

NAXOS

BOTTESINI

**Concertino in
C minor**

**Duo Concertante
on Themes from
Bellini's I Puritani**

**Thomas Martin,
Double Bass**

Moray Welsh, Cello

**London Symphony
Orchestra**

Franco Petracchi

Matthew Gibson



Giovanni Bottesini (1821–1889)

“He was one of the artistic geniuses of Verdi’s century, the most imaginative of the virtuosi. He succeeded in drawing something spiritual from the intricate mechanism of his instrument, and at the peak of his career this great artist gave lively interpretations of Paganini on the double bass. He was born in an era in which the masters of the earth were not engineers, but magnificent lords raised and enlightened by an intellectual hierarchy, and the favour of that generous and romantic age rested graciously upon him. Until the last he broke the bread of glory.” Thus begins the most famous piece written on Giovanni Bottesini: a chapter of *Paese del melodramma* (The Land of Melodrama) by Bruno Barilli. His fame spread around the world and his life, up to the few months preceding his death, was one long voyage. Given the time involved in travelling by contemporary means of transport, there is something fantastic about his appearances in the most distant of theatres. He travelled throughout Europe from Portugal to Russia and in the Americas, almost a month’s voyage away, and the success he met with is still talked of today.

Despite the ponderousness of the instrument, Bottesini made it do the unexpected. “Under his bow”, wrote Depanis, “the double bass groaned, sighed, cooed, sang, quivered, roared – an orchestra in itself with irresistible force and the sweetest expression.” The last word belongs to Barilli, with his evocative description of the scenes at his concerts: “Indescribable. The aristocratic court audience was ecstatic. Applause and calls for encores exploded down the disorderly rows at every bar. The magnificent ladies, finely clad, in the theatre boxes of the aristocracy were caught up in the applause without warning, trying to retain their modesty, laughing behind their fans. Supported by his great wooden sound-box, Bottesini leant over his instrument like a conquering hero.”

The virtuoso was first given the nickname ‘the Paganini of the double bass’ in Parma on 12th December 1843 following a landmark concert before the Duchess Maria Luigia. Many anecdotes caricatured his success and it seems that Bottesini was the inspiration for Jacques Offenbach’s operetta *Oyayate ou La reine des îles*.

Bottesini was a “generous and intelligent character in a lanky body, stupefyingly absent-minded” and too good-hearted. He earned incredible sums only to die penniless and have his funeral paid for by Parma town council. His mistake was to ignore Rossini’s advice, who, writing to tell him that he had recommended him to the court of St Petersburg, finished his letter “Make yourself known. Earn as many roubles as you can, save them up for your old age!” How did he lose everything? The answer lies in one of Bottesini’s letters. He was worried about what he had left behind in Egypt: his women, the Arabs who looked after the house, his pets. For in Cairo Bottesini had collected a veritable seraglio in his villa on the banks of the Nile. Gaming took care of the rest.

Apart from his skill on the double bass, Bottesini was a brilliant all-round musician. He was one of the first Italians, if not the first, to unite the figures of the concert musician and orchestral conductor in Havana in 1847. As a conductor he travelled to all the corners of the globe, winning respect for his precision, accuracy, his faithful readings of composers’ intentions – although sometimes accused of a certain stiff formality of interpretation. He was one of the leading Italian conductors, highly innovative, conducting a large number of symphonies and working with soloists on various instruments.

Bottesini’s approach to chamber music was equally innovative. He was one of the founders of the first Italian Quartet Society in Florence in 1861 and among those founding a similar society in Naples on 2nd September 1862, wanting this kind of music – loathed by Verdi – to have its hallowed temple. A few years previously in London, on a legendary evening in August 1856, Bazzini, Arditi, Piatti and Bottesini had performed five of Donizetti’s unpublished quartets, written at the age of nineteen.

In addition to performing, Bottesini composed quintets and quartets for string instruments. In 1862 he won the Basevi competition with his *Quartet in D*, inaugurating the second year of the Florence Quartet Society with the performance. His other chamber compositions (of which orchestral versions also exist) were masterpieces of

exhilarating pyrotechnic virtuosity. Pages could be dedicated to his drawing-room airs (more than seventy are known to exist), his symphonies, his sacred music (his Requiem), his educational compositions (his Method), but there is not space enough here.

Bottesini's lyric operas must not be overlooked. Although they did not meet with great success at a time when Italian opera houses were obsessed with Verdi, certain passages deserve recognition as being jewels of expressive, appropriate melody. Among these operas *Ero e Leandro* and *Ali Babà* merit special mention. In the

former the *Sacred Dance*, the dance of colours, anticipated heated discussions on the relationship between music and colour by some years. For its part *Ali Babà* has seen hundreds of rather unusual performances this century: in 1914 Poldrecca founded the Teatro dei Piccoli in Rome, and toured the world with operas directed, sung and played by top professionals, with stage sets and costumes by the greatest Italian artists, but performed by the 'Piccoli' – and Giovanni Bottesini's *Ali Babà* was the puppets' greatest success.

