

Bach&Italy 4

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) / Giuseppe Martucci (1856-1909)

Orchestral Suites / Overtures nos. 1-3

Piano transcription

Overture / Orchestral Suite in C major No. 1 (after BWV 1066)

- 1- Overture
- 2- Courante
- 3- Gavotte I and II
- 4- Forlane ("Venetian Dance")
- 5- Menuet I and II
- 6- Bourrée I and II
- 7- Passepied I and II

Overture / Orchestral Suite in C major No. 2 (after BWV 1067)

- 8- Overture
- 9- Rondeau
- 10- Sarabande
- 11- Bourrée I and II
- 12- Polonaise and Double
- 13- Menuet
- 14- Badinerie

Overture / Orchestral Suite in C major No. 3 (after BWV 1068)

- 15- Overture
- 16- Air
- 17- Gavotte I and II
- 18- Bourrée
- 19- Gigue

Credits:

Recorded on July 20th-22nd, 2020, at – Imagina Sound Production Studios, Turin

Steingrüber Grand Piano

Recording: Alessandro Cardinale

Editing: Gabriele Zanetti

Mix & Mastering: Alessandro Cardinale

With thanks to Aldo Bergamini of Bergamini Pianoforti, Pianezza (TO)

BIOGRAPHY

Born in Turin in 1983, Chiara Bertoglio began her piano studies at the age of three, obtaining her Diploma in Piano with top marks and with honours at the Conservatory of Turin when only sixteen. She obtained Master's Degrees in piano at the Accademia di Santa Cecilia in Rome as well as the Swiss Diploma of Virtuosity, always with top marks and honours. After a Master's in Musicology from the University of Venice (top marks and honours), she obtained a PhD in Music Performance Practice from the University of Birmingham, with the supervision of Kenneth Hamilton. She also holds Master's Degrees in Systematic Theology. She also studied with M. Rezzo, I. Deckers, E. Henz, P. Badura Skoda, S. Perticaroli and K. Bogino.

She made her debut as a soloist with orchestra at the age of nine, under the baton of Ferdinand Leitner; later she performed with orchestras such as Rome Symphony Orchestra, the European

Union Chamber Orchestra, the Curtis Chamber Orchestra, the Italian Philharmonic Orchestra, the Aargauer Symphonieorchester and many others. In 2005 she made her debut at Carnegie Hall under the baton of Leon Fleisher. She performed in such venues as the Concertgebouw of Amsterdam, the Royal Academy in London (during the Messiaen Festival 2008), the Mozarteum in Salzburg, the Chopin Institute of Warsaw, the Academy of Santa Cecilia in Rome, the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino and other festivals such as “Imago Sloveniae”, “Woerthersee Classics”, “MITO Settembre Musica”, “Armonie della sera” and many others. She performed both recitals and concertos with orchestra in Italy, USA, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Poland, Israel, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Mexico and Slovenia, and was often broadcast by national radio and TV programs (RAI, Swiss Radio RSI, ORF, AVRO Klassiek, Polish and Slovenian Radio and TV etc.).

Her most important recordings include Respighi’s Toccata for piano and orchestra (Brilliant Classics), two albums for “Velut Luna” (Schubert’s complete Impromptus, and “Mors&Vita”, with works by Mussorgskij and Messiaen, both issued in 2012) and a selection of Mozart’s Piano Concertos for “Panorama”. Since 2018 she records for DaVinci Classics, issuing a series of CDs about Bach and Italy, including several world premieres.

Her first book dates 2005, and is a study on Mozart’s piano and opera music, prefaced by Paul Badura Skoda. Later she wrote other musicological books, mostly published by Effatà, and her PhD thesis has been published by Lambert Academic Publishing. Her monumental monograph *Reforming Music* (De Gruyter 2017) has won the prestigious RefoRC Book Award in 2018; her most recent monograph, *Musical Scores and the Eternal Present*, is published by Pickwick (2021). She authors musicological articles for important Italian and international journals, and is often invited as a speaker at musicological conferences in Europe and the USA; she also gives seminars for Italian and British universities. She is the recipient of the Prize of the Pontifical Academies 2017, and the co-founder of JSBach.it. She teaches musicology at the Theological University of Northern Italy and piano at the Conservatoire of Novara. Since 2007 she gives annual cycles of lectures and concerts for the private university “Studio Filosofico Domenicano” in Bologna, and she regularly teaches at Italian Theological University (FTER, FTIC, FTIS). Her website is www.chiarabertoglio.com.

