

Giuseppe  
**MARTUCCI**

**Sei pezzi • Capriccio e Serenata  
Minuetto e Tempo di Gavotta • Sonata facile**

**Matteo Generani, Piano**



**Giuseppe**  
**MARTUCCI**  
(1856–1909)

<b>1</b>	<b>Romanza facile</b> (1889) .....	<b>3:05</b>
	<b>Capriccio e Serenata, Op. 57</b> (1886) .....	<b>8:12</b>
<b>2</b>	No. 1. Capriccio .....	5:07
<b>3</b>	No. 2. Serenata .....	3:05
	<b>Sei pezzi, Op. 38</b> (1878)* .....	<b>21:37</b>
<b>4</b>	No. 1. Flatterie .....	2:42
<b>5</b>	No. 2. Souvenir d'un bois .....	3:48
<b>6</b>	No. 3. Chant d'amour .....	3:29
<b>7</b>	No. 4. La Chasse .....	5:54
<b>8</b>	No. 5. Sérénade .....	3:50
<b>9</b>	No. 6. Moment de joie .....	1:54
<b>10</b>	<b>Notturmo 'Souvenir de Milan', Op. 25</b> (1875)* .....	<b>4:26</b>
	<b>Minuetto e Tempo di Gavotta, Op. 55</b> (1880/1888)* .....	<b>9:24</b>
<b>11</b>	No. 1. Minuetto (1880) .....	5:10
<b>12</b>	No. 2. Tempo di Gavotta (1888) .....	4:14
<b>13</b>	<b>Sonata facile, Op. 41</b> (1878)* .....	<b>5:40</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>Three Scherzos, Op. 53 – No. 2 in E major</b> (1880) .....	<b>4:38</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>Two Nocturnes, Op. 70 – No. 1 in G flat major</b> (1891) .....	<b>5:27</b>
<b>16</b>	<b>Sei pezzi, Op. 44 – No. 6. Tarantella</b> (1880) .....	<b>6:12</b>
<b>17</b>	<b>Prima barcarola, Op. 20</b> (1874)* .....	<b>2:47</b>

\* WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING

**Matteo Generani, Piano**

## Giuseppe MARTUCCI (1856–1909)

### Piano Works

Of the Italian composers who, in the second half of the 19th century, chose to focus their energies on writing instrumental music, Giuseppe Martucci, born in Capua, not far from Naples, in 1856, is probably the most significant figure. His efforts to restore the great tradition of purely instrumental music had a long-lasting impact on generations of Italian composers. After years of neglect Martucci's music is slowly starting to take its place in the repertoire, especially the magnificent symphonies, the piano concertos and several chamber works of truly exquisite craftsmanship, like the *Quintetto, Op. 45*. Yet the same cannot be said of his large output of piano music, which spans over 40 years of activity; ironically, to say the least, given that as a pianist Martucci started his career and gained universal praise. A child prodigy, he received his first education from his father, a military trumpeter and bandmaster who, recognising the precocious talent of his son as a pianist, brought him before the public at the age of eight, in December 1864, in Pozzuoli. This was the first of a number of successful public appearances of the young musician. It was also not long before Martucci showed his interest in composing: in April 1867 he performed a piece of his own entitled *Il genio*, which was immediately published by the local music publisher Del Monaco. Martucci's extraordinary talent drew the attention of the famous pianist and teacher Beniamino Cesi, who had been a student of Thalberg. Cesi convinced Giuseppe to enter the Reale Collegio di San Pietro a Maiella, which would become the Conservatory of Naples, one of Italy's most prestigious music institutions, where he studied piano and composition. Both his piano teacher, Cesi, and his composition teacher, Paolo Serrao, were advocates of 19th-century Austro-German music, and arguably played a major role in Martucci's choice to focus on instrumental music. After completing his studies, which prevented him from playing in public for several years (it was a rule of the Reale Collegio), Martucci began his career as a pianist, his fame quickly spreading to Italy and Europe: in 1874 he performed in Rome, where Liszt greatly appreciated his playing, and then started to tour Europe, giving concerts in London, Dublin, Paris and many other cities.

So successful was a performance in Milan in 1875 that Ricordi acquired the rights to publish Martucci's music, which resulted in six books of music that collect the composer's output spanning an entire lifetime.

