

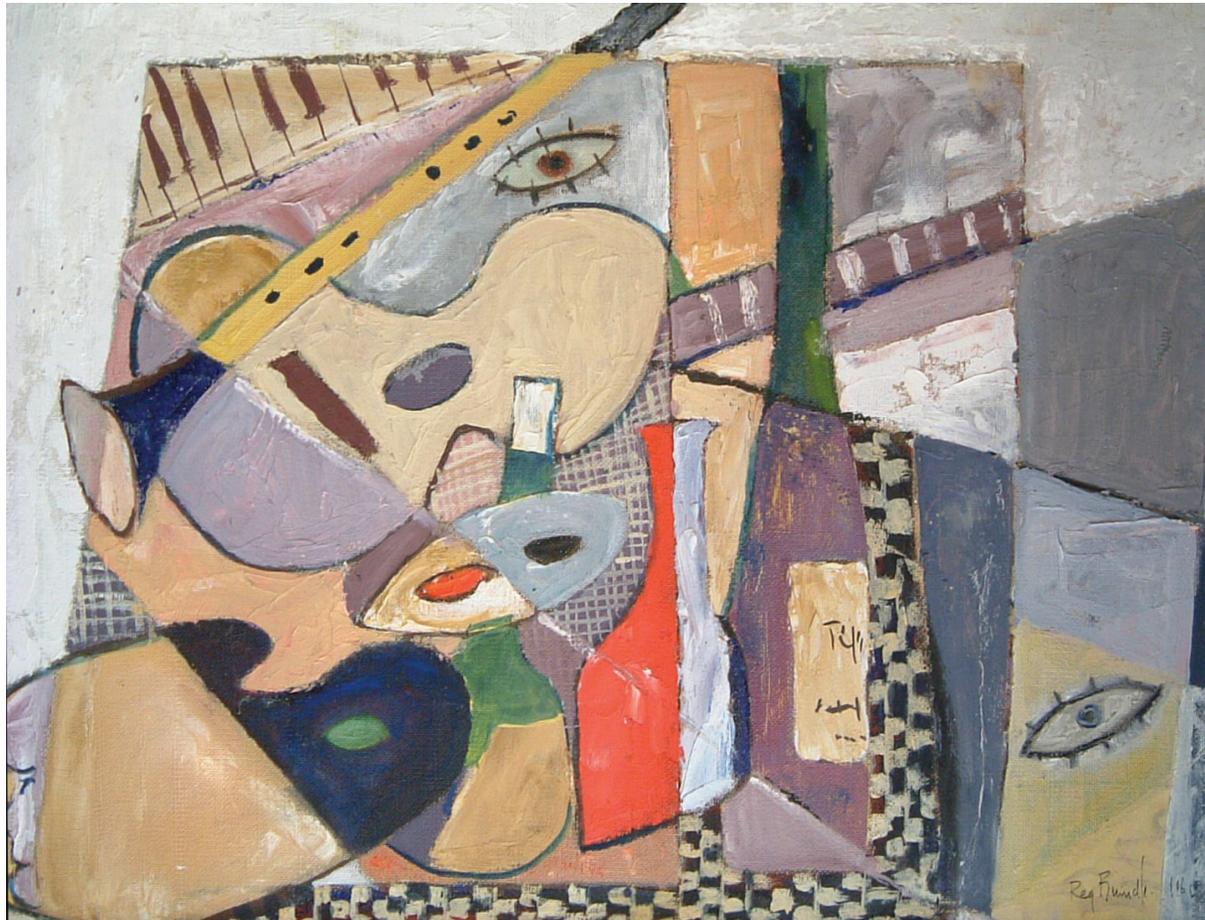
NAXOS

Reginald
SMITH BRINDLE

Complete Works for Solo Guitar • 3

Preludes, Fantasies and Variations

Duilio Meucci, Guitar



Reginald
SMITH BRINDLE
(1917–2003)

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Reginald Smith Brindle (1917–2003)

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Reginald Smith Brindle, British composer and writer, born in Cuerden, Lancashire, studied various musical instruments throughout his life including the guitar, clarinet and saxophone, and later the organ. But his gifts lay particularly in the direction of composition and scholarly research. During the Second World War he served in Africa and Italy in the Royal Engineers. From 1946 to 1949 he studied music at the University College of North Wales, Bangor, before going to Italy to further his compositional work with Pizzetti and Dallapiccola, and Germani for organ.