The Gospel famously says that it is impossible to serve two masters at once; and what happens when this task is attempted is humorously shown in a comedy by Carlo Goldoni, *The Servant of Two Masters*. I admit to occasionally having felt like the protagonist of Goldoni's play, Arlequin, when facing the challenging interpretive choices posed by Giuseppe Martucci's piano transcription of the first three Orchestral Suites by Johann Sebastian Bach. To whom did I owe my loyalty, as a performer? To Bach or to Martucci, when – in my opinion – their musical wills collided? And how could I be sure that my perception and my choices were right?

Of course, there is no univocal answer to these interpretive problems. Performers have to find their own way in order to render in the best possible fashion the score they are playing. But, in this case, it was much harder than it usually is. For one thing, Martucci's transcriptions are exceptionally difficult to play on the merely technical plane. So complex they are that Martucci's first biographer labelled them as "nearly unplayable", and, in fact, to my knowledge this is the world premiere recording of these magnificent arrangements. Giuseppe Martucci was a virtuoso pianist, but also an appreciated composer and conductor. He had always been at the forefront of the Italian Bach cult: he had conducted the first complete performance of a Bach cantata on Italian soil, had proposed excerpts from the St. Matthew Passion, and had played works for solo keyboard and for keyboard(s) and orchestra on numerous occasions. He had also been the first Italian to conduct an Orchestra Suite by Bach in its entirety, and the famous *Air* from the Third Suite, sometimes flanked by the Gavotte, had frequently been featured in his programmes (even in such important venues as the La Scala theatre in Milan). The Italian premiere of the D-major suite under Martucci's baton was a revelation: "It is one of the most amazing works I know", wrote a critic after the concert.

During the years 1895-6, Martucci was intensely and fully occupied by the composition and premiere of his *First Symphony*. After this prolonged effort, his compositional activity underwent a brief interruption, possibly due also to the need to practise the demanding piano works which he was booked to perform in 1897 (including Beethoven's *Emperor Concerto*). Thus, Martucci's entire compositional output for the year 1897 consisted only of transcriptions, including those of Bach's Suites.

Martucci had been rather active as a transcriber for years. His biographer, Fano, characterises his transcriptions as follows: "there is a tendency to preserve all the notes, even doubling the original chords, though this may lead to pianistically unrewarding passages; then, [there is] a widespread, sometimes excessive use of arpeggios; by way of contrast, a certain freedom in the ornaments, where the personal taste of the composer [Martucci] is shown; in general, however, a great feeling of precision". Several of these traits mark a distinct difference between Martucci's attitude as a transcriber and that of, for example, Ferruccio Busoni.

The concept of Bach music revealed in Martucci's transcriptions is a very powerful and majestic one. The impression received by today's listeners is of a colossal, solemn, and gigantic view of Bach's style, particularly in the slow movements. This is easily observed by comparing Martucci's transcriptions for the piano after Bach's Orchestral Suites with those by Joachim Raff, which predate them by a couple of decades (1875). Martucci was familiar with Raff's output, and, curiously, he conducted one of Raff's symphonies in the very same year which would also see the creation of his own Bachian arrangements. In all likelihood, Martucci knew well Raff's transcriptions and used them as a basis and inspiration for his own work, as appears rather clearly (though not indubitably) by comparing certain passages of their respective arrangements. By way of contrast, however, the differences between their two versions are even more significant, and bear witness to a markedly divergent model of Bach interpretation. For instance, Martucci's perspective prominently focuses on the bass line, e.g. through massive doublings of the lowest line. Moreover, the contrapuntal fabric is richer and denser in Martucci. Particularly in the dances,

moreover, Martucci's skill in trying to suggest the typical timbres of the original instruments is noteworthy. Martucci considerably thickens the scoring, by consistently doubling the bass line, and he achieves some timbral differentiation by privileging large chords.