In 1880, aged only 24, this international recognition garnered him a post as a piano teacher at the Reale Collegio, and in Naples he also became the conductor of the newly founded Orchestra Napoletana. These engagements virtually ended his career as a virtuoso pianist, and he stayed mostly in Italy for the rest of his life; but his endless commitment to the circulation of orchestral and chamber music, both as a composer and as a conductor, was of immense importance. Besides conducting all of the Beethoven symphonies, he introduced the music of many lesser known composers to the Italian audience, including Berlioz, Liszt, Schumann, Franck, d'Indy, Lalo, Sullivan, Stanford, Parry, Mackenzie and Cowen, and he gave many notable Italian premieres, including, most importantly, Brahms' *Symphony No. 2* in 1882 and Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* in 1888. Nor was he unaware of the roots of instrumental music: Bach, Scarlatti and Rameau were often in his repertoire. In 1886 he left Naples to direct the Liceo Musicale of Bologna, where he had Ottorino Respighi as a pupil, staying in the city until 1902, when he returned to his beloved Naples to direct the Reale Collegio, which in the meantime had become the Conservatory. In Naples he continued to broaden his repertoire, performing Debussy's music, which at the time was almost unheard of. He died, aged 53, in 1909.

As stated before, Martucci's piano works remain largely unexplored. It could be that while the composer had Toscanini as an advocate of his symphonic music, Alfredo Casella, who incidentally benefited from Martucci's legacy and suggestions (he advised Casella's parents to send him abroad), was a vocal critic of his piano works. Casella was perhaps quite harsh in his judgement – Martucci only gradually found his voice as a composer of piano music. The purpose of this album is to give new life to a wide range of Martucci's solo piano works with the hope that they

will attract a wider audience and be performed more frequently. It is a common opinion that the works from *Opus 2* to *50* do not contain any real masterpieces (although there is at least one exception featured later).

Most of these pieces are mainly short compositions representative of salon music, characteristic pieces like mazurkas, polkas, romances, and those genres that sprung from the pen of the early Romantic composers, including scherzos, nocturnes, caprices and barcarolles. But even in the most humble and least demanding compositions Martucci's music is always refined and finely crafted; examples include the elegant *Romanza facile*, a plain and intimate piece that shows Martucci's gift for melodic invention, and the *Barcarola*, in the same vein, where the rocking melodic line passes from the right hand to the left, to return embellished in the upper voice. These pieces owe much to the elegant music afforded to skilled amateurs composed by Chopin or Mendelssohn; with the effort of filling the gap created by the absence of a Romantic Italian instrumental identity that we find in German speaking territories. The Chopinesque *Nocturne, Op. 25* was composed in London in 1875, and bears the subtitle 'Souvenir de Milan': the arabesque in the right hand is sustained by the left-hand arpeggios, and the melody almost dissolves into droplets of sound, very much as in Chopin's *Berceuse*.

As he matured as a composer, Martucci returned to some of these genres with much more depth, as the *Nocturne in G flat major, Op. 70, No. 1* shows. This is probably the most famous of Martucci's piano pieces, not least because he later transcribed it for orchestra. Here we again find the composer developing highly embellished, fast-flowing melodic lines, their strong singing quality pervaded by a melancholic tone, which are paired with a constantly syncopated accompaniment that gives the sense of endless forward movement.

Among the more interesting pieces is the *Sonata facile, Op. 41*, a fresh and jaunty piece in one movement; here Martucci seems perfectly at ease, as he has an Italian model to gain inspiration from, and what a model: Scarlatti's sonatas, with their brilliance and richness of ideas that appealed to the Romantic pianists. This sonata, which despite the 'facile' in the title is not an easy piece, reveals much about how pianists looked at Baroque keyboard music in the 19th century.

