

NAXOS

Bruno
BETTINELLI

Complete Works for Guitar

Davide Ficco



Bruno Bettinelli (1913–2004)

Complete Works for Guitar

1	Come una Cadenza (1983)	5:34	Cinque Preludi (1971)	7:09	
2	Notturmo (1985)	4:39	Dedicated to Ruggero Chiesa		
	Dedicated to Guido Margaria		18	No. 1 Tranquillo	1:30
	Dodici Studi (1977)	25:51	19	No. 2 Deciso e ritmato	1:40
3	No. 1 (Monodico) Andante	2:21	20	No. 3 Lento	1:30
4	No. 2 (Ritmico) Mosso	1:30	21	No. 4 Veloce	0:45
5	No. 3 (Arpeggi e canto superiore) Tranquillo	1:52	22	No. 5 Allegro	1:29
6	No. 4 (Accordi) Calmo	2:19	Sonata Breve (1976)		
7	No. 5 (Registri alternati) Andante	1:24	Dedicated to Aldo Minella		
8	No. 6 (Note ribattute) Andantino	2:38	23	1. Lento–Allegro	2:54
9	No. 7 (Intervalli spezzati) Allegro a piacere	0:59	24	2. Aria (Calmo)	1:39
10	No. 8 (Polifonia) Calmo	1:59	25	3. Mosso	3:14
11	No. 9 (Prevalenza di melodia nel basso)		26	Improvvisazione (1970)	4:35
	Moderato (Tempo di Valzer lento)	2:25	(Calmo – Mosso – Più mosso e brillante – Più lento – Più mosso – Calmo)		
12	No. 10 Mosso	2:31	Quattro Pezzi (1972)		
13	No. 11 Calmo	2:15	Dedicated to Angelo Gilardino		
14	No. 12 Tempo di Passacaglia	2:55	27	No. 1 Introduzione (Andante scorrevole)	2:32
	Mutazioni su Tre Temi Noti (1994)	6:34	28	No. 2 Toccata (Veloce)	1:47
15	Mozart: ‘Là ci darem la mano’ (Andante)	2:08	29	No. 3 Notturmo (Calmo)	2:56
16	Chopin: Nocturne in E flat, Op. 9, No. 2 (Tranquillo)	2:24	30	No. 4 Ritmico (Allegro)	3:25
17	Stravinsky: Little Waltz, Petrushka (Allegretto)	1:54			

Bruno Bettinelli, born in Milan, was one of the foremost progressive twentieth century Italian composers and teachers profoundly influenced by the music of Stravinsky, Hindemith, and Bartók, as well as by the previous generation of eminent fellow countrymen such as Malipiero (1882-1973), Casella (1883-1947), and Petrassi (1904-2003). Bettinelli graduated from the Milan Conservatory in 1931, began teaching there from 1938 and was subsequently appointed professor of composition from 1957 to 1979. His pupils across a wide range of musical achievements included the conductors Abbado, Chailly, Muti, and Serembe, pianists, Bucci, Canino, and Pollini, composers Chailly, Corghi, Brusa and the songwriter

Nannini. His prolific output covers operas, orchestral works, a number of vocal pieces, and chamber and instrumental music.

Bettinelli's early style owed much to the neo-classicism of Hindemith, but after the Second World War he moved away from tonality into atonal chromaticism and a close analysis of Webern's compositional concepts. He also explored the possibilities of electronic music. Bettinelli's orchestral output lists seven symphonies, four concertos for orchestra, and several other concertos. His interest in writing for the guitar began during the 1970s at a time when the repertoire was attracting many composers who had not previously written for the instrument. Bettinelli

was encouraged both by the Italian guitarist, composer, and editor, Angelo Gilardino, who in the 1970s initiated a new series for Bérben in an attempt to widen the guitar's contemporary expressiveness, and also by Ruggero Chiesa, the distinguished Milanese editor and teacher.

