

NAXOS

ROSSINI

Péchés de vieillesse • 2
(Sins of Old Age)

Album pour les enfants dégourdis
(Album for Smart Children)

Alessandro Marangoni, Piano



Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868)

Péchés de vieillesse: Volume VI, Album pour les enfants dégourdis (Excerpts)

Gioachino Antonio Rossini, one of the most successful and popular operatic composers of his time, was born in Pesaro in 1792, five months after the marriage of his parents. 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^{me} 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. Other volumes also contain piano pieces.

The sixth volume of the *Péchés de vieillesse* has the title *Album pour les enfants dégourdis* (Album for Smart Children). It contains twelve pieces, of which the eleventh, *Etude asthmatique*, is here omitted, to be included in a later recording. The set starts with *Mon prélude hygiénique du matin* (My morning hygienic prelude). The opening flourish, a wake-up call, is interrupted by chords of Wagnerian solemnity, marked *ppp*, before the lively principal theme with its echoes of Chopin is heard. The chords return, to be followed, *dolcemente*, by a brief aria, which makes its due return in the tonic key of C before the piece reaches its emphatic conclusion.

The second piece, *Prélude baroque*, after its dramatic opening, seemed about to promise reflection of Rossini's interest in earlier music, but it is not long before melodic language of the new century finds a place, the two elements providing a distinct contrast.

The solemn C minor *Memento homo* (Remember, O Man) takes its title from the words of the Ash Wednesday liturgy for the distribution of the ashes; *Memento, homo, quia pulvis es, et in pulverem reverteris* (Remember, O man, thou art dust, and to dust thou shalt return). It opens with the distant death knell, sounding in the depths of the keyboard, with music that has been said to recall Rossini's *Quelques mesures de chant funèbre: à mon pauvre ami Meyerbeer*, a four-part male chorus written on the death of Meyerbeer in 1864. Mourning and thoughts of death are thrown aside abruptly in the following light-hearted *Assez de memento: dansons* (Enough of Memento: let us dance), with its constant left-hand accompaniment and insouciant twirls of melody.

In *La Pesarese* Rossini turns to a melody from his native town of Pesaro, presented *con grazia*, but with a suggestion of future counterpoint in the imitative entries of the main theme in a central section.

The sixth piece, *Valse torturée*, opens with wayward introductory chords, before the waltz proper starts, a characteristic example of Rossini's familiarity with the musical language of a younger generation, the dance here tortured by interruptions and by its brusque first theme, shifting to a less abrupt secondary melody, and ending with a wayward and prolonged flourish.

With *Une caresse à ma femme* Rossini offers an endearment to his wife, Olympe Pélissier, who had been a close companion since the early 1830s. She did much to care for Rossini during these years, as his health and state of mind fluctuated, coming to serve as a nurse and his protector from unwanted intrusion, when that became necessary. The piece is a sincere

tribute to a woman to whom he owed much.

Barcarole, after its introductory chords, embarks on a lulling boating-song, with more than an echo of Chopin, mingled with more purely Venetian inspiration.

There is an autobiographical element in *Un petit train de plaisir, comico-imitatif* (A little pleasure train, comico-imitative). Train journeys had not always proved congenial to Rossini, and here a bell summons the passengers, who climb on board, before the train starts its journey. The satanic whistle blows, the brakes are gently applied and the train arrives in a station, where Parisian *beaux* hand their girls down from the coaches. The journey continues, but the train comes to grief in a dramatic derailment. There are two casualties, the soul of one flying to heaven and the other down to hell, followed by a funeral march. The heirs express their bitter sorrow in a cheerful *Allegro vivace* and Rossini ends with the words '*Tout ceci est plus que naïf c'est vrai*'.

Fausse couche de polka mazurka (Miscarriage Polka Mazurka) matches the ironical suggestion of its title, as the promised dance occasionally miscarries.

The album ends with *Un enterrement en carnaval* (A Carnival Interment) which reveals its initially funereal character in the muffled drums represented by tremolo bass octaves. A shift from B minor to G major brings a less mournful mood, before the drums of the first section return, fading to a carnival D major *Allegro moderato*, with a gentler *meno mosso* at its heart.

Keith Anderson

Alessandro Marangoni



Born in Italy in 1979, Alessandro Marangoni studied the piano with Marco Vincenzi, obtaining the diploma with honours (*summa cum laude*), and continued his studies at the Scuola di Musica di Fiesole with Maria Tipo and Pietro De Maria. Besides his musical studies he also graduated with honours in philosophy at the Università di Pavia with a thesis on Fernando Liuzzi's philosophy of music. He was also a *merit student* of the Almo Collegio Borromeo, one of the oldest and most important European colleges. After winning several national and international awards, he has appeared in many important musical events in Europe, both as a soloist and as a chamber musician, with performances in Rome at the Accademia di Santa Cecilia, in Florence for the Accademia della Crusca, in Lucca for the Associazione Musicale Lucchese, for the Walton Foundation on Ischia, the Cittadella in Assisi, and the Teatro Verdi in Trieste, as well as at the Engadiner Internationale Kammermusik-Festspiele, Sagra Musicale Umbra, the Italian Cultural Institute in London, the Teatro Dal Verme, Milan, and St John's College, Cambridge. As a chamber musician he has

collaborated with some of the most important Italian musical personalities and groups, including Mario Ancillotti, Vittorio Ceccanti, Fanny Clamagirand, Daria Masiero, Stefano Parrino, Quirino Principe, Carlo Zardo and the Nuovo Quartetto Italiano. He won great success in Spain with the Malaga Philharmonic Orchestra and in Bratislava with the Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by the great Italian conductor Aldo Ceccato. He has recently started artistic cooperation with the Italian actress Valentina Cortese. He is the pianist of the Trio Albatros Ensemble, with which he has won international acclaim. In 2007 he made a recording for la *Bottega Discantica* of the piano works of Victor de Sabata, for the fortieth anniversary of the great Italian conductor's death. In December of that year Marangoni played in a recital at the Teatro alla Scala, Milan, with Daniel Barenboim, in further tribute to De Sabata. In 2007 he won the prestigious *Amici di Milano* International Prize for Music.

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Rossini spent his final years in Paris where he wrote numerous short piano pieces arranged in 13 volumes, which he jokingly called *Peches de vieillesse* (Sins of Old Age), that juxtapose irreverence and seriousness. Volume VI, *Album for Smart Children*, includes diverse movements whose titles, whether ironic or deeply sincere, reflect their stylistic range. The eleventh (*Etude asthmatique*) will be included in a future album. Alessandro Marangoni's highly praised recording of Volumes VII & IX is available on Naxos 8.570590-91.

Gioachino
ROSSINI
(1792-1868)

Complete Piano Music • 2

Péchés de vieillesse, Volume VI:

Album pour les enfants dégourdis (excerpts)

1	No. 1. Mon prélude hygiénique du matin	7:05
2	No. 2. Prélude baroque	7:54
3	No. 3. Memento homo	8:14
4	No. 4. Assez de memento: dansons	4:58
5	No. 5. La Pesarese	6:01
6	No. 6. Valse torturée	6:41
7	No. 7. Une caresse à ma femme	4:45
8	No. 8. Barcarole	5:24
9	No. 9. Un petit train de plaisir, comico-imitatif	11:19
10	No. 10. Fausse couche de polka mazurka	4:32
11	No. 11. Un enterrement en Carnaval	11:07



Alessandro Marangoni, Piano

Piano: Steinway & Sons (Angelo Fabbrini collection)

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Please see inside booklet for full details

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