The six characteristic pieces composed in 1878 and published together as *Opus 38*, each with a French title, are represented in full in this recording, and prove that Martucci was not inclined to the trivial writing that often plagued this kind of music. *No. 1. Flatterie* is elegant and very much in the French fashion. Noble ideas, and using a pianistic gesture as inspiration (reminding us that Martucci was a pupil of Thalberg, who was one of Liszt's students), are shown in the second piece, *Souvenir d'un bois*, in which fragments of massed chords scatter up and down the instrument. In *No. 3. Chant d'amour* the melody is played by the left hand beneath the repeated chords of the right hand, the long lines often bending to unexpected harmonies. Moments of unconventionality are found also in the Schumannesque *La Chasse*, a work which only retains the rhythmic impulse of the style. *No. 5. Sérénade* is a sombre *barcarola*, and the short, flamboyant *Moment de joie* that closes the set recalls *No. 2*. There is a certain unity of inspiration in these six pieces – they were not just conceived at the same time and grouped together at random. That Martucci did not put together pieces just by chance is proven by the two stylised dances, *Minuetto* and *Tempo di Gavotta*, composed at a distance of eight years one from the other, and brought together in *Opus 55*. There is very little to dance to here, especially in the *Minuetto*, composed in Naples in 1880, with its assertive main theme: despite the title we can consider this piece more a *scherzo* with a *trio*. Even less danceable is the *Tempo di Gavotta*, composed in Bologna in 1888, which shares with the *Minuetto* the energy of the first section and the ecstatic harmonies of the *trio*. My suggestion is that here Martucci is blending two dance types with the characteristics of the early Romantic *scherzo*; during those years he was engaged with the *scherzo* form – one example being the lively and joyful *Scherzo, Op. 53* also written in 1880, and more easily recognisable as a *scherzo* – and somehow, whether consciously or not, he transferred the features of the *scherzo* to his other compositions, but further research or discoveries might provide more enlightenment on this. Just one detail seems to detract from my theory: whereas the *Minuetto* can easily adapt to a *scherzo*, sharing the ternary metre, it might sound odd in the case of the *Gavotta* – a *scherzo* in 4/4 time? And yet it works, if one listens with an open mind; after all, didn't Schumann write a march in 3/4 in his *Carnaval*?

In the 1880s Martucci's voice as a composer of piano music was definitely original, although flashes of great originality coexist with the inevitable homages to the achievement of his foreign models. This is especially evident in the two pieces published as *Opus 57, Capriccio* and *Serenata*. The first, written with great mastery, pairs with the *Serenata*, a little gem that is worthy of being better known and performed. Beneath its humble appearance, from the ceaseless movement of duplets suggesting the pizzicato of a plucked instrument, emerges a melody that is memorable and vague at the same time. It might be that Martucci is at his best when he writes in forms and genres that belong to his cultural background, rather than having to assimilate, as in this *Serenata*, which is found in the heart of every Neapolitan. And another piece that proves this is another masterwork in his piano *oeuvre*, the flamboyant and finger-twisting *Tarantella in G minor, Op. 44, No. 6*, composed in 1880, which reveals the real Lisztian background of Martucci as a pianist. Awesome tarantellas have been written by composers who were not from Naples, but could understand well enough its spirit so as to mimic it in a convincing way, like Rossini or, even more surprisingly, the American composer Louis Moreau Gottschalk. Martucci, being from Naples (Capua is not Naples, but people from Campania tend to have quite a broad view of where the boundaries of its cultural capital are), felt free to fertilise the tarantella with the sonata form: we have an exposition with two main themes in two different tonalities, the second being more lyrical in character (the movement of triplets remains in the left hand), a development and a recapitulation that brings back the two themes in the same key. The result is a piece that conjugates the folk element with the classical exigency of formal discipline, while at the same time capturing both the spirit of the tarantella and that of Romantic virtuosity.

**Tommaso Manera**

**Also available**



**8.573438**



## **Matteo Generani**

Italian pianist Matteo Generani is an Italian music specialist, performing works from Frescobaldi to contemporary composers. In May 2020, he recorded the complete set of *Études, Op. 23* by the contemporary Italian composer Giovanni Albini. Particularly important is his research on Giuseppe Martucci, the topic of his doctoral studies in Kansas City, for which he presented several lectures, performed and recorded solo piano and chamber music works, and made original arrangements. Generani is co-founder of the Neo-Art Piano Duo with Indonesian pianist Regina Tanujaya, and the Medhelan Duo with Italian violinist and violist Dorian Di Domenico. Generani is deeply committed to outreach initiatives: he serves as the co-artistic director of Classical Music Express (based in Kansas City), and holds the position of artist in residence with the Emerald Coast Music Alliance Foundation, a programme that takes place every winter season in Florida, providing performances and music education to various communities. He has been vice-president of Mu Phi Epsilon and, since 2023, has been the festival coordinator of the prestigious Lieven Piano Foundation in Vienna.

**[www.matteogenerani.com](http://www.matteogenerani.com)**

Giuseppe Martucci was one of the formative figures in the re-establishment of Italian instrumental music in the second half of the 19th century. His orchestral music had advocates as powerful as Mahler and Toscanini, and his piano concertos won admirers. His solo piano music was performed mostly by him, and today remains virtually unknown. These compositions offer verdant, colourful melodies, striking dance themes, and elegant music crafted for the salon. There are also some flamboyant and virtuoso challenges, tracing a lineage back to Scarlatti.

## Giuseppe MARTUCCI

(1856–1909)

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