

Béla Bartók 1881–1945

Compact Disc 1

63'02

Suite Op.4b for two pianos (BB122/Sz115a/W12)

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|---|-------------------------|------|
| 1 | I. Serenata | 6'26 |
| 2 | II. Allegro diabolico | 8'49 |
| 3 | III. Scena della Puszta | 7'30 |
| 4 | IV. Per finire | 7'01 |

Matteo Fossi piano I · Marco Gaggini piano II

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| 5 | The Miraculous Mandarin Op.19 for two pianos (BB82/Sz73/W49) | 33'15 |
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Marco Gaggini piano I · Matteo Fossi piano II

Compact Disc 2

53'22

Seven Pieces from Mikrokosmos for two pianos (BB120/Sz108/W59)

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|---|-------------------------------|------|
| 1 | Bulgarian Rhythm | 1'11 |
| 2 | Chord and Trill Study | 1'02 |
| 3 | Perpetuum Mobile | 0'54 |
| 4 | Short Canon and its Inversion | 0'46 |
| 5 | New Hungarian Folk Song | 1'00 |
| 6 | Chromatic Invention | 1'10 |
| 7 | Ostinato | 2'35 |

Matteo Fossi piano I · Marco Gaggini piano II

Sonata for two pianos and percussion (BB115/Sz110/W75)

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|----|--------------------------------|-------|
| 8 | I. Assai lento – Allegro molto | 13'22 |
| 9 | II. Lento, ma non troppo | 6'23 |
| 10 | III. Allegro non troppo | 7'08 |

Marco Gaggini piano I · Matteo Fossi piano II

Federico Poli, Gianni Giangrasso percussion

György Ligeti 1923–2006

Drei Stücke für zwei Klaviere (Three Pieces for two pianos)

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|----|--|------|
| 11 | Monument | 4'42 |
| 12 | Selbstportrait mit Reich und Riley (und Chopin ist auch dabei)
<i>Self-portrait with Reich and Riley (and Chopin in the background)</i> | 8'05 |
| 13 | In zart fließender Bewegung
<i>In a gentle flowing movement</i> | 4'56 |

Matteo Fossi piano I · Marco Gaggini piano II

Bartók · Ligeti: Music for two pianos

Béla Bartók's output for two pianos is almost entirely limited to the period 1937–41, and is mainly associated with his special artistic partnership with his wife, pianist Ditta Pásztory. From 1938, Bartók often performed in public concerts together with his wife, even though at that time his catalogue included only a few works for two pianos (four of the pieces included in the six volumes of *Mikrokosmos*). These circumstances probably created the need for the composer to write a version for two pianos of his Suite Op.4, plus an arrangement of seven pieces from *Mikrokosmos* and the Sonata for two pianos and percussion.

The **Suite Op.4** was originally written for orchestra between 1905 and 1907; later on Bartók revisited this work and created a version for two pianos (in 1941) which went far beyond a transcription and led to a radical revision of the original orchestral score (1943). This work represents Bartók's first realisation of the musical and artistic ideas that he researched and developed after exploring Hungarian music's folk heritage. With his Suite Op.4, Bartók approached composition from a new perspective, no longer dominated by the picturesque and nationalistic flavour of works such as his symphonic poem *Kossuth*: the Suite represented a genuine fusion of classical music with the ancient folk tradition of his country.

In the piano version of the Suite Op.4, Bartók also revised the titles of the four movements. The only title that remained unchanged was that of the first movement, Serenade, which is characterised by two contrasting themes: the first one naive and ironic, the second edgier and more nervous. The second movement (Allegro scherzando in the original version, Allegro diabolico in the version for two pianos), presents a fugue that goes on for about 100 bars in its central section, and it is built around a descending seventh that recurs so often in this movement that we could define it as the composer's signature. In the third movement, Scena della Puszta (Hungarian name for the vast and desolate landscape of the low-lying plains region), the structure of the piano parts is fascinating: the opening is dominated by an unaccompanied melody from which the entire piece develops. The last movement, Per finire, seems to recall the first movement in the way it is structured; in fact, as in the Serenade, it presents two contrasting themes: one clearly based on a old folk melody which appears to be simple and charming, while the second theme is neatly percussive and develops into a canon between the two piano parts. One of the most interesting features of this still relatively unknown

and seldom performed work is that from playing it one would never guess that it is a transcription of an orchestral score, thanks to the skilful balance that Bartók achieves between the two piano parts.

