

# ROSSINI

## Péchés de vieillesse • 5 (Sins of Old Age)

Quelques riens pour album

**Alessandro Marangoni, Piano**



## Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868) Péchés de vieillesse: Volume XII, Quelques riens pour album

Gioachino Antonio Rossini, one of the most successful and popular operatic composers of his time, was born in Pesaro in 1792. His father, a brass-player and later teacher of the French horn at the Bologna Accademia, had a modest career, disturbed by the political changes of the period as the French replaced the Austrians in Northern Italy. Rossini's mother was a singer and as a boy Rossini made his appearance with his father in the pit orchestra and from time to time as a singer with his mother on stage, going on to work as a keyboard-player in the opera orchestra.

Rossini's early studies in music were with his father and mother, and with other teachers through the generosity of rich patrons. In childhood he had already started to show ability as a composer and his experience in the opera-house bore natural fruit in a remarkable and meteoric career that began in 1810 with the production of *La cambiale di matrimonio* in Venice. There followed a series of operas, comic and tragic, until the relatively poor reception of *Semiramide* in Venice in 1823 turned Rossini's attention to Paris. Under the Bourbon King Charles X Rossini staged French versions of earlier works and in 1829 *Guillaume Tell*. A contract for further operas came to nothing when the King was replaced in the revolution of 1830 by Louis-Philippe, although eventually, after some six years, Rossini was able to have his agreed annuity restored. With matters settled in France, in 1836 he returned to Italy and in spite of ill health concerned himself with the affairs of the Liceo Musicale in Bologna. The revolutionary disturbances there in 1848, activities with which he had little sympathy, seemed to threaten him and his second wife, Olympe Pélissier, whom he had married in 1846, after the death of his first wife, the singer Isabella Colbran, from whom he had been legally separated since 1837. For his own safety he moved first to Florence, but in 1855, partly in a search for better health, returned to Paris. In that city and a few years later at his new villa at Passy he passed the rest of his life.

Rossini's last ten years brought a return to composition, principally with a series of pieces described as *Péchés de vieillesse* (Sins of Old Age). Some of these are based on earlier works, some designed for performance at the informal Saturday evenings when he entertained guests in Paris, and others simply musical *obiter dicta*, as it were, pieces written as the mood took him. The *Péchés de vieillesse* are included in thirteen volumes, with the fourth to the eighth grouped together by Rossini as *'Un peu de tout. Recueil de 56 morceaux semi-comiques pour*

*le piano* ("Je dédie ces *Péchés de vieillesse aux pianistes de la 4<sup>me</sup> classe à la quelle j'ai l'honneur d'appartenir*") (A little of everything. Collection of 56 semi-comic pieces for the piano: "I dedicate these Sins of Old Age to pianists of the fourth class, to which I have the honour to belong"). Rossini was unfairly modest about his abilities as a pianist, which were, it seems, not inconsiderable.

The twelfth volume of the *Péchés de vieillesse*, with the title *Quelques riens pour album*, contains 24 piano pieces. It seems that Rossini had originally intended to follow the example of J.S. Bach or of Chopin with a series of pieces covering all the major and minor keys, a plan he apparently abandoned half way through<sup>1</sup>. Most of the pieces are undated, but the collection seems to date from after 1866. In that year Michele Carafa asked Rossini for help with a pressing debt of 1000 francs. Rossini told him that his wife Olympe controlled the money and that his pocket money would not run to such a sum, but the following day he gave Carafa a hastily composed piece, *Douces réminiscences offertes à mon ami Carafa pour le nouvel an 1866 (L'Africaine)*. No. 16 of the present album, telling him to show it to the publisher Brandus. The latter, seeing the name of Rossini apparently offering something based on Meyerbeer's opera *L'Africaine*, seized the chance of a bargain and provided Carafa with the money he needed, only to find that in the end there was absolutely no connection at all with Meyerbeer's popular work<sup>2</sup>. Sets of Rossini's piano pieces, including the 24 *Riens*, were later published by Heugel with titles of doubtful relevance added to each piece.

