

INTERVAL

VARIATIONS ON A MALTESE THEME GORDON MIZZI (b.1947)

Gordon was born on the island of Malta where he studied music from an early age. He completed his studies at the University of Leicester (England) and Italy and also graduated from the University of Southern California in the United States. He has the gift for composing music as well as for writing his own arrangements. He is influenced by aspects of daily life and by the rich musical roots of his native Malta. His compositions are bright and full of inventive form such as his *Variations on a Maltese Theme*. Other works are *Saints and Fireworks*, *Madliena Sonata*, *Song of the Sea* and the *Sonata for Six Mute Swans*. He has also arranged not only children songs but Maltese folk songs too. He was commissioned by the Knights of Malta in 1551 to transcribe the *Branies de Malte* for classical guitar. Other works written by him are *Three Love Poems*, *Maltese Island Scenes*, *Mdina - Citta*, *Notabile*, *Slima-It-Torri*, *Vallerta - Barrakka Gardens*, *San Giljan - Festa Fil-Bajja* and *Paceville*. The well known guitarist Carlos Bonell has recorded few of Gordon Mizzi's pieces in a CD named 'Song of the Sea, Carlos Bonell plays Gordon Mizzi'. The CD was broadcasted by BBC Radio 3 and on a number of other stations around the world. (Information obtained from Carlos Bonell - last.fm).

SUITE ESPAÑOLA OP. 47

Granada - *Serenata*
Asturias - *Leyenda*
Sevilla - *Sevillana*
ISAAC ALBÉNIZ
(1860-1909)

Albéniz is regarded as the founder of the Spanish 'national school' he was most fascinated with the music of Andalusia. He was a child prodigy who performed for the first time in front of an audience at the age of four and at seven years old he passed his audition exam for piano at the Paris Conservatoire but was not admitted due to an incident with a broken glass window while playing with a ball. Nonetheless, his career as a pianist began at the age of nine when his father organised a tour throughout Spain for him and his sister Clementina. It is said that Albéniz went through three compositional periods, early works, middle period and mature composition. The early period followed popular music of a salon style, influenced by Chopin, Schubert and Brahms dance rhythms, the use of *cante Combo* (flamenco-profound songs), exotic scales of flamenco music, the so called Phrygian mode, and the transfer of guitar idioms into piano writing. We have then *Chants d'Espagne*. The suite contains five pieces *Prelude*, *Oriental*, *Sous le Palmier*, *Córdoba*, and *Seguidillas* (1891-1897); his orchestral works include *Spanish Rhapsody* and *Catalonia*. During his stay in London (1990) he wrote mainly theatrical works.

Albéniz composed numerous small but beautifully performed portraits of his native Spain. They were brightly coloured piano pieces of Spanish landscapes for which he was called the *Listz of Spanish music*. There are eight movements in this Spanish Suite: *Aragón*, (*Fantasia*), *Cádiz*, (*Canción*), *Castilla* (*Seguidilla*), *Cataluña* (*Corranda*), *Cuba*

(*Capricho*) of which Simon has chosen the three above-mentioned ones. Albéniz met the musicologist Felipe Pedrell in 1880's who collected his traditional songs and this nurtured in him a life long passion for traditional Spanish music, which was edited by Juan Salvat. *The Suite Española Opus 47* was transcribed and fingered by Manuel Barrueco for solo guitar, but *Asturias* (Leyenda, 1886), one of the last movements incorporated to the Suite, and the most famous one, was transcribed for guitar by Francisco Tárrega, (1852-1909). Albeniz began suffering from kidney disease in 1900 and returned to his piano writing producing the famous *Iberia* suite of twelve piano impressions. He passed away at the age of 48 in Combo-les-Bains and is buried at the *Sudoest Cemetery* in Barcelona.

LAS CUATRO ESTACIONES PORTEÑAS

Verano *Proteño*

Invierno *Porteño*

ROMANTICO

LA MUERTE DEL ANGEL

ASTOR PIAZZOLLA

(1921-1992)

Piazzolla has the merit of enriching tango by taking it to the highest pinnacle by incorporating jazz and classical elements in its form. He was born in Mar del Plata, Argentina and spent his childhood between Buenos Aires and New York. He begun his studies of music at nine years old in the United States and continued them in Buenos Aires and Europe. With the demise of the *Old Guard* form in 1945 the first classical elements were introduced in the tango. Between the hostility of many and the appreciation of a few the unquestionable leadership of the 'new school' was taken by Astor Piazzolla in such a way that now is often included in classical guitar recordings, concerts and festivals. Piazzolla's career as a performer took off when he played the bandoneon in the orchestra of Anibal Troilo. But it was the legendary Nadia Boulanger who advised him to follow his own style. His music has been described as diabolic, exciting, sensual, almost erotic; it reaches those extremes at the least expected moments, the rhythm and sound quality skillfully maintained came from his ability to constantly renew his work. He was able to exploit all the possibilities of his splendid harmony transforming the environment in a matter of seconds from a romantic sensuality to a piercing shout. In 1955 he came back home and formed his *Octeto Buenos Aires* selecting his musicians in a manner similar to Gerry Mulligan's jazz band, encouraging him to introduce daring arrangements as well as unusual tango timbres, like the electric guitar was influenced by modern composers such as, Bartok and Stravinsky. Piazzolla added atonal and irregular passages to the music, and in this way we have the new *tango* which evolved from the original one: a traditional song and dance. In the 1960s his music was misjudged and subjected to

strong criticism and he needed to defend it with great effort gaining the fame of a 'tough cookie' but at the end of the decade he was at the height of his creative period and surrounded by the best musicians. In 1967 he wrote together with the poet Horacio Ferrer the opera tango *María de Buenos Aires*. In 1984 inspired by the four annual seasons, he composed *Las Cuatro Estaciones Porteñas* (The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires) Although it is not necessary to consider them descriptive as they are strictly musical works, outstanding in their form and moderate structure, one can be led to a special climate and atmosphere related to the seasons evoked by the tunes and motives. Piazzolla established a strong contrast between the passion of the *Verano* (Summer) and the nostalgic *Invierno* (Winter) of Buenos Aires with brilliant moments. These skillfull contrasts give a special character to *Las Cuatro Estaciones Porteñas* written for his Quintet.

With *Adios Nonino*, *Decarisimo* and *Muerte del Angel* paved the way for his concert in the Philharmonic Hall of New York and he also put music to the poems by Jorge Luis Borges. During his last years he preferred to perform in concerts as a soloist accompanied by a symphonic orchestra and with few performances with his quintet. *Romántico* is a tango of the 20th century period and *La Muerte del Angel* tango have been recorded several times, in the CD *La Historia de un Idolo*, Vol 2, Columbia, also Sony in 'Nuevo Tiempo', Piazzolla recorded it again with his *New Tango Quintet* in 1962 and subsequently was recorded 'live' at the Auditorium of Radio Municipal in Buenos Aires in 1963 with Piazzolla on the bandoneón, Antonio Agri, violin, Jaime Gosis at the piano, Oscar López, guitar and Quicho Díaz on the bass.

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