The first draft of the pantomime *The Miraculous Mandarin* Op.19 (based on a libretto by Menyhért Lengyel) was written in 1919. Five years later, in 1924, the composer completed the orchestral score and also decided to write a version of it for piano four hands, part of which was performed live for Radio Budapest on 8 April 1926. The first official performance of the pantomime was given by Cologne Opera on 27 November 1926. The work was very poorly received and created a scandal: the audience was disgusted by its salacious and erotic nature. In fact, the story was too modern and provocative for its time – it is set in the lower echelons of a metropolitan society driven and overwhelmed by corruption and prostitution, where people behave more like animals than like human beings.

In an attempt to convince the censors to permit a new performance of the work, which was planned for 25 March 1931 in Budapest – but never given – Bartók decided to cut about 40 bars from one of the more 'explicit' scenes. Almost all of these changes to the original version of the pantomime were also applied to the 1952 and 1955 versions for piano four hands, the latter of which was published along with the very first edition of the orchestral score. The most recent edition of the four-hands piano version of the work (Universal Edition 2000 31432, by Peter Bartók) cuts the original finale that Bartók wrote in 1925. However, for this recording we decided to reinstate the 1925 finale, whose 'provocative' character is better suited to the overall non-conformist mood of the music. One further interesting aspect of this work is some of the specific technical features of the piano score. For example, there are passages that are technically impossible to perform with four hands on one single piano (this is why this piece is usually performed on two pianos); also – in contrast to the Suite Op.4 – the attempt to recreate an entire orchestral landscape using just two pianos is much more evident – we can sense that this work was not originally conceived for just two instruments, and can see how the transcription does justice to the kaleidoscopic orchestration of the original score. Despite these technical difficulties, however, the result is superb: a performance of this piece on two pianos is at once theatrical and musical, bringing this colourful pantomime to life in sound.

We know for sure that by the time the six volumes of *Mikrokosmos* were published in 1940,

Bartók had already transcribed seven pieces from the same collection (No.113 *Bulgarian Rhythm*, No.69 *Chord and Trill Study*, No.135 *Perpetuum Mobile*, No.123 *Staccato and Legato*, No.127 *New Hungarian Folk Song*, No.145 *Chromatic Invention*, No.146 *Ostinato*), which were eventually published in 1947. A very interesting aspect of these transcriptions is that Bartók transformed these studies into real concert showpieces. Furthermore, he conceived the combination of these seven pieces as a sort of suite, where the contrasting structures and characters of the different ‘movements’ give rise to an expressive and dynamic musical whole.

The **Sonata for two pianos and percussion BB115**, undoubtedly the most famous work in this set, is arguably the composition in which Bartók condensed and synthesised not only the full perfection of his writing skills for two pianos but also his entire mature artistic language. The piece was commissioned by the Internationale Gesellschaft für Neue Musik of Basel; it was composed in 1937 and performed one year later, on 16 January by the composer’s wife, Fritz Schiesser and Philipp Rühlig. The most striking aspect of the work is the rhythmic experimentation that results from the folk influences that were so important to Bartók. Even though he never abandoned the concept of bars – a characteristic of so-called ‘erudite music’ – in this sonata this appears to almost be a vanishing remnant of the ‘ancient’ world of classical music; in fact, the rhythmical and metrical forms in the texture of the score often force the performers to free themselves from the confines of bars and metre, and unleash the primitive pulsation of time and tribal rhythmicity that Bartók evokes in this complex work.

