

The background is an abstract painting with a vibrant, textured style. It features large, expressive brushstrokes in shades of blue, green, yellow, and red. The composition includes stylized, organic shapes that suggest trees and a landscape. A prominent tree trunk is visible on the left side, and a boat is depicted in the lower right quadrant. The overall effect is one of dynamic energy and naturalistic abstraction.

**GIAN FRANCESCO MALIPIERO**  
**Violin Concertos**  
**Nos. 1 and 2**

**Per una favola cavalleresca**

**Paolo Chiavacci**, Violin  
Orchestra Sinfonica di Roma  
**Francesco La Vecchia**

# Gian Francesco Malipiero

(1882–1973)

## **Violin Concerto No. 1** (1932) **21:44**

- |          |                          |      |
|----------|--------------------------|------|
| <b>1</b> | I. Allegro (con spirito) | 5:23 |
| <b>2</b> | II. Lento, ma non troppo | 6:30 |
| <b>3</b> | III. Allegro             | 9:51 |

## **Per una favola cavalleresca** (1914–15, rev. ?1920)\* **27:50**

- |          |      |      |
|----------|------|------|
| <b>4</b> | I.   | 5:05 |
| <b>5</b> | II.  | 8:28 |
| <b>6</b> | III. | 7:21 |
| <b>7</b> | IV.  | 6:56 |

## **Violin Concerto No. 2** (1963) **19:35**

- |           |                      |      |
|-----------|----------------------|------|
| <b>8</b>  | I. Allegro           | 4:34 |
| <b>9</b>  | II. Non troppo lento | 7:30 |
| <b>10</b> | III. Alquanto mosso  | 7:31 |

**\*WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING**

**Paolo Chiavacci, Violin** **1-3 8-10**  
**Orchestra Sinfonica di Roma**  
**Francesco La Vecchia**

## **Gian Francesco MALIPIERO (1882–1973)**

### **Violin Concertos Nos. 1 and 2 • Per una favola cavalleresca**

On a first hearing, it may seem hard to believe that the three works recorded here could all be by the same composer, the Venetian Gian Francesco Malipiero. But in fact there are hidden affinities amid their myriad differences. In 1960, a few years before the composition of the last of these pieces, the *Second Violin Concerto*, Malipiero's younger colleague Luigi Dallapiccola (1904–1975) singled him out from other Italian 20th-century composers as 'the most important personality that Italy has had since the death of Verdi'. That individual personality underpins all three of these works, lending continuity to their contrasts.

The solo instrument in the two concertos that frame this issue was Malipiero's own, though he had an ambivalent relationship with it. He started to learn the violin at the age of six, shortly after the birth of his two younger brothers, Riccardo (1886–1975) who became one of Italy's leading cellists, and Ernesto (1887–1971) who became a professional violinist. The boys' parents were both from age-old aristocratic families in Venice – indeed in medieval times two Malipiero ancestors had served as the city's head of state, the Doge. Their mother, Countess Emma Balbi (1852–1940), was wealthy, but their grandfather Francesco Malipiero (1824–1887) – himself a composer once seen as a rival to Verdi – squandered much of his family's fortune, and bequeathed similar tendencies to his piano-playing son Luigi (1853–1918), the boys' father. Luigi's financial profligacy was a major factor in the collapse of his marriage to Emma in 1893, at which point he embarked on a wandering life, taking with him their eldest son, the eleven-year-old Gian Francesco, and his own mother. For the next six – crucially formative – years, Gian Francesco travelled with them far across German-speaking Europe, first to Trieste, then to Berlin, and eventually to Vienna, where he studied at the Conservatory for a year before finally fleeing back to his mother in Venice in the summer of 1899. It is hardly surprising, then, that Gian Francesco grew up into a psychologically complex adult who always tried to avoid talking about his childhood. When his friend, the French music critic Henry Prunières (1886–1942), discussed it in a biographical article about Malipiero in 1919, the composer wrote unhappily to another friend, the Italian critic Guido M. Gatti (1892–1973): 'there are certain details of my private life that Prunières came to know about in some of the saddest circumstances, and I greatly regret that he has published them.' Prunières reports that, during those itinerant teenage years, Malipiero 'practised his violin badly and was often obliged to play with his father in small light orchestras. He knew many painful hours, having as sole consolation the warm affection of his grandmother, who bore misfortune with much stoicism'.