Gaspare Nello Vetro

Prelude to Ero e Leandro
Concertino in C minor
Sinfonia to Il diavolo della notte
Passioni amorse
Élégie in D
Overture to Ali Babà
Duo Concertante on Themes from Bellini's 'I Puritani'

Prelude to Ero e Leandro is the overture to what is considered Bottesini's greatest operatic masterpiece. Verdi conceded in a letter that it seemed to be the success of the season in 1879, the year of its première at the Teatro Regio in Turin. At the first performance the composer was called to the stage 23 times and the *Preludio* was encored. There were 28 repeat performances and at some of these Bottesini serenaded the audience during the interval with his double bass. The librettist was Boito, who later provided the libretti for Ponchielli's *La Gioconda* and three great Verdi operas, *Simon Boccanegra*, *Otello* and *Falstaff*.

Bottesini's *Concertino in C minor* predates the much more grandiose and heavily scored *Gran Concerto in F sharp minor*. In this original version it is scored for double bass and strings. The soloist is obliged to tune his instrument a minor third above the orchestral tuning of the double bass. This is perhaps the most popular of Bottesini's compositions for the instrument among bassists today. In common with most of Bottesini's music he provides very sympathetic and interesting accompaniment for his own solo part. Virtuosity serves musical ends throughout and the *Concertino* is considered by many to

be his finest composition for double bass. The three movements are marked *Moderato*, *Andante* and *Allegro*.

Bottesini spent most of his 37th year in Milan, where *Il diavolo della notte* was given its première at the Santa Radagonda Theatre on 18th December 1858. Preceded by a *Sinfonia*, it is a classic comic opera in the style of Rossini, set in the court of Louis XIV. The opera was well received and (as with *Ero e Leandro* and *Ali Babà*) was published by Ricordi, to whom it is dedicated.

Passioni amorse for Two Double Basses, an early work, is one of a number of compositions for this combination of two double basses which were written for Bottesini to play with his friend from conservatory days, Arpesani. It was Arpesani, in fact, who told Bottesini where to find the Testore bass which became his lifelong companion – in the broom closet of a Milan marionette theatre. In these three pieces (marked *Allegro deciso*, *Andante* and *Allegretto*) one feels the young virtuoso not only stretching his technical horizons but also developing as a composer.

The *Élégie in D* is one of several Bottesini compositions in slow, singing style with titles such as

“Romanza”, “Melodia” or “Rêverie”. It is scored for double bass and strings. There are instructions at the end of the score either to finish (as here) or, probably as an afterthought, to follow on with a contrasting *Tarantella*, differently scored for the usual opera orchestra.

1870 found Bottesini working mostly from Paris and enjoying the protracted success in Monte Carlo of his opera *Vinciguerra il bandito*, which ran for forty extra performances. The Franco-Prussian War, however, forced him to flee to London. After a solo tour of provincial British cities, he was asked by the impresario Tito Mattei to write a comic opera, and he completed *Ali Babà* in only seven weeks. The opera opened at the Lyceum Theatre in early 1871 and was far more successful than expected, running nightly for nearly a year. The production then went to Madrid. In the 1920s the opera was revived and adapted for the famous puppet theatre *Piccoli di Podrecca*,

and in 1924 it earned a triumphant reception when performed by English singers at the Garrick Theatre in London.

Bottesini composed his *Duo Concertante for Cello and Double bass on Themes from Bellini's I Puritani* for the 1851 seasons in London and Paris, to be performed with his great friend and fellow student at Milan Conservatory, Piatti, regarded as the great virtuoso of the cello. The technical requirements in both parts are formidable and the composition is rarely performed for this reason. Although he wrote several works for the combination of cello and double bass, this is the only one to have survived. There are two manuscript versions which differ in many small details: the present recording uses material from the collection of Franco Petracchi.

Thomas Martin

London Symphony Orchestra

The London Symphony Orchestra is widely considered to be one of the world's leading orchestras, on the strength of its performances alone, but there is much more to its work than concerts in concert-halls. Its many activities include an energetic and ground-breaking education and community programme, a record company, a music education centre and exciting work in the field of information technology, and much more. A hundred years after it was formed the



orchestra still attracts excellent players, many of whom have flourishing solo, chamber music or teaching careers alongside their orchestral work. The roster of soloists and conductors is second to none, starting with Principal conductor Valery Gergiev, LSO President Sir Colin Davis, and Daniel Harding and Michael Tilson Thomas as Principal Guest Conductors. At its Barbican home in the City of London, the orchestra promotes more concerts than any other classical music organization in London, and its LSO Live recordings made there take the orchestra to a global audience of millions. With music for films, including all six *Star Wars*, on radio, television, on computer games, on planes and online, the orchestra can be heard everywhere. Five minutes from

the Barbican, at LSO St Luke's, the UBS and LSO music education centre, the orchestra is expanding its artistic programme to include BBC TV Sessions, BBC Radio 3 lunchtime chamber concerts and UBS Soundscapes: Eclectic concerts with world-class artists from diverse musical backgrounds. LSO Discovery is facilitating music education and community music-making, using LSO musicians and amateurs, and new technology to build ever-stronger links with local people and in East London schools.



