

ALFREDO CASELLA
Triple Concerto, Op. 56

GIORGIO FEDERICO GHEDINI
Concerto dell'albatro

Emanuela Piemonti, Piano • Paolo Ghidoni, Violin
Pietro Bosna, Cello • Carlo Doglioni Majer, Speaker

Orchestra I Pomeriggi Musicali

Damian Iorio

Alfredo Casella (1883-1947): Triple Concerto, Op. 56 (1933)
Giorgio Federico Ghedini (1892-1965): Concerto dell'albatro (1944-45, rev. 1949)

Compare and contrast. Two concertos composed within a dozen years, by Italian composers born less than a decade apart, and using the same rare combination of piano trio and orchestra – yet the immediately striking thing is how different they sound. But on closer acquaintance some surprising affinities appear. And if Ghedini's *Concerto dell'albatro* is ultimately the more original of the two – indeed, one of the most hauntingly individual Italian compositions of the twentieth century – he might never have been able to write it without the groundwork laid by Casella.

Alfredo Casella (1883-1947) and Giorgio Federico Ghedini (1892-1965), each of whom is featured in an ongoing Naxos series of orchestral works, were both children of Piedmont – the far northwest region of Italy, which has a very distinctive character. The nineteenth-century political cradle of Italian unification, Piedmont became in the twentieth century both the country's industrial powerhouse, most famously as home to the car manufacturer FIAT (Ghedini particularly loved cars), and the heartland of what little Italian anti-Fascism there was before World War Two (Casella was an enthusiastic Fascist, and Ghedini at least a passive one, happy to take advantage of opportunities offered by Mussolini's regime). Casella was born in the Piedmontese capital Turin, but left at the age of thirteen, effectively never to return: after almost twenty years in Paris, he settled for good in Rome. Ghedini, born in Cuneo, Italy's westernmost city, also left home at thirteen – but, in his case, to move the almost 100km north to Turin, the city he loved best for the rest of his life.

More than almost any other Italian city in the late nineteenth century, Turin had nurtured a musical life with strong Germanic influences, and a thriving tradition of orchestral and instrumental music. Perhaps most unusually for Italians of their time, both Casella's and Ghedini's parents were huge fans of Wagner. Casella's grandfather, father and uncles were all fine cellists, and Casella himself and his mother were gifted pianists; piano and cello were precisely the two instruments on which Ghedini excelled. Casella, a youthful prodigy, having made his name in avant-garde pre-First World War Paris, scandalised Rome audiences with his musical iconoclasm on returning to Italy in 1915; but as a tireless performer and promoter of new music (both Italian and European) he played a crucial role in establishing orchestral and instrumental music on a more equal footing with Italian opera – or re-establishing it, given Italy's

golden history in the field, from the sixteenth-century Gabriellis via the likes of Frescobaldi and Corelli to Vivaldi and Domenico Scarlatti in the eighteenth century. Ghedini, a relatively late developer, was one of the younger composers who – more or less unconsciously – reaped the benefits of Casella's work. In the mid 1920s Casella developed a new instrumental idiom which was immensely influential for the next generation – his so-called 'third style', in such pieces as the *Concerto for String Quartet*, Op. 40 (1923-24) and the *Partita for piano and small orchestra*, Op. 42 of 1924-25 [Naxos 8.573005], whose very name proclaims its Italian Baroque ancestry. Ghedini, his younger friend Goffredo Petrassi (1904-2003) and Petrassi's almost exact contemporary Luigi Dallapiccola (1904-75) all composed *Partitas* of their own in the late 1920s and early 1930s: Ghedini got there first, with a work he felt was probably the most significant single milestone on his road to success.