More surprising, perhaps, is the sheer beauty of much of the music for the soloist in Malipiero's *First Violin Concerto*: somehow, despite everything, he must have retained a love for the violin. Completed on 18 February 1932, less than a month before the composer's 50th birthday, this was the very first work Malipiero labelled as a 'concerto', though the previous year he had given the unusual plural title *Concerti* to a piece in which seven instrumental sections of the orchestra take turns in the limelight (Naxos 8.573291). For Malipiero's English biographer John C.G. Waterhouse, the 'intensely lyrical' *First Violin Concerto*, with its 'remarkable melodic expansiveness', cements his 'new manner of the 1930s'. For almost 15 years, ever since the first of his orchestral *Pause del silenzio* ('Breaks in Silence', 1917) (Naxos 8.572409), Malipiero had created instrumental works by juxtaposing quite short, contrasting passages – often called

'panels' – which are usually thematically unrelated; here, however, he writes music that seems to evolve and flow and grow organically. Waterhouse celebrates the 'irrepressible continuity' of the concerto's first two movements, with its opening orchestral summons launching an 'intensely joyful, "neo-madrigalian" melodic impetus that sweeps all before it, pervading not only the solo line but every strand of the orchestral fabric', the soloist frequently dialoguing with just two or three other instruments and never with the full orchestra. The slightly longer second movement, as Waterhouse says, 'achieves a comparable effect in slow motion' and 'seems to hark back in spirit to some of Vivaldi's sunniest slow movements' (in the 1930s the music of Malipiero's fellow Venetian Vivaldi was still largely forgotten, and after the Second World War Malipiero would play a major part in its revival, even directly appropriating some of it in 1952 for his *Vivaldiana* [Naxos 8.555515]). The energetic outer sections of the *First Violin Concerto's* significantly longer third movement frame an extended unaccompanied violin solo (not marked as a cadenza) which starts a couple of minutes in and lasts almost four minutes, and then a lingering passage of the most idyllic slow music in the whole work.

English-speaking listeners may hear another affinity in this concerto. Malipiero's interwar idiom shares many characteristics with that of Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958), from general features such as modal harmony to more specific ones such as melodies and countermelodies that juxtapose groups of two notes against groups of three; and the concerto's predominantly pastoral mood, its occasional hints of melancholy undercurrents, and even some of its actual melodic shapes, all recall one of Vaughan Williams's best-loved works, *The Lark Ascending* (1914, rev. 1920). Both composers' whole conception of the concerto form is far removed from the 19th-century model with its spotlight on a virtuoso soloist: in Malipiero's *First Violin Concerto*, no less than in his *Cello Concerto* of 1937 (Naxos 8.574393), the orchestra 'follows' the soloist 'like a crowd listening' (as Malipiero put it), and 'rhetoric and virtuosity are avoided like the plague'.

*Per una favola cavalleresca* ('For a Chivalric Tale', 1914–15, rev. ?1920), the longest and only purely orchestral work recorded here, is almost exactly contemporary with Vaughan Williams' *The Lark Ascending*, but it inhabits a very different musical world, mingling late Romantic echoes from Germany and Russia with the influence of French impressionists Claude Debussy (1862–1918) and Maurice Ravel (1875–1937), in a manner akin to that of Malipiero's slightly older friend Ottorino Respighi (1879–1936) – who composed his breakthrough piece *Fountains of Rome* (*Fontane di Roma*) in 1915 and 1916. *Per una favola cavalleresca* was Malipiero's first work to be issued by the famous Italian publisher Ricordi; structurally it is one of his 'panel' pieces, though its complicated history – which only fully emerged after Malipiero's death in 1973 – shows that in this case the 'panel' design came about almost by accident. During Malipiero's lifetime most listeners would have known little more about the music than they could glean from his single-sentence note printed (in four languages!) at the beginning of the Ricordi score: 'These orchestral fragments, while illustrating legendary scenes of love, tournaments, battles, moonbeams, burials of heroes, etc. etc., have no intention whatsoever to be "programme music".' By 'programme music' Malipiero presumably means music which tells a specific story: after all, he has just admitted that these 'fragments' paint particular pictures – he even subtitles the work 'orchestral illustrations'. He made only one more comment about *Per una favola cavalleresca* in print in his lifetime, in a 1952 catalogue of his works, intriguingly dismissing it as 'Remnants of an unmentionable opera'. Malipiero never did mention the name of the opera in public; but Henry Prunières published it in an article

