

ROSSINI

Péchés de vieillesse • 6 (Sins of Old Age)

Quatre hors d'œuvres et quatre mendiants

Alessandro Marangoni, Piano



**Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868):
Péchés de vieillesse: Volume IV: Quatre hors d'œuvres et quatre mendiants
Excerpts from Volumes VI, X and XIV**

Gioachino Antonio Rossini, one of the most successful and popular operatic composers of his time, was born in Pesaro in 1792. His father, a brass-player and later teacher of the French horn at the Bologna Accademia, had a modest career, disturbed by the political changes of the period as the French replaced the Austrians in Northern Italy. Rossini's mother was a singer and as a boy Rossini made his appearance with his father in the pit orchestra and from time to time as a singer with his mother on stage, going on to work as a keyboard-player in the opera orchestra.

Rossini's early studies in music were with his father and mother, and with other teachers through the generosity of rich patrons. In childhood he had already started to show ability as a composer and his experience in the opera-house bore natural fruit in a remarkable and meteoric career that began in 1810 with the production of *La cambiale di matrimonio* in Venice. There followed a series of operas, comic and tragic, until the relatively poor reception of *Semiramide* in Venice in 1823 turned Rossini's attention to Paris. Under the Bourbon King Charles X Rossini staged French versions of earlier works and in 1829 *Guillaume Tell*. A contract for further operas came to nothing when the King was replaced in the revolution of 1830 by Louis-Philippe, although eventually, after some six years, Rossini was able to have his agreed annuity restored. With matters settled in France, in 1836 he returned to Italy and in spite of ill health concerned himself with the affairs of the Liceo Musicale in Bologna. The revolutionary disturbances there in 1848, activities with which he had little sympathy, seemed to threaten him and his second wife, Olympe Pélissier, whom he had married in 1846, after the death of his first wife, the singer Isabella Colbran, from whom he had been legally separated since 1837. For his own safety he moved first to Florence, but in 1855, partly in a search for better health, returned to Paris. In that city and a few years later at his new villa at Passy he passed the rest of his life.

Rossini's last ten years brought a return to composition, principally with a series of pieces described as *Péchés de vieillesse* (Sins of Old Age). Some of these are based on earlier works, some designed for performance at the informal Saturday evenings when he entertained guests in Paris, and others simply musical *obiter dicta*, as it were, pieces written as the mood took

him. The *Péchés de vieillesse* are included in thirteen volumes, with the fourth to the eighth grouped together by Rossini as 'Un peu de tout. Recueil de 56 morceaux semi-comiques pour le piano' ("Je dédie ces Péchés de vieillesse aux pianistes de la 4^{me} classe à la quelle j'ai l'honneur d'appartenir") (A little of everything. Collection of 56 semi-comic pieces for the piano: "I dedicate these Sins of Old Age to pianists of the fourth class, to which I have the honour to belong"). Rossini was unfairly modest about his abilities as a pianist, which were, it seems, not inconsiderable.

The fourth volume of Rossini's *Péchés de vieillesse* has four items of dessert (*mendiants*), figs, almonds, raisins and hazelnuts, followed by four as *hors d'œuvres*, radishes, anchovies, gherkins and butter. *Les figues sèches (Me voilà – Bonjour madame)* (Dried Figs) (Here I am – Good morning, Madame), greets his wife with a piece that starts amicably enough, to be interrupted by moments of turbulence at the table. *Les amandes (Minuit sonne – Bonjour madame)* (Almonds) (Midnight sounds – Good evening, Madam) opens with the twelve chimes of the bell that bring midnight, followed by a waltz and other episodes. *Les raisins (A ma petite Perruche)* (Raisins – To my little parakeet) is described by Rossini as a compilation of the social gifts of his dear parakeet by his friend and colleague. The bird betrays something of a military background in its own additions to the score, including commands to shoulder arms, present arms and to fire, with the sound of the drum, and songs of smoking and drinking, *J'ai du bon tabac* (I've good tobacco in my pouch) and *Quand je bois du vin clairnet* (When I drink red wine). Dessert ends with *Les noisettes (A ma chère Nini)* (Hazelnuts – To my dear Nini), for his dog and with more than a touch of Chopin. The *Quatre hors d'œuvres* start with radishes, provoking an operatic study in a minor key. *Les anchois* (Anchovies) is a theme with a series of variations of increasing elaboration, followed by *Les cornichons* (Gherkins), which serves as an introduction to *Le beurre* (Butter), a further set of variations.

The tenth volume has six miscellaneous piano pieces. Two of these, both described as *Bagatelles* and relatively short, include a *Bagatelle* in E flat major, marked *Andante mosso* and *Mélotie italienne, In Nomine Patris*, an A flat major piece suggesting the style of Schumann. Eleven of the twelve pieces

that make up the sixth volume are recorded on the second release (Naxos 8.570766) of the present series. Included here is a twelfth piece from the *Album pour les enfants dégourdis* (Album for Smart Children), the eleventh of the album, *Etude asthmatique* (Asthmatic Study), which, in spite of its title, leaves barely a pause for breath in its rapid progress.

