

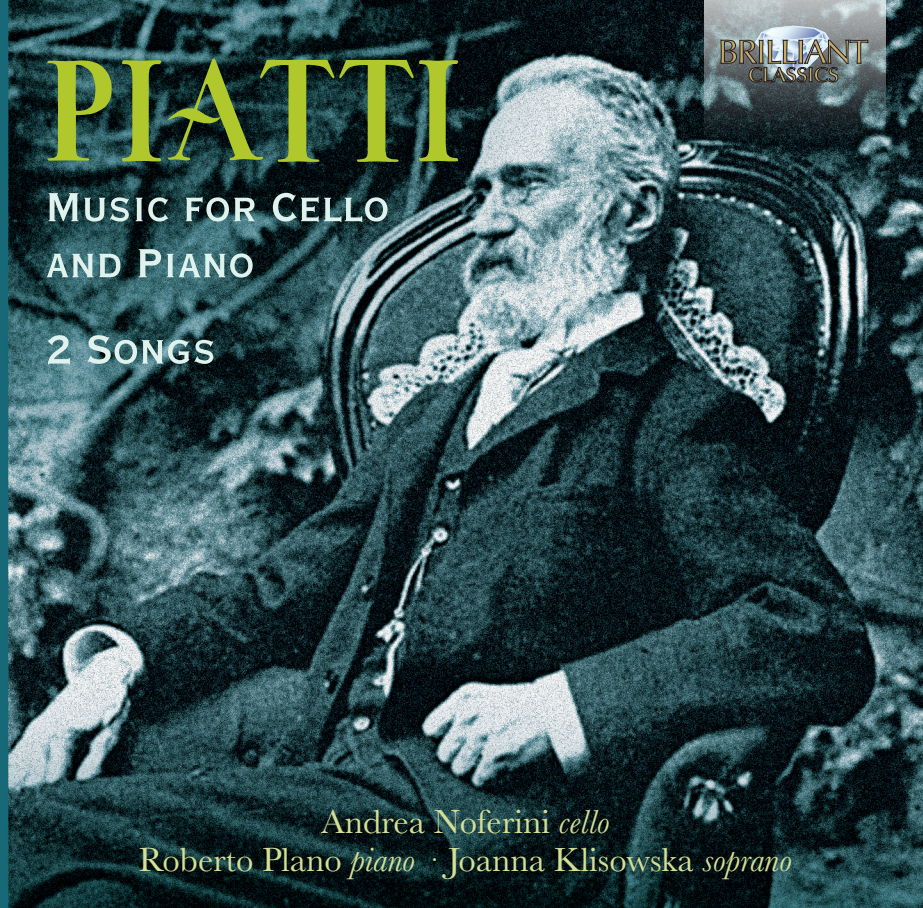
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PIATTI

MUSIC FOR CELLO
AND PIANO

2 SONGS



Andrea Noferini *cello*
Roberto Plano *piano* · Joanna Klisowska *soprano*

ALFREDO PIATTI 1822-1901
Music for Cello and Piano · 2 Songs

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Recording: 16-18 June 2016, BartokStudio, Bernareggio, Italy
Producer & Sound Engineer: Raffaele Cacciola, BartokStudio
Artistic Project & Artistic Director: Andrea Noferini
Editing: Gianluca Laponte & Andrea Noferini (Capriccio Op.22)
Mastering: BartokStudio

Instruments: Cello, "Otello Bignami" Bologna 1981; Piano, "Bösendorfer Gran Coda"

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Supposing you came across a concert program announcing Alfredo Piatti as the cellist, and Nicolò Paganini as the violinist: even first-time concert goers would probably know something about the latter, whose name is practically synonymous with the violin, whereas only cello specialists would be familiar with the name of Piatti.

The two musicians were very different in character, and this probably helps explain why one managed to become the personification of his chosen instrument, projecting a lasting image of his "diabolical" achievements, whereas the other was described as "...slightly built and very simple, a man who shuns all affectation and charlatanism..." (*Revue de Paris*, 1844).

