

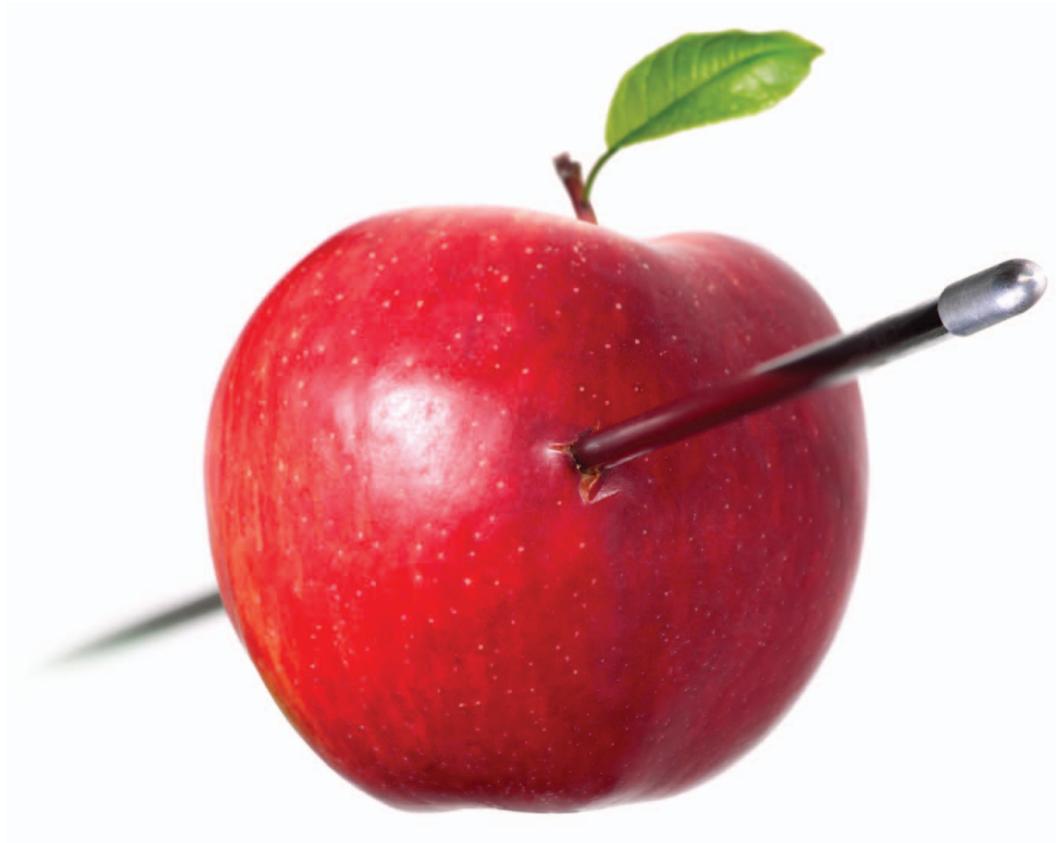
NAXOS

ROSSINI

Complete Overtures • 2

William Tell

The Silken Ladder • Il Signor Bruschino



Prague Sinfonia Orchestra • Christian Benda

Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868): Complete Overtures • 2

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, 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 appeared 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, ending with *Semiramide* in Venice in 1823, the last of his operas for Italy. There had been attractive offers from abroad, and successful visits to Vienna and to London, but he now turned his 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 opera, written for the Paris Opéra, *Guillaume Tell* (William Tell) makes great demands on performers, notably the high tenor rôle of Arnold

Melchthal, and, with its relative length, on audiences. It opens with an overture in four movements, setting the pastoral Swiss scene with five solo cellos and proceeding to a storm, a traditional herdsman's call, the *ranz des vaches*, a trumpet-call and a rapid summons to Swiss patriots that has become all too familiar in other hippodromic contexts. Austrian domination of Switzerland had brought resistance. Arnold Melchthal, a Swiss conspirator, had served in the Austrian army and is in love with the Habsburg Princess Mathilde. Tell saves the herdsman Leuthold from the pursuing Austrians, who take old Melchthal hostage. With Walter Furst he tries to persuade Arnold to join the resistance against the Austrians and supporters gather to swear loyalty to their cause. The killing of old Melchthal forces Arnold to part from Mathilde. The governor Gesler enforces celebration of a hundred years of Austrian rule and Tell, recognised as the one who helped Leuthold, is arrested, with his son, before he can carry a message urging immediate revolt. Tell is forced to shoot an apple off his son's head, which he does. With William Tell now imprisoned, Arnold takes on the leadership of the revolt, which ends with victory for the patriots and the death of Gesler, shot by William Tell.

