

Opera Fantasies on a Steinway

Antonio Pompa-Baldi, piano

Grand Fantasies on *La bohème* and *Carmen* by Roberto Piana

WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS



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Operatic Fantasies: what an ill-fated destiny! A genre which met with the most extraordinary and widespread success in the 1800s, but became quickly obsolete in the following century. It would be hard to pinpoint the exact reasons for this change of fortune, and quite impossible to do so in just a few lines. Suffice it to say that the genesis of my two Grand Fantasies is intertwined precisely with my reflections on the fortunes and misfortunes of the genre, and my hope of contributing to revitalize it.

The musical catalogues of the 19th century confirm the abundance of Operatic Fantasies, and are dominated by the towering figure of Franz Liszt, rightly considered the supreme exponent of the genre. Liszt's lesson is indispensable to anyone wanting to confront oneself with this particular type of composition. However, I studied with the same interest the output of his teacher, Carl Czerny. In his treatise "The Art of Improvising on the Piano, Op. 200," Czerny states that a "Fantasy must aspire to freedom, facility in the connection of ideas, and spontaneity of expression."

Therefore, I made mine Czerny's idea that "a well-written piece of music must be comparable to an edifice of noble architecture, in which symmetry predominates. A good Fantasy resembles a beautiful English garden: to the casual eye, everything seems haphazard, but a strict plan and a profound meaning are hidden under the most seducing variety."

It would be unfair to call Operatic Fantasies anachronistic. With these two works, it was my intention to go well past the mere imitation, to avoid empty mannerisms and try to make the genre current, relevant today. I am convinced that Fantasies can still be laboratories for the most probing research in the field of music elaboration. I am also convinced that Fantasy, as a true offspring of Improvisation, does not belong to any ideal historical "period," if not that in which it happens.

Puccini's "La bohème" and Bizet's "Carmen" are the protagonists, here. Two masterpieces that, inexplicably, have inspired very few elaborations for the piano. From the standpoint of musical form, it won't be hard to recognize the blueprint I used: I tried to respect the Operas' dramaturgy, espoused to my personal tendency to create a discourse unfolding in the most natural and consequential way possible.

The writing is naturally indebted to the great virtuosic tradition of the 19th Century, but hopefully I succeeded in avoiding clichés in pursuit of a more individual style.

I composed these two Fantasies for Antonio Pompa-Baldi, who commissioned them. It is to him that I owe the opportunity to rethink in personal terms a genre which undoubtedly reached remarkable artistic heights in the past, but which I believe still has enormous unexpressed potential.

Born and raised in Foggia, Italy, **Antonio Pompa-Baldi** won the Cleveland International Piano Competition in 1999 and embarked on a multifaceted career that continues to extend across five continents.

A top prize winner at the 1998 Marguerite Long-Jacques Thibaud Competition of Paris, France, Antonio Pompa-Baldi also won a silver medal at the 2001 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition.

Pompa-Baldi studied with two important exponents of the great Neapolitan School: Annamaria Pennella and Aldo Ciccolini. He also received guidance in masterclass settings from Paul Badura-Skoda and Jörg Demus.

Mr. Pompa-Baldi appears at the world's major concert venues including New York's Carnegie Hall, Cleveland's Severance Hall, Milan's Sala Verdi, Boston's Symphony Hall, Shanghai's Grand Theatre, and Paris' Salle Pleyel, to name a few.

He has collaborated with leading conductors including Hans Graf, James Conlon, Miguel Harth-Bedoya, Louis Lane, Benjamin Zander, and Keith Lockhart. He has performed with ensembles and colleagues such as Takacs String Quartet, Alison Balsom, Sharon Robinson, and principals of the Cleveland Orchestra, Dallas Symphony, New York Philharmonic, and Juilliard Quartet, among others.

With a concerto repertoire including more than 60 works, Pompa-Baldi recently performed cycles of all the Rachmaninoff Piano Concertos, the five Beethoven Piano Concertos, and both Brahms Concertos with various orchestras. He has played recitals in most major venues over the world.

Mr. Pompa-Baldi has recorded over 30 CDs to date, for various labels including Steinway & Sons, Centaur Records, Harmonia Mundi, Brilliant Classics, TwoPianists, and Azica.

Pompa-Baldi is a Steinway Artist. He teaches at the Cleveland Institute of Music, and gives masterclasses for many leading Universities, Music Schools, Conservatories and Festivals all over the world.

In 2015, Pompa-Baldi founded the Todi International Music Masters festival, where he serves as Artistic Director and Faculty Member. This summer festival takes place every August in the beautiful Italian town of Todi. It features 15 concerts in 15 days, with internationally renowned faculty members, and piano students from all over the world.



Pianist and composer **Roberto Piana** was born in Sassari, on the Italian island of Sardinia, in 1971. He perfected his studies with numerous famous pianists, but owes his training to Isabella Lo Porto, with whom he graduated in piano studies with top marks, at the Music Conservatory of Sassari.

As a pianist, he has performed with great success in numerous theaters such as Rond Point on the Champs-Élysées in Paris, Teatro Regio in Turin, Teatro alla Scala in Milan, University of Saint Petersburg, Russia, as well as in cities such as Ajaccio, Arnhem, Barcelona, Brussels, Charleroi, Düsseldorf, Effretikon, Lausanne, Liège, Mons, Stuttgart, and Zurich. Since 1994, he has authored essays, books, and CDs (Stradivarius, Da Vinci Classics, Amadeus, Tactus, Documenta Edizioni, Suonare News).

As a composer, Roberto Piana is the author of piano, vocal, chamber and symphonic music performed in important festivals all over the world (Newport Festival, Chopin Festival in Duzniki Zdroj, »Rarities of Piano Music« at Husum Castle, Lang Lang International Piano Festival in Shenzhen, Mostly

Modern Festival, International Russian Music Piano Competition-San Jose), and many cities across the United States, Russia, Japan, Italy, England, South Africa, and Israel.

The scores of his compositions have been published by Bèrben, Les Productions d'OZ, Da Vinci Edition, Editoriale Documenta, and Edizioni Musicali Wicky. Many of his compositions can be heard on CDs released by labels such as Steinway & Sons, Centaur Records, Music & Arts, Brilliant Classics and TwoPianists. Recently, he composed twenty elaborations on Neapolitan songs that were recorded by pianist Antonio Pompa-Baldi for the Steinway & Sons label.

Mr. Piana is professor of piano at the Sassari Conservatory of Music.

Opera Fantasies on a Steinway

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Producer: Jon Feidner

Engineer: Lauren Sturm

Assistant Engineer: Melody Nieun Hwang

Production Assistant: Renée Oakford

Mixing and Mastering: Daniel Shores

Equipment: Pyramix using Merging Technologies Horus Converters;
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by Roberto Piana

WORLD PREMIERES

1. Grand Fantasy on Puccini's "La bohème" 29:05
2. Grand Fantasy on Bizet's "Carmen" 25:38

PLAYING TIME: 54:46



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