Born in Bergamo in 1822, Carlo Alfredo Piatti was for the cello what Nicolò Paganini was for the violin: a musician who transcended the acme of culture and performance regarding his instrument. Having completed his studies under Vincenzo Merighi at the Conservatoire in Milan, he began his professional career in 1837, playing in the orchestras of the Teatro Sociale and the Teatro Riccardi in Bergamo, and later with the Teatro Regio in Turin and the Teatro Carcano in Milan.

His remarkable talent was immediately evident, to the extent that by 1843 he was already travelling throughout Europe on concert tours, accompanied by his father. During this period, which included almost a whole year in Russia, he met with great acclaim, although from the economic point of view it was an uphill struggle, despite the esteem he earned among personalities of the calibre of Felix Mendelssohn Bartoldy, François Servais, Jacobs Mayerbeer and Franz Lizst. Indeed, it was this latter who described him as "*a Paganini of the Cello*", presenting him with an Amati cello as a token of his admiration.

Piatti's peregrinations culminated in a visit to London, where he settled in 1846. In the mid-1800s, musical life in the British capital was full of energy and opportunity. In next to no time Piatti was appointed First Cello a Her Majesty's Theatre, and at Covent Garden. It was thanks to this professional position that in 1847 he took part in the premiere performance of Giuseppe Verdi's *I Masnadieri*. On learning that Piatti

was playing in the orchestra, the composer wrote a Prelude consisting of a cello solo with an orchestral accompaniment, which he dedicated to the great cellist.

During the many years he lived in London, Piatti also pursued a brilliant career as a soloist and a member of chamber ensembles, regularly taking part in the city's Popular Concerts. He thus came into contact with important musicians of the time, including Camillo Sivori, Giovanni Bottesini, Clara Schumann, Henri Vieuxtemps, Joseph Joachim, Antòn Rubinstein, Edvard Grieg, Hans von Bülow, Antonio Bazzini, Henryk Wieniawski and Pablo Sarasate. He ultimately left London in 1898, spending his last years in Mozzo, near his native Bergamo, where he died in 1901.

Piatti's repertoire comprised virtuoso pieces, solo works with piano or orchestral accompaniment, and a wide range of chamber music in view of the fact that he played with various ensembles, including the quartet in which Joachim played first violin. The music that most interested him went from Corelli to Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert, without neglecting the works of his own contemporaries, such as Mendelssohn, Schumann, Chopin, Brahms, Tchaikovsky and Saint-Saëns.

As a composer, on the other hand, Piatti studied under the guidance of his friend Bernhard Molique, later producing a considerable catalogue of different works. Written during the years of his far-flung concert tours, his arrangements of great opera themes took the form of *Fantasies*, *Souvenirs* and *Variations* and were definitely written for public performance. The compositions based on folk tunes came into the same category, whereas the shorter pieces were usually performed as an encore.

In his work Piatti managed to reconcile virtuoso skill with a highly lyrical approach to melody, his overall handling of composition revealing his debt to vocal technique. Clearly his aim was to enrich the somewhat limited 19th century cello repertoire with gems such as the *Capricci* Op.25, written in 1865. The intrinsic beauty of these pieces, which unquestionably also embody a degree of didactic intent, explains why they are now hailed as cornerstones of the cello repertoire, just as the Paganini *Capricci* are for the violin.

Piatti retired from public performance in 1897, having since 1866 played a Stradivari that had been given to him and that today bears his name. Curiously enough, during his long career he never used a spike, preferring to play his instrument in the baroque style, wedged between his legs. Piatti's friend and colleague Adrien-François Servais, whom Hector Berlioz described as "a Paganini of the cello", was one of the first to adopt the new endpin, which was rapidly gaining ground among cellists of the period.

