



divine art debut series



# GABRIELE MICHELI

*piano*

Domenico Scarlatti  
Sonata in A minor, K. 217

Johannes Brahms  
Theme with Variations  
in D minor, Op. 18b

Variations on a Theme  
by Paganini, Books I & II, Op. 35

Franz Liszt  
Réminiscences de Norma, S. 394

Maurice Ravel  
La valse



*Scarlatti | Brahms | Liszt | Ravel*

# ***GABRIELE MICHELI, piano***

*Ciccolini Prize Winner 2021*



*Recorded in Trani, Italy, in October 2021*

*Total playing time 74:50*

# ***GABRIELE MICHELI, piano***

## **Domenico Scarlatti (1686-1757)**

- |                              |      |
|------------------------------|------|
| 1. Sonata in A minor, K. 217 | 9:58 |
|------------------------------|------|

## **Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)**

- |  |       |
|--|-------|
| 2. Theme with Variations in D minor, Op. 18b           | 10:46 |
| 3. Variations on a Theme by Paganini, Op. 35 - Book I  | 13:21 |
| 4. Variations on a Theme by Paganini, Op. 35 - Book II | 11:27 |

## **Franz Liszt (1811-1886)**

- |                                   |       |
|-----------------------------------|-------|
| 5. R miniscences de Norma, S. 394 | 16:46 |
|-----------------------------------|-------|

## **Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)**

- |             |       |
|-------------|-------|
| 6. La valse | 12:15 |
|-------------|-------|

Total Playing Time	74:50
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# THE CICCOLINI PRIZE

The Ciccolini Online Competition for Pianists was inaugurated by the Aldo Ciccolini European Arts Academy and its associated Foundation, based in Trani, Italy.

The 2021 competition attracted entrants from many countries and was held in 'virtual' format due to the then strict restrictions on travel and assembly during the worst of the Covid pandemic.

The prestigious jury consisted of:

Professor Pierluigi Camicia (President): international concert pianist and previous Director of the Tito Schipa Conservatory, Lecce.

Professor Alfonso Soldano (Artistic Director): international pianist, musicologist and professor at the Umberto Giordano Conservatory in Foggia.

Professor Tatjana Cratonjic: international pianist, Director of the Gaetano Braga Conservatory in Teramo.

Professor Giuseppe Greco: international pianist, Professor at the Umberto Giordano Conservatory.

Dr. Attilio Cantore, pianist and senior music critic for Amadeus Magazine and many others, Doctor of Musicology from Milan University.

The prizes for First and Second Place included a recording with Divine Art, funded by the Ciccolini Foundation. The overall winner was the brilliant Ukrainian virtuoso Violetta Fialko, and a very close second place was awarded to the exceptional young Italian pianist Gabriele Micheli.

We hope that this album will demonstrate the skill which earned Gabriele his award from the competition and bring him the recognition he deserves.

Stephen Sutton, CEO of Divine Art, July 2023

# THE MUSIC

*Notes by the musicologist and musician Annarosa Partipilo*

## **D. Scarlatti – Sonata in A minor K217 (L42)**

Domenico Scarlatti composed the K217 (L42) sonata in A Minor during his stay at the royal court in Spain. The Italian composer shows to have rhythmic and melodic skills. The sonata is made of a movement, “Andante”, which is divided into two-parts, where it is possible to find the typical elements of the composer’s harmonic compositions. Thanks to the musicologist and harpsichordist Ralph Kirkpatrick, who wrote the first important edition of the sonatas with the numbering from this edition, the Kk. or K. number according to his name, it is possible to identify the “crux” within the piece, which divides the two sections by using a pause. This pause leads to the most important part. In a different fashion from the classical style sonata-form which will be glorified in the works by Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, the keyboard sonatas written by Domenico Scarlatti are simpler one movement, two-section pieces. In spite of a less articulated structure, though, their harmonic and textural refinement should not make one dismiss those little gems as minor works, whose goal is pedagogical as well as entertainment of the player and the listener.

