TOCCATA CLASSICS

Adolfo FUMAGALLI

PIANO MUSIC, VOLUME ONE

GRANDE FANTAISIE POUR LA MAIN GAUCHE
SUR 'ROBERT LE DIABLE' DE MEYERBEER, OP. 106
LE PROPHÈTE: GRANDE FANTAISIE DE BRAVOURE, OP. 43
ÉCOLE MODERNE DU PIANISTE, OP. 100: EXCERPTS

Adalberto Maria Riva

FIRST RECORDINGS

ADOLFO FUMAGALLI: A BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION

by Luciano Gorla

Adolfo Pietro Fumagalli was born in Inzago (in Lombardy, about 25 kilometres north-east of Milan) on 19 October 1828, in a house on the via Gabrio Piola (then the Contrada dell'Addorato), as a memorial plaque on the building attests. Adolfo's parents, Carlo and Carolina (*née* Consonni), had got married in near-by Saronno but thereafter settled in Inzago, where Carlo had been born and was now working as a bailiff. Adolfo was the second of five children; his three brothers, Disma, Polibio and Luca, all went on to become important musicians and teachers in their own right. His father, who was fond of music and an amateur flautist, soon realised that Adolfo had an outstanding musical talent and asked the organist of the local parish church, Gaetano Medaglia, to teach him the rudiments of music. In 1836 Adolfo auditioned successfully for the Conservatorio in Milan and completed his musical education there (probably supported by a local benefactor) between 1837 and 1847, attending classes in piano, composition, harmony and counterpoint.

Fumagalli was gifted with an astonishing facility at the keyboard and with an especial talent for playing with his left hand, which he often used to astonish his teachers and fellow students. In 1840, during the Carnival, he gave his first concert – aged twelve – at the Conservatorio, performing some variations on a march from Rossini's *L'assedio di Corinto* ('The Siege of Corinth'). It was around this time that he began to compose.

In 1848, after his first Italian concerts, he went to Paris, convinced that performing in such a major city would help boost his career as a concert artist – but his early days in Paris were not at all easy, although he faced his difficulties with fortitude. He eventually succeeded in making a name for himself and enjoyed the appreciation of both audiences and critics. He gave concerts at the Théâtre de l'Opéra and played at Prince Poniatowski's residence and at Henri IV's pavillion in Saint-Germain-en-Laye. He met, and enjoyed the esteem of, such important figures as Meyerbeer and Berlioz (the Overture to whose opera *Benvenuto Cellini* he transcribed for solo piano). Some of his compositions were published by the Bonoldis, an Italian family which ran a publishing company in Paris. That was probably how he met Anna Bonoldi, daughter of one of the publishers; they were married in Paris on 23 December 1852 and had two children.

Between 1851 and 1855 Fumagalli gave a number of very successful concerts, performing in Milan, Turin, Genoa, Venice, Bergamo, Trieste, Nice, Paris, Lyon, Marseille, Mons and Brussels,

stirring his audiences with his attractive compositions and his unusual virtuosity, not least with his left hand. In 1853 praise from Franz Liszt increased his prestige – in a letter sent to his Italian secretary he wrote: 'I revere him as a first-rate musician'.[1] In 1856 he settled in Florence with his family, where he continued his career as a concert artist and composer. But before long Fumagalli's precarious health gave way, and he died of 'miliary fever' – probably the result of tuberculosis – on 3 May 1856, aged only 28. He was buried in the cemetery of San Miniato in Florence. He left a total of 112 compositions (not including any that are now missing or are in private hands); many of them, as with Liszt, transcriptions of or fantasies on music from contemporary operas.

Inzago has not forgotten Adolfo Fumagalli. In 1920, following a request from his sister Marina, a street in the town was called after him and a memorial tablet placed on the façade of his birthplace; a memorial stone in the local cemetery also commemorates him symbolically. More recently, an untitled autograph score, marked *Allegretto spiritoso* and dated 13 February 1851, was purchased by the municipality and is now kept at the local library.