in French in 1927: *Lancelotto del lago* ('Lancelot of the Lake'). Prunières, who must have seen or maybe even heard the music of the opera, judged it 'an uneven work, but with a freshness of feeling and delicacy of touch unique in Malipiero's output', and reported regretfully that 'the composer condemned it to oblivion for reasons unconnected with art: he limited himself to forming a suite called *Per una favola cavalleresca* from its various orchestral episodes – which, being descriptive and impressionist, unfortunately lose their meaning if detached from the action'. Perhaps so; but it is surely possible for us simply to revel in the vivid, almost filmic colours of the orchestral patchwork Malipiero sewed together from his 'unmentionable opera' – imagining the chivalric scenes they evoke; perhaps even (at risk of the composer's disapproval) creating our own storyline from the myriad tales of Arthur, his young queen Guinevere, her heroic lover Lancelot and the other Knights of the Round Table; and hearing in the music's pervading lyricism, flecked with melancholy, a younger, more mercurial version of the composer of the *First Violin Concerto*. I recommend experiencing the music in this way first. If you enjoy the experience, you might wish not to read one or both of the next two paragraphs: the first paragraph reveals the reason why Malipiero turned against *Lancelotto del lago*, and the second pinpoints the precise operatic episodes he originally intended the music to portray.

In 1938 Malipiero published an article chronicling the vicissitudes of his career as a composer of stage works, and included the following passage: '1915 [sic]. An unknown writer shows me a libretto in four acts. Its affinity of form and atmosphere with the theatre of Maeterlinck excited my imagination: effortlessly, my fourth dramatic work was born. – 1916. I destroyed the full score of this opera because I consider it impossible for music to mate [or "pair off" – the Italian word *accoppiarsi* has strong sexual connotations] with the poetry of a monster.' In 1976, three years after Malipiero's death, the composer's widow – his third wife Giulietta Olivieri (1912–1996) – allowed John C.G. Waterhouse to study Malipiero's unpublished manuscripts; and among them he discovered a huge two-volume full score of *Lancelotto del lago*, dated 1914–15. As with many other works Malipiero claimed to have destroyed, he had in fact secretly preserved *Lancelotto del lago* – but on the title page of its first volume he scrawled an agitated note: 'When I discovered that the author of the libretto was a vulgar malefactor, this work was withdrawn from circulation *by me* (in 1916), not for artistic reasons, but because of the horror aroused in me by my music with the words of a brute.' The 'unknown writer' of the opera's libretto was a young playwright, later also a film screenwriter, called Alessandro de Stefani (1891–1970). And why did Malipiero denounce him as a 'monster', 'vulgar malefactor' and 'brute'? It appears – from information presumably conveyed to Waterhouse by Giulietta – that De Stefani had an affair with Malipiero's first wife Maria (1883–1921), daughter of the Venetian painter Luigi Rosa (1850–1919). It should be said that Malipiero himself was no saint: during his forty-year second marriage to the Englishwoman Anna Wright (1882–1963) he had at least two long-term – and overlapping – extramarital affairs, the second of them with none other than Giulietta. By her own account, Giulietta, who was the sister of one of Malipiero's students at the Venice Conservatory, all but threw herself at him on a train in 1940, and ended up living with Malipiero and Anna at their house in Asolo, being introduced to visitors as his 'secretary'. But there is no definite evidence of Malipiero cheating on Maria, so his disgust at Stefani may have been free of hypocrisy. His (unconscious?) use of the word *accoppiarsi* could also be seen as suggesting that his revulsion was intensified by the glaring correlation with the subject matter of the opera they had created together – life imitating art. Stefani's *Lancelotto del lago* text evokes an atmosphere of twilight legend somewhere between *Tristan und Isolde* (1857–59), for which the German composer

Richard Wagner (1813–1883) wrote his own words, and the play *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1892) by the Belgian (French-speaking) Symbolist writer Maurice Maeterlinck (1862–1949), best known today through the opera Debussy made from it between 1893 and 1902: in both, older men lose their wives to younger men. At one point in *Lancelotto del lago* a messenger even reports to Arthur, Guinevere and Lancelot the deaths of Tristan and Isolde and the remorse of the elderly King Mark – pointing up the parallels with their own situation, as an ageing King’s beautiful and much younger wife falls for one of his favourite knights. In life, though Maria was almost the same age as Malipiero, Stefani was nine years younger. But by contrast with the artistic precedents, the Malipieros’ marriage survived. Perhaps this helped the composer return to his ‘unmentionable opera’ after the First World War, and to salvage some of its music for *Per una favola cavalleresca*: clearly, deep down, he had faith in the music he had written. As he told Guido M. Gatti after attending rehearsals for the premiere of the third and fourth movements of *Per una favola cavalleresca* in February 1921: ‘despite all my prejudices against this work of mine, I want it to be considered one of my favourites’.

