

EASY STUDIES FOR GUITAR

VOLUME 3

**ABSIL · BELLOMO · BIBERIAN · CAVALLONE
CHASSAIN · FRANCO · MARGOLA
PATACHICH · REBAY · STINGL**

Cristiano Porqueddu *guitar*

Easy Studies for Guitar – VOLUME 3

Absil · Bellomo · Biberian · Cavallone · Chassain

Franco · Margola · Patachich · Rebay · Stingl

Oscar Bellomo 1980		Oliver Chassain 1957	[*]	Franco Margola 1908-1992	[*]	Ferdinand Rebay 1880-1953	[*]
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Cristiano Porqueddu *guitar*

* world premiere recording

** unpublished

This double album is the third and last volume of the triple release **Easy Studies for Guitar**. The first came out in 2016 and the second in 2017, both of them distributed by the Dutch label Brilliant Classics.

The aim of the series has been to select a collection of original works for the guitar by 20th and 21st century composers that are intrinsically good, and at the same time also educational. Because they are recorded here for the first time, the studies included in this third album set all embody a remarkable degree of novelty. Moreover, the pieces by Biberian, Cavallone and Franco were hitherto unpublished.

Works by the Belgian organist and composer **Jean Absil (1893 – 1974)** tend to reveal the influence of the late-romantic school, especially that of Wagner and Strauss. During the years he spent in Paris Absil was also influenced by the music of Milhaud and Schoenberg, developing a style of his own based on polyphony and polymodal structures. An excellent pianist in his own right, he also wrote some significant works for the piano, including the three sonatas (respectively 1937, 1939 and 1965), the two *Grand Suites*, the *Passacaglia in Memoriam Alban Berg* and the *Piano Concerto No.3*, Op.162. On a smaller scale, the *Pièces Caractéristiques* of 1964 are clearly more tonal in tendency and lighter in mood, with plenty of characterization: the spirit of the *ouverture* in the initial *Prélude*, the strict counterpoint of the *Invention*, the cheerful wit of the *Humoresque* and the *Scherzo*, the expressive impact of the *Vals* or the *Chant du Soir*. A small treasure trove of interpretive gems.

© Cristiano Porqueddu

The six short Moments belonging to the *Silencios* collection date back to 2016, which was the year the work was published by *GuitART International Group*. Clearly they are contemplative pieces, six miniatures that are an evident homage to Federico Mompou's cycle *Muscia Callada*, described by the composer himself as "*music that has neither air nor light, like a weak heartbeat*". Far from being a portrayal in sound of superhuman Silences, however, the Moments embody a distinctly human compositional core: a synthesis between sound impressions and psychic experience

that generates figurative elements in constant fluctuation between restlessness and quietude. To borrow terms from the sphere of painting, the music consists of patches of colour and essential, dynamic lines specific to the six Moments. The intimacy of the *Silencios* is completely devoid of sentimentalism, and the sound sphere free of the obvious. The deep, nocturnal idiom of the guitar allows the listener to make his or her own way through the secret regions of the mind. This is where music keeps its voice down, *callada*, while "*solitude becomes music*".

© Oscar Bellomo

Note: For several years now Cristian Porqueddu has been involved in revising and analysing a collection of over a hundred unpublished works by Gilbert Biberian. The 10 Studies for Guitar (1944) are part of this collection.

Étude for Chords, No.17

Written as a homage to the great master, Fernando Sor, the piece seeks to reflect the consummate simplicity of this great master's art of the small form. In this genre, to this day, his Op.44 is unequalled with few exceptions, the texture is of four-note chords. Whilst executing even sounds, the uppermost line must, nevertheless, be prominent. The 4th finger is exercised quite significantly as it has to go from string 4 to string 1 accurately. The long durations need a lot of attention: be sure not to lose attention towards the end of the duration.

The dynamic is very low, from *p* to *ppp*. It is essential to maintain this range of dynamics and to create an emotional climate of tenderness and melodic sweetness.

