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MERTZ

FANTASIAS FOR SOLO GUITAR

GIUSEPPE CHIARAMONTE *GUITAR*

Johann Kaspar Mertz (1806 - 1856)
Fantasias for Solo Guitar

Trois Morceaux Op.65		6. Pensée Fugitive	10'05
1. Fantaisie Hongroise	7'30	7. Harmonie du soir	10'03
2. Fantaisie Originale	8'48	8. Fantaisie über Motive aus der Oper: Don Juan [Mozart] Op.28	6'43
3. Le Gondolier	5'10		
4. Pianto dell'Amante	6'12		
5. La Rimembranza	8'29		

Giuseppe Chiaramonte *guitar*

Recording: 21 April & 29 September 2018, Cappella dell'Immacolata, Collegio Rotongi - Gorla Minore, Italy
 Sound Engineer: Alessandro Scandroglio
 Cover: Redgreen and Violet-Yellow Rhythms 1920, Paul Klee 1879–1940. Metropolitan Museum of Art,
 The Berggruen Klee Collection, 1984
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Mertz's Fantasias are the most tangible example of how he intended to adapt piano technical virtuosity to the guitar, an instrument with much fewer possibilities than the piano (other than its variety of tonal colours, a quality that would become more evident in Spanish guitars a few decades after Mertz death). The style in Mertz's Fantasias is truly outstanding, virtuoso, brilliant. They are extremely demanding technically: rapid chord changes in all positions; octaves progressing up to the high frets; successions of elaborate arpeggio patterns, often requiring very rapid right-hand thumb movement; trills on one and on two strings; various types of tremolo passages; complex embellishments with flurries of notes; una-corda passages with glissando and slurs. The full extension of the instrument is used, and the whole dynamic range between pianissimo and triple forte. Expression marks, like 'con fuoco', 'con bravura', 'appassionato', 'grandioso' and 'brillante' also emphasize the virtuoso character of the pieces, which are, at the same time, counterposed by expressions like 'dolcissimo', 'lugubre', 'elegante', 'tristamente', 'con dolore'. Each piece is perfectly in balance between the two most distinguishing aspects of Romantic art, which can be synthesized by the French terms "flamboyant" and "larmoyant".

Mertz's wife Josephine recounted that during one of their concert tours in 1855, a customs official suspected Mertz of selling music supplies, because he was traveling with two guitars and a substantial quantity of strings. Mertz explained to the official that he had devised a novel right hand technique which involved plucking the strings using the fingernails, able to achieve a superior tone but at the same time causing the strings to deteriorate more rapidly. Taken literally, this record provides evidence that Mertz preferred the use of nails, a topic that was debated among guitarists throughout the nineteenth century.

William Foden stated that "There is no question Mertz had a good and facile right hand, capable of executing arpeggios and alternating fingerings with great rapidity and precision, which is manifested in many of his celebrated arrangements and original compositions for the guitar." According to Makaroff, Mertz's playing was marked by power, energy, feeling, clarity and expression.

It would suffice to look at his music to affirm that he adopted a singular right hand technique: it is open to speculation as to what exactly it consisted of, but we can be quite sure that it involved finger-on-strings preparation, both upward (quite common today) and downward (still unknown to most guitarists). How to achieve a homogeneous combination of these two modes of preparation has been the focus of 15 years of experimentation and refinement by Italian guitarist Angelo Capistrano and his pupil Giuseppe Chiaramonte. The results in terms of full-bodied, powerful and extremely controlled sound, even during very fast passages, are remarkably interesting, and this monographic CD is also in some way a testimony and a milestone of this endeavour. The focus of this work is on the non-operatic (except for the last piece) Mertz Fantasias, most of them never published during Mertz's life by his own choice, since belonging to his most demanding works. Mertz himself explained to Makaroff the reason: "*First, on seeing these, the publishers would say it was too difficult, that I would have to rearrange them. That would spoil the composition. Second, as long as these compositions remain in my brief case, they remain new and are mine for my own concerts. Within six months after publication, they would become old. Further, they would become distorted and mutilated by those miserable guitarists who can only scratch the strings of the guitar*".

