Flávio Apro plays

NAPOLEON COSTE

Guitar music
A “RENAISSANCE MAN” OF THE ROMANTIC PERIOD

Much has been said about Claude Antoine Jean Georges Napoléon Coste (27 June 1805 – 17 February 1883), Fernando Sor’s arguably most prominent pupil and musical heir. However, it is what is often omitted about him that would allow us to truly appreciate his talents as a “renaissance man” of the romantic period. We all know the stories of the young child prodigy, already performing concerts and teaching during his teenage years in Valenciennes. The composer, who had a successful and brilliant concert career, even during the period in which the guitar saw its worst decline in centuries.

What has been largely forgotten about Coste are his other indomitable traits. We must not forget the entrepreneur, who successfully self-published his own music due to lack of general interest from publishing houses on the waning guitar within the Romantic period. The inventor of new types of guitars and hybrid instruments such as the Heptacorde and the Decacorde, in collaboration with René Lacôte. The diffuser of music for guitar and such new instruments, achieving success for this new expanded repertoire from England to Russia. The musicologist who provided early adaptations of music by Visée to the Modern guitar, many decades before Pujol. The pedagogue, who dedicated the last 20 years of his life to becoming an outstanding teacher, after a tragic fall robbed him of his concert career in 1863, at the peak of his powers. The dedicated Freemason initiated mid-1843 at the Paris Lodge Les Frères Unis Inséparables, who achieved the rank of Master Mason a mere six months after said initiation, and reached the 18th degree by the end of his life.

Having become mostly a teacher after his accident, the genesis of the 25 Études de Genre, Op.38 (1873) as precious gems of music from the Romantic period is no happenstance. Individually dedicated to persons important to the Maestro, they were composed in different moments of his life, displaying both the growth of Coste as a mature composer and musician, and his talent for incorporating romantic subtleties of harmony with the pedagogy of the instrument throughout his life. The Études...
were only first published as a set three years prior to Coste’s passing (1880), when the composer was at the seasoned age of 75. A second, posthumous edition would be published in 1887, with revisions from the composer himself. Despite Coste’s own words of calling them “(...) modest productions (...)” dedicated to talented amateur players and former students, whose memory is precious to the author “(...)”, the set is of true-to-form, durable concert pieces, containing within it a mini-treatise of Romantic harmony and musical forms used in Europe at the time. The transcendental usage of the seventh string tuned in low “D” (a full step below the standard tuning of the Classical guitar’s 6th string) is a problem difficult to address at times. The composer mentions in his preface that 6-string players may be able to replace those passages with the tenor voice of the 4th string, one octave higher “(...) very imperfectly (...)”. This was not a trivial issue for Flávio Apro, whose innovative solutions may be heard in detail on Etudes Nº 1, 4, 7, 9, 14, 17, 21, 23 and 24 (the latter including a bold and expedient trick, consisting of the dropping of the 6th string to “D” by the end of the first section).

In contrast, the Grande Sérénade, Op.30 reflects Coste’s abilities and versatility at his prime as both a composer and performer. A grand concert piece, it was written and submitted to the International Competition of Guitar Composition held in Brussels in 1856, sponsored by Russian nobleman and guitar enthusiast Monsieur de Makaroff, also the dedicatee of the piece. And although Coste came second in the competition behind J.K. Mertz (ahead of 29 other composers from different nations), the Maestro’s prowess as a composer, virtuoso and showman are showcased in full force here, from the Largo introduction in its improvisational character, to the Spanish Bolero as a bridge to the Grand Finale, the piece takes us all back to the European salons of 150 years ago, allowing the listener to enjoy the beautiful music of a simpler time, completely immersed in said atmosphere.

Recording such a repertoire from this illustrious composer calls for an artist of impeccable credentials and utmost caliber. Such a task calls for Flávio Apro: PhD
“It was heard a wide dynamic palette of finely graduated tones and a sensitive conception. Apro is a noble sound esthete, which he understands masterfully. He always elicted from the guitar dramatic tension, strong ornamentation, impressive scales and captivated the audience’s attention. Apro can either display sounds full of softness as well as put in the room dramatic and loud sounds. Landau was at the concert on Saturday with Brazilian music, so close to heaven.”

PASSAUER NEUE PRESSE, Germany.

Flávio Apro is recognized for his work as guitarist, producer, researcher and teacher. He holds a Master degree from UNESP and a PhD from the São Paulo University. Apro is one of the most recognized Brazilian researchers on Musical Performance, with published books and several articles in leading academic journals. In connection with his research, he released the CD “Francisco Mignone - Doce Estudios Para Guitarra” by the label Tempus Clasico (Mexico). He performs regularly at the main Brazilian and international concert halls, and devotes himself as well to chamber music. Apro is also a producer and South American representative of HERMANN HAUSER GUITAR FOUNDATION, a non-profit cultural institution based in Germany, organizing concerts and international competitions. His activity as a teacher is widely respected as the guitar chair of MARINGA STATE UNIVERSITY and visiting scholar at CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY FULLERTON, besides being guest in several Brazilian and foreign institutions. In 2014, he released two CDs for the prestigious label Brilliant Classics (Netherlands): “Nocturne” (94875) and “The Brazilian Guitar” (94810), as well as “The Brazilian Guitar” (Delira Music), sponsored by the Brazilian Ministry of Culture.

This album is dedicated to Sophie Ramos Apro

Thanks to:
Kelly Ramos, Martha Masters, Marc Dickey, Candido Pinto, Denis Mandarino, Luiz Claudio R. Ferreira, Eugenia Moliner, Virginia Luque, Jovane Oliveira, staff from Crêpes de Paris in Brea (CA), Bruno Sanches from American Razor Barber Shop in Fullerton (CA)

This CD was supported by CAPES – a Foundation affiliated with the Ministry of Education of Brazil; School of Music – California State University Fullerton; and Yorba Linda Masonic Lodge #469, California.

The artist uses Albert Augustine Strings.

Recording Venue: Vaughncille Joseph Meng Concert Hall, California, USA
Recording Dates: May 26, June 3 and June 9, 2015
Played on a guitar built by Sérgio Abreu OS-NWR 2013
Sound Engineer: Bob Minor
Artist Photo: Larry Griffin
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