Étude for Chords No.19

This is an ambitious work in variation form. The French traditional song, *Sur le Pont d'Avignon*, is the basis of four variations and a finale in the shape of a recapitulation with some significant variations in the original setting. The technique, so natural and indigenous to the guitar. The essential task, however, is to maintain the thumb

consistently at an appropriate distance from the fingers throughout. The expression is joyful yet aristocratic.

Étude for Chords No.32

I wrote this in fond memory of my dear friend and wonderful musician, Andy Johnson. His untimely death at the age of 42 was a tragedy. Therefore, the elegiac quality of the piece is explicit. The two tonalities play against each other to create dark and light, *chiaroscuro*. The enharmonic overlapping between the two keys make the slip from one to the other and then back again seamless. Until, of course, the end where we float into the light and the bright. However, not without the interruption that carries the maximum amount of emotion. The texture, though conventional, is full of subsidiary melodies but of a subordinate value. The false relations and chromatic voice-leading are elements that need to be highlighted, all according to their hierarchical value.

Étude for Slurs, No.16

The repeated trochaic rhythm of this piece marks it out proudly as a march. It must have that bombastic confidence but mixed with a sense of humour and a wink in the eye. I intended more a character from the Italian *Commedia dell'Arte* than a soldier in the *Cold Stream Guards*.

Again, the melodic texture is often contrasted with chords and sustained moments indicated by the pedal sign.

Étude for Slurs No.22

This is, essentially, an exercise expanded to occupy the grander space of a piece. It has no pretensions despite the dissonant sound world. The slow tempo, though expressive, is intended to safeguard the good health of the tendons of the arm. The dynamics, as in all cases, help shape the piece.

Étude for Arpeggios No.28

This is another piece based on the Baroque model. The sonority is different because of the key of F minor. The right hand formula is a delicate texture, like lacework, intended to be used as a backcloth to developing the control of index finger. The quiet and narrow dynamic range doesn't mean that the tone is allowed to be weak. Quite the contrary, full tone within the dynamic range is absolutely essential. The short episodes are separated by linear passages that are intended to let the light in the chinks for the sake of structural articulation.

Étude for the Right Hand No.32

The piece is in the form of a Greek Dance followed by a free-form song-like improvisatory passage. The Dance is in strict tempo, vigorous and virile. The Song is *espressivo* and flexible.

The technical brief of the piece is to exercise fingers 3 and 4. The mode I used is with an augmented fourth which enables me to focus on fingers 3 and 4. The middle eastern flavour of the work permeates it from beginning to the end.

Étude for the Right Hand No.24

The purpose of this rather extended piece is to exercise and develop fingers Ring finger and Middle finger diverse combinations. The widespread use of the interval of the perfect fourth imparts a distinctive flavour of the piece. The odd-number bar structure is also a feature of the form and the changes in metrical rhythm require strict tempo so as not to lose the contrast intended. In essence the piece is jubilant.

Étude for Arpeggios No.26

This is one of the earliest (1964) of my essays in Baroque style. This rippling texture over a slowly-moving harmonic progression is one that suits the guitar extremely well and, moreover, one that suits the idea of an étude, a study that relies on repetition. As rich and sonorous a texture as possible is what will bring this piece to life. The

metrical rhythm is what we call a limping rhythm which is easy to play as long as you maintain the 1/8th note as the pulse as long as you maintain it in the following manner: 2+2+1+2. The Right Hand fingering of it is specially designed to deliver a flowing ripple of pearls of sound, uninterrupted except for the ends of episodes and sections. The next episode but also with it the texture of low strings, high stopped notes against open strings. The last four bars changes the texture altogether with the last chord being one with the thick part in the lower part.

Étude for the Right Hand No.36

This piece marks a return to the Baroque model. With the pedal and scordatura in D, the dark mood is relieved only very briefly with the appearance of the F#. The mood is resumed thereafter. The obsessive melodic fragment, in the middle of the texture of each bar, is to be played in relief so that it is always audible. The structure is in two-bar phrases. The intensity is *f* from beginning to end. The motoric flow imparts an almost tragic feeling of inexorable forward motion.

© Gilbert Biberian

The **Sei Canzoni Ebraiche** originated as studies, both for teaching purposes and in relation to my own interest in polyphony and expression in modal and tonal music. The six pieces are like musical watercolours that do not seek to be innovative, but rather to bring to the fore lovely melodies derived from folk music, rich in history and religious feeling.

