

Piano music by

CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO

(1895-1968)

Mark Bebbington *piano***Le danze del Re David** (1925) (16:12)

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|------|
| 1 | I Vivo e tumultuoso | 1:47 |
| 2 | II Ieratico | 2:13 |
| 3 | III Rapido e selvaggio | 1:24 |
| 4 | IV Lento ed estatico | 3:34 |
| 5 | V Rude e ben ritmato | 1:18 |
| 6 | VI Malinconico e supplichevole | 3:18 |
| 7 | VII Allegro guerriero | 2:37 |

8 Questo fu il carro della morte (1913) 6:02**Alt Wien** (1923) (16:26)

- | | | |
|----|---------------------|------|
| 9 | I Alt Wien (Walzer) | 4:06 |
| 10 | II Nachtmusik | 6:07 |
| 11 | III Memento mori | 6:13 |

12 I Naviganti (1919) 7:41**Piedigrotta** (1924) (20:37)

- | | | |
|----|--------------------------------------|------|
| 13 | I Tarantella scura | 2:31 |
| 14 | II Notte 'e luna | 3:34 |
| 15 | III Calasciunate | 3:21 |
| 16 | IV Voce luntana (Fenesta che lucive) | 6:42 |
| 17 | V Lariulà! | 4:19 |

Total duration: 66:56

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Mario

CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO



Le Danze del Re David

Questo fu il carro della morte

Alt Wien

I Naviganti

Piedigrotta

Mark Bebbington *piano*

MARIO CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO

PIANO MUSIC

Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco (b.Florence 1895-d.Beverly Hills 1968) probably lives on today more in the achievements of his students at the Los Angeles Conservatory of Music than in the performance of his own compositions.

As a sought-after teacher of film music, his pupils included Henry Mancini, Andre Previn, Nelson Riddle and John Williams. His own writing for the medium amounted to an involvement with over 250 projects for many of the major studios, but he was seldom given screen credit in his own right, and indeed described himself as a 'ghost writer'.

These Hollywood activities came about as the result of enforced emigration from his native Italy during the 1930s. Like other established Jewish composers such as Schoenberg and Korngold, he was forced to flee Europe to escape the rising tide of anti-Semitism during the

rise of the Nazi and Italian Fascist parties. He had never been less than proud of his Jewishness, and indeed espoused the cause of oppressed Italian Jewry; much of his music proclaims this heritage.

Though chiefly remembered in the concert-hall mainly for his copious guitar music (not least the Concerto in D of 1939), Castelnuovo-Tedesco also produced amongst his huge output much music inspired by Shakespeare, and a corpus of music for piano solo which spans his entire career, from the age of 10 onwards, and one which deserves to be much better known.

This piano music presents formidable challenges for the pianist, often lying uncomfortably under the hands (Castelnuovo-Tedesco himself was idiosyncratic as a pianist, though recordings do exist of him playing his own music) and free-flowing rhapsodic forms take precedence over

a more rigorous sense of structure. In compensation, however, there is often a wonderful orchestral sense of colouring, aided by an almost Satie-esque detail in expressive markings. Dynamics are conceived in orchestral terms, making difficulties for their realisation on the piano, but clearly indicating the sounds in the composer's mind.

The rewarding if neglected repertoire offered on this disc breathes the warmth of the Mediterranean, whether tasted from the sun-kissed shores of the composer's Italian homeland or the more exotic realms of Israel's King David. It also reveals the breadth of Castelnuovo-Tedesco's impressive aural memory and his welcoming of positive influences: Granados and Albeniz in the Neapolitan *Piedigrotta*, Rachmaninov's *From the Isle of the Dead* in the sombre *I Naviganti*, Debussy and Richard Strauss elsewhere. It also reveals the composer's fondness for major-triad endings in minor-key works.

Written in 1925, *The Dances of King David* bear the subtitle "Hebrew

rhapsody on traditional themes", and are headed by a quotation from Psalm 37, verse 25: "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken." A sharply-defined linking motif is heard at the very beginning, marked "shrill, like a shofar" (the ancient Biblical trumpet also referred to in Elgar's *The Apostles*), moving immediately into the first of these seven movements, *violento ed impetuoso*.

After this proud, "savage" opening, the shofar music returns, introducing a "hieratic" movement, each hand notated in differing keys, where bell-like textures emerge from Lisztian arpeggiac figurations. The third dance is a mini *Rite of Spring*, "rapid and savage, brusque and strident", where an eloquent melody appears over pulsating accompanimental figures. Soon the shofar introduces the fourth dance, "lento ed estatico, very sweetly and dreamily", announcing a poised melody sounding in three treble octaves, developing into a sinuous, highly charged expression of ecstasy – "flexible, light and rustling" is the

indication over *tremolando* left-hand chords built over a pedal-point.

Following this poetic heart of the sequence, the fifth Dance of King David, “rough and very rhythmic”, grows from a martial two-part quasi-canonic texture into a full-blown chordal statement, moving directly (for once without the shofar link) into the swaying sixth dance, “melancholy and supplicatory”. Eventually a mere hint of the shofar leads into the finale, “fast and warlike”, approaching with muffled tread from a distance, sounding “like drums, horns, trombones” as it eventually reaches its triumphant and affirmative conclusion.

