

MARGOLA

Music for Mandolin

AND OTHER CHAMBER MUSIC

Raffaele La Ragione *mandolin*
Gabriele Zanetti *guitar*
Daniele Richiedei *violin*
Giacomo Ferrari *piano*

Franco Margola 1908-1992

Music for Mandolin and other Chamber Music

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|---|------|---|------|
| 1. Grande Sonata
<i>for mandolin and guitar</i> | 5'54 | Tre pezzi for mandolin and piano | |
| 2. Piccola Suonata
<i>for violin and piano</i> | 5'28 | 10. I. Allegro | 0'48 |
| 3. Allegro for violin and guitar | 4'54 | 11. II. Adagio | 1'17 |
| 4. Moderato
<i>for mandolin and piano</i> | 4'24 | 12. III. Finale | 1'01 |
| 5. Fantasia for guitar and piano | 9'29 | 13. Improviso for guitar and piano | 2'51 |
| 6. Adagio for mandolin and piano | 0'55 | 14. Romanza senza parole
<i>for mandolin and piano</i> | 3'03 |
| Sonata for violin and guitar | | Daniele Richiedei b.1984 | |
| 7. I. Allegro | 2'40 | 15. Minimal Choro for mandolin,
<i>guitar, violin and piano</i> | 2'49 |
| 8. II. Adagio | 3'30 | (after Adagio dC 263 | |
| 9. III. Vivace | 1'01 | by Franco Margola) | |

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The **Franco Margola** archive comprises a great many unpublished works, many of which are unfinished, either because they were deliberately abandoned, or because they represent seminal ideas for future compositions. This explains why dating them can also be a problem.

The titles the composer chose for his works tend to be traditional. To establish a reasonable degree of chronological order, each page has been carefully studied and catalogued. The present recording focuses on unusual works, pieces that are unpublished or rarely performed, possibly conceived for a particular ensemble or instrument that caught the attention of a composer who loved to tackle a challenge. For instance, it is very difficult to write for guitar and piano because the sounds of the two instruments are highly incompatible, making alternation almost the only feasible approach. Despite this, various eminent composers have tried their hand at it, including Beethoven. Margola's own efforts were remarkably successful, although he only began writing for the guitar in 1960. His *Fantasia* of 1979 was published in 1980 by Zanibon, and has been performed on various occasions by the two musicians to whom he dedicated the work, Guido and Emilia Margaria. It has also been recorded by the Lapo Vannucci and Luca Torrigiani duo. Moreover, during the same period Margola wrote the *Improviso* and a number of short, untitled pieces also for guitar and piano. During those years he also wrote the somewhat neo-baroque *Fantasia seconda* and the *Improviso*.

Having studied with Romano Romanini, Margola was more than familiar with the violin, which he liked to pair with the guitar. In the unpublished *Allegro*, which shares the terse style of the famous *Sonatine* for piano and is arguably one of his later works, there is a folk element that prevails over the interweaving canons, along with some interesting echoes of jazz. Another unpublished work is the *Grande Sonata* for violin and guitar, which was almost certainly written in 1979, although there is a second manuscript score for the same combination of instruments that is very difficult to date.

Margola's fondness for the combination of violin and piano is also evident in another unpublished piece, the *Piccola Sonata* for violin and piano dating back to around 1929. Made up of three sections (Maestoso-Allegretto-Maestoso), it is elegiac and eloquent, concise despite the distinctly late-romantic elements. The more extensive second movement is like a charming Scherzo, somewhat reminiscent of Ravel, which culminates in the finale, where the mood becomes more serene.

Margola first turned to the mandolin in the 1980s, when he was teaching at the Conservatoire in Parma. At the time he wrote chamber music for particular ensembles, both for teaching purposes and at the request of musician friends. From the mandolin and piano repertoire we have chosen an *Adagio*, a *Moderato*, a *Romanza senza parole* and *Tre Pezzi*. Written in 1980, the *Adagio* is a very short piece, possibly conceived as a prelude to another work or a movement within a more extensive composition. The mandolin is handled as though it were a lute, and the harmonically interesting relationship with the piano recalls certain of Respighi's transcriptions. Of evident Romantic derivation, the *Romanza senza parole* features an airy theme that alternates between the piano and the mandolin in a lyrical mood that naturally brings Mendelssohn and the world of Lieder to mind.

The *Minimal Choro* by the eclectic violinist Daniele Richiedi consists of a brief melody first played by the mandolin and the guitar, and then gradually shared by the other instruments: a sort of "Homage to Margola".