Among Casella's (many) performing activities, he joined forces in 1930 with violinist Alberto Poltronieri (1892-1983) and cellist Arturo Bonucci (1894-1964) to form the Trio Italiano ('Italian Trio'), which enjoyed great success on both sides of the Atlantic for more than a decade: by 1938, Casella tells us, they had given 'five hundred concerts in Europe, Africa and America' (which averages out at more than one every week!); and, naturally enough, it was for the Trio Italiano that he wrote his *Triple Concerto*, Op. 56, in 1933, as well as the later *Sonata a tre* ('Triple Sonata', Op. 62, 1938). In the 1940s Ghedini became friendly with the young violinist Renato Zanettovich (b. 1921), cellist Libero Lana (1921-89) and pianist Dario de Rosa (1919-2013), who as the Trio di Trieste – named after their native Trieste, another north Italian city with strong historic influences from the German-speaking world – inspired two of his greatest and most original works: *Sette ricercari* ('Seven Ricercars', 1943); and then the *Concerto dell'albatro* ('Concerto of the Albatross', 1944-45, rev. 1949), which they performed no fewer than 37 times.

It has sometimes been said that Casella's music of the 1930s 'risks lapsing into a routine' (to quote the English expert on early twentieth century Italian music, John C. G. Waterhouse) – especially in his series of 20-to-30-minute works, several of them called 'Concerto', in a characteristic three-movement fast-slow-fast form, where (in Waterhouse's view) 'Casella seems to be adapting standardised stylistic and even formal principles to a succession of different instrumental

forces – a sign of creative stagnation.' Certainly there is a grain of truth in this: consider, for example, the similarities between the *Introduzione, aria e toccata* for orchestra ('Introduction, Aria and Toccata', Op. 55, 1933) [Naxos 8.573005]; the *Cello Concerto*, Op. 58, of 1934-35 [Naxos 8.572416]; and the purely orchestral *Concerto*, Op. 61 (1937) [Naxos 8.573004]. And yet: could not the same accusation of 'Concerto standardisation' be levelled – to a far greater extent, indeed – against Casella's famous Italian forebear Vivaldi? Or even at the Piano Concertos of Mozart? Ultimately, each work should be judged on its own merits: is it good music? Writing his autobiography in 1938, Casella – not renowned for modesty, false or otherwise – judged his *Triple Concerto* to be one of his best pieces. He singled out the central *Adagio* as 'a type of middle movement without precedent in my work for its great serenity and soft, luminous transparency' – suggesting that it reflected the natural loveliness of the landscape around the city of Siena in Tuscany, where he composed it in the summer of 1933. The slow movement, in Casella's habitual 3/4 time, is indeed the heart of the work: built around a warm, truly beautiful melody, with distinctive Casellian harmonic sideslipping in the middle, which is introduced by the solo piano (Casella himself), developed 'very sweetly and tenderly' by the solo violin and cello over a bed of low orchestral strings, and soon taken up by the whole orchestra, with counterpoint and decoration from the solo trio, before the solo horn contributes its own memorable variants. Casella also ingeniously transforms the *Adagio's* melody into the happiest of the gigue themes that dance through the final *Rondo*. In the first movement's 'Slow, broad, imposing' introduction, the orchestra announces first the two string soloists and then the piano, before all three solo instruments combine to propel us into the fast main body of the movement, driven forward by Casella's typical motoric rhythms. So far, so 'standardised'? Casella drew attention to another of the work's genuinely special features, in the way it treats 'the interplay between the trio and the orchestra – one of the most serious and difficult sonic problems a composer can face, so much so that the only previous attempt was made by Beethoven.' But I handle the relationship in a completely different way: while Beethoven deliberately gave each of the three solo instruments a markedly brilliant, bravura role, in my *Concerto* they form a small body of sound which is contrasted with the orchestral mass, exactly as the *concertino* group is contrasted with the full *ripieno* in the old concerto grosso.' If Beethoven has three soloists, Casella effectively has one – with many voices. Further originality lies in the dark, sometimes forbidding,

sometimes almost Mahlerian passages which cast momentary shadows over the apparently untroubled progress of each of the *Concerto's* three movements: above all in the stern opening of the slow movement, and in the mysterious question mark that unexpectedly interrupts its final smiling peace, there is a spiritual, textural and even motivic kinship with the extraordinary brooding stillness that is the most personal feature of Ghedini's music.

