



GRAND  
PIANO

# PARAPHRASES DE SALON

## 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY OPERA TRANSCRIPTIONS

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RUBEN MICIELI



# PARAPHRASES DE SALON

## 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY OPERA TRANSCRIPTIONS

RUBEN MICIELI, *piano*

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Producer and Engineer: Michael Seberich

Editors: Ruben Micieli, Gianluca Abbate

Piano: Steinway, Model D-274 'Henry'

Piano Technician: Giulio Passadori

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**EDUARD BIEHL (1824–1895)**

- 1** **FANTASIE DRAMATIQUE SUR *IL TROVATORE* DE VERDI, OP. 8**  
(pub. 1854) **10:18**

**IGNACE XAVIER JOSEPH LEYBACH (1817–1891)**

- 2** **FANTASIE BRILLANTE SUR *I PURITANI* DE BELLINI, OP. 48**  
(pub. 1862) **08:19**

**JOACHIM RAFF (1822–1882)**

**DEUX PARAPHRASES DE SALON, D'APRÈS VERDI, OP. 70 (1857) 10:13**

- 3** No. 1. Il trovatore 04:40

- 4** No. 2. La traviata 05:33

**STEFANO GOLINELLI (1818–1891)**

- 5** ***LA TRAVIATA* DI VERDI, DIVERTIMENTO BRILLANTE, OP. 93 (1853)**  
(arr. Ruben Micieli) **06:57**

**FERDINAND BEYER (1803–1863)**

**TROIS FANTAISIES BRILLANTES SUR DES THÈMES DES OPÉRAS  
DE BELLINI, OP. 50 (pub. 1842)**

**12:31**

**6** No. 3. I Capuleti e i Montecchi

**ADOLFO FUMAGALLI (1828–1856)**

**7** MELODIA VARIATA SU *LA TRAVIATA* DI VERDI, OP. 98 (pub. 1854) **05:22**

**EUGENIA APPIANI (1820–1870)**

**8** BALLATA NELL'OPERA *RIGOLETTO* DI VERDI (pub. 1850) **04:38**

**IGNACE XAVIER JOSEPH LEYBACH**

**9** FANTASIE BRILLANTE SUR DES MOTIFS DE L'OPÉRA *NORMA*  
DE BELLINI, OP. 65 (67) (pub. 1864) **12:01**

**TOTAL TIME: 70:50**

## PARAPHRASES DE SALON

### 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY OPERA TRANSCRIPTIONS

The enduring appeal of opera in the 19th century found a new and intimate expression in the realm of solo piano music. As composers sought to bring the grandeur of the stage into the parlours and salons of their audiences, they reimagined operatic works as dazzling paraphrases, fantasies and variations. These pieces not only preserved the essence of their source material but also transformed it, showcasing the piano as an instrument capable of capturing the drama, lyricism and virtuosity of the vocal tradition. *Paraphrases de Salon* celebrates the compositions of Vincenzo Bellini and Giuseppe Verdi, whose masterpieces inspired a generation of pianistic creativity.

Vincenzo Bellini (1801–1835) earned recognition as one of the 19th century's finest melodists, blending formal simplicity with remarkable expressive depth. Despite his tragically short musical career, Bellini's contributions to opera were transformative. A meticulous craftsman, he prioritised melody over intricate harmonic structures, creating music that not only highlighted the singer's artistry but also seamlessly advanced the drama. His character-driven approach ensured that every note served both emotional resonance and narrative purpose. Bellini's innovative use of declamatory recitative and his blurring of traditional forms contributed to the fluidity and dramatic cohesion of his works. Bellini's enduring legacy lies in his unparalleled ability to marry simplicity with striking lyrical intensity, securing his place as one of the most significant voices of the *bel canto* ('beautiful singing') tradition.

In contrast, Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901), one of the greatest Italian musical dramatists of the Western canon, elevated the operatic form to new dramatic and musical heights. His potent blend of melodic fluency, theatrical intensity and structural innovation amplified the sense of realism and psychological dynamism of his characters. Verdi's use of recurring motifs, dramatic pacing, and richly textured orchestration allowed him to magnify the emotional and thematic resonance of his operas, while breaking new ground in his treatment of ensembles and choruses as dynamic agents rather than mere decorative elements. Furthermore, Verdi's ability to merge music with the complexities

of social and political themes, brought a new layer of depth to the art form, allowing audiences to connect with the opera on a more personal and universal level.

