

NAXOS

**Marco Enrico
BOSSI**

(1861–1925)

**Violin Sonatas
Nos. 1 and 2**

Emmanuele Baldini
Violin

Luca Delle Donne
Piano



Marco Enrico BOSSI (1861–1925)

Violin Sonatas Nos. 1 and 2

For 19th-century composers, the sonata for violin and piano was a fascinating concept, as within it the two instruments that most perfectly embodied the Romantic idea of virtuosity had to abide by the constraints of a form inherited by the Classical period. The genre flourished especially in Germany, Austria and France. Following the examples of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, violin sonatas were written by Schubert, Weber, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Brahms, and by all the main French composers: Fauré, Saint-Saëns and Franck. With the latter, who blends the complex harmonic language of late Romanticism with the Classical form in a cyclical framework, the violin sonata reached, according to many, its peak.

While German and French cultures were deeply committed to chamber music, in Italy instrumental music was, in the 19th century, rather sparse. Nonetheless, in the second half of the century, the sacred flame of absolute music was kept alight by a group of musicians who resisted the siren call of opera, with significant results, and towards the end of the century Italy gave its small contribution to the genre of violin sonata with the two sonatas of Marco Enrico Bossi, preceded by the only sonata written by Giuseppe Martucci in 1876 (the young Ferruccio Busoni also wrote a violin sonata in 1890, but it is a rather juvenile work). Bossi is one of the composers who, along with Martucci and Sgambati, laid the foundation for instrumental music, that, in a century dominated by opera, was coming out of a lethargic state. It was not that he despised opera, but his love for it was unrequited, and his attempts in the genre – *Paquita*, *L'Angelo della Notte* and *Il Veggente* – are today completely forgotten. His impressive output stands out among 19th-century Italian music, comprising more than 150 large scale compositions, including organ works, a large number of Masses, cantatas and motets. He also composed a conspicuous number of orchestral and chamber music works that testify to his devotion to also pursuing a solely instrumental ideal.

Bossi was born in Salò in the province of Brescia in 1861, a true child of art: his father and grandfather were both professional organists, and from the age of ten he studied at the Liceo Musicale of Bologna, the stronghold of instrumental music in Italy, and then at the Conservatory of Milan, his broad education including composition, piano, violin and organ.

After spending ten years in Como, where he was appointed organist and conductor at the cathedral, he took on important positions until the end of his life, becoming a professor of organ and harmony at the Conservatory of Naples and later director of the Liceo Benedetto Marcello in Venice, the Liceo Musicale at Bologna and the Conservatory of Rome. Being the head of so many prestigious institutions allowed him to exert an extraordinary influence on music education at a high level.

Bossi's main interest was the organ, the instrument with which his name is mainly associated. He is considered one of the foremost virtuosos of the instrument of all time, and surely the most important and influential Italian organist of modern times. His organ works, some of which are extraordinarily demanding, such as the *Étude symphonique*, are still played, especially the *Organ Concerto in A minor* and the *Scherzo in G minor*, and his *Metodo teorico pratico*, a theory and practice method for the organ, written with Giovanni Tebaldini, is still in use at conservatories today.

It seems paradoxical that, while he graduated both in piano (1879) and composition (1881), he never completed his organ studies. He was overtly critical of the way the instrument was played and taught in Italy, not to mention how the instrument was mostly confined to the boundaries of liturgical music. To keep pace with his colleagues he travelled extensively in Europe and America, participating in organ festivals and giving concerts; these occasions brought him into contact with the best organists of his time, including Franck, Saint-Saëns, Dupré and Straube, with some of whom he made long-lasting friendships.

Less well known than his organ music, but no less fascinating and well deserving of better recognition, are a number of chamber works that prove the effort he made in bringing Italian chamber music in line with European standards. Especially interesting are the two violin sonatas included on this album, and his trios for piano, cello and violin; these compositions show that Bossi was a significant composer beyond organ music. The instrumental writing is competent, and both sonatas

are idiomatically written for their respective instruments, which engage with a technique that is always demanding but never so much as to impede the delivery of the sense of dialogue that belongs to the best sonatas for two instruments. The deftly balanced violin and piano parts show that Bossi knew both instruments very well.

