

# *Out of Italy* Liner Notes

by Eugene Braig

In the modern art-music psyche, the guitar tends to be perceived as an Iberian entity, the musical embodiment of Spanish temperament and culture. However, closer consideration reveals a shared history with major advances in the instrument and its music stretching across many cultures. For example, the earliest known guitars built to carry six single strings (as on the standard modern instrument) came out of Italy at the dawn of the Classical era, the time of Mozart and his contemporaries. Italian guitarist composers of the early Baroque era were some of the first to deliberately group mostly dance-form pieces by key into greater multi-movement suites. These pioneers of guitar were also some of the first in all music to generate musical cycles spanning every key and crafted to facilitate through-performance, all around 100 years before J.S. Bach's famous Well-Tempered Clavier. Most of the music featured on the present recording is extracted from similar collections (albeit of a very different stylistic era, that to follow Bach by around 100 years): collections specifically composed to feature guitar music in every key.

The present recording carries the Italian guitar spirit into the Romantic era of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the age of idolized instrumental virtuosi like Paganini and Liszt. It is important to note that there was no “Italy,” *per se*, at the time of the composers featured here. Italy was split into several smaller nations and dominated by foreign rule (most notably by Habsburg states and Napoleonic France) until unification in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nationalistic yearnings often led educated (and often politically subversive) artists into exile, both self-imposed and otherwise. The Italian passion for opera at that time also created a musical culture that found many instrumental musicians relegated to playing support roles in theater pits throughout Italian-speaking regions. As a result, many leading Italian instrumentalists—including the guitarists featured here—sought their recognition as soloists abroad.

Francesco Molino (1768–1847) was born in the town of Ivrea in northern Italy (at that time, the Kingdom of Sardinia). He spent time as an oboist, violinist, and violist with the royal theater and royal chapel in Turin before touring Europe in

high demand as a performer and teacher of violin and guitar, settling in Paris sometime before 1820. In its day, Molino's technique was considered a modern departure from the conservative tastes of the Parisian guitar scene, which he documented in his *Grande Méthode Complète*, op.46.

Molino's *Méthode* includes brief preludes as exercises for playing in each key. These impressive miniatures, rarely exceeding even one minute in performance, are imbued with a level of drama that belies their brevity: sudden and surprising pauses, rapid changes in dynamics, clever manipulation of dissonance, unique arpeggio patterns... Their paradoxical brief-but-masterful nature makes it difficult for the modern performer to know what to do with them. Wohlwend's approach to bringing these pieces (pieces well worth hearing) to modern listeners is brilliant in its obviousness: use select preludes exactly as titled, as preludes to multi-composer sets of miniatures, miniatures carefully selected to complement each other by mood and key. The prelude in C major is an *Allegretto* that moves between full-voiced chords on strong beats using double stops and broken double stops in contrasting dynamics. After a brief, dramatic introduction, the E minor prelude, *Moderato*, is comprised of a series of rolling triplet arpeggios, some richly dissonant and some in patterns with unusual turns, to resolve satisfyingly on the tonic. The A minor, *Andante con moto*, and A major, *Allegro maestoso*, preludes are also arpeggio studies, this time in sixteenth notes with occasional and occasionally dissonant melodies moving through the upper voice. After a declaratory series of *fortissimo* chords, the G major prelude, *Allegro*, features a pedal passage and spicily chromatic scales.

Luigi Legnani (1790–1877) was born in the northeast city of Ferrara in the Papal States. His family relocated to Ravenna where he began his musical studies at the age of eight and was singing as a tenor in the city's theater by the age of 17. He made his public debut as guitarist at a performance in Milan in 1819. From that point forward, he was celebrated as a guitar virtuoso and was touring Europe and Russia extensively by 1822. In addition, Legnani, working with Stauer in Vienna and later as a luthier himself, had a strong influence on the construction of the guitars of the Romantic era.

Legnani was also a prolific composer. While the opus numbers credited to him are numbered higher than 200, there is nothing known between just under 100 and 201, and a number of compositions totaling in the 100s seems more likely. His music tends toward an extreme virtuosity, and his history as a professional singer is often evident in his lyric and dramatic—almost operatic, almost *bel canto*—approach to melody and supporting harmony in his guitar solos.

Legnani's *36 Capricci per tutti i tuoni maggiori e minori*, op.20 is a monumental work that may have been his most popular and remains so to this day. The capricci it contains are akin to Paganini's in their romantic breed of instrumental virtuosity, and the two composers were friends. On its title page, op.20 advertised that it spanned all 24 keys; however, in reality, it covers only 22, omitting C-sharp minor and G-sharp minor. The *Andante* in C, no.1; *Allegretto* in A minor, no.4; and *Moderato* in G, no.2 are excellent examples of Legnani's operatic sensibilities, displaying a predilection for lyric melodies above thoughtful accompaniments of active harmonies. The *Allegro* in E minor, no.2 and *Prestissimo* in A major, no.7 demonstrate Legnani's virtuosity: no.2 in its rapidly descending diminished chords and no.7 in featuring short scalar bursts and arpeggio passages at break-neck tempi.