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Franco Margola's roots as a composer can be traced back to the 19th century, and appreciation of this is essential for understanding his place and role in the history of music. Born in 1908 in Orzinuovi, near Brescia, where he died in 1992, Margola belongs to the sphere of Italian musical culture that had focused on the instrumental repertoire since the 1800s, largely within the confines of the Conservatoires and the various Concert Societies that sprang up in numerous cities. He studied the violin in Brescia at the Istituto Musicale Venturi, the school founded by the great violinist admired by Schumann, Antonio Bazzini, whose output was considered the only valid counterweight to Verdi's world of opera. From an early age Margola was thus steeped in the cultural atmosphere that stood for a lively but somewhat hidden alternative to the sway of opera during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His teacher was Romano Romanini (1864-1934), who had studied alongside Arturo Toscanini and who proved to be an outstanding exponent of 19th century instrumental music. On Bazzini's invitation he moved to Brescia to direct the Istituto Venturi, a charismatic role he maintained for around forty years. By that time Bazzini, who had directed the institution for the previous twenty-five years, was in his sixties, and had certainly instilled in the youthful Margola something of his diffidence for expressions of exasperated and decadent sentimentalism and his deep respect for the classical tradition that few musicians of the time were inclined to manifest.

Such were the conditions surrounding the composition of the **Piccola suonata per violino e pianoforte** dC 8. Despite its brevity, the work speaks for the first stage of Margola's musical training, when he was living in Brescia and studying at the Istituto Venturi. In actual fact the older man's apprehensive approach did not dampen Margola's sunny, outgoing character, or even influence him unduly as a musician. Still in his early twenties, Margola probably considered his teacher to be overly attached to forms of somewhat mannered late romanticism, in contrast with his own leaning towards the more succinct forms of classical derivation. Indeed, it may well be that

Margola's manifest lack of enthusiasm for the violin was in fact a reaction to his teacher's severity.

At all events, this unambitious *Piccola Suonata*, which was probably composed around 1929, already contains the main stylistic features that were to characterize the composer's later works: complete lack of virtuoso elements, concision, immediacy of expression shorn of all technical ostentation, great sense of formal balance.

Apart from this example of his early compositions, all the other works in this brief anthology of chamber music (much of which is recorded here for the first time) belong to Margola's later oeuvre. In the space of the intervening fifty years, a great deal of water had passed under the bridge: not only in terms of history and music, but also in the composer's personal life. Yet his idiom as a composer remained remarkably steadfast.

During the 1950s Margola paid some attention to the modern techniques of dodecaphony, which ultimately failed to convince him entirely. In fact he soon returned to the safer sphere of tonal music, which he handled with such freedom and ease that he was able to avoid all risks of rigid academism. Indeed, he was inclined to experiment with a wide range of diverse instrumental ensembles, in all likelihood more intrigued by the input of his numerous pupils than by any real interest in the specific timbre of the instruments. In particular the guitar represented a real discovery, one that was to condition much of his later output.

One of these innumerable compositions is the **Sonata for violin and guitar dC 242**, written around 1979 at the behest of the publisher Zanibon of Padua. With its classical structure in three movements (*Allegro-Adagio-Allegro*) it is clearly traditional in framework, shorn of would-be stylistic or compositional innovation. Yet the use of the guitar instead of the traditional piano makes the overall sound fabric much lighter, underlining the sense of concision that was already evident in the early *Piccola suonata* of 1929: a characteristic for which Margola has always been widely admired.

From this point of view, the **Fantasia** and the **Improvviso dC 255** that also date back to 1979-80 come across as brief but demanding examples of sound equilibrium

in which the frail notes of the guitar must compete with the powerful sound of the piano. Challenges of this sort were a spur for Margola's creativity, however, as listeners will appreciate. They are also highly demanding for the players, who find themselves involved in the true essence of chamber music: dialogue among the parts, sound balance among the instruments, the delight in working together rather than allowing one instrument to predominate over the other.

Maargola did not declare any educational intent, yet there can be no doubt about the efficacy of these compositions from the didactic point of view. In the case of the two compositions mentioned above, Margola was certainly inspired by his encounter and later his friendship with the guitarist Guido Margaria, who was also a great teacher. As a result, these works were not conceived for concert performance or to express some profound artistic meaning, but rather as well-crafted products intended for musicians, including his students, rather than virtuoso soloists. The goal was the sheer pleasure of making music together.

To return to the subject of sound combination and balance, the challenge for Margola was even more stimulating when the instrument involved was the mandolin with its quieter, more tinkling voice. It was probably this very factor that the composer found so galvanizing in his later years.