And nowhere does Ghedini develop that to more sustained and powerful effect than in his *Concerto dell'albatro* – 'pervaded', said the composer himself (who rarely wrote about his own music), by the 'obsessive sadness... desolation... loneliness... panic... terror...' he found in the renowned sea story *Moby-Dick*; or, *The Whale*, published in 1851 by the American Herman Melville (1819-91). Melville was a favourite author of Ghedini's: in 1949, the year the *Concerto dell'albatro* reached its definitive form, he also created an opera-like 'scenic oratorio' from another Melville tale, *Billy Budd* (Benjamin Britten started work on his own better-known operatic version in 1950). 'Call me Ishmael' is *Moby-Dick's* famous opening sentence, launching the sailor Ishmael's narrative of a voyage to the Pacific under the strange captain Ahab, who craves vengeance on an old sperm whale known as Moby-Dick which tore off half of his leg in a previous confrontation; from the climactic three-day battle with Moby-Dick, Ishmael emerges as the only survivor. Ghedini's direct inspiration was Ishmael's mystical memory of an earlier experience, when on the edge of the Antarctic Ocean he first encountered an albatross, those great, white, enormous-winged birds that soar over the southern seas. The chill atmosphere is implacable from the very first notes of the *Concerto of the Albatross*. In the first of the five (continuous) movements, as John Waterhouse puts it, 'slow, spacious contrapuntal lines and icy, crystalline sonorities on the piano at once evoke a potent sense of vast grey expanses of water'; in the second, faster figures rise and fall in waves; the third is eerily becalmed. The three soloists interact fluidly yet unpredictably with each other and with the orchestra (of strings only, at first), the piano often playing bare octaves or even just a single line. Quietly but inexorably, the music's very restraint builds tension, the sense that something – what? – is going to happen. Timpani rumble ominously. The fourth movement whips up a gale, ever faster and louder – with the wind instruments, just two forceful trombones and a squealing piccolo (later flute), sounding for the first time in the climax – before abating in a low chorale for the trombones and solo cello. And then: we hear Ishmael's voice – 'I remember the first albatross I ever saw';

and 'the words seem to give "a local habitation and a name" to what was already clear in the music' (John Waterhouse again, quoting Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*).

The published score presents the spoken text in Melville's original, portentous English, together with parallel versions in Italian and French; this recording uses the Italian, whose source is an acclaimed complete translation of *Moby-Dick* by the poet Cesare Pavese (1908-50), another native of Piedmont.² Ghedini also gave careful instructions for discreet electronic amplification, so that the narrator can speak naturally, 'quite slowly and softly, simply but also deeply felt, with touches of both wonder and gravity', his voice 'becoming like another instrument'.

And so the solo cello sets out in the fifth movement with a passacaglia theme, joined, one after another, by a trombone, a single piano line, the flute and violin, in profoundly expressive five-part counterpoint, until the orchestra takes up the thread and Ishmael weaves his memories among them, pausing from time to time for awestruck or agitated reflection. Finally, he recalls how the albatross found freedom, envisioning it flying far above the sea to take its place among the angels; and Ghedini's music takes ethereal wing, ascending, dissolving into unearthly silence.

As Ghedini surely knew, by requiring not only the unusual pairing of piano trio and orchestra but also a musically literate narrator, he risked severely limiting the number of performances the *Concerto dell'albatro* would ever receive; but

he achieved the exact opposite – it has probably been played more often than any of his other works. Even Ghedini's one-time composition student Luciano Berio (1925-2003), who was notoriously ambivalent about his teacher's creative capacities, praised the *Concerto* for its 'highly evocative new harmonies and timbres'. Goffredo Petrassi, hearing it for the first time, called it simply 'a revelation'. For all Ghedini's Casellian heritage, when composing at this pitch of intensity he created something utterly unique, a music like no other.