The effect he obtains is particularly solemn and imposing, and it is reminiscent of organ pedalling and registration. Similar to what happens to Busoni's version of Bach's Chaconne, in which the model for the transcription seems not to be Bach's violin original, but rather an imagined organ piece, here too the path from orchestra to piano seems to touch the organ in between. This aspect was already noticed by one of the first reviewers of Martucci's transcriptions, Edgardo Del Valle de Paz, who wrote: "Martucci, inspired by Liszt's great transcriptions of Beethoven's symphonies and of Bach's organ works, has succeeded in making it possible to perform these orchestral pieces, adapting them to the piano, which is the complete instrument *par excellence*".

As every performing musician knows, however, timbral and volume choices can never be taken in isolation from those regarding tempo and rhythm. Both for practical reasons (the need to "prepare" a powerful sound and/or a dilated hand position) and for aural considerations (a loud sound, as one rich in harmonics, will decay more slowly than a thin one), the adoption of thick timbral textures impacts on both tempo and agogic. Thus, Martucci's tempo indications remain one of the most striking and idiosyncratic aspects of his transcriptions, though they are fully consistent with his overall aesthetic view.

Martucci, in fact, carefully indicated the metronome tempi of the individual movements in his transcriptions of the Suites. While some such indications, as that for the *Badinerie* in the B-minor suite, are substantially in accord with those adopted by modern, "historically informed" performances, other are impressively at odds with today's sensibility. In the case of the B-minor Fugue, as a performer I decided that Martucci's metronome indication must contain a typo, and that it should be interpreted as indicated a tempo twice as quick as that read on the score. In spite of this, the *Overtures* and their polyphonic sections are the movements where the distance between Martucci's taste and today's is most pronounced.

Martucci evidently associated the idea of solemnity and gravity to Bach's music. A reviewer writing in 1899 affirmed, about Martucci's performance of the D-minor Concerto: "Here, Martucci played the piano part with such a seriousness, nay, a severity in intentions and means, that the greatest and most surprising effect was drawn from that same dryness of the genre and performance. Nor could the spirit of deep mysticism which inspires all of the works by Bach be better felt and rendered than as Martucci felt and rendered it". These nouns and adjectives seem to suggest the feeling of a very strict and objective performance (at least by contemporaneous standards), while the last one, "mysticism", seems not to suggest here anything like a rapturing experience, but rather a "religious" approach in the manner of liturgical music. Even more explicitly, a critic wrote about a concert given on April 8th, 1907, in Naples, whose opening piece was a Chorale and Fugue by Bach: "How solemn and almost hieratic he was in that Chorale introduction by Bach, and how [well] he expressed its clean classical austerity in the imposing and sober Fugue!".

Thus, it may be inferred that the tempi so carefully notated by Martucci in his transcriptions mirrored rather faithfully his actual performing practice. They are also highly suggestive of a radically different aesthetical approach to Baroque music, which was considered – at one and the same time, and almost paradoxically – both as an example of restrained and almost geometrical Classicism, and of a sublime and magniloquent expression.

It is therefore particularly fascinating to study these scores, as they reveal something – in the absence of audio recordings – about how Bach's Orchestral Suites were first performed and heard in Italy. It can be argued that Martucci's interpretive concept contributed not only to a more widespread knowledge of Bach's music, but also to the creation of a taste to which later interpreters had to conform – or else against which they had to take a standing. Almost regardless

of the actual dissemination of Martucci's transcriptions, thus, these scores represent an invaluable witness – and a very detailed one, even painstakingly so – of Martucci's interpretive concept. When Martucci's transcriptions are performed today, following – as much as it is possible and opportune – his tempo, character, and dynamic/agogic indications, strange as they may appear to today's listeners, the effect is always impressive. Not only, in fact, they are fundamental witnesses of a past performance practice, but they also show an undeniable artistic worth. For today's audiences (and performers, to be sure), the well-known pieces by Bach become something dramatically different from those we are familiar with, thus providing even to our ears a fascinating and refreshing experience. They bear witness to the fullness and wealth of ideas which can be found in Bach, whose music can still surprise us with a feeling of novelty, and to the perceptive, imaginative, and creative interpretation which Martucci designed for them. Thus, these transcriptions should be rediscovered and reconsidered, both for their documentary value and for the objective beauty they achieve, even though, at times, the player may feel torn apart by the two masters he or she is attempting to serve at the same time.