



NICCOLÒ CASTIGLIONI

P I A N O M U S I C

S A R A H N I C O L L S

METIER

# Niccolò Castiglioni (1932-1996)

music for piano

Sarah Nicolls - piano

1 **Cangianti (1959)** 10:56

## Tre Pezzi (1978)

2 i Sweet 6:15

3 ii Kinderlied ohne Worte 5:36

4 iii Fregi 6:09

## Come io passo l'estate (1983)

5 i Arrivo a Tires 0:49

6 ii La Fossa del Lupo 1:06

7 iii Andiamo al Rifugio Bergamo 1:06

8 iv La Valle del Ciamin 1:00

9 v Il Buco dell'Orso 0:39

10 vi La Fontanella di Ganna 0:37

11 vii Ghiaccio sul Rosengarten 1:02

12 viii Antonio Ballista dorme in casa dei Carabinieri 1:38

13 ix Il Fantasma del Castello di Presule 0:40

14 x Canzone per il mio Compleanno 0:37

## Dulce Refrigerium (Sechs Geistliche Lieder) (1984)

15 i Humilitas 1:57

16 ii Humus 2:17

17 iii Urquelle 1:15

18 iv Lied 1:40

19 v Liebeslied 1:48

20 vi Choral 0:17

## Sonatina (1984)

21 i Andantino mosso assai dolcino 5:26

22 ii Laendler 0:44

23 iii Fughetta 1:10

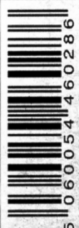
24 **HE (1990)** 4:04

Total Time 59:50

Original recording made at 24bit / 96kHz  
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The sparkling, shimmering surface of much of Castiglioni's work is, in fact, quite unlike anything else in recent Italian music. Drier and cooler than the erotically charged, luxuriant expressionism of Bussotti; more absorbed in pitch controls and elaboration than Sciarino. Less economical, and less confined and obsessive than Aldo Clementi; but more whimsical, more historically allusive, and more restrained than Donatoni.

Castiglioni studied with Giorgio Federico Ghedini, as did Berio, and it is perhaps from Ghedini that the icy, glittering sound-world comes. High registers usually predominate – and the fastidious, even if sometimes hyper-active, texture stems somewhere from the neo-Baroque or neo-Rococo music of the 1920s and 30s – Stravinsky's Piano Sonata or any of Malipiero's String Quartets. Although, were they needed, models also exist in much earlier Italian music – in Monteverdi's seventh and eighth books of madrigals (then newly edited by Malipiero) or, closer still in manner, the keyboard toccatas of Frescobaldi (a particular favourite with Castiglioni).

Castiglioni wrote for the theatre and the concert-hall – and his taste in literature embraced both Lewis Carroll and Emily Dickinson: the child-like fantasy of the former and hermetic qualities of the latter are opposite qualities that are equally absorbed by his music at all sorts of levels.

In common with many of his generation, Castiglioni sought contact with the music of Schoenberg and Webern, and found it in the study of 'dodecaphony' with Blacher in the early 1950s. He was also a virtuosic pianist, and evidence of this is not difficult to find in some of the works here.

'Cangianti' (Changes – 1959) comes from the first mature phase of Castiglioni's work (published by Ars Viva [Schott] and Suvini Zerboni), his music was being played with great success across Europe, and the exuberance and detail here are confident and exciting – the changes, or contrasts, between registers and dynamic-levels, are quite obvious and conceived very dramatically. Silences (timed in seconds) frequently interrupt the initially short groups of notes (mostly notated as demisemiquavers), and as the groups expand and multiply so do the levels of exaggeration, be they quietly murmuring or – much less often – frenetically exploding. Pianistic bravura and exploitation of timbre are more obvious throughout than any traces of serial dogma.