Although Smith Brindle composed a variety of compositions including an opera, he is best known for his guitar music. This was first featured in various Julian Bream recitals from the late 1950s onwards. From 1957 to 1970 Smith Brindle pursued a distinguished academic career lecturing at the University College of North Wales, and from 1970 to 1981 as professor at the University of Surrey. His scholarly publications over the years included *Serial Composition* (1966), *Contemporary Percussion* (1970), *The New Music: The Avant-garde since 1945* (1975), and *Musical Composition* (1986).

Il Serchio: Prelude is an excerpt of guitar music from a documentary film of that name. The Serchio is a river in Tuscany flowing between the Apuan Alps and the Apennines. The middle Serchio valley is a geographical district of the province of Lucca. This short work was published in *The Guitar Review, No. 13* (1952), with the copyright retained by the composer in 1950. The piece is defined by its full exploitation of the top register of the guitar, but it also draws on evocative bass lines, a snatch of lyrical melody, and some intricate ornamentation.

As the editor of *Île-de-France Variations*, Steven Thachuk, informs us in an introduction, the work was composed in 1990, seven years after Smith Brindle's previous guitar piece *Romance de la Pena Negra* (1983). The variations were composed for the Concours International d'Île-de-France and dedicated to Óscar Cáceres. The editor further comments that 'the work alternates a slow *sarabande*-like theme, with episodes of varying intensity', and that 'the language of the piece is often similar to Smith Brindle's sonatas of the 1970s but displays a further degree of technical complexity.'

November Memories is an extended work, a combination of nostalgia and melancholy. It is dedicated to the Italian poet Margherita Guidacci (1921–1992), a fervent translator of English poetry into Italian (including works by John Donne, T.S. Eliot and Elizabeth Bishop) who is also accredited with the introduction of the term *paparazzi* after a character in her translation of George Gissing's travel book *By the Ionian Sea*. The nature of her relationship with Smith Brindle is not known, but she travelled to England in the late 1940s. The piece was published in 1976.

Ten Simple Preludes, edited by John W. Duarte, was published in 1979. The works were intended to 'prepare the guitarist for 20th-century music at an early stage' after beginning early guitar studies with didactic material almost entirely derived from the 19th century.

The editor introduces the pieces: 'The ten preludes by Smith Brindle employ a variety of musical textures, some of which look but do not sound like guitar music of the 19th century. None has a clear tonic and the final chords are indeterminate (none is a major or minor triad) though this should not sound strange to modern ears. The predominant language is twelve-tone, which in itself denies the presence of a tonic...'

The title of each simple piece is usually self-explanatory. *The Harmony of Peace* requires the holding down of notes to assure overlapping rich sounds. *Counterpoints I* and *Counterpoints II* involve upper and lower voices in separate parts, with the upper line played by the fingers and the lower by the thumb. *Calm Intervals* once again allows sustained notes to build smoothly into chordal structures. *Canto* is a melodic line punctuated by chords as in a 'dialogue' between a singer and a guitar accompaniment.

Corsa (from the Italian meaning 'run' or 'drive') is marked *con moto* and includes a number of slurred notes within an arpeggiated texture. The seventh piece, *Llanura*, (from the Spanish for 'evenness' or 'smoothness') presents a bass melody below repeated notes in the treble. *Little Barrés* offers practice in the technique of stopping two or more strings with one finger across the fingerboard. This technique is sometimes difficult for beginners to master. *Cantilena*, an Italian word meaning 'lullaby', is applied to a melodic line in lyrical style. In this piece melodic fragments are interrupted by a persistent chordal progression where the rhythm constantly changes. The final work in the collection, *Arpeggios*, affords the player a performance of rapidly moving arpeggio patterns that are mildly dissonant.

Romance de la pena negra ('Romance of the Black Pain') is dedicated to the Czech composer Josef Holecek (b. 1939). The piece is the composer's expressive response to the poem of that name by Federico García Lorca (1898–1936).