Fantasia Sopra Alcuni Motivi della Gemma di Vergy

At the time many composers wrote virtuoso-style arrangements and variations on opera arias. In 1840 Piatti published a somewhat heterogeneous work based on themes from Gaetano Donizetti's opera *La gemma di Vergy*, which was premiered at La Scala in Milan in 1834.

The original version of this Fantasia envisaged the solo cello accompanied by an orchestra, but to extend its appeal the composer also arranged and published a version for cello and piano. This was common practice at the time, the piano score being a mere arrangement of the orchestral part, along the lines of the piano scores that are still used today to accompany singers performing opera arias.

The *Fantasia* begins with an orchestral introduction, the *Allegro*, which is followed by a *Solo, a piacere* statement on the part of the cello preceding the first Aria, an *Andante* in 12/8 time with embellishments in *gruppetti tagliati* featuring a descending flourish to the key note, a device that recurs throughout the composition. At the end of the Aria there is an opulent *Allegro* that embodies a brilliant technical expedient to introduce the new variation in 3/4 time, and *Allegro* in the shape of a waltz that is then reworked in agile double triplets, arpeggios and octaves. A further orchestral passage links this up with a *Moderato, capriccioso*, which in its turn heralds a new Aria. As with the *Capriccio della Niobe* Op.22, the *ben legato* subject of the new Aria is "self-accompanied", not only by the piano, but also by the cello itself,

with measured trills on the lowest string that echo the *tremoli* of the strings in the orchestra. The serried conclusion of the Aria features octaves that tend towards the cadenza (*Tempo a piacere, con molta espressione*) that is developed in harmonics in the second part, leading to a recapitulation of the waltz motif, this time in the halved values of 6/8 rather than 3/4 time, followed by a coda and the resolution in classic opera style, in which Piatti invests the cello part with an amazing display of *picchettati*, double thirds and octaves.

Air Baskyrs Op.8

This work was written during Piatti's year-long stay in St Petersburg, between 1844 and 1845, when he spent a great deal of time with his fellow countryman, the Bergamo-born tenor Gian Battista Rubini, with whom he also performed in many concerts.

The *Baskyrs* were an ethnic group of Turkish and Tartar origins, largely residing in the area between Belaja on the Volga and the southern reaches of the Ural mountains.

The story behind *Air Baskyrs* concerns a Baskyr man who often used to linger by the window of the house where Piatti was living, drawn by the musician's presence. After listening for a while, he was wont to take out a typical folk instrument, a sort of basic bagpipe, and play tunes of his own. These ethnic motifs inspired Piatti to write the *Air Baskyrs*, in which the cello could be accompanied by a string quintet or a piano, as in the original version.

The composition consists of an initial *Andante Lento*, which slightly resembles a sort of hymn, followed by an *Andante Allegretto* in dance form in which elements reminiscent of folk instruments come to the fore. To achieve this Piatti used bowing on two strings to create something akin to a bourdon effect on the lower string, which accompanies the mood and stance of the dance movement played on the upper string. Next comes a recapitulation of the initial part in an *Andante Lento*, followed by a return to the *Andante Allegretto* that leads to the finale with its display of pizzicato played by both hands, before concluding with the arpeggios of the coda.

L'Abbandono Op.1

Song for cello and piano, published in 1842.

This *Andante Melanconico* in B flat major features an extreme example of a trait typical of Piatti's handling of melody in writing for the cello: the use of octaves in the thematic passages, especially in the development and the recapitulation. In this case, the cello voices the double tessitura in the second part of the composition, as if it were a variation. Moreover, apart from the subject in octaves, Piatti has also added a constant trill to the lower note that greatly enhances the complex audacity of the entire passage.