Apart from *Quattro pezzi*, published by Bérben in 1973 and recorded several times since then, Bettinelli's guitar music has been neglected by recitalists, especially when the focus of the repertoire subtly shifted in the late twentieth century away from avant-garde experimentation towards a greater emphasis on neo-romanticism. Guitarists may therefore be surprised by the quantity and substance of Bettinelli's music. He is a composer with a distinctive voice and writes in an austere but often lyrical style which explores the instrument's resources with integrity and thoroughness. The range of his guitar pieces covers twelve studies as well as sonatas, preludes, and shorter, more improvisatory movements. His music has no affinities to Spanish influences but approaches the problems of guitar composition in a uniquely contemporary manner, involved with placing the guitar within the context of progressive twentieth century modernism.

Come una cadenza (In the manner of a cadenza) (1983) poses the question of the nature of a 'cadenza' – usually signifying a virtuoso solo passage inserted near the end of a concerto movement. In the eighteenth century cadenzas were often improvised as indication of a performer's brilliance, but later on it was the composer's brilliance that the instrumentalist was representing when this episode was written out in full.

Bettinelli's *cadenza* is somewhat more extended than most examples in concertos. It expresses a definite flavour of improvisation, opening with an angular detached sparseness before developing into more complex textures and moods. A variety of guitaristic techniques are deployed throughout such as staccato effects, the resonances of single sonorous notes, rapid arpeggiated figurations, harmonics, pizzicato, and strummed chords.

Nocturno (Nocturne) (1985), dedicated to and edited by Guido Margaria, harks back atmospherically to preceding

evocations of night in guitar music such as Goffredo Petrassi's *Suoni Notturni* (1959) and Benjamin Britten's *Nocturnal after John Dowland, Op. 70*, (1964), rather than to the sophisticated tradition of Chopin's great set of *Nocturnes*. As such it is a worthy addition to the expressive poetic nature of the guitar. *Nocturno* opens in three-four time, marked *calmo*, with meditative single lines in the bass before broadening into melancholic chords and bell-like harmonics. A second section develops the treble voice, supported by chords, moving into agitated accelerating semiquavers and strident octaves until, once again, calm is restored, *liberamente*, with soothing harmonics. A final episode leads back to intimations of the opening bass line, with a concluding passage where serenity is established almost in terms of a tonal lullaby with gentle harp-like chords.

Dodici Studi (Twelve Studies) (1977) will irresistibly remind guitarists, at least as far as the title is concerned, of the famous *Douze Études* for guitar of Heitor Villa-Lobos, composed in 1929 for Segovia. But whereas the great Brazilian composer's studies were the product of a natural romantic, Bettinelli's ambitious set of studies project a defiantly contemporary identity, appropriate and timely after the half century of musical development which the guitar had passed through. Thus, in thoroughly modern idioms, the composer explores the separate techniques of the guitar, including monody, rhythm, melody with supporting arpeggio, chords, alternate registers, repeated notes, spaced intervals, polyphony, melody in the bass, multiple textures, expressive calmness, and finally, the intricacies of the *Passacaglia* (reminiscent of Britten's *Passacaglia* towards the end of *Nocturnal*). Bettinelli's achievement here is an effective compendium of the demands placed on performers in the context of contemporary music.

Mutazioni su tre temi noti (Mutations on three well-known themes) (1994) takes for its themes, Mozart's *Là ci darem la mano* (Give me your hand) from *Don Giovanni*, Chopin's *Nocturne in E flat, Op. 9, No. 2*, and Stravinsky's *Little Waltz* from *Petrushka*. Each *Mutation*

begins with a statement of the melody followed by a new look at the material from the composer's perspective and a further glimpse of the original theme.

With *Cinque Preludi* (Five Preludes) (1971) the title once again may well remind us of Villa-Lobos's famous *Five Preludes* written during the 1940s. But the Italian composer invariably offers his own unique musical language even while ironically reminding us of guitaristic precedents. A chaste clarity of outline is characteristic of these pieces, each being short and to the point. In some ways they are also reminiscent of Richard Rodney Bennett's *Five Improptus* (1968) in that these brief contrasting statements establish structures within which a composer could explore guitar textures for the first time. *Cinque Preludi* are dedicated to Ruggero Chiesa.

