsody seems to form a unique "nocturnal poem brimming with tenderness and poesy". Other than the title, the tracks are not strictly built on Di Giacomo's poems. The various themes are all original, in some ways derived from folk material, apart from the melody attributed to Vincenzo Bellini *Fenesta che Lucive*, which Castelnuovo-Tedesco spaced with chromatics and chiselled with glimpses of sound. It is worth noting that the title *Piedigrotta 1924* ironically refers to those collections of songs that come out every year, with the date of issue plastered on the cover, of the Piedigrotta festival. This shocked a little his Neapolitan friends, who used to abhor such folksy tunes. It all goes down to show how Castelnuovo-Tedesco was not only strictly careful in his creative choices but also showed he had a sense of humour.

Attilio Cantore

(translation by Adrian Scerri)



"Alfonso Soldano : a huge great promise for the piano, supported by outstanding instrumental abilities as well a musical sensitivity absolutely out of the ordinary. Alfonso Soldano was born in Puglia, South Italy : and therefore belongs to a land which is, and has always been a breeding ground for top class artists. Congratulations with all my heart!" - Aldo Ciccolini

ALFONSO SOLDANO THE PIANIST

Alfonso Soldano was born in 1986 in the Puglia (Apulia) region of southern Italy. He completed his five year bachelors and postgraduate courses at the Conservatory "N. Piccinni" in Bari, gaining his Degree in Piano Performance with Honors. He also obtained the High Performance Diploma in Concert Piano Performance at the National Academy of Santa Cecilia in Rome, under Benedetto Lupo. His mentors throughout his artistic life are Aldo Ciccolini and Pierluigi Camicia. Mr. Soldano has attained first place in many piano competitions and is regularly invited to competitions both as artist and juror in Italy and throughout Europe. He also gives masterclasses all over Italy and has played with a substantial number of major orchestras.

In particular he performed, at age 17, in a production of Rachmaninov's complete works for piano and orchestra, with the Bacau Philharmonic Orchestra. He has worked with conductors such as O. Balan, D. Frandes and M. Cormio and performed with many orchestras, both Italian and from other countries. Mr Soldano is recognized for his deep and particular sound and breathtaking virtuosity, considered by many to be among the foremost Italian talent of his generation. He is one of the last and favourite long-time students of legendary Italian-French pianist Aldo Ciccolini; he has developed a substantial repertoire that includes many solo piano works and numerous concertos with orchestra. Mr. Soldano has undertaken many concert tours, festivals and events in great halls, such as the Musikum Salzburg, Hindemith Foundation Switzerland, G. Enescu Festival Bucarest, Bacau, MUSik Saal of International P. Tchaikovsky Academy of Music in Kyiv (Kiev), several Italian universities (Rome "La Sapienza", Bari) and recitals in major cities including various theaters in Rome (Parco della Musica), Milan, Verona, Bologna and many others. As a writer he produced the first biography of Russian composer Sergej Bortkiewicz, which was published by Florestano Edizioni.

Alfonso Soldano was awarded the International Gold Medal Prize for Best Italian Artist in April 2013, with a large ceremony in the University's "La Sapienza" great hall. Mr Soldano is also actively involved in an established piano duo with Stefania Argentieri, and is also busy working as a concert transcriber. He most recent work includes the publication, with Florestano Edizioni, of a large piano set of concert transcriptions for two pianos. The great pianists that have heard him have always highlighted the particular interpretative maturity of his performances, the result of continuous insights into the history of piano technique and interpretation. Mr Soldano is currently Professor of Piano performance at the Conservatory "G.Braga" in Teramo and Artistic Director of the European Arts Academy Foundation "Aldo Ciccolini" in Trani, the town in which he now resides.

Also by Alfonso Soldano:



SERGEI BORTKIEWICZ: PIANO MUSIC (Russian Piano Music Series, volume 12)

dda 25142

Lyrice Nova, Op. 59
Etude in D flat major, Op. 15 No. 8
Nocturne, from *Trois Esquisses*, Op. 24
Esquisses de Crimée, Op. 8
Preludes, Op. 13 No. 5; Op. 40 No. 4; Op. 66 No. 3
Piano Sonata No. 2 in C sharp minor, Op. 60

“This is absolutely a fantastic disc. If you're not already acquainted with Bortkiewicz... prepare to be transported to a place of spell-binding splendor.” – *Jerry Dubins (Fanfare)*

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