*Lancelotto del lago* has still never been performed; but the full score Waterhouse rediscovered, now part of the remarkable Malipiero Collection at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini in Venice, contains other annotations by Malipiero that show how to weld together no fewer than twelve separate excerpts from the opera to form the four movements of *Per una favola cavalleresca*.<sup>1</sup> The first movement [4] uses three orchestral passages from the prologue of *Lancelotto del lago*: the opera’s untitled prelude, introducing us to the fantastical house made of glass at the bottom of a lake where Lancelot has been raised by the fairy Viviane; the *Interlude of the Kiss* [1:32], in which Lancelot and a young woman named Moreotta, also held in thrall by Viviane, share a fevered kiss through the cold glass wall that separates them; and the *Interlude of the Dream* [3:24], as Lancelot imagines Moreotta in his sleep. Curiously, the supernatural submerged world conjured up in the Prologue bears little relation to the earthbound action of the opera’s three ensuing acts, which Malipiero drew on in turn for the three further movements of *Per una favola cavalleresca*. The second movement [5] is made up of four passages from Act I: its joyful opening, where Lancelot, having smashed through the walls of the glass house, steps from the lake on to dry land and gazes in wonder at the new world around him; the *Interlude of the Youth* [1:25], evoking Lancelot’s growth to manhood; the *Interlude of the Flight* [3:28], in which Guinevere, bored of Arthur, flees his castle with his impetuous young nephew Mordred who is infatuated with her (though her own feelings are ambivalent); and lastly the *Intermezzo of the Hero* [5:14]: soon after Arthur has brought the repentant Guinevere back to his court, Lancelot, now ‘a young valiant who defeats every brave man in combat’, is presented there for the first time. For the third movement [6], Malipiero combines two orchestral interludes from Act II of the opera: the *Interlude of the Prison*, portraying Mordred, sadder and wiser, incarcerated by Arthur in a grim cell; and the *Interlude of the Moon* [4:14], setting the nocturnal scene in the castle garden for a chance encounter between Lancelot and Guinevere, whose growing love gnaws at their loyalty to Arthur. And in the final movement of *Per una favola cavalleresca* [7] we hear three episodes from the opera’s concluding act: the dramatic *Interlude of the Pursuit*, in which Lancelot and his closest companion Galehaut set off on the trail of the dark knight Meleagan, who has tricked Guinevere away with him – an arduous quest that will eventually bring them, a full year later, to Meleagan’s remote ruined castle hideout; the *Interlude of Solitude* [3:00], depicting Lancelot alone: he has killed Meleagan and freed Guinevere, but now chooses duty over love, and renouncing arms and charging Galehaut with carrying Guinevere back to Arthur, starts life anew as a hermit; and the very end of the opera [5:07]: Arthur,

finally catching sight of his queen again after two years, has breathed his last, and Guinevere, in tears, removes her crown and thinks of the future – with Lancelot?

Around 1950, not least under the influence of changes in the European musical world at large, Malipiero began to move away from the predominantly mellifluous sounds of his earlier works – witness, for example, his *Passacaglie* (1952) and *Fantasie di ogni giorno* ('Everyday Fantasies', 1953) recorded on Naxos 8.573291, or his later symphonies available on Naxos 8.570880, 8.570881 and 8.570882. It is crystal clear from the very first notes of his *Second Violin Concerto* (1963) that this music breathes more acerbic air than the *First Concerto* or *Per una favola cavalleresca*; but its angular lines and sometimes forbiddingly dissonant textures ultimately reveal themselves as inspired by the selfsame lyrical impulse – albeit now infused with deeper melancholia. 'My *First Violin Concerto* wanted to resume its conversation,' said Malipiero, in his typically elliptic manner, 'so the composer pricked up his ears and the *Second Violin Concerto* emerged unproblematically.' It is almost as if the spirit of the *First Concerto* has been refracted through the prism of post-war atonality – and emerged alive and well. In the *Second Violin Concerto*, once again, the soloist leads, eschewing 'rhetoric and virtuosity', and the orchestra sustains and seconds its discourse. The *Second Concerto* too has a short, lively opening movement followed by two longer ones: a slow second movement, and a finale that includes the fastest passages in the piece, an extended unaccompanied violin solo a couple of minutes after the start, and then – almost exactly halfway through the movement – the concerto's slowest, most profound music, which leaves an impression long after the final notes have died away. In the *Second Violin Concerto* this slow music is at first impassioned, played by the orchestral violins, violas and cellos, then quietening poignantly when the soloist joins them. But by contrast with the *First Concerto*, the slow music is destined to return at the end – more desolate, a tone lower in pitch, and with the solo violin now musing throughout as a keening oboe sings its original solo line: a moving conclusion to the whole work.