In the poem a gypsy, Soledad Montoya, 'smelling of horse and shadow', with 'skin like yellow copper', comes down a darkened hillside. Asked what she desires Soledad replies 'the one I want'. She is searching for happiness, but is in severe pain and longing almost to the point of insanity. The poem concludes:

*Oh pain of gypsies,
Pain so clean and always so alone.
Oh pain from hidden streams
And the distant dawn.*

Smith Brindle's *Preludes and Fantasias* comprise a serious set of expressive compositions. His explanatory notes (published in German) reveal that in the quicker *Preludes* rhythm is the dominant factor with syncopations and counter rhythms, along with rhythmic bass lines. The slower *Preludes* benefit from vibrato and colour variation to bring them to life. *Preludes Nos. 2, 4 and 5* must be performed expressively. Smith Brindle observes that these *Preludes* are not technically difficult but rather an attempt at expressive composition.

The two *Fantasias* follow the *vihuela* masterpieces of the 16th century, Luys Milán's *Pavana No. 2* and Alonso Mudarra's *Fantasia que contrahaze en la manera de Ludovico* ('Fantasia Which Imitates in the Manner of Ludovico'). By this contribution Smith Brindle composes heart-felt tributes to the 16th-century composers.

The Prince of Venosa, subtitled *Variations on a fragment of Gesualdo da Venosa*, is a series of six brilliant variations in contemporary musical language. Carlo Gesualdo, Prince of Venosa (c. 1561–1613) was an Italian aristocrat and composer. He is best remembered, however, for murdering his wife and her lover when the pair were caught *in flagrante* – although the Grand Court concluded that no crime had been committed.

Gesualdo was a prolific composer of sacred vocal pieces. But Smith Brindle gives us no clue in his published edition of which fragment inspired the variations. Nevertheless, the spirit of Gesualdo pervades these variations at the same time as the work fully expresses the vivid imagination of the English composer.

Graham Wade

With grateful thanks to Federica Castaldo, Marco Rossi and Giuliana Carbone of Fondazione Pietà de' Turchini for the venue for this recording; Paolo Montella for his tireless work and endless patience; Marco Balestrieri for the realisation of the videos; Steve Thachuck for support with the research; Alban Smith Brindle for the help and the kind concession of the photographic archive material; and Antonia La Torre for the love, support and encouragement.

This work is dedicated to my family and all those who love music.

This production was made possible thanks also to the kind support of the Fondazione Pietà de' Turchini (Napoli).



Duilio Meucci



Photo: Andrej Grlic

A pupil of Angelo Gilardino, Duilio Meucci studied at the Haute école de musique de Genève under Dušan Bogdanović. Since 2008 – the year of his recording debut – he has pursued a career that combines the development of an eclectic solo repertoire alongside the exploration of chamber music and improvisation. He has collaborated with numerous artists and ensembles, including Tommaso Lonquich, Miriam Prandi, Marcello Nardis, Quartetto Felix, Marco Salvio and the OEOAS (Orchestra Elettroacustica Officina Arti Soniche). In 2013, he made his debut with an orchestra in the Grande Salle of the Haute école, performing Guido Santórsola's *Concerto for Two Guitars and Orchestra*. He is the dedicatee of works such as *Sonatina-Lied N.7* by Angelo Gilardino and *Trois à propos* by Dušan Bogdanović, pieces he also edited and recorded with Francesco Venga on the album *Pièces Intimes* (NovAntiqua Records). In 2021 he was awarded the Chitarra d'Oro for Best Video at the International Guitar Convention in Milan, and in 2023 was invited to lecture at the 50th edition of the Guitar Foundation of America convention at the Manhattan School of Music. A year later, he gave the Italian premiere of Smith Brindle's *Concerto for Guitar and Orchestra* at the invitation of the conservatory of Benevento. Meucci made his label debut for Naxos with the first volume in this series (8.574476).

Reginald Smith Brindle served with the Royal Engineers in Africa and Italy during the Second World War, and later returned to Italy in 1949 to further his compositional studies with Pizzetti and Dallapiccola. The influence of Italian landscapes and culture can be found in many of Smith Brindle's works, including an extended combination of nostalgia and melancholy in *November Memories* dedicated to the poet Margherita Guidacci, and an evocation of the spirit of Gesualdo in *The Prince of Venosa*. The sheer variety of his guitar music is further represented in the expressive *Preludes and Fantasias*, the technical demands of the *Île-de-France Variations*, and the pedagogical but intriguingly atonal *Ten Simple Preludes*.

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***WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING**

Duilio Meucci, Guitar

A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet.

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