

A large, bright full moon is the central focus of the image, set against a dark, gradient background that transitions from a deep blue at the top to a dark purple and black at the bottom. The moon's surface is detailed with various shades of grey and white, showing craters and lunar maria.

GIAN FRANCESCO MALIPIERO

Piano Works (1909-1921)

Poemetti lunari • Preludi autunnali
Cavalcate • Tre danze antiche • Risonanze

Rira Lim

Gian Francesco Malipiero (1882-1973): Piano Works (1909-1921)

Pianists who perform my piano works (is any living composer luckier than me?) are rare. Perhaps they feel that the piano does not love me; but I harbour no ill will towards this strange enemy of mine – rather, I am deeply in love with certain pianistic sonorities, with their luminosity. I understand the poetry of the keyboard and the vibrations of this, the most complete of all sound organisms, but acrobatic virtuosity fills me with repugnance.

(Gian Francesco Malipiero, writing to his friend Guido M. Gatti in 1941)

The seeds of Malipiero's unrequited affair – or should that be 'love-hate relationship'? – with the piano seem to have been sown early. He never studied it seriously: his first instrument (from age six) was the violin, which accompanied him throughout an increasingly unsettled and unhappy childhood. By his early teens, his parents had separated, and young Gian Francesco and his father were travelling across German-speaking central Europe, playing in salon orchestras. A tough year at the Vienna Conservatory (aged sixteen and seventeen) convinced Malipiero both to abandon the violin and to return home to his mother in their native Venice. He began to study with the composer Marco Enrico Bossi, who clearly did not rate Malipiero's creative capacities and encouraged him to take up another instrument. Gian Francesco chose the bassoon – a subtle way, perhaps, of thumbing his nose at Bossi?

Nonetheless, the 25-year-old Malipiero's first published composition was a set of *Six Pieces* for piano; and for a decade from the outbreak of World War One keyboard works were as integral as any other genre to his abundant output. But even at that time the piano pieces rarely challenged Malipiero's operatic, orchestral, vocal or even larger-scale chamber works in importance; and while he continued to grapple with his 'strange enemy' throughout his life, their encounters became ever more sporadic. In 1952, after six years in which he composed not a single solo keyboard piece, Malipiero went so far as to say of his piano music that it 'leaves me cold' – albeit adding that he 'would certainly not repudiate' the works written in 1916-22, which include the *Risonanze* and *Cavalcate* recorded on the present disc. Malipiero made these comments in a letter to another friend, Gino Scarpa, who had just finished editing the most important book about the composer that appeared in his lifetime, *L'opera di Gian Francesco Malipiero*,

'The Works of Gian Francesco Malipiero' – and a few lines earlier (and not for the first time) Malipiero did virtually disown all of his earlier piano music and pretty much everything else he had written before 1916. He was a little less hard on himself in his annotations to the catalogue that is *L'opera di Gian Francesco Malipiero's* most invaluable feature, allowing (for example) both the *Poemetti lunari* and *Preludi autunnali* to appear under the heading 'Piano Works' rather than relegating them to the category of 'Works Destroyed or Repudiated despite being Published' (the *Tre danze antiche*, however, merit not one mention in the whole book). But Malipiero's notes on the piano works in the catalogue tend to be laconic and unflattering; so it is frustrating that they are practically his only published comments about most of the pieces recorded here. Living on, and composing, into his nineties, Malipiero did return to the piano occasionally after 1956 – the year when he was surprised, on hearing radio performances organised by Guido M. Gatti of the *Preludi autunnali* and three of the *Poemetti lunari*, to find himself rather liking them; but by then orchestral music and operas were his dominant interests.

Yet in the piano music itself there is abundant evidence of the love for the instrument's unique resonances that Malipiero himself identified in 1941, and also of his conscious aversion to traditional keyboard acrobatics – which itself doubtless helps explain why pianists who perform this music have always been 'rare': it offers few opportunities to show off a brilliant technique. But those who appreciate the piano's 'poetry' and 'luminosity' – not to mention flashes of humour – will find plenty to enjoy; and amateur pianists who explore Malipiero's music are often delighted to discover that much of it is nicely within their capability (probably because it had to be within the composer's own capability!).