Violin Sonata No. 1 in E minor, Op. 82

The first sonata, in E minor, was composed in Naples in 1892. It was a fertile period for the genre: Saint-Saëns composed his first sonata in 1885 and his second in 1896; Franck's sonata was presented in 1886, while Brahms completed his second sonata in 1886 and his third in 1888, and in the same year Richard Strauss had also completed the violin sonata that he wrote for his wife. Violin sonatas were also written by Grieg (his third dates from 1887) and Sibelius (1884 and 1889), among others.

Bossi's *Sonata No. 1*, in three movements, is dedicated to Teresina Tua, a highly regarded violinist who was acclaimed all over Europe. The first performance took place in Rome, in the presence of many important personalities, including Giovanni Sgambati, Aristide Sartorio and Ugo Ojetti. The performance enjoyed great success, and the sonata was later published by Breitkopf & Härtel.

Bossi sent the work to the old Giuseppe Verdi, who, in 1893, sent him back a letter which shows his admiration (he had looked at it with Arrigo Boito), despite objections regarding the daring usage of dissonances: 'If I had to say that the entire composition seems to me to be based too much on dissonances, you could reply: – Why not? Dissonance, as well as consonance, are both elements that constitute Music. I prefer to use the first. – And you would be right. On the other hand: why should I be wrong?'

Besides the intense usage of dissonance, which shows how receptive Bossi was to the extreme explorations of Wagner's followers in this field, the work is dense, and employs a number of compositional techniques that puts it in line with Franck's sonata, in particular the use of the cyclical form, where one or more motifs are heard throughout the entire composition. At the same time Bossi looks at Brahms' 'developing variation' technique, in which a musical event that seems to be new in reality develops from something already heard. In Bossi's sonata this is shown by the derivation of the main motifs from the opening theme, which consists of an ascending arpeggio that steps back onto the semitone below (the leading tone), and is presented by the violin first, then taken over by the piano, and finally played by both at the same time. Not only is the chromatic note that complements the arpeggio a unifying device, it is also the motor that drives the harmony in exploring remote relations between the tonalities. Despite the clarity of the sections we could hardly assign each to a place within the Classical form: yes, we recognise the bridge that leads the first group of themes to the second, but we would be pressed to find a clear tonal point where these groups are presented according to the canonic scheme of tonic-dominant or tonic-relative major. The wandering harmonies constantly shift from one point to another, like in many of the works composed in the late-Romantic era; we almost feel that tonality is dissolving, or at least losing the idea of a centre. It is often said that Bossi's melodies lack that 'Italian singing quality' and therefore have less appeal. But in many places his music proves this wrong, such as at the climax of the movement, reached at the end of the development (on the score marked '*Largamente*') where the piano and the violin play a melody of such late-Romantic flavour that one would believe it was written by Rachmaninov (who, incidentally, in 1895, at the beginning of his career, was hired by Teresina Tua in her Russian tour). Although he was capable of writing 'singing' melodies, mimicking the long emphatic lines of the opera arias, this was not Bossi's main goal. Rather, he builds an intricate web to show his mastery of the art of composition and craftsmanship, and his sensitivity to the possibilities of this historical form. The perfect example is the second movement, *Andante sostenuto con vaghezza*, which is structured like a fantasia based on the alternation of two sections, the first consisting of a peaceful theme in double thirds, and the following, *Molto sostenuto ma sempre andante*, where the melody played by the violin is sustained by the arpeggios of the piano. After a brief return of the first theme a new section, *Vivace, gaio, quasi canzone*, acts like a mini *scherzo*, and is followed by the *sostenuto* and then again by the first theme, creating an arch-like structure, with the *scherzo* section as the climax. Here Bossi blends different forms, in the same way as Brahms does in many of his sonata

movements. This hybridisation is only one of the features that gives at first a rhapsodic appearance to Bossi's works: he does not like to rest on a single theme, or even on a section for too long; he does not like repetitions, and avoids the easy connection; nevertheless, every bit of his music is carefully considered, as the third movement, *Allegro focoso*, makes clear even further. Bossi's gift for subtle thematic relationships is particularly on show here: the main theme, characterised by a dotted rhythm upbeat, consists of an ascending arpeggio on the substitute subdominant, preceded by a note a half tone lower. If we look back at the very beginning of the sonata we note that the idea underlying the theme is the same: an ascending arpeggio plus a chromatic note, this time put at the beginning, giving a strong sense of cadence towards the tonic to the entire phrase. This phrase is developed at length, until it leads to a second theme that moves from the main key, E minor, to neighbouring tones, misleadingly making us believe that we are finally listening to a movement in sonata form. The music abruptly vanishes, however, to make room for the return of the first theme of the second movement, this time over a pedal of B flat, and almost nestled in between we hear the opening theme of the first movement. Then the *scherzo*-like theme of the second movement reappears, eventually merging with the main theme of the third movement and leading to the last part of the sonata, where the gypsy-like binary rhythm runs until the end.

