



Filippo
GRAGNANI
(1768–1820)

Masterful Guitar Duos

Duos Nos. 1–3 for Two Guitars

Jørgen Skogmo • Jens Franke



Filippo Gragnani (1768–1820)

Duos Nos. 1–3 for Two Guitars

Little is known about the Italian guitarist-composer Filippo Gragnani. Born in Livorno on the Ligurian Sea arm of the Mediterranean on 3 September 1768 – the *Registro dei battesimi del duomo di Livorno* (register of baptisms at the Cathedral of Saint Francis of Assisi) refutes 1767, a date given by François-Joseph Fétis and perpetrated by the Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo Unico and British Library among others – he came from a family of musicians. His father Antonio Gragnani (1740–1794) was regarded for his violins in the style of Stradivari and Amati, and his brother, Onorato, was also a luthier. Filippo studied with one Giulio Maria Lucchesi from Pisa, a local composer who had taken instruction from Moriani, Nardini and Checchi and had 'supposedly' been in the service of Mozart's Salzburg nemesis, Hieronymus von Colloredo. Initially, it appears, he wanted to write liturgical music, but then, having started out as a violinist, became more interested in the guitar. In 1796, the *Almanacco di Livorno* lists him as a mandolin teacher. By the end of the century, diverse sources maintain, he befriended the marginally younger Neapolitan Ferdinando Carulli (1770–1841), from whom he took lessons. Carulli's son, Gustavo, was born in Livorno in 1801.

A 'skilled concert player' (Alessandra Ciccaglioni, *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*), Gragnani visited Germany during the early 1800s, and had various works published by Gombart of Augsburg, whose catalogue included Mozart, the Haydn brothers and Weber. Around 1809–10 he moved to Paris, Carulli and family having settled there in April 1808. The assumption, unsupported but attested still by the Bibliothèque nationale, is that Gragnani died in Paris in 1812. Nothing is heard of him again. We now know that he returned to Tuscany, apparently without wife or heirs. An entry in the *Registro dei Morti*, Church of St Martino di Salviano, Livorno, dated 29 October 1820, reads: 'Filippo, son of the late Antonio Gragnani and the late Anna Maria [Cecilia] Bianchi, 59 years old [sic, actually 52], died yesterday [28] at 7am, fortified by the last sacraments; today the remains were

consecrated at this church and were buried in this churchyard'.

'A pocket-sized [Medici] city, pretty enough to put on a snuffbox.' (Charles de Brosses, *L'Italie il y a cent ans, ou Lettres écrites d'Italie à quelques amis en 1739 et 1740*, 1836 posth.). Across the water from Corsica, Livorno, 'Leghorn' to the Anglo-Saxons, enjoyed strong British links from the late-16th century and the establishment of the Levant Company servicing commerce and exotica between the Ottoman Empire and London. Jewish, Greek and Armenian communities added to its vibrancy. Change came with the French Revolution. By early 1796 the bulk of the English Protestant community shadowing Gragnani's formative years had left. During the *guerres de la Révolution française* it fell to Napoleon's troops, trade with Britain being one casualty. Following the Congress of Vienna and Waterloo (1815), French rule was replaced by Habsburg. The city Gragnani returned to wasn't the one he'd known as a young man. Culturally, though, it retained its traditional importance as the next step on the Grand Tour after Florence, attracting travellers, writers and painters (Turner sketched the Cathedral in 1828).

First Empire capital, the Napoleonic portraiture of Ingres, Blondel and David, campaigns won and lost. Gragnani's Paris was a metropolis with a population, give or take, 15 times greater than Livorno's. A city of boulevards and covered galleries on the one hand, of narrow muddy streets on the other, open sewers and storm drains, excreta and waste a daily hazard. At night lighting was dim, provided by oil lanterns. 'Everywhere,' chronicled a visitor in 1810 (the year Napoleon divorced Joséphine), 'there are the hideous imprints of the Revolution. These are the churches and convents half-ruined, dilapidated, abandoned. On their walls, as well as on a large number of public buildings, you can read: "National Property for Sale."' (François Louis Poumies de La Siboutie, *Souvenirs d'un médecin de Paris*, 1910 posth.). Prostitution was endemic – from high class

courtisanes, to actresses and *danseuses*, to 'pavement nymphs and roadside flowers' plying their profession from boudoirs to cemeteries: 'prostitution is as much a part of Parisian history as Notre Dame' (Victoria Dailey, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 1 March 2019).

The palaces and town houses of the *nouvelle aristocratie*, of Napoleon's marshals, generals and policy-enforcing officials reflected the upside of Empire. Commerce ran its course, women wielding much the same independent power as men. The grand banking families maintained their grip, the de Rothschilds arriving from Frankfurt in 1812.