David Gallagher

¹ This is a major exaggeration. Beethoven's *Triple Concerto* in C major, Op. 56 (composed 1802-4) may be the only well-known example, but several eastern European composers had followed in his footsteps, albeit I know of only a single work for piano trio and full orchestra explicitly entitled *Concerto* between Beethoven's and Casella's: by the Hungarian composer Emanuel Moór (1863-1931), dating from 1907. Other pieces for trio and orchestral forces include the *Grand rondau concertant* in D major, Op. 25 (1820) by the Bohemian composer Jan Václav Volíšek (1791-1825) and the *Concertino* for piano trio and strings, Op. 47 (original version 1930-31, rev. 1965) by the Russian Alexander Tcherepnin (1899-1977). The Czech Bohuslav Martinů (1890-1959) wrote two such works in the very same year as Casella: his *Concerto for Piano Trio and Strings* (1933, H. 231) and, when he lost(!) the *Concerto's* score, the shorter replacement he called *Concertino for Piano Trio and Strings* (1933, H. 232). Given Casella's awareness of the Beethovenian model, it is hard to avoid wondering whether it was by coincidence or calculation that his own *Triple Concerto* has the same opus number, 56.

² Pavese published various versions of his *Moby-Dick* translation in the 1930s and 1940s; the *Concerto dell'albatro* text appears to be based on the 1941 edition, with some small emendations probably made by Ghedini himself. One historical recording that uses Melville's original, narrated by an American, the NBC radio and television presenter Ben Grauer (1908-77), with the NBC Symphony Orchestra, is conducted by Ghedini's former pupil Guido Cantelli (1920-56).

English / Italian texts for *Concerto dell'albatro*

I remember the first albatross I ever saw. It was during a prolonged gale, in waters hard upon the Antarctic seas. [...] I ascended to the overclouded deck; and there, dashed upon the main hatches, I saw a regal, feathery thing of unspotted whiteness, and with a hooked, Roman bill sublime. At intervals, it arched forth its vast archangel wings, as if to embrace some holy ark. Wondrous flutterings and throbbings shook it. Though bodily unharmed, it uttered cries, as some king's ghost in supernatural distress. Through its inexpressible, strange eyes, methought I peeped to secrets which took hold of God. As Abraham before the angels, I bowed myself; the white thing was so white, its wings so wide, and in those for ever exiled waters, I had lost the miserable warping memories of traditions and of towns. Long I gazed at that prodigy of plumage. [...] At last the Captain made a postman of it; tying a lettered, leathern tally round its neck [...]; and then letting it escape. But I doubt not, that leathern tally, meant for man, was taken off in Heaven, when the white fowl flew to join the wing-folding, the invoking, and adoring cherubim!

Excerpt from *Moby-Dick* (Chapter 42, 1851 Edition), Hermann Melville (1819-91)

Ricordo il primo albatro che vidi. Fu durante un lungo colpo di vento in acque remote nei mari antartici. [...] Ero salito sul ponte coperto di nubi e là vidi, gettato sulle boccaporte di maestro, un essere regale, pennuto, d'immacolata bianchezza, e dal sublime e romano rostro adunco. A intervalli esso allargava le ali immense da arcangelo come per abbracciare qualche arca santa. Stupefacenti palpitazioni e sussulti lo scuotevano. Quantunque incolume materialmente esso cacciava strida come il fantasma di un re in preda a una soprannaturale disperazione. Attraverso i suoi inesprimibili, stranissimi occhi mi pareva di scorgere segreti che giungevano a Dio. Come Abramo dinnanzi agli angeli, io m'inchinai: l'essere bianco era tanto bianco, le sue ali tanto immense, e in quelle acque del perpetuo esilio io avevo perduto le meschine memorie di tradizioni e di città che ci distraggono. A lungo contemplai quel prodigio di penne [...] Alla fine, il capitano ne fece un *messaggero*, legandogli intorno al collo *uno scritto* e poi lasciandolo fuggire. Ma io non ho nessun dubbio che il *messaggio*, indirizzato all'uomo, fosse portato in Cielo, quando l'uccello bianco volò a raggiungere i cherubini alati, invocanti, adoranti!