The 'Three Pieces' date from almost twenty years later than 'Cangianti'. American minimalism and the European 'new simplicity' were re-asserting (functional or superficial) tonality. Atonality, serialism or other types of chromatic composition were no longer the

dominant forces in contemporary music. In some quarters Castiglioni's star had also dimmed, no longer a 'hot property' he'd moved from Europe to America, and moved back again to teach at the Conservatorio in Milan - his work was now contracted to Ricordi. Maybe there is a story of disillusionment along the way, a loss of innocence, and also of a certain setting and even hardening of the expression. So are the opening gestures of 'Sweet' intentionally reminiscent of Messiaen's birdcalls? Or the opening of 'Child's Song without words' deliberately evocative of Webern's 'Child's (Piano) Piece'? Or are the 4th-plus-tritone 'triads' – so familiar from the second Viennese school, and semi-tonal 'clusters' – a modernist cliché ever since Cowell and Bartok, conceived as musical objects for 'critique' – almost as if the pieces were a sort of parodistic exorcism? Remember the parodies in 'Alice in Wonderland', the wealth of allusions, secret messages, detachment and irony. Sweetness and charm – a child's wordless song – the decorative, ornamental friezes in churches or palaces.

Five years later and, in 1983, 'How I spend the summer' is more explicitly referential, to diatonic modes of composition and the many sets of genre-miniatures for piano, usually for domestic consumption, that recall illustrated nursery-books, or postcards sent home from abroad, or from on holiday. But this is no regular pastiche of 'Album for the Young' or an updated 'Holiday Diary'. It seems more a series of stylistic 'jeux d'esprit'. As with some of Castiglioni's English 'experimental' contemporaries, Satie might be in the background. In the eighth piece the eminent pianist Antonio Ballista – reposeful in the arms of the law – spends sixteen of the twenty-one bars, each with a single semi-breve 5- to 8-note chord, always centred on D in the treble and mostly on C in the bass. The succeeding five bars recall, as elsewhere in this work, Schoenberg's Op.19 – with Viennese major thirds to the fore. The three repetitions of the birthday-song in the tenth piece only carry slight variation and elaboration. The melody's clear, if surreal, G-major is grotesquely disturbed by the bass-drone in the central episode and, more mildly, by the persistent C-sharp trill that accompanies the final one. More elaborate, vaguely atonal, arabesques appear only in the ninth piece, and virtuosic elements – of which the sixth piece is a none-too gentle reminder – are otherwise absent.

1. *Arrival at Tires* (a location in the Dolomites where Castiglioni lived)
2. *The wolf's deep* (a cavernous location in the Rosengarten dolomites)
3. *Let's go to the Bergamo refuge* (a common overnight destination for mountaineers in the Alpe di Tires)

4. *The valley of Ciamin* (in Alto Adige)
5. *The bear's hollow* (a refuge in the same valley).
6. *The little fountain of Ganna* (on a pathway in the same region)
7. *Ice on the Rosengarten*
8. *Antonio Ballista* [the first performer of this work] sleeps in the house of the carabinieri [policemen]
9. *The Castle of Presule's ghost*
10. *Song for my birthday* (Castiglioni was born on 17th July)

The next year saw the composition of six 'Religious Songs' with a title that could be translated as 'chilled sweetness'. The first two carry Latin titles – *Baseness* (or Humility) and *Earth*, and occasionally return to the atonal gestures of 'Cangianti' though here the music blends these with more conventional figurations, octaves, scales, arpeggios and root-position triads. The remaining four sections have German titles: *Fundamental Source*, *Song*, *Love-song*, *Chorale*. The 'source' may either be the horn-calls at the start of 'Das Rheingold' or the opening bars of Beethoven's twenty-sixth Piano Sonata in E-flat – *Les Adieux* – though the formula also appears in countless other nineteenth-century works. The 'Lied' is entirely monodic, while the 'Liebeslied' consists entirely of chords articulated at the whim of the performer. The short 'Chorale' consists of a single statement of the E-flat 'horn-call' labelled "Ah! The old affections return" with the additional statement that this should "reign in your heart".