Violin Sonata No. 2 in C major, Op. 117

At the turn of the century Bossi composed a second sonata in C major, dedicated to Olga de Prospero and published in the same year by Kistner, which at a first glance seems to look back at the form inherited by the Classical composers. He writes a lengthy piece in four movements. The first, *Moderato*, includes two main themes that follow the rhetorical and structural elements of the sonata form. It seems like the form is programmatically recalling the Classical style. A number of details conjure up this feeling of Classicism, such as the choice of the tonality, or the modulation at the dominant in the exposition, where Bossi employs the last theme of the first thematic group as a transition to the second thematic group, a technique widely utilised by Mozart and Beethoven. Furthermore, there is not so much contrast between the themes, as in most of Haydn's sonatas. And yet, after this essay in Classical writing, a plethora of ambiguities, metrical shifts, dissonances and key relationships pushed to the limit contribute to ensuring that this second sonata is as up-to-date as the first. Take, for instance, the second movement, *Scherzoso*, that begins in a *scherzo*-like fashion, and effectively sounds like a Classical *scherzo*; the elements from the tradition are all there, including the rhythm and the alternation of different sections, but the contrasting lyrical sections bear much more weight than the trio in a traditional *scherzo*. The first, in 3/4 time, is played after the initial and the last apparition of the *scherzo*, while the second, in binary metre, which is based on the second theme of the first movement, lies exactly in the middle of the movement, so that the general impression is that of a rondo form with the character of a *scherzo*, following the form A–B–A–C–A–B–A. Blurring genre boundaries, the theme of the *scherzo* reappears modified and shortened, and crops up here and there in the lyrical sections. Once again, as in the first sonata, Bossi blends different forms and styles. The third movement, *Adagio elegiaco*, is a moment of deeply expressive eloquence: particularly striking is the fact that, unlike in the rest of the sonata, here Bossi assigns different roles to the instruments. The melodic lines unfold in the violin throughout the movement, while the piano, although confined to the role of accompanist, seems to explore a wide palette of expressivity, running the gamut from lyrical to dramatic.

The complex fourth movement, *Allegro con fuoco*, is the hardest to grasp as a whole, as it seems to be in a free form rotating around the forward-moving first theme, introduced by a long phrase where every accent is shifted. This theme, that recurs a sufficient number of times to label it as being in rondo form, is a homage to the Classical style found in dramatic piano pieces, such as the third movement of Mozart's *Piano Sonata No. 8 in A minor*, K. 310, the opening theme of Haydn's *Piano Sonata in C minor*, Hob. XVI:20, or even Brahms' *Hungarian Dance No. 8 in A minor*. Whatever the intentions were or where the inspiration was taken from, the sense of synthesis is strong. Many elements, including the fugato that interrupts the movement to revitalise and renew it, like, for example, in Beethoven's *Sonatas Op. 106* and *Op. 110*, signal that with this sonata Bossi wanted to embrace the sonata narratives, engaging with a century of instrumental music. All the main forms and styles of the 19th century are assimilated and revised in a combination of intricate relations, extreme harmonic

explorations and ambiguity used as a regular device to puzzle the listener and at the same time to delight the competent music lover.

This is fine chamber music, that stands on a par with the best produced in the latter part of the 19th century, and we believe it is time to clear up any misconceptions about Italian composers having to catch up with the rest of Europe. At the turn of the century Italian composers had produced a number of remarkable works, and Italy had several personalities of international calibre. Bossi was one of them, a composer of thoroughly international outlook, as testified by the general esteem in which he was held by his colleagues as a composer and performer, and by the hundreds of recitals he gave across three continents. Bossi was totally at ease with late 19th-century language: he uses harmonies as adventurously as the most skilled of his contemporaries, and adapts the outer aspects of the form of the individual movements to his expressive ends. In 1925 he was invited to the United States to give a series of recitals, and on that occasion Puccini sent him his wishes: 'they will hear, there in America, what it means to play the organ!'. So successful was he that when he set sail in New York to return to Europe he had a contract for the following year. Sadly, he was destined never to return alive to his home: he died of a cerebral haemorrhage in the mid-Atlantic, on 20 February 1925.