A year after Verdi's *Il trovatore* ('The Troubadour') premiered in Rome (1853), German composer, arranger and editor Eduard Biehl (1824–1895) recrafted the dramatic spirit of the Spanish tragic tale in his *Fantaisie dramatique sur Il trovatore* for piano. A series of consuming, yet ominous descending falling figures of six entice the listener into this catastrophic world. The work weaves together themes from pivotal moments such as Leonora's delicate 'Che più t'arresti?' in which she confesses her love for the Troubadour to her confidante, Ines, which Biehl styles beneath a delicately balanced trilling right hand. Rushing scale passages depict the intensity of Leonora's lament before moving to the expressive 'Tacea la notte placida'. The pace slows to an *andante* grave assertion of the duet between Manrico and Conte di Luna, 'Deserto sulla terra'. The vitality of Azucena's heartfelt 'Stride la vampa' ('the flames are roaring') amidst the gypsy camp's bonfire scene is captured through fervent chordal patterns and dense pianistic writing before a rousing *allegro pomposo* nod to the famous 'Anvil Chorus' is rendered with rolling octaves and brilliant flourishes bringing the work to an exciting close.

When Bellini's final work, *I puritani* ('The Puritans'), debuted in Paris in 1835, the composer exclaimed: 'The French had all gone mad; there were such noise and such shouts that they themselves were astonished at being so carried away!' The historical drama centres on the love between a royalist (Arturo) and the daughter of a Puritan (Elvira) during the English Civil War. Twenty-seven years later the opera's sublime melodies and extravagant vocal lines continued to pervade the musical sensibilities of the era, inspiring French composer and pianist, Ignace Leybach's (1817–1891) virtuosic paraphrase, *Fantaisie brillante sur I puritani*. A stately introduction leads into the exquisite 'A te, o cara' aria, replete with delicate undulating scales, falling two-note patterns and staggered octaves before the frenetic coloratura of 'Son vergin vezzosa'. Bellini's original mastery is recast in brilliant flourishes, complex arpeggios and skilful passagework.

In 1857, German-Swiss composer, Joachim Raff (1822–1882) distilled the integrity of Verdi's *Il trovatore* and *La traviata* into two concise yet impactful miniatures. The former of the pair takes the opera's most iconic themes, weaving them into a tapestry of lyrical beauty and dramatic urgency as the piano writing mirrors Verdi's orchestral drama, with thunderous octaves and refined filigree suggesting both the tragic plot and its rich musical textures. The opening tumultuous bars of the second paraphrase instantly sets the scene for the ensuing tragic plight of the fallen Violetta. Raff brings us to the final *Largo* of the opera where Violetta is reunited with her love Alfredo but it is too late, as she dies in his arms. Through cascading runs, sophisticated textures, and dramatic shifts, Raff balances the gaiety and tragedy of Verdi's narrative with convincing aplomb.

Stefano Golinelli (1818–1891), an Italian virtuoso pianist and composer was equally enamoured with the musical spirit of *La traviata*. His *Divertimento brillante* (1853), extensively revised by Ruben Micieli, is a veritable kaleidoscope of sophisticated variations and elaborate ornamentation. The narrative deftly balances technical fireworks with lyrical interludes, offering a showcase for both pianist and composer.

Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* was a source of programmatic inspiration for many artists in the 19th century, including Bellini, who composed *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* ('The Capulets and Montagues') in 1830. Drawing on this Italian interpretation of the tragic story, German composer and pianist, Ferdinand Beyer (1803–1863), crafted his third *Fantaisie brillante*. Following an abrupt musical flurry, Giulietta's poignant 'Oh! quante volte' aria becomes the lyrical centrepiece upon which the piano mirrors the delicate phrasing of the soprano voice, enhancing the theme with subtle embellishments that deepen its emotional impact while preserving its haunting quality. The passionate duet between Romeo and Giulietta, 'Sì, fuggire: a noi non resta', is transformed into a climactic passage, with dexterous interplay between contrasting textures reflecting the characters' desperation and resolve.