In November of the same year Castiglioni wrote the 'Sonatina' in three movements, dedicating it to Danilo Lorenzini. The first movement is the most elaborate and varied in texture. Its synthesis of atonal and tonal gesture recalls 'Dulce Refrigerium', although repeated material has become much more insistent. The central 'Laendler' is monodic apart from a single dyad in the third bar and the sustained chord that occupies the final four bars, the material might be Mahlerian in contour but the repetitions are more like Antheil in 'futuristic' mood or possibly the stuck grooves of ancient gramophone-records. The 'Fughetta' is brief, rather strict, and closes with a slow 'Lebewohl' horn-motif identical to the one in 'Dulce Refrigerium'.

The short piece 'HE' dates from 1990. It is dominated by the dyad E-F (initially as a seventh, and eventually as a second), and seems to have returned to a fully chromatic pitch

reservoir. Perhaps the shades of an older dodecaphonic practice are also suggested by a coda in which the remaining notes of the scale, that aren't either E or F, are stated in order: B-flat, G, A, D, D-flat, C, F-sharp, B (all these in bare octaves!) and finally E-flat and A-flat as part of a final long-held chord that also contains a valedictory low F. The flamboyance of 'Cangianti' is also once more in evidence, although the rhythmic layout is more brittle and durationally restricted. That balance and poise, so much a part of the classical ideal always implicit somewhere in Castiglioni's music, has been achieved here – without sacrificing the brusque vitality or the playful intellectuality that are his special characteristics.

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I came to Castiglioni through the discovery of an old score of 'Cangianti'. Beginning to decipher it, I found myself intrigued and beguiled by the mixture of organic development and pianistic relish and I wanted to find out more immediately. Castiglioni's music has many unique qualities but I am particularly drawn to it's often childlike nature; it is incredibly beautiful yet, at times, starkly obsessive. 'HE' is incredibly energetic – marked 'to be played as loud and as fast as possible' – and it is this sense of energy I heard in Castiglioni's own playing. Whilst researching for this disc I discovered a recording of Castiglioni's own performance of 'Cangianti', given at Darmstadt in 1958; it was truly thrilling to sit in the listening room there and hear him exploding into the piano with alternate delicacy and wild abandon.

I would heartily recommend 'Come io passo l'estate' for children as a fantastic set of varied, highly imaginative pieces. My thanks go especially to Luigi Mammolini at the Italian Cultural Institute and Philip Mead at the London College of Music and Media for their continuing support.

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'Sarah Nicolls brings a rare and radiant commitment to her focus on the contemporary repertoire. Three works by Niccolo Castiglioni framed her recital, with extremes of percussiveness as convincing as the gossamer delicacy.'

*The Guardian*, July 2004, Cheltenham Festival

'Nicolls's performance seemed a model of clarity and accuracy. There was a certainty about every gesture, a cool precision even when the music was at its most explosive'

*The Guardian*, December 2003, Berio Piano Sonata premiere

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Specialising in new music, Sarah has become one of the leading performers of her generation, reflected in her 2004 Royal Philharmonic Society Young Artist Award nomination and consistent critical acclaim. Winner of the British Contemporary Piano Competition 2000, Sarah has performed at London's South Bank Centre every year since her debut in the Park Lane Group Series 2001. Often invited to appear as soloist by the London Sinfonietta, she has played in their ground-breaking concerts with Warp Records, leading to current electro-acoustic research.

Sarah gave the UK premiere of Luciano Berio's Piano Sonata in 2003, has given recitals at the Bath, Cheltenham, Aldeburgh and Edinburgh Festivals, and has performed in the Ravello and Reggello Festivals in Italy and the Klara Festival in Brussels. She has also appeared at the Wigmore Hall several times and in venues throughout Europe. Sarah has made several broadcasts on Radio 3 and Belgian National Radio. She read music at King's

College, London and the Royal Academy of Music, studying with Catherine Miller, Piers Lane, Paul Roberts and Andrew Ball and currently holds a lectureship in music at Brunel University.

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Scores available from:

[www.ricordi.co.uk](http://www.ricordi.co.uk) or for 'Cangianti' [www.esz.it](http://www.esz.it)