The approach to each melody is different, despite the overall stylistic similarity, so that the pieces can be played individually or as a sort of suite, their appeal lying in the simplicity of the polyphony and harmonic line. As works for the guitar, they deliberately focus on achieving melody and the best expressive solutions with the fretboard. The fingering Porqueddu uses exalts the polyphonic line and general expressiveness of each individual piece.

© Franco Cavallone

The idea for *Brèves de Pupitre* sprung from my work as a teacher. Each short piece features a distinct aspect of guitar technique and guitar writing: horizontality and verticality present themselves as important compositional constructs. I found these aspects worth investigating, as well as exploring the polyphonic nature of the guitar. This collection also came out of my students' basic technical needs or flaws - not to mention my very own. The idea behind these vignettes is conciseness, brevity, and musical immediacy, which allow guitar players to readily and fairly easily access their expressive sides. Yet, writing *simple* pieces turns out to be not a simple matter at all; rather, it is quite the challenge, whether one plays the guitar or not. I remain hopeful that I shall some day completely succeed in the endeavour.

In the spirit of my previous teaching collections – *Patchwork* and *Ad hoc* among others – I chose *Brèves de pupitre* over a more generic title like *Études*, not to downplay their teaching value, but rather to leave it open to other uses and to the idea of sharing. All the pieces from my various teaching collections can be played as a set. These *Brèves de pupitre* are to me what *Péchés de vieillesse* may have been to Rossini: a deliberately diverse collection, without pretence, gathered over the years as time and inspiration allowed, and with no particular agenda: an “open structure” of sorts.

© Olivier Chassain

Sette Aforismi is a collection of brief, lean sound snapshots arranged so that the first three return as the next three with subtle variations in melody and harmony, culminating in the fourth that consists of a single phrase and a short responsive conclusion, where the musical material grows increasingly rarefied. Reiterated use of idiomatic guitar features such as natural and artificial harmonics adds to the sense of fading sound as the music tends towards silence.

Even in the two more lively pieces the composer's aim revolves around the idea of lightness as a form of expression, as the indication “*Leggero*” clearly denotes. Although not deliberately devised as works for teaching purposes, the collection as a whole

focuses on types of expression extraneous to those usually found in guitar studies.

The emphasis on timbre in guitar literature is not without famous forerunners, since it is this very trait that pertains to the more mysterious, nocturnal voice of the instrument.

© *Alfredo Franco*

Franco Margola (1908-1992), was a Brescia-based composer and teacher who maintained strong links with tradition, developing a distinctive neoclassical style that featured remarkable elegance in the handling of harmony. The many works he wrote for the guitar are all perfectly tooled, ranging from short, sonata-like pieces to a concerto for guitar and strings. Here we have the first ever recording of his 8 *Pezzi Facili per Chitarra*, which all speak eloquently for his skill in handling shorter works. Although items such as these were written for teaching purposes, their form is unfailingly perfect, a trait typical of Margola's work that reveals his stature as a composer. They are pieces that reveal a common narrative thread: for instance, in the first four studies, in the *Arietta* and in the final *Raccontino*. By contrast, the central *Improvviso* and *Preludio* are dreamier in mood.

The first volume of the *Gyermekdalok gitárra* (Children's Songs for Guitar) by **Iván Patachich (1922-1993)** is part of the track list of the Easy Studies for Guitar Vol. 2, while those included in this CD come from the second volume. In both cases, the compositions derive from the world of traditional Hungarian children's songs. Although they were published in 1978, they have never before been recorded, and indeed rarely performed in public. Compared with the other works in the same track list, they are slightly more demanding from the technical point of view, especially as regards the composer's use of different techniques in the right hand. The Leitmotiv for the five compositions is an imaginative approach to the accompanied melody, though this changes from one to another, and even within the same piece.

To grasp fully the variety and range of vision, it is advisable to listen to all ten songs in their numerical order.