Luciano Gorla, born in Inzago in 1950, is an important local historian, contributing articles to the local press and various publications of local history; he is a leading figure in the Associazione Studi Storici di Inzago e della Martesana. His research into the Fumagalli family in the 1980s provided the basis of Achille Maccapani's book, I Fumagalli: la saga di una famiglia di musicisti inzaghesi (Adolfo, Polibio, Disma e Luca)*, Melzo, Inzago, 1990.*

[1] Letter by Franz Liszt to Adolfo Fumagalli, quoted in the *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*, 24 April 1853.

THE CHANGING FORTUNES OF ADOLFO FUMAGALLI

by Ettore Borri

From the outset of his brief career Adolfo Fumagalli demonstrated a determination to conquer the summit of musical composition, not only taking inspiration from Liszt and Chopin but also making his own mark on European cultural life during the time he spent in Paris. In the 1850s he was among the standard-bearers of the aesthetics of programme music, as revealed by the ambitious collection of studies *École moderne du pianiste*, Op. 100. The writer Antonio Ghislanzoni reported[1] that Fumagalli enjoyed such fame that he was frequently approached by composers who wished to promote their

[1] 'Riminiscenze artistiche. Fumagalli Adolfo', *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*, 24 July 1866.

work through piano transcriptions. One such was Antonio Bazzini, who in 1852 requested the publisher Tito Ricordi to ask Fumagalli to arrange Bazzini's famous virtuoso piece *Ronde des lutins*, originally written for violin and piano, for solo piano (unfortunately, Fumagalli never took on the task).

The prestige the young Fumagalli had acquired by the middle of the nineteenth century confirmed the qualities that had been already perceived by Liszt:

> it seems to me that you have too many intrinsic qualities and too much real talent [….] allow me to seriously exhort you […] to point towards higher and more distant aims.[2]

That view was confirmed by the enthusiastic recollections of Filippo Filippi published soon after Fumagalli's premature demise.[3]

But times were changing rapidly. The loosely constituted Italy of the Wars of Independence was on the path towards unification, with a consequent cultural normalisation of the entire nation. Fumagalli was a musician with an exclusive gift for instrumental music and he could not compete with the national pervasiveness of opera. His image was handed down almost as an icon of a damned artist, like those involved in the *Scapigliatura,* a literary movement based in northern Italy and especially in Milan in the second part of the nineteenth century. There he attracted brief comment in the diary of the writer Carlo Dossi,[4] he featured in the extended recollections of Antonio Ghislanzoni,[5] and he was seen by Salvatore Farina – in the pages of the *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano* (Farina was its *redattore capo* from 1872 to 1886) – as anticipating the first true Italian musician of European importance to dedicate himself exclusively to instrumental music, Giuseppe Martucci.[6] But after unification in 1861 Italian cultural life proceeded without any awareness of Fumagalli's stature.

Although the composers known as the *generazione dell'ottanta* – Casella, Malipiero, Pizzetti, Respighi *et al.* – made a systematic effort to revive interest in earlier Italian instrumental music, their focus was on the Baroque and early Classical periods, and Fumagalli's contribution was overlooked. Busoni was the only major Italian musician to retain a handful of Fumagalli's works in his repertoire. Nowadays, with more detachment and objectivity, a revival of research into nineteenth-century Italian musical history is underway, so that Adolfo Fumagalli may finally be able to claim his rightful place in it.

[2] *Loc. cit.*

[3] Filippo Filippi, 'Della vita e delle opere di Adolfo Fumagalli', *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*, No. 1720, Ricordi, 1857.

[4] Carlo Dossi, *Note Azzurre*, ed. Dante Isella, Adelphi, Milan, 1964, pp. 481 and 571.