Eduardo e Cristina was written in 1819 and first performed in Venice at the Teatro Benedetto. The opera is principally a pastiche, using material from other works, supplemented by a few new numbers. It deals with the romance of Cristina and a Swedish soldier, Eduardo, their secret marriage, and Eduardo's final triumph, after suffering imprisonment by the Swedish king. The overture is occasionally heard in the concert-hall. It starts with a slower introduction, leading to an *Allegro brillante*, its two principal themes highly characteristic of the composer.

Rossini's one-act *farsa*, *L'inganno felice* (The Happy Deception), with a libretto by Giuseppe Foppa, was first performed at the Teatro San Moisè in Venice on 8th January 1812. Isabella, the wronged and banished wife of Duke Bertrando, long supposed dead, has in fact been rescued from the sea by the villager Tarabotto. The Duke, with his wicked confidant Ormondo and the latter's henchman Batone, comes to the village, where the duplicity of the villains is revealed. The opera, among

Rossini's earlier works, is set in a mining village. Foppa also provided the libretto for Rossini's *La scala di seta* (The Silken Ladder) and *Il Signor Bruschino*, and, with less success, for *Sigismondo*. After an introductory passage, the overture launches into a livelier melody and material that includes characteristic dramatic elements. The second theme of the *Allegro* is taken from the *Sinfonia in D* of 1808, and the overture was used again for *Ciro in Babilonia*, staged in Ferrara in March of the same year.

La scala di seta (The Silken Ladder) dates from the same year and is a collaboration again with the librettist Giuseppe Foppa, after a French original. It was first performed at the Teatro San Moisè in Venice on 9th May 1812. Giulia's secret marriage to her lover Dorvil is happily revealed when she engineers the marriage of her guardian's chosen husband for her. Dorvil's friend Blansac, with her cousin Lucilla. The opera starts with a popular overture, a frequent concert opener, drawn from this early example of Rossini's skill in handling comedy of this kind. The overture follows a familiar pattern, after the startling opening bars. An *Andantino* oboe melody leads the way to a brilliant *Allegro*, its two themes returning in recapitulation before the final chords.

Rossini's first opera, *Demetrio e Polibio* (Demetrius and Polybius) was written in 1808. A *dramma serio* in two acts, it was first performed at the Teatro Valle in Rome on 18th May 1812. It deals with the enmity between the kings of Syria and Parthia and the love of their daughter and son. The overture summons attention at the start, followed by a gently lyrical bassoon melody which leads to the livelier principal melody, stated first by the oboe, and the second subject, entrusted to the bassoon. Diabelli, for a piano reduction published in Vienna, found it necessary to make certain adjustments to regularise the form of the recapitulation.

The third of Rossini's operas with a libretto by Foppa was *Il Signor Bruschino*, a one-act *farsa giocosa* first staged on January 1813 at the Teatro San Moisè in Venice. Sofia and Florville are in love, but Sofia's guardian, Gaudenzio Strappapuppole, is against the match. He is an enemy of Florville's father and when matters seem easier, with the latter's death, he presents a

further obstacle, having promised Sofia to the son of his old friend Signor Bruschino. Florville impersonates young Bruschino, who has been detained for an unpaid tavern bill, which Florville has actually settled on his behalf, and the complications that arise when old Bruschino appears are eventually solved when Signor Bruschino is induced to accept Florville as his son, for the present purposes, although well aware of the whole situation. A witty comedy, *Il Signor Bruschino, ossia Il figlio per azzardo* (Signor Bruschino, or The Son by Chance) opens with an overture to match, with the novel feature of music stands tapped by the violin bow as part of the thematic material. Otherwise the form of the overture brings two contrasting themes, the first taken over from the early *Sinfonia 'al Conventello'* (Naxos 8.570933), the second, in the dominant key, introduced, as usual by wind instruments, and returning in the tonic key in the final recapitulation of the two themes.

From 1806 to 1809 Rossini was a student at the Liceo Filarmonico in Bologna. His *Sinfonia in D major*, known as the *Sinfonia di Bologna*, was written 1808, one of a group of juvenilia largely eclipsed by the *Six String Sonatas*, written a few years before for his patron Agostino Triossi. The *Sinfonia di Bologna* provides, in its second subject, a subsidiary theme for the overture to *L'inganno felice*.