The Viennese composer, pianist and conductor **Ferdinand Friedrich Wilhelm Rebay (1880-1953)** began his musical education at an early age, studying choral music under Hans Fink, the organist at Stift Heiligenkreuz Abbey. He then went on to study composition and piano at the Konservatorium der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna. During this period he was awarded the *Brahms Premium*, and following his degree in 1920 he joined the faculty of the Staatsakademie für Musik und darstellende Kunst in Vienna, where he taught piano. His oeuvre comprises a wide range of music for the piano, including a concerto, as well as operas, a symphony and even a Mass. Rebay was encouraged to write for the guitar by Jacobus Ortner, who taught guitar at the Musikhochschule, and his niece, the guitarist Gerta Hammerschmied.

All in all Rebay wrote around six hundred pieces for the guitar: not only solo works, but also chamber compositions, studies, exercises for beginners and children's songs for choir and guitar accompaniment. His frame of reference was unmistakably romantic, featuring distinctive melody within baroque and classical forms (respectively the *suite*, and the sonata, theme and variations). These *Zehn kleine Lieder ohne Worte* (Ten little songs without words) are like a miniature of Rebay's entire musical universe. In highly expressive terms he evokes the world of childhood with its melodies and happy memories in a series of wonderfully varied and subtle musical gems. Of particular interest are Studies IV (*Leicht bewegt*) and IX (*Kleine Studie*), where the composer's expressive refinement comes fully to the fore.

In 2015 the heirs of **Anton Stingl (1908-2000)** granted me permission to publish for the first time the composer's *Sonata Op.17* for guitar with Edizioni Musicali Bèrben of Ancona. It is a major work that occupies an important place in the critical analysis of Stingl's oeuvre that I began working on in 2013.

Stingl was only just out of boyhood when he first began to focus on music for the guitar. He was self-taught, learning from "*Moderner Lehrgang des künstlerischen Gitarrespiels*" the famous manual by Heinrich Albert (1870-1950), in years in which it was not easy to pursue non-amateur guitar studies in Germany. Stingl then moved

to Vienna to study under Jacobus Ortner, who also inspired Rebay. Between 1930 and 1933 he attended further lessons in Freiburg held by Hans Hal, Julius Weismann, Erich Doflein and Friedrich Wilhelm Lothar. He was the first guitarist to work with Hans Werner Henze, and he was also involved in the world premiere of *Le Marteau Sans Maître* (suite for contralto voice and 6 instruments) by Pierre Boulez in 1955.

The 12 *Leichte Stücke Op.51* included in this recording belong to a collection of compositions that avoid stylistic progression and uniformity. Like Margola's *Easy Pieces*, they are works that speak eloquently for the composer's style. Each is paired with another featuring a similar rhythm, use of harmony or expression, thereby creating a musical development that is both informative and enjoyable.

© Cristiano Porqueddu

Translation by Kate Singleton



Cristiano Porqueddu is considered one of the world's foremost interpreters of 20th and 21st century guitar music. Critics have described him as "a reference point for the new generations of musicians". He

has won numerous awards at international guitar competitions, and his playing has garnered enthusiastic reviews in the specialized press.

Porqueddu's first teacher was his father. Later he specialized under **Angelo Gilardino** at the Perosi International Music Academy. Today his busy career includes concerts, recordings and composition.

In 2017 he made his debut at the Carnegie Hall in New York with a concert featuring 20th and 21st century music. He also holds courses and conferences in Europe and in the United States, devising innovative programs that often include world premieres. His most recent Carnegie Hall recital was described as "*a triumph*".

He has made **20 recordings**, consisting of over 50 albums released by Brilliant Classics. Numerous eminent composers, including Angelo Gilardino, Mark Delpriora and Franco Cavallone, have dedicated their compositions for solo guitar and orchestra to him.

Since 2014, he has acted as chief editor at Edizioni Bèrben in Ancona, Italy. He is also the author of revised editions of unpublished original music, much of it dedicated to him. His own music is published and performed worldwide.

He currently lives in Nuoro (Sardinia), where he also teaches. Since 1998, he has acted as artistic director of important events relating to classical music.

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I am also grateful to Chiara Asquini for her great help in translating certain indications regarding interpretation.



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