[5] *Loc. cit.*

[6] Quoted in *Folco Perrino*, Giuseppe Martucci, : L'evoluzione artistica 1880-1886, Tipolitografia Esperia/Centro Studi Martucciani, Novara, Vol II, 1997, p. 74.

Ettore Borri, with degrees both in piano and in literature, has written extensively on Italian piano music. He has also recorded, for RAI, Duetto and Naxos, piano music by Donizetti, Field, Respighi and Sgambati. He has taught piano at various Italian conservatories and is currently a faculty member at the Conservatorio Giuseppe Verdi in Milan. From 1995 to 2001 he was director of the Scuola Musicale di Milano and from 2002 to 2011 of the Conservatorio Guido Cantelli in Novara. He is president of the historical music association Vittorio Cocito in Novara and represents the Pontificio Istituto di Musica Sacra on the board of the Association Européenne des Conservatoires.

ADOLFO FUMAGALLI, THE PAGANINI OF THE PIANO

by Adalberto Maria Riva

> Fumagalli was but 27 years-old, and at that age he was rapidly advancing in great leaps to become Liszt's successor, easily overtaking the young generation of contemporary pianists.

So wrote *Le Figaro* in 1856, when it announced the death of Adolfo Fumagalli, at the same time giving public recognition to his stature as among the most important pianist-composers of his generation. Fumagalli was one of the few Italian pianist-composers of the nineteenth century, if not the only one, who was able to establish himself in the international musical context of his time, earning himself the flattering sobriquet of 'the Paganini of the piano'. Even during his period of study, as an adolescent, at the Conservatorio di Milano, his outstanding abilities were observed by Filippo Filippi, editor of the *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*, whose series of enthusiastic reviews presaged a brilliant career – to which Fumagalli's rigorous programme of studies, under the guidance of his teacher Antonio Angeleri, certainly contributed, a programme as rigorous as it was up-to-date and a complete response to the requirements of the times:

> Clementi for the mechanism and the form, Bach for the mind, Beethoven for the mind and the heart, Liszt for the strange sonorities of the great virtuoso; these are, in my opinion, the four principal pillars supporting the immense edifice of the art of playing and moving.[1]

It was natural, then, that after Fumagalli had taken up residence in Paris, he was hailed in the *Revue et*

[1] *Il pianoforte, posizione delle mani, modo di suonare. Cenni teorico-pratici*, a method devised by Antonio Angeleri (1801–80) and published by Ricordi (Milan, 1872), quoted by Filippo Filippi, *loc. cit.*, p. 14.

Gazette musicale de Paris as 'the first serious pianist to come from Italy', and he soon enjoyed considerable success in the concert-halls of the French capital, delighting the public especially with brilliant piano transcriptions of operatic numbers. It was a musical genre that at that time became a point of reference for every young virtuoso who wished to ingratiate himself with the public. Fumagalli's ability to find and recreate on the piano sound-effects not originally imagined for the instrument excited the admiration of Liszt himself, who wrote in 1853:

> I bow in front of you as to the greatest of the pianists, because anyone who is able to negotiate the difficulties of transcribing an overture like that of [Berlioz's] Cellini is without any doubt an artist out of the ordinary.[2]