A more stylistic paraphrase of Verdi's *La traviata* is seen in Italian pianist and composer Adolfa Fumagalli's (1828–1856) *Melodia variata su La traviata di Verdi* (pub. 1854).

The elegant opening hints at the poignant melodies to come, quickly establishing its connection to one of the opera's most enduring arias, 'Ah, fors'è lui'. This theme, sung by the heroine Violetta, reflects her introspective yearning, and in Fumagalli's hands, it becomes a vehicle for deeply expressive pianistic lyricism. Each variation explores a different pianistic texture or effect, while showcasing the changing colours of the opera.

Renowned for its dark themes, complex characters, and unforgettable melodies, Verdi's *Rigoletto* provided fertile material for pianist and guitarist Eugenia Appiani's (1820–1870) *Ballata nell'opera* (pub. 1850). An evocative introduction sets a solemn and introspective tone that recalls the opera's tragic undertones before transitioning into thematic material from the iconic 'La donna è mobile', infusing Verdi's buoyant melody with sparkling embellishments and agile runs that enhance its charm while preserving its lyrical simplicity. Appiani imbues the work with a story-telling quality, evoking the opera's pathos and intrigue through shifting moods and pianistic contrasts. The piece culminates in a brilliant coda that highlights the piano's percussive and lyrical potential.

Leybach's *Fantaisie brillante sur des motifs de l'opéra Norma de Bellini* exemplifies the art of the paraphrase. Published in 1864, this tour de force, incorporates the opera's most beloved arias, including the iconic 'Casta diva', into a seamless intellectual realisation of the tale. The transcription demands not only technical prowess but also a dramatic vocal sensibility, requiring the pianist to evoke the soaring lines of Bellini's divas through the percussive medium of the instrument.

Through these paraphrases and fantasies, the grandeur of Bellini's and Verdi's operas is reimagined within the intimate medium of the solo piano. Each piece not only preserves the spirit of the original but also transforms it into a pianistic statement of artistry, inviting listeners to experience the drama, beauty, and emotion of the operatic tradition in a new, exhilarating way.

**Emer Nestor**



## A NOTE FROM RUBEN MICIELI

Music has always been my life. I started playing the piano at the age of four and a half, and since then, it has become my breath, the essence of my existence. It's like a constant companion, always providing what I need, whether it be comfort or a way to express myself. For me, music is life itself and a profound expression of the soul.

In 2008, when I was eleven, an elderly pianist named Maria Paraninfo learned about my piano studies. Without any musical heirs, she gifted me her collection of sheet music, including a rare early 20th-century edition of the *Fantaisie brillante* on Bellini's *Norma* by Joseph Leybach. This was her favourite piece, and she asked me to learn it. Twelve years later, this piece became the inspiration for my album, *Paraphrases de Salon*.

I spent a great deal of time rediscovering these forgotten pieces. I studied the orchestral scores by Verdi and Bellini and made what I felt were necessary musical and structural adjustments to these transcriptions adding missing melodies and refining the metre to better reflect the original intent of the works. Many of the pieces were initially written in a simplified form, so I aimed to enhance their polyphonic depth, much like Liszt or Horowitz might have done.

My love for opera, especially Verdi and Bellini, runs deep, rooted in my experience accompanying singers from a young age. This album serves as a tribute to Italian opera's rich tradition, allowing me to bridge the past and the present through my own interpretations.