In addition to the three *farse* set by Rossini, Foppa also provided the libretto for *Sigismondo*, a *dramma* in two acts, first staged without contemporary success at the Venice Teatro La Fenice in December 1814. The plot concerns Sigismondo, King of Poland and his wife, Aldamira, daughter of the King of Bohemia, and the bad advice of Sigismondo's chief minister, Ladislao, who accuses the Queen of infidelity, leading to her condemnation to death. Posing as her sister, she is brought back to the palace and eventually acknowledged by Sigismondo as his faithful wife and Queen, with her final reinstatement when Sigismondo is confronted by the reality of the situation. The overture has an introductory section that includes an impressive oboe solo and the first theme of the *Allegro* was later used in the overture to *Otello*. The opera provided other material for later re-use.

Keith Anderson

Prague Sinfonia Orchestra

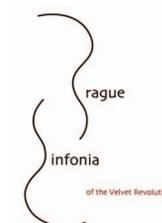


During the celebrations of the Czech National Day, the former President of the Czech Republic Václav Havel became Honorary President of the Prague Sinfonia Orchestra in a gala concert under Christian Benda at the Czech National House in New York City. After having collaborated with conductors such as Václav Neumann, Gerd Albrecht, Charles Mackerras, Trevor Pinnock and, for over ten years with Christian Benda, its chief conductor and artistic director, the Prague Sinfonia Orchestra was established for the symphonic repertoire during Prague Chamber Orchestra's sixteenth tour of North America. The orchestra has toured widely throughout the world, and is a regular participant of Czech musical life, with concert series in Prague and participation in festivals such as Salzburg, Bregenz, Berlin, Dresden, Lucerne, Montreux, Cheltenham, Besançon, and Biarritz. Solo artists performing with the orchestra have included Maxim Vengerov, Arturo Benedetti-Michelangeli, Friedrich Gulda and Christoph Eschenbach. Recordings for companies including RCA, EMI, Decca, Sony Classics, Naxos, Polydor, Nippon Columbia, Denon, BMG, Telarc, Ariola, Eurodisc and Supraphon have won a number of prestigious prizes, including the Wiener Flötenuhr, the Grand Prix du Disque Académie Charles Cros twice, and, after having sold one million records, the Golden Disc Award.

Christian Benda



Christian Benda is descended from a long line of musicians. First guest conductor of the Turin Philharmonic, he appears worldwide with orchestras including the Prague Symphony, Shanghai Philharmonic, Orchestra della Toscana, Polish National Opera, Budapest Concert Orchestra MAV, Cyprus State, Moscow Virtuosi, Münster Philharmonic, Ulster Orchestra, Orquestra Sinfônica do Estado de São Paulo, and Suisse Romande Orchestra, invited by festivals such as Schwetzingen, Echternach/Luxemburg, Cité de la musique Paris, Prague Spring, George Enescu Bucharest, Hong Kong Arts, Klangbogen Wien, and the Menuhin Festival in Switzerland. Christian Benda is chief conductor and artistic director of the Prague Sinfonia Orchestra with which he has recorded numerous standard classical works, as well as Schubert's and Rossini's complete overtures. Singers such as Renée Fleming, Barbara Hendricks, Cheryl Studer, and Simon Estes have appeared under his baton. In collaboration with the Vienna State Opera he has devised a new introduction to opera for the general public and young people, *High-Lights and Micro-Opera*, based on Goethe's colour theory, with the participation of narrator and dancers.



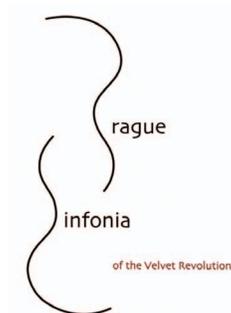
Rossini's ceaseless wit and invention are best exemplified in his series of operas. His colourful orchestration and command of both comic and tragic elements can be savoured in this second of four volumes of the complete symphonic overtures. *Guillaume Tell*, with its overture in four movements, includes a scene for five solo cellos. *La scala di seta* (The Silken Ladder), one of his most popular pieces, opens with an overture of charm and élan. Volume 1 (8.570933) was described by *MusicWeb International* as "an admirable start to what looks like being a very desirable series".



Gioachino
ROSSINI
(1792-1868)



Complete Overtures • 2



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|----------|----------------------------|--------------|
| 1 | Guillaume Tell | 11:37 |
| 2 | Eduardo e Cristina | 9:17 |
| 3 | L'inganno felice | 6:07 |
| 4 | La scala di seta | 6:01 |
| 5 | Demetrio e Polibio | 6:31 |
| 6 | Il Signor Bruschino | 4:52 |
| 7 | Sinfonia di Bologna | 5:26 |
| 8 | Sigismondo | 8:30 |

Prague Sinfonia Orchestra • Christian Benda

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Producer: Kateřina Chobotová • Engineer: Michael Rast • Booklet notes: Keith Anderson

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