György Ligeti could be regarded as the natural successor to Bartók; in fact, he took Bartók’s musical language as the starting point of his own artistic journey, one that led him to become the most important Hungarian composer in the second half of 20th century.

The **Three Pieces for two pianos**, written for Aloys and Alfons Kontarsky in 1976, should be seen as a closed cycle in which each piece is clearly differentiated from the others in terms of piano technique and compositional features. They are also Ligeti’s only works for two pianos. The first piece, *Monument* (which starts with five bars of silence), treats the two instruments as independent entities whose parts are made up of single notes expressing a variety of well distinguished dynamical layers. The two lines of the pianos only occasionally come together in time and space, creating layers of ‘harmonic’ interactions that reach a climax in the final section, and then dissolve into a single note at the end.

Selbstportrait mit Reich und Riley (und Chopin ist auch dabei) is a homage – albeit a gently ironic one – to the American composers Steve Reich and Terry Riley. It begins by imitating the same sparse texture of the closing bars of *Monument* and immediately develops into a series of cyclical rhythmic patterns and canons (that Ligeti calls ‘over-saturated’) to be played using a somewhat peculiar technique (keeping some keys of the piano pushed down). The reference to Chopin comes in the finale, where the shape of the melody hints at the finale from Chopin’s Sonata in B flat minor (however, Ligeti himself specifies that it is not a quotation but just reminiscent of the work).

The last piece, *In zart fließender Bewegung*, presents a much more traditional application of piano technique, with a multi-layered structure similar to that of the first piece, but this time the two pianos interact more closely and the melodic lines are much more fluid than in *Monument*. The final section takes the form of a chorale with eight voices; it acts like a coda for all three pieces, telescopically collapsing until the end.

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Matteo Fossi and Marco Gaggini first met in Florence in 2004 when they were both studying in Pier Narciso Masi's class. During this incredibly rewarding and fruitful time (they graduated in 2008), Fossi and Gaggini discovered that they shared the same vision about the role of piano music in our times. It made perfect sense that they should form a piano duo.

In 2005 – entirely by chance – the two musicians came across the original transcription for two pianos of Johannes Brahms's Fourth Symphony. As sometimes happens with a book, a picture or a piece of music, they immediately felt a special affection for the score and began an amazing journey of

study and research, of stopping and starting again. Much like watching ripples spread out after throwing a pebble into still water, they found more and more interesting questions emerging, encouraging them to look for similar scores, in a quest to discover meaning, history and aesthetic value.

The duo's most important endeavour is the 'Two Pianos Project', which aims to extend the scope of the piano far beyond the limits of its traditional repertoire, as was the case throughout the 19th and until the early 20th century. Fossi and Gaggini are enthusiastic explorers in the field of autograph transcriptions and have released an acclaimed CD (in 2009 on Fenice Diffusione Musicale) featuring the two-piano versions of Brahms's Fourth and First Symphonies (the latter being a world premiere recording). Their recording of Brahms's complete symphonies (released on Universal Classics & Jazz) was equally successful.

The Brahmsian project was brought to completion in 2012 with the recording of a CD (released on Decca) featuring the Sonata Op.34b, the Variations on a Theme by Haydn Op.56b and the Tragic Overture Op.81 in its version for piano four hands. Fossi and Gaggini have recently broadened their four-hands piano repertoire to include Shostakovich's little-known transcription of

his Ninth Symphony Op.70 (giving the Italian premiere), together with more famous transcriptions such as Debussy's *La Mer*.