How, then, did Adolfo Fumagalli play the piano? Filippo Filippi, the main source of biographical detail on the composer, describes his touch as clear and precise without a blur; he reports 'fingers of steel' able to obtain from the instrument the most surprising effects, from loud *fortissimi* to the most beautiful sounds and to render all the nuances of a beautiful melody.[3] His operatic arrangements and fantasies on famous operatic themes represent a veritable mine of piano combinations, evidence of his ability to command a huge range of colours and sounds, from the sweetest to the most daring, without ever losing expressive and timbral quality. There are interesting examples to be found in his transcription of the *Grande Ouverture de Benvenuto Cellini par Hector Berlioz*, Fumagalli's Op. 81, which Liszt so admired, in the *Grande Fantaisie*, Op. 84, the 'Introduzione e Quartettino dai Puritani' from the *Gran Fantasia sui Puritani*, Op. 28, and in the Meyerbeer-based *Le prophète: Grande fantaisie de bravoure*, Op. 43 – one of Fumagalli's *pièces de résistance*, which earned Meyerbeer's public praise after Fumagalli had performed it in the Opéra de Paris. But there are also examples in early works, like the fantasies on Bellini's *La sonnambula*, Op. 14, and on Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Op. 26. Often Fumagalli places the melody in the central register, subdividing it between the two hands and thus creating a stereophonic, illusionary effect of three hands (Liszt and Thalberg often used the same device); or introduces a countermelody that gradually blends in more markedly with the main subject. Fumagalli, moreover, generally keeps the dramatic climax of the work in reserve until it is required by the progressive, parallel thickening of the texture and sonority – as, for example, in the final galop of the fantasy on *Le prophète* 6. Although the special effects of these compositions were devised to appeal to the fashion of the time, responding technically and dramatically to the expectations of the audience, they are always judiciously considered.

[2] *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*, 24 April 1853.

[3] *Loc. cit.*

Fumagalli's transcriptions for the left hand represent a speciality in which it seems he was second to none. Among them are an arrangement (his Op. 61) of the famous 'Casta Diva' from Bellini's *Norma*, a *Studio da Concerto* (the second of two which form his Op. 18) based on 'Coro O Signore del tetto natio' from Verdi's opera *I Lombardi alla prima crociata*, which is very interesting for its timbral solutions, and the *Grande Fantaisie sur 'Robert le Diable' de Meyerbeer*, Op. 106 [3], without any doubt the most complex and best constructed, which is dedicated to Liszt. The story goes that the feared critic Paul Scudo – having arrived late at a concert by Fumagalli at the Salle Herz in Paris in which he was performing this piece, and not believing his own ears – looked in from the back of the hall and discovered to his astonishment that Fumagalli's gloved right hand was resting on his knee.

Both the fantasy on *Robert le diable* and that on *Le prophète* are based on a simple yet effective tripartite structure which allows Fumagalli to exploit, with consummate skill, an enormous range of combinations of timbres and registers, in spectacular writing that puts considerable strain on both piano and pianist. Thus, after a brief introduction, there is a first section of martial character, built using a dramatic dynamic progression upwards from *piano* to *forte*, parallel to his gradual expansion of the range of the keyboard in use[4] (which is even more of a challenge when you are writing for one hand); a lyrical central section is then followed by a bright finale, generally a galop where the virtuosic demands on the player unfold at a dizzying pace.

Fumagalli's most ambitious and complex music, and his most individual, is found in his *École moderne du pianiste*, Op. 100, a collection intended to contain 24 studies composed on the model of Liszt's *Études d'exécution transcendante*; in the event, Fumagallli's early death meant that he completed only eighteen of them, published in three volumes of six apiece in Paris in 1854.[5] Here Fumagalli creates a personal synthesis between the most advanced tendencies of contemporary Romanticism (for example, all the studies bear a title, pointing to the high profile that programme music had now acquired, if not yet in Italy) and his personal background as an Italian virtuoso. Each study in the *École moderne* is prefaced by a quotation of a piece of prose or poetry by a contemporary French author (among them Victor Hugo, Alphonse de Lamartine, Joseph Méry and Édouard Turquety); some may be by Fumagalli himself, and those attributed to 'A.B.' are probably by Anna Bonoldi, his wife. Each, too, is an original composition rather than an

[4] For a pianist playing with two hands, it is generally impossible to play simultaneously all over the keyboard with the same degree of precision: the limit is between three and four octaves. Fumagalli usually begins within a range of three octaves; after he has increased the dynamic range, he requires the performer to be able to command six or seven octaves.

