

Goffredo PETRASSI
Concertos for Orchestra
Nos. 7 & 8

Sonata da camera

Mario Stefano Tonda, Harpsichord
Orchestra Sinfonica di Roma
Francesco La Vecchia

PETRASSI

(1904–2003)

Settimo Concerto per orchestra (1961–64) 22:34

1	Prologo –	3:00
2	Primo –	3:08
3	Secondo –	2:12
4	Terzo –	4:54
5	Quarto –	3:09
6	Epilogo	4:11

Ottavo Concerto per orchestra (1970–72) 21:51

7	I. Primo movimento	6:44
8	II. Secondo movimento	8:00
9	III. Terzo movimento	7:07

Sonata da camera, per clavicembalo e dieci strumenti (1948) 12:54

10	I. Mosso e scorrevole	4:18
11	II. Adagio	4:58
12	III. Vivace e grazioso	3:38

Mario Stefano Tonda, Harpsichord 10–12

Orchestra Sinfonica di Roma 1–9

Members of the Orchestra Sinfonica di Roma 10–12

Luca Marconi, Flute • Andrea Tenaglia, Oboe

Giammarco Casani, Clarinet • Giuseppe Ciabocchi, Bassoon

Francesca Vicari, Alessandro Vavassori, Violin • Claudio Ugolini, Andrea Domini, Viola

Giuseppe Scaglione, Cello • Maurizio Turriziani, Double Bass

Goffredo PETRASSI (1904–2003)
Concertos for Orchestra Nos. 7 & 8 • Sonata da camera

Goffredo Petrassi was born in Zagarolo, near Rome, on 16 July 1904. His family relocated to Rome in 1911, where he became a choirboy at the Schola Cantorum of the Chiesa di San Salvatore in Lauro – as decisive a catalyst for his musical career as his work from 1919 at a music shop to supplement parental finances. From 1928 he studied organ and composition at the Conservatorio di Santa Cecilia where, in 1936, he was appointed teacher in the first of a series of prestigious posts – culminating in his being professor of composition during 1940 to 1960, then head of its masterclass in composition from 1960 to 1978. He also taught at the Mozarteum in Salzburg. From 1937 to 1940 he was superintendent of Teatro La Fenice in Venice where he organised the Biennale, the international festival devoted to contemporary music.

Petrassi's reputation was established in 1932, when his *Partita* attracted popular and critical acclaim. That year it won the Contemporary Music Award of the National Musicians Union and was selected by the Società Internazionale di Musica Contemporanea (SIMC) for both its festivals in Amsterdam (1933) and Prague (1935). Comparable inspiration in traditional Italian dances is apparent in the *Introduzione e Allegro* (1933), whose adherence to neo-Classicism is countered by more modern traits expressed via allusions to jazz and a marked timbral asperity. Works such as his *Ouverture* (1931) show the influence of Hindemith and Stravinsky. Sacred choral compositions, such as *Psalms IX* (1934–36) or the *Magnificat* (1939–40), refer to Baroque polyphonic music with the sacred aspect evident in a luminous and solemn ritual.

In the 1940s, as a direct experience of working at the Teatro La Fenice, Petrassi turned to the theatre, composing the ballets *La follia di Orlando* (1943), then *Ritratto di Don Chisciotte* (1945), both in collaboration with choreographer Aurelio Milloss. He enjoyed further success with his two one-act operas: *Il cordovano* (1944–48), derived from Cervantes and translated by Eugenio Montale, then *Morte dell'aria* (1949–50), with its libretto by Toti Scialoja. Religious inspiration was to find further expression toward the end of the composer's life. Of particular significance are the cantata *Noche oscura* (1950–51), to a poem by San Giovanni della Croce, and *Propos D'Alain* (1960) – the idea for which had come directly from one of the *Propos sur le christianisme* of Alain Chartier. In his last years Petrassi was at work on a Mass, of which he managed to complete the *Kyrie* (1986), but got no further than the beginning of the *Gloria* when failing eyesight intervened. He died in Rome on 2 March 2003 at the age of 98, his significance to 20th-century European music duly acknowledged well beyond his homeland.

This third release of Petrassi's concertos for orchestra features the last two in the series (*Nos. 1–3* are on Naxos 8.573702; *Nos. 4–6* are on 8.573703). His *Seventh Concerto for Orchestra* (1961–64) started out as the *Prologo e Cinque Invenzioni* for the Portland Junior Symphony, whose first hearing on 17 November 1962 the composer judged a disaster. He then rewrote it from scratch, the present work being premiered in Bologna on 18 March 1965 conducted by Piero Bellugi. Its six continuous sections find Petrassi evolving his idiom to a point where it was hardly out of place in a series with music by the Italian avant-garde, and itself apposite in view of this occasion being the first concert series of music in honour of the resistance.

Prologo opens with speculative gestures from wind and strings, brass intoning balefully and percussion adding a menacing touch. *Primo* builds the tension accordingly, with the timpani brought forcefully into the spotlight, brass adding its aggressive interjections and only strings managing a vaguely conciliatory tone. *Secondo*, by contrast, functions as an ironic interlude, mostly scored for woodwind and percussion (notably woodblock), though with brass making its presence felt towards the close. *Terzo* is, in turn, the longest movement, and initially focusses on strings as they unfold a sustained and intensely wrought texture, before heading into the background whereupon the xyloimba enjoys a quizzical solo. Just briefly the strings manage to reassert themselves, alternating with xyloimba as the tension mounts once more.