Fantaisie Hongroise, *Fantaisie Originale* and *Le Gondolier* were published as *Trois Morceaux Op.65* in 1857, one year after Mertz death. This work consists of three pieces in a key relationship (A major, E major, E minor): every fantasia contains some motifs derived from the others. Because of the related motifs all three pieces are loosely connected, albeit they are very different in nature. *Fantaisie Hongroise* is a kind of rhapsody, with many Hungarian themes, that is reminiscent of a rhapsody by Franz Liszt, with the proper reductions. In *Fantaisie Originale* we find a remarkable example of the two-finger style of tremolo. Mertz developed techniques that allowed him to create sostenuto effects to help sustain the melodic line. In addition to the melodic tremolo technique that was widely used by guitarists during and after the composer's time, Mertz created the impression of sustain with

rapid accompaniment figures, usually arpeggios or tremolo patterns in an inner voice. This allowed the composer to compensate for the rapid decay inherent in the guitar and arrange melodies originally intended for the voice with great ease and efficacy. Various examples of this can be found in *Pianto dell'Amante* and *Harmonie du Soir. Le Gondolier*, where the central theme is in the form of a barcarolle, was more likely inspired by Liszt's "La lugubre gondola" than by a joyful trip on the canals of Venice.

Pianto dell'Amante is renowned for the seductive theme that seems to be operatic in origin, or possibly a concert aria, or a song, or yet again it might even be an original theme: the dispute is still open.

What we called an adaptation of piano technical virtuosity to the guitar reaches its peak with the trilogy *La Rimembranza*, *Pensée Fugitive* and *Harmonie du Soir*. Thanks to these works, Mertz could easily be considered as "The Liszt of the guitar". An introduction ("Largo", then "Brillante") leads to a romance with pianistic accompaniment and an extended, virtuoso section with a sparkling finale, in *La Rimembranza*. *Pensée Fugitive* has a real rhapsodic structure with several well-developed sections, very different from each other. *Harmonie du Soir* (this title may well be borrowed from Liszt's Transcendental Étude No.11 "Harmonies du soir") is the only known work by Mertz which explores the extended higher frets of the Scherzer design guitar: it requires an instrument of at least 22 frets and three added bass strings. For this piece, the sixth string was lowered to D and only the notes over the 19th fret played one octave lower. In fact, the entire CD was recorded using a 6-string guitar, "La antiqua", made by the luthier Mario Grimaldi in 2016. It is a Torres-inspired instrument constructed with exceptionally old wood, and possessing a traditional, "old world" sound able to confer to the music of Mertz a wider variety of colours compared to the Viennese romantic guitar of his time. *Fantaisie Op.28* on Mozart's themes (from Don Giovanni) is the only Mertz operatic fantasia included in this CD: it is interesting to note that, among other themes, he also used notes from Mozart's "mandoline serenade" from aria "Deh, vieni alla finestra".

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Giuseppe Chiamonte stands out in the international classical guitar scene for his exceptionally warm and full bodied tone, a quality which along with the emotional intensity and expressive quality of his interpretations, has lead the organizers of his recent European concerts to regard him as the “Poet of the Guitar”.

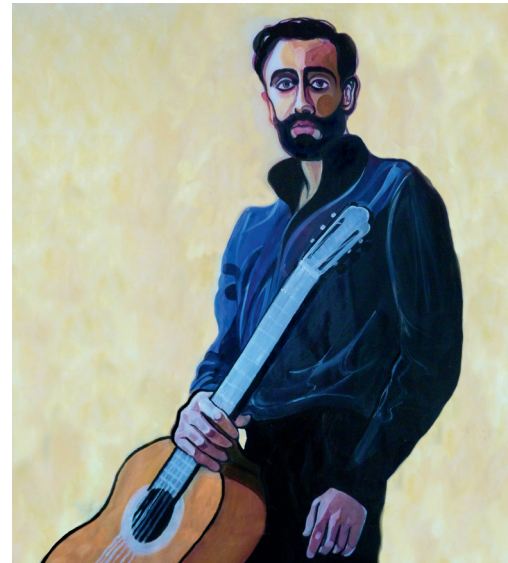
Since the age of 15 he has conducted an intense concert schedule which has brought him to perform in prestigious venues across Austria, Germany, Switzerland,

Spain, Italy, consistently achieving a remarkably favourable response both from the public and from the critics. He has also performed various concerts live on radio programmes dedicated to him.

Giuseppe Chiamonte has been the winner of National and International Guitar Competitions and a growing number of contemporary composers have dedicated solo guitar music to him, which he has premiered during his concerts.

He completed his classical guitar studies with Angelo Capistrano and further perfected his skills at the International Academy of Music in Milan, with Aldo Minella, ex-pupil of Andrés Segovia.

In May 2017, the Japanese Label “Da Vinci Classics” released his solo guitar album “Soul of Strings”, containing pieces from baroque period to contemporary music.



Painting by Vittoria Vimercati