[5] All eighteen studies of the *École moderne du pianiste* were recorded in 2011 (along with the *12 Studi*, Op. 3, by Francesco Sangalli (1820–92) from Cremona) as part of a project conceived and organised by Ettore Borri and involving students from six European conservatoires; details at www.discantica.it/discantica250.html.

arrangement or transcription, unlike the bulk of his output. Each, too, offers innovative touches.

No. 7 [1], 'Le Cloître', styled a 'Prière du matin', imitates the tolling of bells and the sound of the organ and has a long *cantabile* melody in the middle section symbolising prayer. Here – like Liszt in 'Harmonies du soir', the eleventh of his *Études d'exécution transcendante* – Fumagalli uses clusters in order to create the illusion of three hands at work. The superscript text, by Édouard Turquety (1807–67), reads as follows:

Oh! toujours prisonnière et toujours élancée
Vers ce monde idéal qu'invoque sa pensée
L'âme ici plane sur les temps ;
Et, quand l'orgue a gémi, de sa plainte divine
Mon regard s'épouvante et ma tête s'incline,
Je sens que Dieu passe et j'attends.

Oh! Always a prisoner and always thrown
Toward that ideal word that its thought invokes,
The soul here glides on the times;
And when the organ has moaned its divine lamentation,
My gaze takes fright and my head bows,
I feel God is passing by and I wait.

No. 10, a 'Danse fantastique' entitled 'Le Reveil des Ombres' [2], evokes a kind of dance of the dead, with creaking bones and the swirl of infernal furies in a *danse macabre* close to similar compositions by Berlioz, Liszt and Saint-Saëns; the trumpets of the last call are clearly audible in the final section. One of the most complex studies of the entire collection, it is a cyclical work built on at least four basic thematic cells variously combined – a technique developed more fully later in the nineteenth century. The prefatory text, by 'A. B.', reads:

La lune venait à peine de paraître à l'horizon, lorsqu'une musique étrange se fit entendre dans la forêt des grands chênes, et, tout à coup, j'aperçus comme des formes blanches se dresser parmi les buissons ; croyant reconnaître des ombres, je m'enfuis aussitôt glacé d'une frayeur mortelle.

The moon had only just appeared on the horizon when a strange music could be heard in the forest of the great oaks and, suddenly, I saw how the white shapes were rising among the bushes. Believing that I recognised spectres, I immediately fled, frozen by mortal fear.

No. 14, a 'Caprice de légèreté' entitled 'La Fille de l'air' [4], proposes interesting timbral solutions *à la* Liszt in the high register. Busoni liked this piece very much and often programmed it in his concerts. The text, by Joseph Méry (1797–1866), reads:

Souvent, d'une aile timide
Je m'abats sur les roseaux.
Tout près d'une grotte humide

Often, with timid wing
I drop onto the reeds,
Close to a damp cavern

Où dorment des fraîches eaux.	*Where fresh waters sleep.*
Le doux bruit de la fontaine	*The sweet sound of the fountain*
A mon oreille incertaine,	*Covers the distant clamour*
Couvre la clameur lointaine	*Of your anxious palaces*
De vos palais soucieux ;	*To my delicate ears;*
Et, par mes lèvres rasée,	*And from my shaven lips*
Votre campagne embrasée	*Your parched countryside*
Boit la divine rosée	*Drinks the divine dew*
Que je lui porte des cieux!	*That I bring from the sky!*