The above text is taken from the Italian translation of *Moby-Dick* by Cesare Pavese (1941 edition, Edizioni Frassinelli), reproduced by kind permission of Adelphi Edizioni S.p.A. Milano, © 1973; the words highlighted in italics are emendations believed to have been made by Ghedini.



Emanuela Piemonti

After graduating with the highest distinction from the Conservatorio 'Giuseppe Verdi' of Milan in 1980, Emanuela Piemonti won a number of important national competitions, including the Vittorio Gui Prize (Florence), Città di Torino and the Atkinsons Prize (Saturnia). She was the pianist with the Trio Matisse for 25 years and performed with them in Italy's most famous concert halls, as well as in Germany, Spain, Portugal and Israel. The trio recorded all of Beethoven's Trios for RAI, and made commercial recordings for the monthly magazine *Amadeus* and for the Aura label. Concerts included début performances of works composed especially for the Trio by Mauricio Kagel, Luis de Pablo, Luca Francesconi and Alessandro Solbiati. Emanuela Piemonti teaches chamber music at the Conservatorio 'Giuseppe Verdi' of Milan.



Paolo Ghidoni

Paolo Ghidoni was born in Mantua, where he obtained his violin diploma with special merit at the age of seventeen, under the guidance of Ferruccio Sangiorgi. Ghidoni is well known as a soloist and chamber music performer, especially for his ability to communicate with audiences. He followed chamber music courses with members of the Trieste Trio at the Fiesole Music School and at the Accademia Chigiana, where he obtained three diplomas with merit under the guidance of Franco Gulli. He has collaborated with Mario Brunello, Enrico Dindo, Giuliano Carmignola, Franco Petracchi and the Trio d'Archi of La Scala, and usually performs with the pianist Marino Nicolini. He has also served as a member of the Trio Matisse. Ghidoni is now responsible for the chamber music department at the Conservatory of Mantua.



Pietro Bosna

Born in Bari, Pietro Bosna studied and graduated at the Niccolò Piccinni Conservatory, continuing in master-classes with Amedeo Baldovino, Antonio Janigro, Mario Brunello, Isaac Stern, and János Starker. He was a member of the Trio Matisse, and collaborated as principal cellist with the Turin Teatro Regio, Parma Orchestra Arturo Toscanini, and Bologna Teatro Comunale. He teaches at the Verona Felice Evaresto Dall'Abaco Conservatory. Pietro Bosna joined I Musici di Roma in 2007. Pietro Bosna plays a cello by Lorenzo Storioni (Cremona 1791) courtesy of M° Pietro Lacchio.



Carlo Doglioni Majer

Carlo Doglioni Majer was born in Milan. He was artistic director of the Turin Teatro Regio and Naples Teatro di San Carlo, together with other important Italian musical establishments. He has taught at the Naples and Venice Universities and is currently vice-president of Italy's National Institute of Verdi Studies, Parma.



Damian Iorio

Damian Iorio was born in London to a family of Italian and English musicians. He completed his violin studies in Britain and the United States before joining the Danish National Radio Symphony Orchestra. During his time in Copenhagen he also studied conducting in St Petersburg before being appointed Music Director of the Murmansk Philharmonic Orchestra, where he became the catalyst in the subsequent success and growth of the orchestra in opera and concert. His career has since taken him to major orchestras and theatres around the world, including the London Philharmonic, BBC Symphony, BBC Philharmonic, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, Detroit Symphony, Glyndebourne Festival Opera and Opéra de Paris. He also enjoys working with many youth orchestras in Europe and is Music Director of the National Youth String Orchestra of Great Britain. In 2006 he received the Knight of the Order of Sant'Agata from the Republic of San Marino in recognition for his services to music there. For more information www.damianiorio.com