## RUBEN MICIELI

Pianist, conductor and composer, Ruben Micieli, has won over 40 international competitions, including Second Prize at the 9th International Franz Liszt Piano Competition Weimar-Bayreuth, and was a semi-finalist and received the Best Italian Award at the 66th Maria Canals International Music Competition. He has performed in prestigious venues across Europe and Asia, such as Teatro La Fenice, Weimarhalle, Palau de la Música Catalana, Salle Cortot and Auditorio 'Víctor Villegas', collaborating with renowned orchestras including the Staatskapelle Weimar, Filarmonica Arturo Toscanini, Orquesta Sinfónica de la Región de Murcia and the orchestra of the Teatro Massimo Bellini, Catania. A frequent guest at international festivals and series such as Öschberghof Classik, Concerts Grand Salon in Zurich, Virtuoso & Belcanto Festival in Lucca, Piano City Milano, SummerFest in Hong Kong and Lerici Music Festival, he is also part of The Keyboard Charitable Trust. Micieli graduated with honours from the Conservatorio Bellini in Catania and the Academia Internacional de Música 'Aquiles Delle Vigne', studying with Giovanni Cultrera and Aquiles Delle Vigne, and has honed his craft with Michel Béroff, Piotr Paleczny, Roberto Prosseda, Boris Berman, Till Fellner, Jörg Demus, Andrzej Jasiński, Sergio Perticaroli, Leslie Howard, Yejin Gil and Carmelo Pappalardo. As a conductor, he has led the Orchestra Senzaspine, Bazzini Consort, Roma Tre Orchestra and the David Orchestra.

*[www.rubenmicieli.com](http://www.rubenmicieli.com)*



**RUBEN MICIELI**  
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## 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY OPERA TRANSCRIPTIONS

The enduring appeal of opera in the 19th century found a new and intimate expression in the realm of solo piano music. This recording reveals how the grandeur and expressive range of operas by Bellini and Verdi was brought from the theatre into private parlours and salons. The composers featured on this album preserve the spirit of the original works while reimagining the famous melodies and dramatic scenes as paraphrases, fantasies and variations. Award-winning Italian pianist, Ruben Micieli, performs these dazzling pieces in his own unique way, making musical and structural adjustments to each transcription after studying the scores by Bellini and Verdi.



RUBEN MICIELI

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|------------|---|----------|---|
| <b>1</b>   | <b>EDUARD BIEHL (1824–1895)</b><br><b>FANTAISIE DRAMATIQUE SUR</b><br><b>IL TROVATORE DE VERDI, OP. 8</b><br>(pub. 1854) <b>10:18</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>FERDINAND BEYER (1803–1863)</b><br><b>FANTAISIE BRILLANTE SUR DES</b><br><b>THÈMES DE L'OPÉRA I CAPULETI E</b><br><b>I MONTECCHI DE BELLINI, OP. 50,</b><br><b>NO. 3 (pub. 1842) 12:31</b> |
|            | <b>IGNACE XAVIER JOSEPH</b><br><b>LEYBACH (1817–1891)</b>   |          | <b>ADOLFO FUMAGALLI (1828–1856)</b>   |
| <b>2</b>   | <b>FANTAISIE BRILLANTE SUR</b><br><b>I PURITANI DE BELLINI, OP. 48</b><br>(pub. 1862) <b>08:19</b>                                    | <b>7</b> | <b>MELODIA VARIATA SU LA TRAVIATA</b><br><b>DI VERDI, OP. 98 (pub. 1854) 05:22</b>  |
|            | <b>JOACHIM RAFF (1822–1882)</b>   |          | <b>EUGENIA APPIANI (1820–1870)</b>  |
| <b>3–4</b> | <b>DEUX PARAPHRASES DE SALON,</b><br><b>D'APRÈS VERDI, OP. 70 (1857) 10:13</b>  | <b>8</b> | <b>BALLATA NELL'OPERA RIGOLETTO</b><br><b>DI VERDI (pub. 1850) 04:38</b>  |
|            | <b>STEFANO GOLINELLI (1818–1891)</b>  |          | <b>IGNACE XAVIER JOSEPH</b><br><b>LEYBACH</b>   |
| <b>5</b>   | <b>LA TRAVIATA DI VERDI,</b><br><b>DIVERTIMENTO BRILLANTE, OP. 93</b><br>(1853) (arr. Ruben Micieli) <b>06:57</b>                     | <b>9</b> | <b>FANTAISIE BRILLANTE SUR DES</b><br><b>MOTIFS DE L'OPÉRA NORMA</b><br><b>DE BELLINI, OP. 65 (67)</b><br>(pub. 1864) <b>12:01</b>  |

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 70:50



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