Capriccio over a Theme from "Niobe" by Giovanni Pacini Op.22

Written in 1843, the Capriccio Op.22 derives from the Aria "I tuoi frequenti palpiti" from Giovanni Pacini's opera "Niobe". Apart from the 12 Capricci Op.25, it is Piatti's only other Capriccio for solo cello. "Niobe" had been premiered at the Teatro San Carlo in Naples in 1826, providing inspiration for various composers intent on writing Variations on opera arias: suffice it to mention Franz Liszt and F. A. Kummer.

The structure of this Capriccio largely mirrors that of opera, with its *Tempo a Capriccio* introduction leading to the start of the Aria, marked as *Moderato*. A first variation is followed by a cadenza and a further aria, *lento*, in the minor key, 'self-accompanied' by measured trills on the lower string to mirror those that the composer is likely to have envisaged for the strings in an orchestra. Following a brief *Allegro* transition, this leads to a last variation with a coda and a brilliant *più presto* finale. One of the characteristics of this lovely piece is the way Piatti introduces tapping with the bow in the last variation, with its succession of two lower notes followed by two higher notes, thereby creating a continuity of short, rapid bursts.

Pioggia d'Aprile Studio Capriccio

This charming miniature marked *Allegro ma non troppo* speaks for Piatti's skill in writing virtuoso pieces for the cello without compromising the overall sense of elegance and freshness perceived by the listener. The cello is entrusted with the thematic part, which is highly technical and brilliantly underpinned by the piano accompaniment.

Here again, Piatti establishes a noteworthy technical element to support the entire composition. Throughout the whole piece, the cello plays with constant chord changes, avoiding all repetition of two notes on the same string through to the final arpeggios. This feature is also to be found in the Capricci Op.25, but with an important difference: in *Pioggia d'Aprile*, the first string played in the alternation of the two is the higher one, whereas in the first Capriccio Op.25 the first string to be played is the lower one.

Notturmo Op.20

Published in 1865 in F major, this composition in 12/8 time echoes the style of 19th century bel canto. It consists of an *Andantino mosso* involving delicate phrasing and a sense of slight palpitation suggested by the use of repeated descending accentuation. The central part, marked as *Poco più Animato*, introduces a degree of ardour and agitation, before returning to the atmosphere of the *Andantino come prima*.

La Bergamasca Op.14

La Bergamasca is one of Piatti's most famous pieces, its name deriving from a dance typical of Bergamo, similar to a *Saltarello* or certain forms of *Tarantella*. Published in 1852, it was presented to London audiences by the composer himself in 1855. The evident accentuation of the second half of the bar accounts for the name of the piece, since it was a feature typical of the Bergamasca.

The work begins with an orchestral introduction, an *Allegro molto* followed

by a brief *Adagio* on the cello, accompanied by harmonics and short cadenza embellishments. Next comes an *Allegro molto* leading to the actual dance form, a *Meno Allegro* in which the traits mentioned above come clearly to the fore, here and there also suggesting the typical step of the *Tarantella*. In this respect it is also somewhat reminiscent of the *Tarantella for Cello and Piano Op.33* by David Popper.

O Swallow, Swallow

Following his move to London, where he lived until his return to Italy three years before his death, Piatti adopted England as his second homeland, to the extent that in time he probably had more friends in his elective country than he did in Italy. His correspondence also reveals how he gradually came to appreciate the more muted, cloudy colours of England, for all that they differed from the beauty of the blue skies and sunny air of Italy.

This song, which is marked as *Moderato*, is an expression of his love for his adoptive country, where his career as a musician and composer really got off the ground. It is a setting of a poem by Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892), one of the most famous British poets.