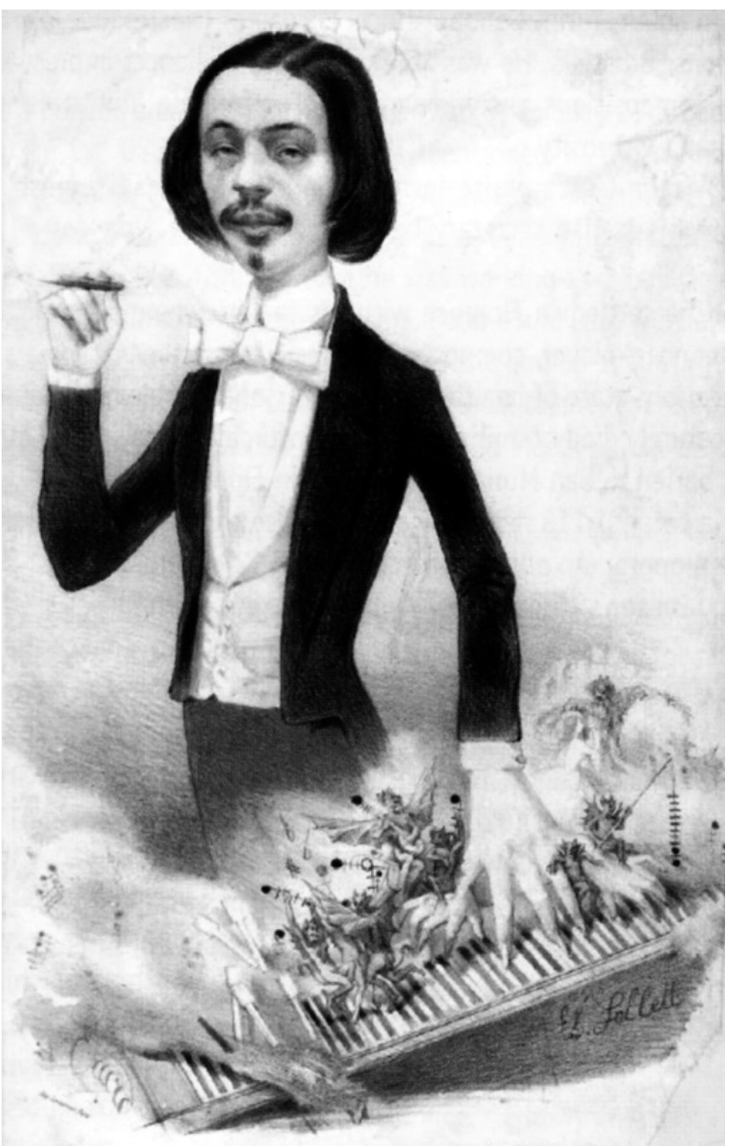
No. 17, an 'Étude de bravoure' called 'La Roche du Diable' 5, is the most technically demanding piece of the whole collection, shaking the keyboard with stormy arpeggios and *fortissimo* chords in the lower register in the depiction of a raging storm, complete with claps of thunder, similar in atmosphere to 'Wilde Jagd', No. 8 of the *Études d'exécution transcendante* of Liszt, to whom this study is dedicated. The prefatory text, from the tenth poem in Victor Hugo's collection *Les feuilles d'automne* (1831), reads:

D'où vient que sur ta tête chauve	*Why is it that tawny-eyed eagles*
Planent incessamment des aigles à l'œil fauve?...	*Hover incessantly over your bald head?*
--------	--------
Pourquoi dans tes flancs noirs tant d'abîmes pleins d'ombre?...	*Why on your black sides are there so many shadow-filled chasms?...*
Quel orage éternes te bat d'un éclair sombre?...	*Which eternal storm strikes you with a dark flash of lightning?*

In nineteenth-century Italy there was a marked imbalance of importance between opera and instrumental music, a situation that even now has not yet been studied in any depth and which thus limits awareness and performance of the latter. Fumagalli's career was atypical of the Italian cultural scene: not only was he one of the most important pianist-composers to gain a degree of international renown, but he did so a half-century ahead of the *generazione dell'ottanta*, who are generally credited with having 'reinvented' Italian instrumental music and 'liberated' it from the yoke of nineteenth-century melodrama. The truth was different: it was the musicians of Fumagalli's generation – men such as Francesco Pollini (1762–1846), Theodor Döhler (1814–56 – born in Naples despite his name) and Stefano Golinelli (1818–91), to cite only three – who prepared the ground for the so-called 'revival' of Italian instrumental music later in the nineteenth century, re-establishing the tradition of

such earlier composers as Boccherini, Sammartini and Scarlatti and calmly absorbing advanced, modern ideas from north of the Alps. It is much to Fumagalli's credit that, a pioneer in a foreign land, he was able to maintain the tradition of Italian instrumental music outside the borders of his homeland.