The first piece, in G minor and marked *Allegretto*, opens with the firm declaration of descending fifths, a motif that is to return throughout the piece, leading to an accompanying figure, in G major then G minor. It is followed by a shorter piece in E flat major, with the direction *Allegretto moderato*. This opens with hesitant chords, ending in a sudden outburst of sound, before an operatic melody appears. The two contrasting elements are to return, leading to a final emphatic tonic chord. The third of the set, starting in A minor and marked *Allegretto moderato*, offers a unison melody, followed by a horn-call, before a melody appears in the lower register. This is answered by an A major melody in an upper part, with both elements returning before the A major ending.

Marked *Andante sostenuto*, the fourth *Rien*, in F minor, has an air of operatic tragedy, its mood altered by a change of rhythm and key in a lively B flat major *Allegretto*, a light-

hearted comment on the opening, which then returns in a final F minor section. There are changes of key and mood in the following A flat major piece, with its melodic charm and cadenza-like passages for modest pianistic display. Starting *Andante maestoso* and in C minor, a second element soon appears in the sixth *Rien*, when Rossini turns to Bach, *Allegro brillante*, in C major, and with dazzling contrapuntal display, contrasted with an intervening operatic melody in E flat. The two elements continue in contrasting juxtaposition.

The jaunty dotted rhythms of the seventh piece, in D major, with the direction *Andantino mosso*, is followed by the G major *Andantino sostenuto* of the eighth with its gently lilting gait. The ninth piece, in C major, suggests the music-hall and ends emphatically, *Tutta forza*. The tenth, *Andantino mosso* and in F major, is a Schumannesque cradle-song, with a fiercer D minor section providing a contrast. It is followed by a D flat major piece, with a contrasting F major section, marked *Allegretto moderato*. The original key and mood return, with an ending gradually dying away, *morendo poco a poco*. The *Danse Sibérienne*, the twelfth *Rien*, survives in a facsimile of a shorter version, dated Passy, 1864. The longer version, in the same key of F sharp minor, has a contrasting section in A major, linked by sequences to the returning dance, which gradually increases pace as it nears the end.

The thirteenth piece in the album is an E flat major waltz, with echoes of Chopin, nearly twenty years dead as Rossini compiled this collection, and hints also of Mendelssohn and Schumann, whom Rossini again had outlived by a good few years. The wittily allusive fourteenth *Rien* leads to the *Petite Galette Allemande*, a jocular title recalling those Rossini used ironically or allusively in other sins of old age. Introduced by a dramatic ascending scale, the piece is a virtuosic waltz, varied by shifts of key as it moves from sequence to sequence. The *Douces Réminiscences* for Rossini's friend and compatriot Carafa, which provides a date *ante quem non* for the album,

adds to the dedication "*Oh africaine!!!*", deliberately misleading if it suggested a work based on Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine*, first staged in Paris in 1865; it is a pun on that title, as the word '*fric*' is one of many slang French words for money. An A flat major waltz here frames a duple metre *Allegretto brillante*, in a piece that seems to have performed its intended original function.

*Un Rien No. 17* opens with an E minor display of arpeggios, *a piacere*, leading to an *Andantino mosso*, quasi *Allegretto*, a waltz with contrapuntal touches. The eighteenth piece, *Andantino mosso* and in G flat major, has an *Allegro* stuttering subsidiary section, which returns in various keys before being combined with the principal theme in the original key. An E major *Allegretto moderato* follows, opening tentatively, before moving forward in greater confidence. The twentieth piece, *Allegro brillante* and in C major, its rapid course interrupted by occasional pauses, leads to an *Andante sostenuto* in F sharp minor/major, with an apparent allusion to Offenbach.