While regarded as one of the greatest guitar (and concertina) virtuosi of the Victorian era, sporting a relatively well documented and thoroughly reviewed musical career by the time he was only *nine* years old, little is known of the origins and very early life of Giulio Regondi (1822–1872). He was born in Lyon or possibly Geneva to a German mother who died during childbirth. Young Giulio was then left to the care of a Milanese “father” named Regondi (and often asserted to have no real relationship to the boy) who himself is said to have been a guitarist of some skill. This “father” (or stepfather...or foster father) is almost universally disparaged in the literature as a harsh taskmaster whose only evident interest in Giulio was exploiting the boy as a touring prodigy. By the time young Regondi was nine, the pair had performed in every major court of Europe except Madrid. In the 1830s, the “father” absconded with their earnings and abandoned Giulio in England where he was fortunate to be supported by friends. There, he enjoyed a successful career and was consistently praised for his sensitive nature and artistic powers of expression until succumbing to cancer in 1872.

Wohlwend is not alone in his assertion that Regondi's body of work represents “perhaps the most highly developed composition for guitar in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.” It is truly romantic in nature: rife with daring modulations, delayed cadences, and long elided phrases. It is also fascinating that Regondi's music for English concertina (much more rarely performed than that for guitar) exhibits the same qualities and consistency of mood. Regarding the technical aspects of performance, there can't be many pairings of more dissimilar instruments than concertina (an accordion-like reed instrument) and guitar. That Regondi's uniquely romantic voice is recognizable in his compositions for these two disparate instruments, that his virtuosic musical language so transcended the idiomatic limitations of instrumental technique, is truly remarkable. Given its quality, Regondi's output for guitar is frustratingly sparse.

Regondi's 10 Etudes for guitar have rightly become staples of the repertoire. However, the full set existed only as excited rumors among guitarists until very recently: until a manuscript of these works was brought out of the Soviet Union by guitar scholar Matanya Ophee in the late 1980s and first published by Editions Orphée in 1990, approximately doubling Regondi's known guitar output. Their loss to all but the current population of guitarists is particularly unfortunate when considering the recent discovery that the most famous 20<sup>th</sup>-century classical guitarist, Andres Segovia (1893–1987), was gifted a copy of the 10 Etudes when touring Russia in 1926 and appears to have done nothing with them. No.1, a *Moderato* in C, and no.8, *Allegretto con moto ben marcato la melodia* in G, are studies in melody—the first dancing with position-shifting scalar passages and the second full of sprightly romanticism—both with richly modulating middle sections and concluding with well-crafted, unifying codas. Of the slower etudes, no. 4, *Adagio cantabile* in E, features a highly romantic and contemplative melody over a gently pulsing chordal accompaniment and no.9, *Larghetto* in E, is a passionate and legato chorale.

Marco Aurelio Zani de Ferranti.(1801–1878) was a veritable “Renaissance man” of the romantic era. He counted the most elite luminaries of his day as friends and admirers: composers Rossini, Berlioz, and Paganini; the family of the Russian Tsar; etc. *ad infinitum*. Marco Aurelio Zani de Ferranti was born in Bologna. His

mother died when he was only a baby. His father then led a life of travel and had little association with young Marco Aurelio, and the boy was probably largely raised by his paternal grandmother. He was sent to Lucca for his education at age seven. By the age of 12, he had published a book of Latin verse that his granddaughter would later boast was “read in all Italy.” He continued to write and translate and was respected in literary circles throughout his life. Also at 12, he heard Paganini perform and was inspired to take up the violin, which was abandoned in four years in favor of the guitar. Obsessed with technical perfection on the instrument, the technique he eventually developed was unique: no fingernails, extended use of the left-hand thumb, barres with any of the four fingers, etc. This personal approach to guitar coupled with the extreme degree of difficulty associated with the execution of his music contribute to the fact that it is very seldom performed or recorded today. A staunch critic of rightist regimes and advocate for Italian unification, Zani de Ferranti almost made a habit of imprisonment and exile, periodically settling in Paris, Russia, Belgium, and Italian states. For a time, he was appointed as Guitarist to King Leopold of Belgium. He also toured Europe extensively as a virtuoso and came to the United States as a personal assistant to the violinist Camille Sivori. Marco Aurelio performed in New York in 1846, making him one of the first European guitarists to tour the US. American guitarists continued to cite Zani de Ferranti's music on their own programs into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Like Legnani's *36 Capricci* and Molino's *Méthode* before, Zani de Ferranti's *24 Caprices pour servir à l'étude de la Guitare*, op.11 was intended to be another compositional didactic effort spanning all major and minor keys. Unfortunately, only the first section, comprising eight of the set, has been found. The caprices tend to be focused studies on scales (most notably no.1, *Presto* in C juxtaposing contrapuntal scales in differing note durations), arpeggios (no.2, *Allegro* in G; no. 4, *Allegro spiritoso* in B-flat; no.5, *Allegro con fuoco* in E minor; and no. 7, *Presto* in A), or romantic melodies over a rhythmic accompaniment (no. 3, *Andante* in D and no.8, *Allegretto grazioso* in F-sharp minor). After a brief *Allegro moderato* introduction in dotted rhythm, no.6 in E moves to a rolling *Allegretto con moto* in pastorale mood. All feature ample chromaticism and plenty of opportunity for virtuosic display (even passages that seem simple upon first hearing are deceptive in their difficulty).

Together, the miniatures presented here make for a fine *tour de force* introduction to the romantic, virtuosic guitar aesthetic of pre-Italy Italians abroad. This is fine music that is only recently being reintroduced to the guitar playing and listening public. This collection represents a valuable addition to the recorded repertoire. Enjoy!

*Further reading*

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