The later volumes of the *Péchés de vieillesse* are collections of various pieces by Rossini, subsequently assembled to provide a publishable continuation of the series. The various pieces that constitute the fourteenth volume include *Petite promenade de Passy à Courbevoie* (Little Walk from Passy to Courbevoie). After his return to Paris in 1855, Rossini rented a villa for the summer at Passy, on the Bois de Boulogne, and was later to have a house built there, the place where he was to die in 1868. The little walk, from the centre of Paris to Passy runs, as its continuing title declares, through all the keys of the chromatic scale and is, in a phrase worthy of Eric Satie, to be played *homéopathiquement et à la pesarese* (homeopathically and in the style of Pesaro). A rhythmic and melodic pattern is repeated

in various keys as the piece progresses. This is followed by *Ritournelle gothique* with its repeated short ritornello, to be followed by *Tourniquet sur la gamme chromatique, ascendante et descendante* in which Rossini explores the possibilities of a very short repeated phrase, revolving, as its title proclaims, through the ascending and descending chromatic scale. *Encore un peu de blague* (A little bit more fun) follows a similar procedure, exploring the possible chromatic modulations of a short phrase. *Une réjouissance* is a waltz, starting in A minor and building to an eventual climax in the tonic major key.

The *Waltz in E flat major*, one of a pair of such pieces, is dedicated to the *carissima Signora Elena Bandiera Ricci*, whom Rossini describes as his *candido estimatore*, his honest appraiser. The piece is dated 1849, when Rossini had moved from Bologna to Florence, to avoid the civil disturbances in the former city. The identity of the dedicatee has not been established.

Keith Anderson

Alessandro Marangoni

Born in Italy in 1979, Alessandro Marangoni studied the piano with Marco Vincenzi, obtaining a diploma with honours and continuing his studies at the Scuola di Musica di Fiesole with Maria Tipo. He graduated with honours in philosophy at the Università di Pavia as a merit student of the Almo Collegio Borromeo. After winning national and international awards, he has appeared throughout Europe, America and China as a soloist and as a chamber musician, collaborating with some of Italy's leading performers, including Mario Ancillotti, Aldo Ceccato, Valentina Cortese, Enrico Dindo, Quirino Principe, Milena Vukotic and the Nuovo Quartetto Italiano. He also gave more than a hundred concerts for the Second Life virtual platform. He has also given more than a hundred concerts for the Second Life virtual platform. He is a member of the Trio Albatros Ensemble, and in 2007 recorded the piano works of Victor de Sabata for the fortieth anniversary of the latter's death, playing in a recital at the Teatro alla Scala in Milan with Daniel Barenboim. His recordings for Naxos include the ongoing cycle of the complete piano works of Rossini (*Péchés de vieillesse*), Clementi's *Gradus ad Parnassum* (8.572325-28) and Castelnuovo-Tedesco's *Two Piano Concertos* (8.572823). In 2007 he won the prestigious Amici di Milano International Prize for Music. He teaches piano and chamber music in masterclasses in Europe and South America. He created the *Chromoconcerto* with Pierpaolo Venier.

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Photo: Alessandro Cerino

Rossini's operas have remained amongst the most popular in the repertoire but over the last decade of his life he turned largely to piano music. The *Péchés de vieillesse* (Sins of Old Age) occupy thirteen volumes, and the deliciously informal and comic fourth is called *Quatre hors d'œuvres et quatre mendiants*. Its theme is food, and Rossini lavishes all his abundant abilities of characterisation in his descriptive passages, not least the introduction of a parakeet.

**Gioachino
ROSSINI**
(1792-1868)

Playing Time
70:24

Complete Piano Music • 6
Péchés de vieillesse, Volume IV:
Quatre hors d'œuvres et quatre mendiants

	Volume IV: Quatre mendiants	
1	Les figes sèches (Me voilà – Bonjour madame)	6:48
2	Les amandes (Minuit sonne – Bonjour madame)	5:33
3	Les raisins (A ma petite perruche) *	4:10
4	Les noisettes (A ma chère Nini)	8:47
	Volume IV: Quatre hors d'œuvres	
5	Les radis	4:49
6	Les anchois (Thème et Variations)	5:00
7	Les cornichons (Introduction)	5:28
8	Le beurre (Thème et Variations)	3:49
	From Volume X: Miscellanée pour piano	
9	Une bagatelle	1:22
10	Mélodie italienne (Une bagatelle). In Nomine Patris	1:05
	From Volume VI: Album pour les enfants dégourdis	
11	Etude asthmatique	6:25
	From Volume XIV: Other Péchés de vieillesse	
12	Petite promenade de Passy à Courbevoie	3:46
13	Ritornelle gothique	1:29
14	Tourniquet sur la gamme chromatique, ascendant et descendant	4:00
15	Encore un peu de blague	2:39
16	Une réjouissance	3:03
17	Waltz in E flat major (dedicated to Signora Elena Bandiera Ricci, 1849)	2:14

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* The parrot voice-over is by Alessandro Marangoni

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