'Everything in Paris is about fashion and fantasy' (Karl Christian von Berckheim, *Lettres sur Paris*, 1809). Opera, *variété* and theatre, pleasure gardens, cheap wine, dances and a loose lifestyle facilitated by low status *ginguettes* took minds off war, disease and more serious matters. The Théâtre-Italien staged Cimarosa, Paisiello, Paër, Mayr and Mozart, *Don Giovanni* topping the bill in 1811. Other venues produced operas *lirico* and *buffa* by Cherubini and Spontini. Elite training meanwhile was provided at the Conservatoire in the 9e arrondissement, established in 1795. Here Kreutzer dominated the violin faculty for 30 years. And a new *salle des concerts*, seating over a thousand, was inaugurated in 1811.

Given these surroundings, fellow countrymen and guitar resurgence notwithstanding, Gragnani was a comparative loner. Excluding Carulli, the legendary 'modern' Parisian guitar fraternity, with its path-defining influx of Italians and Spaniards – men like Aguado, Carcassi, Molino and Sor – largely post-dated his sojourn. Similarly, so did celebrated guitar makers such as Louis-David Pons ('Pons Jeune'), François Roudhloff, René François Lacôte and Guillaume-Martin, each influenced by the demands of the radical Italian school... Did Gragnani's circle include Joseph Pons ('Pons Aîné') who opened for business in 1810, and was responsible for the 'De Monte' guitar commissioned by Empress Marie-Louise for Giuliani in Vienna? Did he buy his strings from Koliker's, on the rue Croix-des-Petits-Champs? The trail runs cold. As for the controversy between the 'Carullists', advocating the left-hand thumb stopping the sixth string, and the 'Molinists',

advising against – a lithograph in Charles de Marescot's voguish *La Guitaromanie* (c. 1825–29) calls it a 'discussion' but the depiction is more of a heated exchange with elegantly waisted guitars splintered into weapons, parlour room turned into bare-knuckle arena – this too was long after Gragnani had departed.

Gragnani's output was modest, comprising just 15 opus numbers and a handful of works without, mostly confined to the chamber medium but including also some liberated, virtuosic solos. A guitar method (Milan Conservatory) and some exercises (Naples) survive among sundry manuscript holdings. Gombart apart, he had publishing arrangements with Monzino and Ricordi (Milan) and Carli, Meissonier and Richault & de Momigny (Paris). Understandably popular were the *Duos*, *Op. 8* for violin and guitar printed in Augsburg in 1808. Refreshingly inventive are a *Quartet* for clarinet, violin, and two guitars and a *Sextet* for flute, clarinet, violin, two guitars and cello – *real* chamber music suggesting Gragnani must have had superior players at his disposal, writing for the clarinet in ways bridging the transition between Mozart, Beethoven and Weber.

Gragnani combined *fin de siècle* Viennese rigour with fresh Latin disposition. He had imagination and good taste, he used the *lingua musica* of his day with assurance, crafting evocative cameos of time and place. Freed of pedantry and platitude, courtesy and romance, etiquette and gallantry lace the melody of his nights, a nascent Bohémien life-style not so distant. In the drawing rooms of Jane Austen's synchronic world we meet with musical eroticism and body language. With the idea that certain instruments could 'show a fine figure to advantage' (*Regency Etiquette: The Mirror of Graces*, 1811), that observing countenance was as important as the listening experience. Gragnani, anticipating Sor, provides the soundtrack.

Carulli, 'son ami', was the dedicatee of a D major *Trio* for (innovatively) three guitars, *Op. 12* (Carli, plate number/address c. 1818) and the *Three Duos*, without number, recorded here (Richault & de Momigny ?1809, according to a copy in the Library of Congress, imported for the British market by Johanning & Whatmore around

1825). In turn, Carulli inscribed to Gragnani his early *Grand Solo Varié 'pour Guitarre ou Lyre'* (the lyre-guitar was popular in Napoleonic society) and *Three Duos, Op. 46*, published in 1809 and 1811 respectively. Aspects of the *Op. 46* set (the *largo* turns of *No. 2* for instance) suggest happily exchanged familiarity with Gragnani's expressive emotions.

Aimed at professional players, both instruments of concertante importance, Gragnani's *Duos* favour three-movement structures, with sonata form first movements, both halves repeated. In the present recording we vary this dynamic, as well as the ordering: *No. 2*, exposition repeated; *No. 1*, all repeats; *No. 3*, no repeats. The slow movements, their cadential pauses inviting ornamentation, plumb unexpected depths – the *gran espressione* voice of *No. 2* (F major) calling for keyboard transcription, the 6/8 *Adagio* of *No. 3* (E minor), with its Baroque Phrygian sign-off, suggesting gondola song more than *pastorale*. Familiar Classical resonances landmark the way – *allegro* developments based on gyrating harmonies/sequences for one, 'orchestrally' doubled-up pseudo cello/basso lines for another. But every so often the colour changes – the exoticism of the A minor's 'fashionable' polonaise, the climactic *crescendo* of the D major's finale coda, reminding us, like the closing flurries of the *Clarinet Quartet*, that it wasn't just Rossini who had the knack of writing such things.