## **J. Brahms – Theme with Variations in D Minor, Op. 18b**

“If we can’t compose with Mozart’s beauty, let’s at least try to equal him in purity”. So says Brahms, and this is the spirit of the composition presented here. Brahms writes these Variations referring to the theme of the slow movement of the sextet for two violins, two violas and two cellos op.18, in which it is possible to identify a sort of noble, austere, almost tragic march: that is to say a pure one. It is possible to state that the classical and pre-classical tradition inspired Brahms, especially those of Mozart and Bach, to compose these six variations. These variations follow the classical principles of the compositional technique of the Variations, which the Author will bring to the extreme consequences with his mature style, and which affirms the so-called “development by variation”. With their diversity, the six variations constitute a single narrative arc rather

than episodes in their own right: the first three variations modify the theme from a rhythmic point of view, which is clear especially in the second, where the writing is done as well as rhythmic, very dense and concentrated too. In the third variation, there is no lack of virtuosic scales on the bass, which accompany the proclaimed theme by the right hand. The fourth is a very sweet and expressive variation; in the fifth, it seems that Brahms wanted to lead us to that “memory” of the initial theme (it is not by chance that the latter two variations are in the most consoling key of D major). In the last variation Brahms tends to bring out even more the feeling of “*déjà vu*” mentioned in the fifth variation, by connecting all the singing voices of the memory of the initial theme in a brilliant, refined and very sweet way. The piece is an inscription to Clara Schumann.

#### **J. Brahms – Variations on a Theme by Paganini, Op.35 Books I and II,**

Brahms loved the genre of Variations: this work together with those on original Themes (the same Op. 18b recorded here) and on themes about Schumann, Handel and Haydn shows it. The friendship with Carl Tausig, a pupil of Liszt that he met in Vienna, inspired the composition of the two Books of “Variations on a Theme of Paganini”. Tausig performed these variations for the first time in Berlin on 25 March 1865. Clara Schumann was the first to perform the Brahms’ Handel Variations, which she herself defined as “magnificent variations”, in Hamburg on 7 December 1861; she never performed the Brahms-Paganini. Paganini represented the model of the “virtuoso of the instrument” and like him, Franz Liszt tried to bring the novelty of the “transcendental” technique into his compositions, (he wrote a Study in the form of Variations on the twenty-fourth “Capriccio” by Paganini too); for this reason, Brahms was an admirer of Liszt’s direct pupil: Carl Tausig.

With this purpose Brahms intended to insert within his composition a virtuosic manner capable of including great technical skills, but without ever overshadowing the search for a necessary fundamental expressiveness. Brahms’ original title was “Studies for Piano: Variations on a Paganini Theme”. He equally distribute each of the twenty-eight variations within the two books. Each variation deals with a specific and technical aspect, and combines the athletic data with the coloristic one, the deadly double notes

of the first variations with the chiaroscuro of the repeated accompaniment chords, the suppleness of the brilliant passages with the harshness of the most daring jumps, according to the best tradition of the piano study from Clementi to Czerny to the same Chopin and Liszt.

#### **F. Liszt – Réminiscences de Norma, transcription from Norma by Vincenzo Bellini S. 394**

In 1831 Bellini composed “Norma” and the work was an immediate success. In 1841, only ten years later, Liszt, in love with this music, and skilled in his “bravura” transcriptions, rich in virtuosity, decided to concentrate this work in a piece for piano solo, including the themes of seven Bellini’s arias, two of which are even superimposed, in a display of virtuosity not only technical-instrumental but also compositional and contrapuntal. Liszt fully respects the dramatic impact of the work by using a virtuosic and dynamic way of writing that makes piano colours vivid, like the orchestral ones. This work is a real test of technical skill, and only the most virtuous pianists can really try it out, also enhancing those tragic and dramatic elements, which make it unique. Furthermore, the pianist Leslie Howard observes that we can recognize Liszt’s genius in the composer’s comprehension of Bellini’s masterpiece, instead of searching it in the pyrotechnics of the mechanism just for the sake of it. This is demonstrated by the fact that the two superimposed arias, referred to above, are not taken at random or only for their compatibility in terms of underlying harmonies and, but they are the ones that embody the themes, one of love and the other of death between the priestess and the Roman centurion Pollio. A combination already very dear to the one, who only thirty years later will become the father-in-law of Richard Wagner, author of Tristan and Isolde.