The last three pieces bear titles. The D minor *Thème et Variations sur le mode mineur*, treats the theme to something more elaborate in its first variation, while the second is a 3/8 *Allegro*, leading to a brief Coda, marked *Largo*. *Thème et Variations sur le mode majeur* announces the major theme in hymn-like chords before ornamenting it with triplet rhythms. This is followed by a display of arpeggios, *Più mosso*, ending, as before, with a short Coda. *Un Rien sur le mode enharmonique*, with its enharmonic shifts in notation inherent in the chosen key of D flat major, provides a brilliant conclusion.

**Keith Anderson**

<sup>1</sup>qv. *Quelques Riens pour Album*, ed. Martin Tartak, Fondazione Rossini Pesaro, 1982: Prefazione, p. XVI. The anecdote is reported by Jean-Baptiste Weckerlin.

<sup>2</sup> Marvin Tartak: Prefazione: *Quelques Riens pour Album*. Fondazione Rossini Pesaro 1982, p. XVII

Rossini's *Péchés de vieillesse* or 'Sins of Old Age' is a series of thirteen volumes of piano works which were the main musical occupation of his last decade. The 24 pieces of volume twelve are of breathtaking variety, including flavours from Bach and Chopin, opera and the music-hall. Some revel in witty dances and bravura pianistic display, and one was written overnight to help a friend out of financial debt. Alessandro Marangoni's playing 'sparkles and seduces over and over again' (*Toronto Star* on Volume 2, 8.570766).

**Gioachino**  
**ROSSINI**  
(1792-1868)

Playing Time  
**79:55**

**Complete Piano Music • 5**  
**Péchés de vieillesse, Volume XII:**  
**Quelques riens pour album**

<b>1</b>	<b>No. 1: Allegretto</b>	<b>2:45</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>No. 2: Allegretto moderato</b>	<b>1:30</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>No. 3: Allegretto moderato</b>	<b>2:45</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>No. 4: Andante sostenuto – Allegretto – Tempo prima</b>	<b>4:53</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>No. 5: Allegretto moderato</b>	<b>3:30</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>No. 6: Andante maestoso – Allegro brillante</b>	<b>4:27</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>No. 7: Andantino mosso</b>	<b>1:12</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>No. 8: Andantino sostenuto</b>	<b>2:43</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>No. 9: Allegretto moderato</b>	<b>2:02</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>No. 10: Andantino mosso</b>	<b>2:35</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>No. 11: Andantino mosso</b>	<b>3:26</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>No. 12: Allegretto moderato (Danse Sibérienne)</b>	<b>2:07</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>No. 13: Allegretto brillante</b>	<b>1:21</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>No. 14: Allegro vivace</b>	<b>4:08</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>No. 15: Petite Galette Allemande: Allegro brillante</b>	<b>3:23</b>
<b>16</b>	<b>No. 16: Douces Réminiscences offertes à mon ami Carafa: Andantino – Allegro brillante</b>	<b>3:17</b>
<b>17</b>	<b>No. 17: A piacere – Andantino mosso quasi Allegretto</b>	<b>3:38</b>
<b>18</b>	<b>No. 18: Andantino mosso – Allegro – Tempo primo – Allegro – Tempo primo</b>	<b>5:13</b>
<b>19</b>	<b>No. 19: Allegretto moderato</b>	<b>2:24</b>
<b>20</b>	<b>No. 20: Allegro brillante</b>	<b>3:31</b>
<b>21</b>	<b>No. 21: Andantino sostenuto</b>	<b>5:01</b>
<b>22</b>	<b>No. 22: Thème et Variations sur le mode mineur: Andantino mosso – Allegretto – Largo</b>	<b>5:13</b>
<b>23</b>	<b>No. 23: Thème et Variations sur le mode majeur: Allegretto moderato – Più mosso – Largo</b>	<b>5:42</b>
<b>24</b>	<b>No. 24: Un Rien sur le mode enharmonique: Adagio – Andantino mosso</b>	<b>3:11</b>

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