Ateş Orga
www.atesorga.com

Further reading and resources

Daniel Sinier, Françoise de Ridder, luthiers
www.sinier-de-ridder.com
Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani, Vol. 58, Rome (2002)
Dizionario dei chitarristi e liutai Italiani, Bologna (1937)

Jørgen Skogmo

The Norwegian guitarist, theorbo player and mandolinist Jørgen Skogmo (right) studied with Robert Brightmore and David Miller at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. International prizes have included the Admira Young Guitarist of the Year and the Ivor Mairants Guitar Award. He has appeared with ensembles including the English Baroque Soloists (Sir John Eliot Gardiner's *Monteverdi 450*), the London Philharmonic Orchestra (Sir Roger Norrington), the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Les Arts Florissants, the Gabrieli Consort & Players, The King's Consort, The Sixteen, Florilegium, I Fagiolini and English National Opera. In London he has played at the Purcell Room and Wigmore Hall, in New York at the Alice Tully Hall at Lincoln Center, in Paris at the Royal Chapel at the Palace of Versailles, and in Madrid at the Teatro Real. His discography includes works by Schoenberg with the Philharmonia Orchestra under

Robert Craft (Naxos 8.557525). Other recordings, featuring theorbo or Baroque guitar, include Paul McCreesh's version of Handel's *Tamerlano* (Opus Arte) and Charivari Agréable's *Giuseppe Torelli: The Original Brandenburg Concertos* (Signum Classics).

www.jorgenskogmo.com



Jens Franke

The German guitarist and theorbo player Jens Franke (left) studied with Robert Brightmore, David Miller and William Carter at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama and King's College London. Though specialising in Baroque, Classical and early-Romantic repertory, his tastes are eclectic. Chief among contemporary works he has commissioned is Óscar Colomina i Bosch's theatre cycle setting Harris's *List of Covent Garden Ladies*, an 18th-century guide to London prostitutes staged in the Barbican Centre. Recording credits include eight albums of Romantic and Baroque pieces for Schott Music London; an album of late Viennese Biedermeier pieces by Johann Kaspar Mertz (Stone Records); a collection of Schubert songs with Anna Huntley featuring period guitar accompaniments, recorded at Wigmore Hall (Quartz); and, for Naxos, Antoine de Lhoyer's integral chamber works for guitar trio and quartet (8.573575) and the complete guitar duets of José Ferrer (8.574011), both in collaboration with Jørgen Skogmo, his long-standing duo partner.

www.jensfranke.org

Little is known about the Italian guitarist-composer Filippo Gragnani, but he had a reputation as a ‘skilled concert player’, and composed his *Duos for Two Guitars* in the troubled post-revolutionary city of Paris. Aimed at professional players, the *Duos* stand as a testament to Gragnani’s virtuoso technique and vivid imagination while presenting the utmost in stylistic taste and refinement. He gave both players concertante importance in these works, combining *fin de siècle* Viennese rigour with a fresh Latin temperament, and using contemporary musical conventions with assurance to craft evocative cameos of time and place.

Filippo
GRAGNANI
(1768–1820)

Duo No. 2 for Two Guitars in A minor (c. 1809–10) 20:57

- | | | |
|---|--------------|-------|
| 1 | I. Moderato | 10:28 |
| 2 | II. Adagio | 4:48 |
| 3 | III. Polacca | 5:41 |

Duo No. 1 for Two Guitars in D major (c. 1809–10) 23:12

- | | | |
|---|------------------------|-------|
| 4 | I. Moderato | 11:31 |
| 5 | II. Andante mosso | 4:14 |
| 6 | III. Rondo: Allegretto | 7:25 |

Duo No. 3 for Two Guitars in G major (c. 1809–10) 17:19

- | | | |
|---|---------------------|------|
| 7 | I. Allegro | 7:06 |
| 8 | II. Adagio | 4:32 |
| 9 | III. Rondo: Allegro | 5:40 |

Jørgen Skogmo, Guitar I • Jens Franke, Guitar II

Recorded: 29–31 July 2019 at St Margaret, Mapledurham, Oxfordshire, England, UK
Producer: Ateş Orga • Engineer and editor: Dave Rowell • Booklet notes: Ateş Orga
Publisher: Suvini Zerboni, Editions (ed. Ruggero Chiesa) – Pl. no.: S. 8854 Z., 1982 1–3,
Pl. no.: S. 8752 Z., 1982 4–6, Pl. no.: S. 8855 Z., 1982 7–9
Guitars: Jørgen Skogmo – Pons Jeune (1820); Jens Franke – François Roudhloff (c. 1815),
restored by Gary Southwell, 2019, A=430 • Cover: *Livorno, Italy* by Lisa-Blue (iStockphoto.com)
© & © 2021 Naxos Rights (Europe) Ltd • www.naxos.com