Written in 1913 and published as Castelnuovo-Tedesco’s Op. 2, ***Questo ful il carro della morte*** (“This was death’s chariot”) takes for its title lines from Giorgio Vasari’s *Vita di Pier di Cosimo*. Its “grave, insistent” opening puts immense demands upon the pianist in its injunction to “begin extraordinarily quietly” as the macabre dotted rhythm sets this powerful vision in train.

Some of the composer’s favourite fanfaring figurations soon appear, along with more of his three-octave rhetorical outbursts and quasi-orchestral *tremolando* textures as this chariot of death moves powerfully towards its terrifying destination.

Dedicated to the wealthy patroness la Princesse de Polignac, the Viennese rhapsody ***Alt Wien*** (“Old Vienna”), written in 1923, begins with a waltz which has obvious reminiscences of Ravel. Castelnuovo-Tedesco displays a penchant here for adding exclamation-marks to his instructions: “con sentiment esagerato!”, “con bravura!”, and instructs his pianist to mark every beat with a change of pedal.

For all this emphasis, however, the movement is a tender, affectionate portrait of a lost world of insouciant elegance, whirling to a brilliant conclusion with a huge *glissando* in the right hand; *La Valse* is not very far away. A sensuous, barcarolle-like *Nachtmusik* follows, a gentle song harmonised in thirds answered by a gentle dance-

tune in the fragrant distance, before this heady nocturne gives way to an extraordinary finale.

In this *Memento mori* (*Fox-trot tragico*) we hear a ragtime-style lament reminding us of the presence of decay and death, with accompanying figuration evoking a hellish vision of a skeletal banjo-player. This is very much music of its period, reflecting the concerns of so many post-Great War writers and composers. Sinister and eerie, it signals the collapse of the old world-order – with perhaps a hint of the horrors just over the horizon.

I Naviganti sets in nautical terms the same kind of ideas as those expressed in *Questo ful il carro della morte*. In the intervening six years between their respective compositions Castelnuovo-Tedesco here paints a calmer, more resigned vision of sailors escorting their cargo to the isle of the dead.

Altogether different in mood is ***Piedigrotta 1924***, a “Neapolitan Rhapsody” in five movements full of exuberance

and emotion, depicting the life of a district in Naples where religious feast-days are celebrated with sentimental panache. Its opening, *Tarantella scura*, is described by Mark Bebbington as “the most difficult two minutes in the whole of the recital”; *Notte e Luna*, the gentle, quasi-oriental intermezzo which follows, is surely destined to become a favourite listeners’ lollipop.

Calasciunate depicts the sound of an ancient, guitar-like folk-instrument, making way eventually for *Voce luntane* (“voice in the distance”), a setting of the popular, typically melancholy Neapolitan song, “*Fenesta che lucive*” (“Window which was bright”), ending, in the composer’s words, “like a falling star”.

A more extrovert local song follows in *Lariula!*, almost like a marching-band gradually approaching, to bring this delightful cycle to an extrovert, clamorous ending.

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A Pianist's Perspective

At the centre of Castelnuovo-Tedesco's musical style lies an intractable paradox; for in his Art, as within his life, he sought to reconcile the duality of a reverential adherence to his Jewish ancestral roots with a sensual and instinctive response to musical form, dramatic gesture and textural colour.

If *Le Danze del Re David* identifies most strongly with the former (reflected in punishing angular keyboard leaps and plaintive, quasi cor anglais lines), then *Piedigrotta* is its glowing counterpart, where moments of exquisite keyboard colour can create a ravishing portrait of a Neapolitan summer night (*Notte e tuna*).

For the rest, *Questo ful il carro della morte* evokes a Lisztian *la lugubre Gondola* (for the performer the ritualistic procession

is enhanced by fine engravings of skeletons, coffins and sickles in the Forlivesi score), whilst *I Naviganti* seems to emerge from the impressionistic mists of Debussy's *Voiles*.

Despite the *gemütlich* assurance of its title, *Alt Wien* gradually disturbs perceptions of both pianist and listener, as it moves from Viennese Waltz parody through to a *Fox-Trot tragico*, in which hints of the Second Viennese School mingle with a late Mahlerian chromaticism to invoke a movement of disturbing intent.

My discovery of this music is thanks to the encouragement of a cherished mentor, Aldo Ciccolini, whose passion for keyboard colour and exotic musical discoveries has so influenced generations of his grateful protégés.

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Mark Bebbington

Mark Bebbington is fast gaining a reputation as one of today's most strikingly individual British pianists. His discs of British music for SOMM have met with unanimous critical acclaim and notably, his recent cycles of Frank Bridge, John Ireland and Arthur Bliss have attracted seven consecutive sets of 5***** in *BBC Music Magazine*.

Over recent seasons Mark has toured extensively throughout Central and Northern Europe, the Far East and North America and has performed at major UK venues with the London Philharmonic, Philharmonia, Royal Philharmonic and London Mozart Players. As a recitalist, he makes regular appearances at major UK and International Festivals. Recently, Mark made a highly successful Carnegie Hall debut with Leon Botstein and the American Symphony Orchestra in the US premiere of Richard Strauss's *Parergon* and he returns to New York for his recital debut at Alice Tully Hall.



Dates during 2017/18 include London performances with the Royal Philharmonic and London Philharmonic Orchestras, with the Flanders, Buffalo and San Antonio Symphony Orchestras in the US and tours with the Czech National Orchestra and Israel Camerata.

'Truly a remarkable pianist...!' *The Times*

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