*O Swallow, Swallow, flying, flying South
Fly to her, and fall upon her gilded eaves,
And tell her, tell her, what I tell to thee.
O tell her, Swallow, thou that knowest each,
That bright and fierce and fickle is the South,
And dark and true and tender is the North
O Swallow, Swallow, if I could follow, and light
Upon her lattice, I would pipe and trill
And cheep and twitter twenty million loves.
O were I thou that she might take me in,*

*And lay me on her bosom, and her heart
 Would rock the snowy cradle till I died.
 Why lingereth she to clothe her heart with love,
 Delaying as the tender ash delays
 To clothe herself, when all the woods are green?
 O tell her, Swallow, that thy brood is flown:
 Say to her, I do but wanton in the South,
 But in the North long since my nest is made.
 O tell her, brief is life but love is long,
 And brief the sun of summer in the North,
 And brief the moon of beauty in the South.
 O Swallow, flying from the golden woods
 Fly to her, and pipe and woo her, and make her mine
 And tell her, tell her, that I follow thee.*

La Sera

Published in 1840, this delightful composition is based on a poem by Cavalier Maffei and is also known as “Notturmo”, with the title “I love the hour of the dying day” (“*Amo l’ora del giorno che muore*”). The Nocturne begins with an *Andante* that embodies a tribute to the genius of Gioacchino Rossini in the way the cello solo echoes the cello passage in Rossini’s William Tell Overture.

Like his arrangement of the Tennyson poem, this example of Piatti’s handling of the cello, piano and voice in trio form speaks eloquently for his skill in interweaving the timbres of voice and instrument in a rich tapestry of feeling, colour and sound. Granted, the cello was his first love, which is why it is entrusted with the brief solo cadenza that follows the *più mosso* before returning to the initial rhythm and hue of the recapitulation.

*(I love the hour of the dying day
 I love the hour of the dying day when the tired sun goes down
 And on the wave of this sea I watch the supreme ray languish
 In that hour a happier time than this returns to my mind
 In that sweet, gentle hour my thoughts turn to you, dear heart
 Dear heart my thoughts turn to you
 In that hour a happier time than this returns to my heart
 My eyes move and my thoughts remain fixed as I contemplate
 The band of light that comes from the quiet west
 The tranquil ripple of the sea
 And I wish the golden path could lead me to the infinite track
 Rather as my sorrowful life yearns for a calm haven
 For a calm haven
 Rather as my sorrowful life yearns for a calm haven
 For a calm haven)*

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Hailed by the international press as one of today's most eminent cellists, **Andrea Noferini** has won numerous awards, including 'CD of the Month' from Naxos, a gold medal from the Italian Ministry for Culture, 'Artist of the Year' from the City of Bologna. His recording of the Piatti Capriccios was acclaimed as 'setting new standards of technical perfection on the cello'. At Christmas 2001, his performance of Bach's G major Suite was broadcast from the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.

Born into an artistic family – his mother studied piano with Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli and his father was a composer and the director of the Giovanni Battista Martini Conservatoire in Bologna – Noferini's musical training began under the guidance of the great violinist Arthur Grumiaux. He then took a degree at the Giuseppe Verdi Conservatoire in Milan, becoming a pupil of Antonio Janigro and undertaking further studies with André Navarra, Paul Tortelier and Yo-Yo Ma. He has also taught and given master classes worldwide. In 1991 he became principal cellist of the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma. He plays a Tomaso Balestrieri cello of 1759.



Italian pianist **Roberto Plano** performs regularly throughout North America and Europe – notably at the Lincoln Center, Sala Verdi, Salle Cortot, Wigmore Hall and the Herkulesaal. He has appeared with orchestras all over the world, under the baton of renowned conductors such as Sir Neville Marriner, James Conlon and Pinchas Zuckerman. A recitalist at the Chopin Festival, the Portland Piano Festival, the Encuentro de Música y Academia de Santander and many others, he has earned

a reputation for his fine playing and sensitive ensemble work. Plano performs with chamber music groups including the Takács, Fine Arts, St Petersburg, Vogel and Henschel string quartets.

Plano was winner of the 2001 Cleveland International Piano Competition, a finalist at the 12th Van Cliburn Competition, and a prize winner at the Honens, Dublin, Sendai, Geza Anda and Valencia competitions. His engaging personality has made him a favourite guest on radio programmes such as NPR's 'Performance Today', and on TV shows for PBS and Japan's NHK. He has recorded CDs for Decca, Sipario, Azica and Arktos, and has made first recordings of music by Andrea Luchesi for the Concerto label.