**David Gallagher**

<sup>1</sup> I am very grateful to the custodians of the Malipiero Collection at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini for affording me the opportunity to study the Malipiero materials held there.

## **Paolo Chiavacci**

Born in Florence, Paolo Chiavacci is the first violin and founder member of the Quartetto Fonè, with which he has given concerts at leading venues in Italy, including La Scala in Milan, Santa Cecilia in Rome, La Fenice in Venice, the Amici della Musica in Florence, the Associazione Alessandro Scarlatti in Naples, and abroad, with complete cycles of the Beethoven and Bartók quartets. He has appeared as a soloist and guest performer with various orchestras, including Mario Brunello's Orchestra d'archi Italiana, the Padua and the Veneto Orchestras, and the Orchestra Sinfonica di Roma, with which he has recorded Ghedini's *Contrappunti* [Naxos 8.573006]. He teaches violin and chamber music at the Bruno Maderna Conservatory in Cesena, has given masterclasses in Italy and in Japan, and assisted the Tokyo Quartet at the University of Yale in Connecticut.

## **Orchestra Sinfonica di Roma • Francesco La Vecchia**

The Rome Symphony Orchestra was established in 2002 by the Rome Foundation (Fondazione Roma Arte – Musei), a rare example in Europe of an orchestra that was completely privately funded. Under its artistic and musical director Francesco La Vecchia who, in turn, set up the Fondazione Arts Academy, the orchestra performed regularly in Rome at the Teatro Argentina, Teatro Sistina and Auditorium Conciliazione. It received critical and public recognition at distinguished venues in Asia, the Americas and Europe, with notable success in 2007 at the Berlin Philharmonic. The orchestra also undertook a wide-ranging and well received series of recordings, principally for Naxos, of important compositions by Italian composers of the 19th and 20th centuries, including Busoni, Catalani, Franco Ferrara, Ghedini, Gian Francesco Malipiero, Mancinelli, Martucci, Mercadante, Petrassi, Sgambati and Wolf-Ferrari. Many of these are world premiere recordings. The orchestra was dissolved in 2014 not long after giving the first modern performance of Giovanni Sgambati's *Symphony No. 2*.





Paolo Chiavacci



Francesco La Vecchia



Orchestra Sinfonica di Roma

This release couples Gian Francesco Malipiero's two contrasting violin concertos with the world premiere recording of his kaleidoscopic orchestral work *Per una favola cavalleresca*, evoking legendary scenes of love, tournaments, battles, moonbeams and heroes. Malipiero's *First Violin Concerto* is one of his most beautiful and joyful works, a remarkable achievement for a composer who is said to have played the violin badly in his youth. His *Second Violin Concerto*, written 30 years later, sounds astonishingly different on a first hearing, but reveals itself to be inspired by the same lyrical impulse as the earlier concerto.

Gian Francesco  
**MALIPIERO**  
(1882–1973)

Playing Time  
**69:24**

- |             |   |              |
|-------------|---|--------------|
| <b>1–3</b>  | <b>Violin Concerto No. 1</b> (1932)                       | <b>21:44</b> |
| <b>4–7</b>  | <b>Per una favola cavalleresca</b> (1914–15, rev. ?1920)* | <b>27:50</b> |
| <b>8–10</b> | <b>Violin Concerto No. 2</b> (1963)                       | <b>19:35</b> |

**\*WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING**

**Paolo Chiavacci, Violin** **1–3** **8–10**  
**Orchestra Sinfonica di Roma**  
**Francesco La Vecchia**

A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet

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