Orchestra I Pomeriggi Musicali

The Orchestra I Pomeriggi Musicali of Milan made its début in 1945 with a programme that included works by Mozart, Beethoven, Stravinsky and Prokofiev. Immediately after the war, during a period of full reconstruction, the impresario Remigio Paone and music critic Ferdinando Ballo launched the new chamber orchestra with a solid classical repertoire and a particular attention to the contemporary. The orchestra won immediate success, now including works from the twentieth century that had been banned under the Fascists and works composed for them by Alfredo Casella, Luigi Dallapiccola, Giorgio Federico Ghedini, Gian Francesco Malipiero, Ildebrando Pizzetti, and Ottorino Respighi, continuing with compositions by composers including

Giacomo Manzoni, Franco Margola, Francesco Pennisi, Flavio Testi, Marco Tutino, Marcello Panni, Ivan Fedele, Luca Francesconi, and Fabio Vacchi. Today the orchestra includes in its concerts a wide range of music from the baroque to the contemporary and has collaborated with conductors including Claudio Abbado, Leonard Bernstein, Pierre Boulez, Aldo Ceccato, Riccardo Muti, and others. The orchestra is based at the historic Teatro Dal Verme in Milan. Starting with Nino Sanzogno, permanent conductors have included Gianluigi Gelmetti, Giampiero Taverna and Othmar Maga, followed by Daniele Gatti, Aldo Ceccato and Antonello Manacorda. Artistic direction has been entrusted to Italo Gomez, Carlo Doglioni Majer, Marcello Panni, Marco Tutino, Gianni Tangucci, Ivan Fedele and, since June 2011, Massimo Collarini.

Both Alfredo Casella and Giorgio Federico Ghedini are featured in ongoing Naxos series of orchestral works, but this is the first release to couple the two of them. The pieces have much in common – not least, both are concertos using the rare combination of piano trio and orchestra, pioneered by Beethoven – but they are also beautifully contrasted. Casella wrote his *Triple Concerto* for his own Trio Italiano, who performed it five hundred times on three continents in less than a decade. Ghedini's *Concerto dell'albatro* adds the voice of a narrator to the piano trio and orchestra, evoking, in words from Herman Melville's sea story *Moby-Dick*, a remarkable encounter with an Antarctic albatross.

Playing Time

58:11

Alfredo CASELLA

(1883-1947)

Concerto for Piano, Violin, Cello and Orchestra, Op. 56 (1933) 29:11

- | | | |
|----------|--|--------------|
| 1 | Largo, ampio, solenne – Allegro molto vivace | 10:19 |
| 2 | Adagio. Adagio, ma non troppo. Alquanto solenne ed assai tranquillo | 12:01 |
| 3 | Rondò. Tempo di giga, allegro vivace, ma non troppo | 6:51 |

Giorgio Federico GHEDINI

(1892-1965)

**Concerto dell'albatro ('Concerto of the Albatross', 1944-45, rev. 1949)
for Violin, Cello, Piano, Orchestra and Speaker 29:00**

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|----------|--|-------------|
| 4 | Largo [♩ = 46] – | 5:43 |
| 5 | Andante un poco mosso [♩ = 72-76] – | 2:31 |
| 6 | Andante sostenuto [♩ = 66] – | 5:22 |
| 7 | Allegro vivace [♩ = 152] – Poco a poco animando [to ♩ = 208] – Lentamente – | 6:08 |
| 8 | Andante [♩ = 63] – Allegro con agitazione [♩ = 152] – Largo, in 6 movimenti [♩ = 80] –
Pochissimo meno [♩ = 72] – Meno mosso [♩ = 60] | 9:16 |

**Emanuela Piemonti, Piano • Paolo Ghidoni, Violin • Pietro Bosna, Cello
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Damian Iorio**

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