Adolfo Fumagalli deserves a prominent place in the international musical panorama of the nineteenth century. His rapid career disproves the myth that Italian instrumental music found itself in a subordinate position by the middle of the century, but his stature was soon overlooked. His early death was one reason for his neglect. Another was the systematic effort at the end of the century to retrieve an authentically Italian style and re-establish those glorious Baroque and eighteenth-century traditions. And so Fumagalli's contemporaries and successors underestimated his importance and his outstanding music rapidly fell into oblivion – an omission this recording and its successors will seek to redress.



A cartoon of Fumagalli playing his Grande Fantaisie pour la main gauche sur 'Robert le diable' de Meyerbeer

Adalberto Maria Riva studied at the Conservatorio di Musica in Milan and obtained his 'Virtuosité' in 2001 in the class of Dag Achatz at the Lausanne Conservatoire. He is the the winner of several national and international prizes, one of which – the Grand Prize of the IBLA International Competition of Music in 2008 – allowed him to undertake a tour of the USA in April of the following year, including a concert in Carnegie Hall. He has also given recitals in Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Russia, Poland and Spain, and he has now toured North America four times. He has also performed many times with the Timişoara Philarmonic in Romania under the direction of Jean-François Antonioli and with the orchestras Angelicum, Pomeriggi Musicali and Milano Classica in Milan, under the direction of Daniel Gatti, Enrique Mazzola, Massimiliano Caldi and Hiroaki Masuda.

His repertory extends from Bach to contemporary music, a line that he presents in a cycle of concert-conferences applied to the history and pianistic literature especially in Italy and French Switzerland. His fondness for musical discoveries and forgotten composers led to a thesis on Adolfo Fumagalli, and a round-table organised with the *commune* of Inzago, Fumagalli's native town, and to a recording of Swiss Romantic composers – Vincent Adler, Charles Bovy-Lysberg, Caroline Boissier-Butini, Paul Hahnemann, Hans Huber, Fanny Huenerwadel, Joachim Raff and Adolf Ruthardt – released in 2013 by VDE-Gallo. He had recorded several other CDs, among them a disc of piano transcriptions (including Fumagalli's left-hand treatment of 'Casta Diva' from Bellini's *Norma*), *Singing on the Keyboard: Vocal Influences in the Piano Literature* (both for Sheva), *Pianoforte italiano* and *La flûte romantique* (both for VDE-Gallo), as well as a number of radio programmes, particularly for Swiss Radio RSR Espace 2, Italian RAI Radio Tre, Radio Classica and Radio Canada.

His website can be found at www.adalbertomariariva.net.

Live recording made on 23 September 2006 in the Auditorium De Andrè, Inzago, Milan
Recording engineer: Rino Trasi
Piano: Steinway B, supplied by Griffa & Figli, Milan

The Municipality of Inzago contributed to the costs of making this recording.

Booklet notes by Luciano Gorla, Ettore Borri and Adalberto Maria Riva
Cover design: David M. Baker (dmbaker@me.com)
Design and layout: Paul Brooks (paulmbrooks@virginmedia.com)

Executive producer: Martin Anderson

TOCC 0316

Toccata Classics CDs are also available in the shops and can be ordered from our distributors around the world, a list of whom can be found at www.toccataclassics.com. If we have no representation in your country, please contact: Toccata Classics, 16 Dalkeith Court, Vincent Street, London SW1P 4HH, UK
Tel: +44/0 207 821 5020 E-mail: info@toccataclassics.com