The simplest and oldest-sounding music on this disc may well also be the earliest in order of composition; but that is pure coincidence, as the deliberately archaic manner of the *Tre danze antiche* ('Three Old Dances' – precise date of composition unknown, though they were published in Leipzig in 1910) was untypical of Malipiero's style at any period. Perhaps this is why he soon seems to have forgotten all about them – or at least to have avoided the slightest allusion to their existence. As the subtitle of the opening *Gavotte* suggests, a version of it also appears in the second movement of the orchestral *Sinfonie del silenzio e de la morte* ('Symphonies of Silence

and Death') [Naxos 8.570879], which Malipiero most likely composed in 1909–10, and which by 1952 he had banished to the dustbin of 'Works Destroyed or Repudiated despite being Published'; it is uncertain which he wrote first, the piano piece or its orchestrated counterpart. No alternative versions of the concluding *Gigue* have come to light, but a slightly extended variant of the second dance, *Minuet*, appeared in May 1910 as a musical supplement in a Viennese periodical dedicated to music and theatre.

More surprisingly, the first of the *Preludi autunnali* and all seven of the *Poemetti lunari* were first published, in 1916, as musical supplements in Italian mass-market magazines, which usually featured songs and piano pieces that were considerably more popular in style. Malipiero must almost have abandoned hope of seeing the substantial 35-minute collection of *Poemetti lunari* ('Little Lunar Poems') in print. He had been trying hard to market them – notably to the Viennese publisher Universal Edition – ever since he wrote them, at approximately the same time as the *Tre danze antiche*, in 1909 and 1910; and he had touted them under a remarkable variety of titles. The four pieces he wrote in 1909 seem originally to have been called *Venetian Elegies*; but his later names for the complete set of seven pieces all make explicit reference to the moon, and the weekly magazine *Il mondo* ('The World') published them one by one under the overall title *Illusioni lunari*, 'Lunar Illusions'. Their initial animating spirit was an artist and photographer particularly renowned for moonlit works, a great friend of Malipiero's at the time: Mario de Maria (1852–1924), known as Marius Pictor, whose designs decorate several early published scores of Malipiero's music (including the *Tre danze antiche*).¹ Marius Pictor's influence was expressed in titles for the individual pieces in *Il mondo* – titles which Malipiero suppressed when the whole set was eventually published as *Poemetti lunari* by the Parisian firm of Senart in 1918.

The first of the set, in a highly unorthodox main metre of seven beats to the bar, took its original macabre title from one of Marius Pictor's best-known paintings, *I monaci dalle occhiaie vuote*, 'The Monks with Empty Eye Sockets', and its 'Salmodiando, gravemente' marking may be translated as 'Solemnly psalmodising'; Debussy-inspired pianistic sonorities emerge as the piece progresses, with rich chords in the piano's middle register echoed higher up the keyboard. 'Mestamente', 'Sadly', is the indication at the head of the second piece, whose (slightly different) *Il mondo* version was entitled *Evocazione*, 'Evocation': it, too, has an unusual main metre, with five beats to the bar. The 'gloomy' ('lugubre') third

piece first appeared under the title *Ballata dolorosa*, 'Sorrowful Ballad' (or perhaps 'Sorrowful Dance'): its troubled atmosphere remains unresolved in the extraordinary final chord, C minor in the right hand undermined by left-hand C flats. Contrast comes in the very fast fourth piece, whose earlier title was *Giocchi di nubi*, 'Clouds at Play'; but sadness again prevails in the fifth piece, marked 'quasi senza ritmo', 'almost without rhythm', and originally called *Canzone perduta* ('Lost Song') – with, in its outer sections, the most hauntingly beautiful melody of the entire set. The abrupt disjunctions that erupt at the core of the sixth piece – published in *Il mondo*, with a few differences, as *Silenzo spettrale* ('Spectral Silence') – call to mind a composer with whom Malipiero had much in common, but whose music he did not in fact discover till much later, after the First World War: the Moravian Czech Leoš Janáček (1854–1928). In the 'extremely agitated' cumulative power of the final piece, originally named after another of Marius Pictor's works, *La cavalcata della morte*, 'The Cavalcade of Death', the affinities are with significantly later music by Malipiero himself: in 'the pounding tritones, the viciously thrusting chromatic and whole-tone scalic flourishes, and the sudden upsurges of impassioned anguish', Malipiero expert John C. G. Waterhouse hears premonitions of some of Malipiero's greatest music, not least the war-tormented *Pause del silenzio I* ('Breaks in Silence' No. 1, 1917) [Naxos 8.572409]. For Waterhouse, approving the advocacy of previous commentators (including another friend of the composer, the French critic Henry Prunières, who judged this Malipiero's 'first truly characteristic work'), the inner tension pervading the *Poemetti lunari* evokes – 'more clearly and decisively than any earlier piece' – an image he sees as central to Malipiero's output: the 'implacable opposition between a world of radiant Beauty with melancholy undertones, and sombre, turbulent forces that seem bent on destroying that Beauty.' Writing to Universal Edition in 1914, Malipiero himself valued the first and last of the *Poemetti* particularly highly; in 1952 he dismissed the whole set – misleadingly (and deliberately so?) – as 'music about something that no longer interests me'; but when thanking Guido M. Gatti for organising radio broadcasts of the first, third and seventh pieces in 1956, he was forced to admit that he 'almost' preferred them to the *Preludi autunnali*.