Fossi and Gaggini have been performing live since 2007. The duo has appeared at major festivals and concert series in Italy and all over the world, including Auditorium di Milano, Concerti del Quirinale (Rome, with live radio broadcast), William Walton Foundation (Ischia), Austria (Vienna), France (Paris), Poland (Warsaw) and South Korea (Seoul).
www.twopianosproject.com



Federico Poli studied percussion at the Fiesole Music School (Florence, Italy) and graduated with honours. He also attended courses with Gert Mortensen, Ney Rosauero and Martin Kershbaum (Wiener Symphoniker). He was awarded first prize at the Rovigo National Competition for Young Percussionists (Italy), and in 1998 he received a scholarship to the Fiesole Music School. He also studied with Christian Hamouy (of Les Percussions de Strasbourg).

He regularly appears as a soloist with orchestras and chamber groups, and he is a member of the ensemble Nuovo Contrappunto. He has also participated in concerts performing the music of contemporary Italian composers such as Salvatore Sciarrino, Giorgio Battistelli,

Ennio Morricone, Goffredo Petrassi, Matteo d'Amico, Sylvano Bussotti, Ivan Fedele, Marco Stroppa, Fabio Vacchi, Giovanni Sollima and Luciano Berio. He frequently gives solo performances – both in recitals and with orchestras – in various European countries such as Italy, Spain, Switzerland and France (Philharmonique de Monte-Carlo), and leads percussion masterclasses in Italy, Spain and the USA.

He has commissioned and premiered many new works for percussion, and has recorded and collaborated with various composers such as Ennio Morricone, Davide Zannoni, Kamran Khacheh,

Andrea Cavallari, Dimitri Nicolau, Fabrizio Festa, Marco Betta, Andrea Portera, Maria Curcio and Thomas Fortmann, who have dedicated some of their works to him.

Federico has made many recordings that have been broadcast on Italian State Television (RAI), including operas with the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino Orchestra. He has recorded for labels such as Velut Luna, EMA Records, Brilliant Classics, AMADEUS, Nuova Era, CMT Productions and DryCastle Records. His CD recordings include ten chamber and orchestral discs and two CDs for solo percussion entitled *Links* and *Percussion Empowerment*. These discs include many world premiere recordings and were met with great acclaim from music critics, colleagues and audiences, with many favourable reviews in the press.

Federico has also composed and published several pieces for percussion. He is a Yamaha artist and has been present in the YAMAHA concert catalogue since 2003. He has taught percussion at the Rinaldo Franci Higher Institute of Music in Siena (Italy) since 2005.



Born in Florence, **Gianni Giangrasso** graduated in percussion from the city's Conservatory 'Luigi Cherubini' after studying with Renato Stefani. He continued his studies in Berlin specialising in timpani, becoming a student of Rainer Seegers, timpanist of the Berliner Philharmoniker. He then had the opportunity to attend the Academy of the Teatro alla Scala in Milan and the Orchestra Giovanile Italiana, continuing his studies with Jonathan Scully, Gabriele Bianchi, Loris Lenti and Jonathan Faralli.

Devoting himself mainly to the study of the timpani, he has successfully auditioned for the Orchestra Sinfonica di Savona, the Luigi Cherubini Orchestra and the Orchestra Sinfonica di Roma; in 2005 he auditioned for the Toscanini Orchestra, becoming its permanent timpanist in 2006. Throughout his career he has also worked as a percussionist with the Orchestra Sinfonica Siciliana, Orchestra Regionale Toscana, Orchestra del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino and the Orchestra del Teatro alla Scala, collaborating with conductors such as

Riccardo Muti, Lorin Maazel, Zubin Mehta, Georges Prêtre and Yuri Temirkanov in prestigious concert halls worldwide.

He took part in the inaugural concert of the orchestra Spira Mirabilis, where he was timpanist for several years. He also frequently plays in chamber ensembles such as the Ensemble Nuovo Contrappunto (conducted by Mario Ancillotti) and has performed with musicians such as Lorenza Borrani, Francesco Dillon, Matteo Fossi and Federico Poli, in festivals including Musica Insieme in Bologna and Maggio Musicale Fiorentino.

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