

FRANCESCO ZAPPALÀ

Pianist

“There are many artists, a lot of them talented, who perform their piece, bow to the applause, closed in an invisible and impenetrable sphere. Isolated from the public sitting just a few metres from them. Thus art remains closed and uncommunicative. Francesco Zappalà, a pianist of the very highest artistic sensibility, is not content just with the perfection of production, notwithstanding the intelligence and spirituality of the rendition, he wants to create a dialogue with the listener, a continual interplay between original creation and contingent interpretation. This congenial soloist has illustrated, with well-chosen examples, the modes and intentions of the work. Thus a musical concert becomes a concert of intelligent reflection.

(Sergio Sciacca - LA SICILIA - 22 September, 2012).

These are the words of Sergio Sciacca, written as part of a review of **FRANCESCO ZAPPALÀ's recital** of Chopin and Liszt held at the Festival Belliniano 2012 at the Teatro Massimo Bellini.

Francesco Zappalà (b. 1960) began his musical career at the age of 3, teaching himself to play a variety of musical genres on the piano: classical music, light music and jazz. At the age of 18 he decided to study the piano seriously with the teacher Agatella Catania, who proved to be a precious guide for him. He received his Diploma in 1983, with the highest score and an honourable mention. Concurrently, he began taking part in national and international music competitions, achieving a series of successes. He was the winner of the Coppa Pianisti d'Italia di Osimo in 1981 and 1983, of the “Città di Catanzaro” in 1981, the “Premio Ernesto Coop” in Messina in 1982, and of the “Premio Rendano” in Rome in 1982. These were followed by two other important successes: First Prize at the “A. Speranza” in Taranto in 1984 and Third prize at the Concorso Internazionale “A. Casella” della RAI in Naples in 1989.

After having attended several prestigious courses held by the maestri Nunzio Montanari, Michele Campanella and Jörg Demus, he then enrolled at the l'Accademia Internazionale Mügi in Rome from 1991 to 1994, studying under Aldo Ciccolini.

In 1994 he was invited to play at the Teatro Massimo Bellini in Catania where he performed works by Francesco Pollini (1762 – 1846) as part of the Festival Belliniano. In 1995 he executed several of Beethoven's Piano Quartets and recorded the music of Beethoven, Schubert e Rachmaninoff for the RAI. In 2001 he recorded the music of Jean Philippe Rameau for the series CD CLASSICA.

In April 2002, he performed at the Facoltà di Lettere dell'Università di Catania, playing the Bösendorfer 250 piano made in 1881 that belonged to Franz Liszt. On this occasion he played the Three Sonnets by Petrarch and le Due Légendes.

Again in 2002, he was invited by the Orchestra Sinfonica di fiati della Provincia Regionale of Catania, to perform Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue as a soloist, in a rare version by Ferde Grofé , based on the version by Whiteman for “Jazz band” (1924) and for the “Theater orchestra” (1926).

In May 2004 he performed in Rumania, during the 2003-2004 Season of the Bacau Philharmonica, with two consecutive evening performances of solo recitals of the Wienen-Klagen Variations, Liszt's 12 Etudes d'Esecution Trascendente and the Second Concerto op.83 by Brahms.

In August 2006 he was at the II Festival del Val di Noto “Magie Barocche” performing his own transcriptions, with Maria Pia Tricoli in duo, of the 6th Brandenburg Concerto BWV 1051 and Bach's Toccata e Fuga in D minor for organ BWV 565.

In 2007, he was invited by Maestro Piero Rattalino, the then Artistic Director of the Teatro Massimo Bellini di Catania, to perform the cycle of 12 Etudes d'Esecution Trascendente by Liszt, an

historic event in the history of Catania's musical repertoire, having only been performed once before by Michele Campanella in 1987.

In 2009, to commemorate 20 years since the death of Vladimir Horowitz, he organized a program of concerts entitled "Suonare il Mito", with a recital of several significant transcriptions by the great Russian composer, including Mussorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition, some original pieces by Horowitz and the 1979 version of the Sonata n°2 op.36 by Rachmaninov.

In 2010, the Bicentenary of the birth of Chopin (1810-1847), he performed several integral versions of the 24 Studi (op.10 e op.25), including the Mazurka, op.68 e op.59.

In 2011, for the Bicentenary of the birth of Franz Liszt, he was involved in a multi-media concert project, consisting of integral executions of the Harmonies Poétiques et Religieuses, a project that ended with performances at the Facoltà di Lettere dell'Università di Catania, in collaboration with the Istituto Superiore di Studi Musicali "Vincenzo Bellini".

Francesco Zappalà received great acclaim in 2013 with his recital of "Italia-U.S.A one way!" in which he performed his own transcription of An American in Paris by George Gershwin. He performed the same program in October 2013 at the prestigious Barletta International Piano Festival where he returned in 2014 to perform Quattro Scherzi and 24 Preludes by Chopin (the recital was entitled "L'anima di Chopin...Scherzi a parte!")

His constant activity as a performer has always been characterized by a careful and profound exploration of communicative approaches to performance, which he regards as essential and that when studied reveal an historical and sociological evolution. This is the reason why he always gives a title to his concerts and talks with the audience between one piece and the next. He is deeply committed to promoting and developing this approach, most significantly in young pianists.

Since 1983 he has held the Chair of Pianoforte Principale at the Istituto Superiore di Studi Musicali "V. Bellini" in Catania and is also Professor of Prassi Esecutiva and Pianoforte e Orchestra.

In November 2013 he published "PIANOFOCUS", his first book, for Feltrinelli Editore. (www.ilmiolibro.it)

He has also released several videos on You Tube on the channel MrFzappala.