The ominous shadows in the *Poemetti lunari*, and in so much of Malipiero's other music throughout his life, warn that it would be equally unwise to accept unconditionally his 1952 comment on the *Preludi autunnali* ('Autumnal Preludes'): 'Their melancholy is perhaps a consequence of the war – just started

but not yet felt' (Italy did not join the First World War till 1915). Melancholy these four pieces certainly are; very curiously, the first of them was first published in the monthly magazine *Il secolo XX* ('The Twentieth Century') on May Day in 1916 under the title *Preludi primaverili* ('Spring-like Preludes')! Surely only the notoriously capricious Malipiero could claim this 'Lento, ma carezzevole' ('slow, but caressing') music to be full of the joys of spring as well as autumnally regretful. The birdsong-like motif that opens – and recurs frequently in – the second *Prelude* establishes clear affinities with Ravel's *Oiseaux tristes* ('Sad Birds'), the second of his five *Miroirs*, 'Reflections', composed in 1904–5). Malipiero himself was a great bird-lover; and for the still darker third piece he, too, uses the marking 'triste' – which means the same in both Italian and French (although the pronunciation is different). The clouds barely lift in the only fast piece, the fourth.

In the title of the 1918 work that closes the present disc, *Risonanze*, Malipiero makes explicit his fascination with the piano's 'Resonances'. His 1952 commentary brackets this set with all the other, very diverse, piano pieces he composed between 1917 and 1924, characterising them as 'fleeting musical ideas entrusted to the piano ... despite their titles, and the antipathy they inspired in most piano virtuosos, they are nothing but exquisitely pianistic sonorities'. With the benefit of hindsight, Malipiero is (in this case) allowing some genuine self-awareness to express itself. He had come to realise that composition was a daily necessity for him, and that many of his works reflect a need to capture his incessant flow of musical ideas – something he occasionally acknowledged even in his titles: see, for example, the discussion in the liner note to Naxos 8.572409 of various alternative names for the work he finally called *Pause del silenzio II* ('Breaks in Silence' No. 2, 1925–26). Nevertheless, the *Risonanze* conceal far more art and craft than Malipiero suggests. Throughout, they juxtapose two contrasting kinds of bell-like sonorities – one chiming, slow, 'calm' (as indicated for the first piece) and largely chordal; the other tinkling, flowing, rippling (as in the 'fluid' second) like a stream. In the brief, swift final piece, the chords ring out over heaving, growing low reverberations. Another highly structured

feature of the set is its metres: changing all the time in the first piece, they become progressively more regular with each successive *Risonanze*.

Among the other works Malipiero described in 1952 as 'fleeting musical ideas' were the three *Cavalcate* ('Rides'), the first music on the present disc – though the last to be composed, in 1921. Here, as in other piano pieces from around the same time,² his quirky humour comes to the fore. Possibly the most striking single musical image on this entire disc is the opening one, as Malipiero's ride immediately fails to get underway – his steed being a 'recalcitrant' donkey (*somaro*). There may also be a joke in the 'non ritenuto' marking at the head of the music, which (in internationalised Italian musical terminology) means 'not held back': the halting gait is under the control of the beast of burden, not the rider. The camel, with its slow rocking (*dondolante*) motion, is a safer, more reliable mount, for all the unpredictable asymmetry of its metre. But immediately Malipiero leaps on to his 'fiery' (*focoso*) charger (*destriero*), things hurtle out of hand in hammering, furiously unbridled superimpositions of different keys. A (subconscious?) expression, perhaps, of Malipiero's ultimate ambivalence towards the 'most complete of all sound organisms': at home with its gentler vibrations, but more frustrated by its stubborn percussiveness – and thrown completely by its barnstorming warhorses.