Thomas Martin

Thomas Martin studied in America under Harold Roberts, Oscar Zimmerman, and Roger Scott, and has held leading positions with the Buffalo Philharmonic and Israel Philharmonic Orchestras and as a principal with l'Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal, the Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields, the English Chamber Orchestra, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, and latterly, the London Symphony Orchestra. He has been Principal Double Bassist with the Oxford Philomusica since its first season. He now also pursues an interest in solo playing, appearing in recitals and concertos with orchestras around the globe. He has been Senior Professor of Double Bass at London's Guildhall School of Music for many years, was appointed International Chair of Double Bass at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music in September 2007, gives master-classes internationally, and is responsible for many editions of music for double bass. He has served on many International Competition juries, and is also well known as a luthier, having so far made over 140 basses.

Moray Welsh

Moray Welsh has had a distinguished and varied career as a soloist, following his two years of study at the Moscow Conservatory with Rostropovich, on the recommendation of Benjamin Britten. In Britain he has appeared as a soloist at the Proms and in all the major concert halls, with leading orchestras. His international career has brought invitations to give concerts all over the world. With wide musical interests, his recordings range from baroque concertos to several records of contemporary music, including Hugh Wood's *Cello Concerto*, selected as a Record of the Year by *The Sunday Times*. His recording with Martin Roscoe of the Complete Rachmaninof works for Cello and Piano was selected by Amazon as a Record of the Month. Beside his impressive orchestral career as principal cellist of the London Symphony Orchestra, from which he retired in 2007, Moray Welsh has won an enthusiastic audience for his chamber music performances with artists such as James Galway, Kyung Wha Chung, the Amadeus Quartet, Andre Previn and Yuri Bashmet, and is also known for directing his own string sextet, The Arienski Ensemble, which won the 1992 award for the Best Chamber Music Performance on CD from the Music Retailers Association. He is now a member of a Piano Trio with Martin Roscoe and Peter Cropper.



Franco Petracchi

Born in Pistoia in 1937, Franco Petracchi studied in Rome at the Santa Cecilia Academy of Music and graduated (summa cum laude) in 1958 with Guido Battistelli, having also studied composition with Di Donato and Margola and conducting with Franco Ferrara. In 1960 at the Contemporary Music Festival in Venice he gave the world première of Firmino Sifonia's *Double Bass Concerto* and in the same year became principal double bass with the Turin RAI Symphony Orchestra, moving in 1962 to Rome, where he held a similar position until 1980, before embarking on a full time career as soloist and conductor. He has appeared with leading conductors and enjoyed distinction also as a teacher, since 1986 at the Geneva Conservatoire. In the tradition of great virtuosi he is credited with having revolutionised the technique of his instrument and has had a number of works dedicated to him by contemporary composers. As a personal choice Franco Petracchi has for the most part refused to record in studios, but many of his concerts have been recorded live and released on compact disc.



Matthew Gibson

Matthew Gibson comes from the English county of Shropshire and studied the double bass at the Guildhall School of Music in London under Thomas Martin and Kevin Rundell. Whilst at school he showed a keen interest in conducting. He joined the double bass section of the London Symphony Orchestra in 1992. In addition to his playing duties, he has been active in education and outreach projects as well as serving on the Board of Directors of this famous self-governing ensemble.

Photo: Victor Craven

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Known to his contemporaries as the Paganini of the double bass, Giovanni Bottesini significantly extended the technical possibilities of the instrument both as a composer and virtuoso soloist. After the *Prelude to Ero e Leandro*, Bottesini's greatest operatic masterpiece, this disc continues with the most popular of his compositions for the instrument among bassists today, the *Concertino in C minor*. In this work virtuosity is always at the service of musical ends. The rarely performed *Duo Concertante for Cello and Double Bass on Themes from Bellini's I Puritani* makes considerable technical demands of the soloists.

Giovanni BOTTESINI

(1821–1889)

Ero e Leandro – Opera

1 Prelude 4:47

Concertino in C minor
(original version for double
bass and strings) 16:35

2 I. Moderato 5:33

3 II. Andante 6:29

4 III. Finale: Allegro 4:29

Il diavolo della notte – Opera

5 Sinfonia 4:38

**Passioni amorose for two double
basses and orchestra* 11:15**

6 I. Allegro deciso 4:44

7 II. Andante 4:22

8 III. Allegretto 2:07

9 **Elégie in D 5:28**

Alì Babà – Opera

10 Overture 5:28

11 **Duo Concertante on Themes from
Bellini's I Puritani for cello,
double bass and orchestra 13:31**



Thomas Martin, Double Bass 2–4, 6–9, 11

Moray Welsh, Cello 11

London Symphony Orchestra



Franco Petracchi, Double Bass 6–8 and **Conductor** 1–5, 9–11

Matthew Gibson, Conductor 6–8

Includes Free Downloadable Bonus Track (Paganini: *Violin Concerto No. 3: Polacca: Andantino vivace*) available at www.classicsonline.com. Please see booklet for full details.

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