The New York Times music critic Anthony Tommasini wrote of Plano: 'This Italian pianist showed artistic maturity beyond his years... there was a wonderful clarity and control of inner voices in his performances...'. Plano has also been described by *The Chronicle* as the 'Pavarotti of the Piano' on account of his lyricism, and by the Chicago radio commentator Paul Harvey as the heir of Rubinstein and Horowitz.

Plano studied at the Verdi Conservatoire in Milan, the École Normale 'Cortot' in Paris and the Lake Como Academy. He is Founder and Director of the Music Association 'Alfred Cortot'. In September 2016 he joined the Faculty of Boston University.



Joanna Klisowska - Soprano - was born in Wroclaw, Poland, where she began her musical education – first as a violinist, and then as a singer at the Academy of Music in Professor B. E. Werner’s class. She then attended a course in baroque singing under the artistic direction of C. Ansermet (Milan) as well as graduating with honours from a two-year post-graduate studies program at the faculty of early music at the Musikhochschule Trossingen under the direction of Ch. Hilz and M.K. Kiehr. She has also worked under the direction of famous Polish

singer Jolanta Zmurko and attended numerous courses devoted to the performance of baroque music led by specialists such as G. Banditelli, P. Kooij, B. Schlick, J.Christensen, L. Brunmayr-Tutz and Kurt Widme.

Apart from her main focus in performing music of the baroque and classical periods, Klisowska is also interested in French music of the late 19th century, lied and contemporary music. Her intense concert schedule has led her to work with C. Astronio, G. Capuano, R. King, B. Kuijken, L. Ghielmi, V.Luks P. Nemeth, P.Neumann, M. Schuldt-Jensen, M. Toporowski, Ch.Toet and R. Vettori, as well as with such groups such as Accademia dell’Arcadia, Artsemble, Bozen Baroque

Ensemble, Il Canto di Orfeo, Collegium 1704, Divina Armonia, Immortal Bach Ensemble, Stuttgarter Vocal Ensemble, Mitteleuropea Orchestra Barocca, La Verdi Barocca.

Klisowska has performed at the Bologna Festival, Luzern Festival, Utrecht Early Music Festival, Festival Ambronay, Rheingau Musik Festival, Wratislavia Cantans Settimane Barocche , Musica e Poesia a S. Maurizio, Festival Hendlowski [Handel Festival], Festival Internazionale di Danza e di Musica Antica, Festival Brezice, Festival di Musica Barocca di Rovino, Festival Mozart, Maj z Muzyka Dawna [May with Early Music], Miedzynarodowy Festiwal Muzyki Organowej i Kameralnej [International Festival of Organ and Chamber Music], Musica Elettronica Nuova among others.

Joanna Klisowska gives concerts throughout Europe, as well as holding master classes. For two years she was a member of the jury of Concorso Internazionale di Musica Antica, which takes place in Pienza (Italy). At present, together with G. Capuano and Il Canto di Orfeo group, she is involved in recording all the oratorios of Carissimi and Rossi.

Her recordings include the recently discovered Oratorium Musicum “Der Mensch ein Gottesmörder” by L. Mozart, with the Bozen Baroque Orchestra conducted by Claudio Astronio for Amadeus (Italy) as well as motets by F. A. Bonporti recorded for the Austrian ORF (Alte Musik), Responsoria by J. D. Zelenka with Collegium 1704 and Vaclav Luks (Akcent 2012), a CD featuring sacred music by Henry Purcell for soprano and bass with the participation of P. Kooij for Stradivarius (Italy 2012). Moreover, she has recently recorded a new CD of vocal music by M. Castelnuovo-Tedesco with Giulio Tampalini for Brilliant Classics, to be released in 2017.