David Gallagher

¹ Marius Pictor had settled in Malipiero's native Venice when the composer was a child, and in 1910–13 he designed and built his own house on the Giudecca island in a kind of neo-Venetian-Gothic style, the Casa dei tre occhi – 'House of the Three Eyes', so called after the three large, eye-like arched windows on its facade; it is now an exhibition space for contemporary art and photography.

² E.g. the three *Omaggi* ('Homages', 1920) – 'To a Parrot', 'To an Elephant' and 'To an Idiot'; or *Il tarlo* ('The Woodworm', 1922).



Rira Lim

Born in Gwangju, South Korea, Rira Lim completed her undergraduate studies at the Yonsei University in Seoul and her graduate degrees (M.M., D.M.A.) at the University of North Texas College of Music, studying with Joseph Banowetz. She has been awarded prizes at the 2004 Wiesbaden International Piano Competition, the 2005 International Symphonic Workshops Competition and the 2006-07 University of North Texas concerto competition. She gave a critically acclaimed début at Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall in 2009 with a programme including Malipiero's four *Preludi autunnali* and her début concert at Seoul Arts Center's Recital hall in 2010 featured Malipiero's *Barlumi*. Rira Lim has appeared in concerts throughout Asia, Western and Eastern Europe, and North America. She has performed extensively in recital and chamber music throughout South Korea, Germany, and the United States as well as appearing as a soloist with leading orchestras. She currently serves as Assistant Professor of Piano at Korea National University of Education.

The Italian composer Gian Francesco Malipiero, despite considering the piano his 'strange enemy', created a highly individual body of works for the instrument, exploring its most beautiful sonorities. These five contrasting early collections range from the deliberately archaic idiom of the *Tre danze antiche* to the quirky humour of the *Cavalcate* ('Rides' on a donkey, a camel and a fiery charger), via the resonating bell-sounds of *Risonanze* and the gentle autumnal melancholy of the *Preludi autunnali*. The powerful *Poemeti lunari*, a struggle between a world of radiant beauty and forces bent on its destruction, are regarded as Malipiero's first truly personal creation.

Gian Francesco **MALIPIERO** (1882-1973)

Playing Time
71:43

	5:53
1 <i>Cavalcate</i> ('Rides', 1921) *	1:52
2 <i>Recalcitrante</i> (Somaro). Non ritenuto	2:41
3 <i>Dondolante</i> (Camello). Lento	1:20
3 <i>Focoso</i> (Destriero). Mosso, ma ben ritmato	34:10
Poemeti lunari ('Little Lunar Poems', 1909-10)	6:44
4 <i>Salmodiando</i> , gravemente	3:43
5 <i>Mestamente</i> , ma non lento	6:18
6 <i>Lugubre</i>	2:39
7 <i>Presto</i>	4:26
8 <i>Mestamente</i> (quasi senza ritmo)	6:36
9 <i>Molto lento</i>	3:44
10 <i>Agitatissimo</i>	17:22
Preludi autunnali ('Autumnal Preludes', 1914)	4:07
11 <i>Lento</i> , ma carezzevole	4:04
12 <i>Ritenuto</i> , ma spigliato	6:00
13 <i>Lento</i> , triste	3:11
14 <i>Veloce</i>	8:47
Tre danze antiche ('Three Old Dances', c. 1909-10) *	2:20
15 <i>Gavotta</i> (from <i>Sinfonia del Silenzio</i>). Allegretto	3:39
16 <i>Minuetto</i> . Carezzevole	2:48
17 <i>Giga</i> . Presto	5:31
Risonanze ('Resonances', 1918)	2:02
18 <i>Calmò</i>	1:13
19 <i>Fluido</i>	1:21
20 <i>Non troppo mosso</i>	0:55
21 <i>Agitato</i> , non troppo	

WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING *

Rira Lim, Piano

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