#### **M. Ravel – La valse**

On the side-lines of the orchestral score of “La valse” Ravel makes his thoughts known with this annotation: “Whirling clouds give glimpses of couples of dancers. Gradually they dissipate and an immense hall populated by a swirling crowd is distinguished. The scene becomes brighter and brighter and at the very strong the glow of the candlesticks

reaches its maximum splendour. It deals with an imperial dance that takes place around the year 1855". La Valse is a brilliant and engaging work, on the Viennese waltz time, written between 1919 and 1920. Many commentators wanted to recognize in this phantasmagorical waltz parable, which through sound, manages to emit more and more light and strength until to the final explosion, an allegory of Vienna itself (and therefore of the entire fin de siècle world) suspended on the edge of the abyss that will be the First World War. However, the author will always deny such a programmatic will. It is also undeniable what Ravel himself states about the piece, in other words he states that it is "tragic, like any emotion ... pushed to its extreme", "an ascending progression of sonority, together with which the stage comes to life to add light and movement". The piece pulsates and makes the heart of the listener beat the soul of the dance, even if the impresario Diaghilev of the Ballets Russes as a masterpiece, but "rather a portrait of ballet than a ballet" did not consider it, but it does not matter.

The orchestral thought transfused into piano writing is the prerogative of entire generations of classical authors (Beethoven, Schumann and Liszt: cit. *Réminiscences de Norma*, S.394 too), and this consideration could be true for the Nine Symphonies of Beethoven, which Liszt transcribes only for piano. Ravel is the heir of this great tradition: just as he manages to paint all the nuances of the piano sound in the orchestral pieces, so he condenses the sound of an entire orchestra into the piano. La Valse is the most brilliant example of this, although many of his works were born simultaneously for orchestra and solo piano (only for piano).



# THE PIANIST

Gabriele Micheli was born in Rome (Italy) on 21st July 1998. At nine years old he won the admission in Santa Cecilia's Conservatoire, in Rome and in 2017 he graduated in piano with honors in Prof. Elisabetta Pacelli's class. In 2020 he obtained the piano Master's degree with honors and honorable mention from the same Conservatoire. He took part in masterclasses held by important musicians such as Benedetto Lupo, Pietro De Maria, Roberto Cappello, Boris Berman and others. He won many national and international piano competitions, winning significant prizes. He held piano recitals and joined in important piano events in Italy (Rome, Naples, Frascati, Chianciano - Terme, Trento, Castellana Grotte), Bulgaria (Kjustendil), Denmark (Aarhus, Holstebro) and Germany (Leipzig). In the A.Y. 2019/2020 he took part in the Erasmus+ program which allowed him to study at the HMT "Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy" in Leipzig, Germany, in the piano class of Prof. Markus Tomas. Currently he studies with Prof. Pierluigi Camicia. Besides being a pianist, he is a composer and has been teaching piano since 2020.



*Gabriele Micheli*

Recorded in Trani, Italy in October 2021; mastered 2023

Engineered by: Massimo Mazzone

Executive Producer for Ciccolini Foundation: Alfonso Soldano

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**Also Available from Divine Art**



## **Violetta Fialko – Ciccolini Prizewinner Recital**

Violetta Fialko is an exceptionally talented Ukrainian pianist, who has been signed by Divine Art for her commercial recording debut, as winner of the 2021 Ciccolini Prize for Pianists.

**Violetta Fialko, piano  
DBU 2021 I**

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Gabriele Micheli