Quarto begins with scurrying activity on percussion then strings and woodwind, its content ostensibly reprising that of the second section but now with even greater extremes of motion and dynamic, but before long these have been summarily curtailed. *Epilogo* then attempts a degree of resolution of the foregoing, its stark contrasts between timbre

and texture variously alluding to motivic ideas as have already been encountered, while all the time steering the music on towards a conclusion, which is suddenly affirmed by a decisive closing gesture from brass.

Having written six such works in 13 years, Petrassi was intent on not returning to the genre. However, a commission from the Chicago Symphony Orchestra clearly demanded a piece of outright virtuosity, and the composer responded with his *Eighth Concerto for Orchestra* (1970–72), premiered in Chicago on 28 September 1972, conducted by its dedicatee Carlo Maria Giulini. In three substantial and pointedly contrasted movements, it has even greater impact than its predecessors, with Petrassi making no concessions in terms of musical accessibility.

The first movement begins with fugitive gestures on strings, soon offset by strident brass and the first appearance of timpani. Xylophone and marimba enter the fray, adding to a discourse that is constantly in flux whether texturally or emotionally. At length the woodwind trade quirky exchanges, muted brass sound a sinister tone and strings attempt to provoke a confrontation waylaid until the brass emerge with a seething mass of dissonant fanfares. Duly curtailed, this is followed by insouciant gestures from the woodwind but these rapidly die away in the strings.

The second movement starts with detached gestures from various brass instruments, given a degree of cohesion by more continuously active strings and woodwind, which also enables the music to maintain a simmering intensity without overheating. The marimba soon makes a stealthy appearance, followed by pensive exchanges between woodwind and strings, then muted brass briefly flair in the background. The woodwind now attempts a more sustained build-up with the strings increasingly in accord, eventually arriving at a short-lived climax from where the music subsides quickly if with some uncertainly back towards the shadows.

The third movement commences in trenchant dialogue between strings and woodwind, brass entering the picture with timpani also making a return. The mood is now even more fraught than at the beginning, though it duly calms to leave strings musing in ethereal terms. Before long the music regains its earlier impetus, brass once more intent on domination and timpani sounding a brutal rhythmic tattoo that leads to an ending as unequivocal as it is unresolved.

Giulini had earlier given the first performance of the *Sonata da camera* (1948) in Capri, at an International Radio Congress, on 5 May 1949. In three concise movements, the harpsichord first among equals with the other ten instruments, this piece is poised on the cusp of Petrassi's earlier neo-Classicism and the increasingly modernist direction his music favoured thereafter.

Starting with a wry shrug, the opening movement proceeds with a nimble idea on harpsichord which is soon taken up by the ensemble before finding contrast with a more expressive idea heard on flute. Harpsichord again assumes centre stage, before it engages in a spirited repartee with other instruments as earlier ideas are obliquely recalled and upper strings come mellifluously to the fore before a subdued ending. The central movement opens with a ruminative theme for woodwind, presently joined by the harpsichord with stark interjections from brass, before the music emerges at a brief yet plangent climax. From here it continues its restrained discourse, presently subsiding towards a tentative close. The final movement is launched with a lively theme whose capering motion is enhanced through the interaction of woodwind and strings. A central section returns to the understatement of the previous movement, with harpsichord content on playing an accompanying role to the ensemble, but the earlier animation reasserts itself and this work ends with a spirited harpsichord gesture then a decisive cadential chord.

Richard Whitehouse



Orchestra Sinfonica di Roma

Francesco La Vecchia

The Rome Symphony Orchestra was established in 2002 by the Rome Foundation (Fondazione Roma Arte – Musei), a rare example in Europe of an orchestra that was completely privately funded. Under its artistic and musical director Francesco La Vecchia who, in turn, set up the Fondazione Arts Academy, the orchestra performed regularly in Rome at the Teatro Argentina, Teatro Sistina and Auditorium Conciliazione. It received critical and public recognition at distinguished venues in Asia, the Americas and Europe, with notable success in 2007 at the Berlin Philharmonie. The orchestra also undertook a wide-ranging and well received series of recordings, principally for Naxos, of important compositions by Italian composers of the 19th and 20th centuries, including Busoni, Catalani, Ferrara, Ghedini, Malipiero, Mancinelli, Martucci, Mercadante, Petrassi, Sgambati and Wolf-Ferrari. Many of these are world premiere recordings. The orchestra was dissolved in 2014 not long after giving the first modern performance of Giovanni Sgambati's *Symphony No. 2*.

In the early 1960s Goffredo Petrassi's idiom was almost indistinguishable from that of the Italian avant-garde. Completed in 1964, the *Seventh Concerto* evolves with mounting tension and a sense of underlying menace. The *Eighth Concerto* from 1972 was commissioned and premiered by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. It is a substantial piece of outright virtuosity, with dissonance, trenchant dialogues and a fraught atmosphere. The much earlier *Sonata da camera* for harpsichord and ten instruments finds Petrassi poised between neo-Classicism and a more modernist direction. This is the third and final volume of Petrassi's complete *Concertos for Orchestra* on Naxos (Nos. 1–3 are on 8.573702; Nos. 4–6 are on 8.573703).

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Playing Time
55:35

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per clavicembalo e dieci strumenti (1948) | 12:54 |

Mario Stefano Tonda, Harpsichord **10–12**
Orchestra Sinfonica di Roma
Francesco La Vecchia

A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet.

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