Tommaso Manera



Emmanuele Baldini

Emmanuele Baldini was born in Trieste, Italy. After studies in his hometown, he furthered his violin training in Geneva, Salzburg and Berlin, studying conducting with Isaac Karabtchevsky and Frank Shipway. From an early age, Baldini garnered prizes from countless international competitions, and has performed as a soloist and recitalist across the globe. He has appeared in all the major European concert halls, in addition to those in Latin America and especially in Brazil, where he has lived since 2005. Following a highly successful career as a violinist, Baldini has embarked on new musical ventures as a conductor. He founded the Orquestra Sinfônica do Estado de São Paulo (Osesp) Quartet, and has collaborated with internationally renowned artists such as Maria João Pires, Jean-Philippe Collard and Jean-Efflam Bavouzet. Baldini has been concertmaster of the Orchestra del Teatro Comunale di Bologna, the Orchestra del Teatro alla Scala di Milano and the Orchestra del Teatro 'Giuseppe Verdi' di Trieste, and since 2005 has been concertmaster of the Orquestra Sinfônica do Estado de São Paulo. He has also acted as guest concertmaster of the Orquestra Sinfônica de Galícia. Between 2017 and 2020 he was music director of the Orquestra de Cámara de Valdivia in Chile, and in 2024 was appointed music director of the Orquestra Sinfónica de Ñuble in Chile.

www.emmanuelebaldini.com



Luca Delle Donne

Luca Delle Donne began piano studies at the age of six. He obtained his Diploma at the Giuseppe Tartini State Conservatory of Trieste with full marks, honours and a special mention under the guidance of Lorenzo Baldini, and his Master's degree in piano interpretation with Gabriele Vianello. He has also participated in masterclasses with acclaimed artists such as Philippe Entremont, Claudius Tanski, Franco Scala and the legendary Trio di Trieste. Delle Donne has performed throughout Europe and America, and has undertaken several tours across China and Japan. He has given solo recitals, worked with chamber ensembles alongside renowned musicians, and with orchestras. Alongside his work teaching and giving masterclasses in Italy he has been invited to sit on the juries of numerous international competitions, and is the co-founder of Festival Internazionale 'Primavera Beethoveniana'.

www.lucadelledonne.com

Marco Enrico Bossi gained fame as one of the most influential Italian organ virtuosos of his day, and as a composer who helped lay the foundations for a new tradition of instrumental music in a country dominated by opera. Bossi's *First Violin Sonata* has cyclical forms and a density of ideas that put it in line with César Franck's famous sonata, with melodies as expressive as those of Rachmaninov. The *Second Violin Sonata* recalls a Classical style that refers more to Beethoven and Brahms while displaying the eloquence of Bossi's personal idiom. Both of these works reveal a composer whose chamber music stands equal to the most renowned works produced in the late 19th century.

Marco Enrico
BOSSI
(1861–1925)

Playing Time
60:18

Violin Sonata No. 1 in E minor, Op. 82 (1892)	26:21
1 I. Allegro con energia	9:41
2 II. Andante sostenuto con vaghezza	7:31
3 III. Allegro focoso	9:09
Violin Sonata No. 2 in C major, Op. 117 (1899)	33:47
4 I. Moderato	9:24
5 II. Scherzoso	6:47
6 III. Adagio elegiaco	7:07
7 IV. Allegro con fuoco	10:29

Emmanuele Baldini, Violin
Luca Delle Donne, Piano

Recorded: 28 August **1**–**3** and 4 September **4**–**7** 2022 at the Sala Henrique José de Souza,
Sociedade Brasileira de Eubiose, São Paulo, Brazil
Producer, engineer (Avellaria nomad), editor, mixing and mastering (Avellaria studio): Eduardo Avellar
Assistant producer and engineer: João Henrique Baracho • Booklet notes: Tommaso Manera
Cover: The Church tower of San Gottardo in Corte al Palazzo Reale, Milan; photo by Elisabetta Zeccara
Publishers: Breitkopf & Härtel **1**–**3**, Fr. Kistner **4**–**7**
© & © 2024 Naxos Rights (Europe) Ltd • www.naxos.com