Between late 1979 and early 1980, the mandolinist Carlo Bonati commissioned Margola to write the **Three pieces for mandolin and piano dC 263**. The composition essentially also comprised the **Adagio dC 263a** that originally constituted the central section and that for some reason was ultimately removed and replaced. As with the work for violin and guitar mentioned above, here again the basic framework is the classical *Allegro-Adagio-Allegro*. Given the lesser size of the work, however, he felt that calling it a *Sonata* would have been excessive, as he pointed out in a letter to the publisher Zanibon: "The title you suggest is certainly seductive, but it's too impressive for a small work of this sort. What's more, it doesn't have the formal structure or the sense of a Sonata, so that the title *Tre Pezzi per Mandolino e pianoforte* would be preferable...".

The case of the **Grande Sonata per mandolin e chitarra dC 314** composed in December 1982 is different, since it is a much more extensive work, even though the adjective “*grande*” probably reveals a touch of irony that was typical of Margola. The attitude is also evident in the letter he wrote – this time in vain – to Zanibon concerning its publication: “I made peace with the mandolin (which I hated) when I discovered that even my colleague Beethoven wrote for the instrument, albeit without handling it in the Neapolitan fashion, in keeping with my own approach...”. Apart from the jocular reference to Beethoven as a “colleague”, Margola was in fact truly proud of this piece, and not without reason. “This *Gran Sonata* has one shortcoming”, he wrote to Zanibon, “it’s distinctly grand (17 pages); an imposing piece that develops fluently, without breaks...”.

With its lively rhythm the Sonata is immediately enticing, and the same can be said for the **Moderato per mandolin e pianoforte dC 731** which also “develops fluently, without breaks” and is likewise convincing. Like its sister piece, the **Romanza senza parole dC 732**, it is unpublished and undated, though it most probably followed on the heels of the *Gran Sonata per mandolin e chitarra*, which would date it around 1984-1985. Both are well-crafted compositions, but in particular the *Romanza senza parole* stands out for its slight aura of melancholy, a mood rarely found in Margola that adds poignancy to the dialogue between the two instruments.

By contrast, the **Allegro per violin e chitarra dC 748** is more light-hearted. Recorded here for the first time, it is also unpublished and undated, a further example of the natural creativity of a composer who avoided the ranks of the avant-garde, but provided generations of musicians with an attractive repertoire.

The fact that Margola did not see himself as part of the “progressive” music of his time probably earned him a certain degree of disapproval from critics and colleagues. Yet with hindsight this artistic stand was probably a good thing, as the last piece in this recording goes to prove: **Minimal Choro** is Daniele Richiedi’s enchanting arrangement for mandolin, guitar, violin and piano of the *Adagio dC*

263. At a distance of forty years, Margola’s music is still attractive and exciting for younger musicians, which proves that it has passed the test of time and has earned its place in history.

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Translation by Kate Singleton

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Raffaele La Ragione is a mandolinist whose career as a concert performer has taken him throughout Italy, Europe and Asia. He has played with I Solisti Veneti, Orchestra Mozart, Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana, Silete Venti!, Greek National Opera, Motus Mandolin Quartet and conductors such as Claudio Scimone, Claudio Abbado, Myung-Whun Chung, Arturo Tamayo. He is also a member of Renzo Arbore's Orchestra Italiana. He has made numerous recordings for radio and TV (Radio3, RSI, Rai1, Rai2, Rai5), as well as albums and DVDs for labels such as Brilliant, Ermitage, Mondadori, Warner Classics.

Gabriele Zanetti is a guitarist whose main focus is chamber music. He is particularly interested in the unpublished guitar repertoire, and has specialized in works of the 1900s. He has edited a number of hitherto unpublished works by Paganini, Rossini, Donizetti, Heller and Ponce. He is also a scholar and a sound engineer, alternating his musical activities with teaching history of music at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Brescia.

Daniele Richiedei is a versatile musician involved in classic chamber music, contemporary music, jazz and improvisation. He has worked with eminent Italian and international ensembles and soloists, including Sentieri Selvaggi, Marc Ribot, Peo Alfonsi, Baustelle, Konstantin Bogino, Michael Blake, Ryan Blotnick, Ensemble del Teatro Grande di Brescia, Sandro Gibellini, Mauro Ottolini, Sandro Laffranchini, Laura Marzadori, Andrea Rebaudengo and Myung Whung Chung.

Giacomo Ferrari is a pianist who obtained his Diploma under Daniele Lombardi at the Conservatoire in Milan, where he is currently piano accompanist in the classes devoted to different instruments. He has performed in numerous chamber ensembles and as a soloist in Italy and elsewhere, including Hungary, Slovakia, Montenegro, Greece and Poland. With mandolinist Raffaele La Ragione he recorded the album *Serenata Napolitana* for the Brilliant Classics label.