Sonata breve (1976), dedicated to Aldo Minella, is a three movement work like many sonatas. But it is full of surprises and unexpected colours, and the listener is perhaps implicitly invited to place expectations of conventional musical form against the more episodic, fragmented moods of Bettinelli's creation. The first movement begins with a plaintive single line after which comes a more rhythmic dance style. This is followed by a tender *Aria*, with gentler tonal elements developing a quasi-romantic melancholy of great sensitivity. But this is rapidly dispersed by the more strident opening of the third movement which introduces mandolin-like strumming and then moves on to more introspective aspects. The sonata returns to its initial frolics, only briefly dwelling on its own meditation

My sincerest thanks

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before concluding with bold detachment and vigour.

Improvvisazione (1970) was Bettinelli's first composition for guitar. The piece opens with the marking *a piacere, con molta elasticità* (as you please, with much elasticity) before progressing to *a tempo*, and a more impulsive forward motion. The separate sections build up into a complex collage of textures comprising monodic lines, chordal groupings, tapping effects, and even moments which suggest influences from the jazz guitar.

In *Quattro Pezzi* (Four Pieces) (1972), Bettinelli turned his attention to the ancient form of the 'suite', and transforms it into his own contemporary expressiveness. The composition has been authoritatively described by Angelo Gilardino, the work's dedicatee and editor, and the first guitarist to record the four pieces:

These movements are atonal in character but are not tied to any compositional dogma; they use strong elements of invention and form in developing elegant rhythmic, dynamic and expressive contrasts. The *Introduzione* is thoughtful and somewhat introverted, the *Toccata* passes like a swift and buzzing chimera, the *Notturmo* is lyrical and atmospheric, whilst the final *Ritmico* is fierce and assertive. Bettinelli, well-known for his attention to detail, gives here a further demonstration of his style, combining very fluent invention and painstaking accuracy with craftsmanship.

Graham Wade

Davide Ficco

Davide Ficco

Davide Ficco was born in Turin in 1962. He studied with Guido Margaria at the Conservatory of Alessandria graduating cum laude, and conducted further studies with John Williams, José Tomàs, Betho Davezac, Jakob Lindberg, Oscar Ghiglia and Alain Meunier, obtaining, from the latter, a grant from the CEE and two Merit diplomas from the Chigiana Accademia of Siena (1982-1993). In 1989 he received the title of Guitar Performer at the Royal College of Music in London, and in 1985 completed the course in Music Education at the Turin Conservatory. He currently teaches guitar at the Conservatory of Cuneo (Italy). Having won many awards in national and international competitions as soloist or in chamber groups (1978-83), Davide Ficco has collaborated with the Contemporary Music Group and the Symphonic Orchestras of the R.A.I. of Turin (1982-2006) and Milan (1990-1993), with the Regio Theater of Turin, the Labortatorio Lyrico of Alessandria, the Orchestra Sinfonica Italiana and the Filarmonica '900. He plays mainly modern and contemporary music and has made radio and television recordings for the R.A.I. including many world premiere performances. He has recorded for the labels Naxos, Stradivarius, GuitArt, Moisykos and Oliphant with music of the 1900's. As a composer he has written music primarily for guitar, some of which has been published by Gendai Guitar in Tokyo and Carisch in Milan.

Mamela Cerri, Turin





Bruno Bettinelli

Top left: With Riccardo Muti at La Scala, Milan, 1972.

Left: With his wife, Silvia Bianchera, 1986

Above: In 2002

*Photos courtesy of
Silvia Bianchera Bettinelli*



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Booklet notes in English

This is the first recording of the complete guitar music of Bruno Bettinelli, the eminent Italian composer of operas, symphonies and concertos, chamber and vocal works. Bettinelli's guitar music is a delightful distillation of his wider compositional concepts, rooted in twentieth century modernism but full of lyrical insights, inventiveness, and sheer originality. His explorations of guitar sonorities take the listener into new and unexpected areas of contemporary expressiveness. Bettinelli's scrupulous attention to detail and his fascination with every aspect of writing for plucked strings offer a unique experience with novel perspectives on the development of the twentieth-century guitar repertoire.

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Full track details will be found in the booklet

Daide Ficco, Guitar



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