

## THE GREAT REGONDI, Volume 2

Original Compositions by Giulio Regondi (1822-1872)

performed by *The Giulio Regondi Guild*

D'Anna Fortunato, mezzo-soprano

Douglas Rogers, treble and baritone concertina

David Starobin, guitar

Julie Lustman, piano

**1** As Slowly Part the Shades of Night (2:57)

*mezzo-soprano, piano*

Selections from *Leisure Moments* (4:35)

**2** No. 2 Andante—Larghetto (2:26)

**3** No. 3 Andantino (1:00)

**4** No. 4 Allegretto (1:08)

*treble concertina, piano*

**5** Introduction et Caprice, op. 23 (9:36)

*guitar solo*

**6** L'Avviso (3:01)

*mezzo-soprano, piano*

**7** Remembrance (13:41)

*baritone concertina solo*

**8** Absence (2:55)

**9** Tell Me Heart! Why So Desponding? (4:11)

*mezzo-soprano, piano*

Selections from *Leisure Moments* (5:45)

**10** No. 5 Andante cantabile—Allegretto (2:36)

**11** No. 7 Allegretto—Larghetto (1:46)

**12** No. 8 Allegretto giocoso (1:22)

*treble concertina, piano*

**13** Rêverie (Nocturne pour la guitarre), op. 19 (9:38)

*guitar solo*

Total Time: (56:55)

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## GIULIO REGONDI

"His talent was exquisite, and in better circumstances he might have been one of the really great artists." With these words Sir George Grove ended the entry for Giulio Regondi in the earlier editions of his Dictionary. It is, of course, the final echo of a sentiment many times repeated: the regret that such a musician should have devoted his life to the guitar and the concertina rather than the "violin or harp (that) would have led (him) to a more permanent and solid reputation..." (*Athenaeum*, 12 June 1841).

Regondi, born in Geneva—so he believed—of a German mother (who died at the birth) and Italian father, was brought up by a man named Joseph Regondi who taught him the guitar and showed him off throughout Europe as a prodigy. The pair arrived finally in England in June 1831. There Giulio was to stay for the rest of his life, apart from two extended and highly successful tours of the Continent in the 1840s. About 1834, shortly after Giulio had taken up the recently invented English concertina, Joseph apparently deserted him, which always led to speculation that the man was not the real father as had been assumed. The uncertainty about his past gave Regondi a certain romantic mystique. He never naturalised, never became "establishment", never married and never wavered in his devotion to the guitar and the English concertina, whose respective techniques he developed to the highest level, and whose voices he imbued with genuine Romanticism.

For all its pedantry and pomposity, the *Athenaeum* was probably right. Regondi's performance on both his instruments was compared frequently with that of the greatest singers for its tenderness and sweet cantabile, and to the greatest violinists for sheer dazzling verve, delicacy and vigor. This rare ability together with his apparent "mind and enthusiasm", taste and refinement, produced one of the truly individual performers of the 19th century. Circumstances may have been against Regondi, depriving the world of yet another fiddler, but they gave instead a champion to those instruments that needed one! As a grieving friend wrote in *The Musical World* after Regondi's death from cancer at 49: "It is not too much to say

that (his) performance can never be equalled. All he did has died with him. No other equally great musician, with the same scientific talent, would be likely to devote year after year to the enormous amount of practice which he bestowed on his fingers. And when will an individual arise possessing the taste and refinement which perfected this wondrous union of means to an end?"

The shy and gentle Regondi was soon forgotten by the public. His death merited two obituaries in *The Musical World*, but none of his five local newspapers noticed his passing; and while his concertina pieces continued to be played by his friend and closest rival, Richard Blagrove (1826-1895), his guitar works faded quickly into obscurity. Possibly the last personal memories of Regondi were those of Giulia Pelzer, a sister of the leading Victorian guitarist Madame Pratten. Sixty years after his death, when she was well into her nineties, she said of him "...his music is still ringing in my ears—he played like a god!". By this time, however, he had become a mere footnote in the now long-separated worlds of guitar and concertina.

Regondi seems to have been an elusive and complex individual. He was multi-talented, being a capable draughtsman and an unusually fine linguist. Of his character and professional reputation there was no doubt, according to his friend Richard Hoffman, the Anglo-American pianist: "... he showed himself a true and noble artist, full of the finest and most exalted love of music, a man whom to know was in itself a privilege not to be overestimated." Added to this, he was said to be kind and generous, amiable and agreeable, yet he must have been stubborn as a mule, and he bore his agonising final illness with great courage and resignation. Giulio was slightly built and delicate: The pianist Kuhe, who met him in Prague in 1841 described him as "girlish"; and when he was thirty-eight, a reviewer for a Glasgow concert wrote: "...we are almost tempted to call him "Young Regondi" ...he looks so slight and boyish." (At least he'd progressed a little in twenty years!). This much of the person, therefore, is known. Where he becomes more extraordinary is in those areas that show a mercurial, unsettled character. His signature, his writing, his musical manu-

script, are variable, whimsical; and strangely his London lodgings changed on average every two years (until 1863, when he settled at his final address)—but then perhaps the “enormous amount of practice” was not appreciated by his fellow lodgers!

Contemporary references to Regondi the executant are impressively numerous. He appeared and performed with many legendary artists, and in common with most virtuosi of that time composed material that not only suited his manner of performance, technique and taste, but that also showed best the particular powers of his instruments. From his compositions, therefore, one can gain a clear idea of his performance style. For the concertina he wrote two concertos and over a dozen original concert works, though he usually played embellished arrangements of virtuoso violin repertoire by Spohr and de Bériot, as well as three or four of his operatic Fantasias (a very popular genre at the time). Always keen to “legitimise” the little squeeze-box, he also commissioned two concertina concertos from Bernhard Molière (1802-1869), and in his last concerts in the late 60s he played Beethoven and Mozart violin sonatas. At one of these concerts he played a movement of his arrangement of Rossini’s *Stabat Mater* for the baritone concertina, an instrument which only much later had found concert favour with him—perhaps with the introduction of steel reeds. On the guitar, Regondi limited himself almost entirely to transcriptions—apparently quite astonishing—of a few of Thalberg’s piano Fantasias, or the overture to Rossini’s *Semiramide*. His five numbered works for guitar, Opp. 19-23, he seems to have played only latterly, the first performances of *Rêverie*, Op. 19, occurring at the beginning of the 1860s.

The fact that Regondi played instruments that were never fully accepted, and was often under critical pressure to abandon them, yet worked ceaselessly and successfully to have them heard, points to a man both perverse and enigmatic. Regondi seems to have taken the guitar and his early mastery of it for granted. He taught it at some time or another, but wrote no tutor, attempted no concerto, did not publish his

arrangements, and dabbled with a variety of makes and numbers of strings. His musical interests ranged far more widely on the concertina than on the normally solitary guitar. Whereas on the latter instrument he once or twice accompanied a singer and even joined the celebrated Ciebras for a guitar trio, on the concertina he was almost always accompanied by piano or harp; regularly performed vocal, chamber music and concerti; led four concertinas in the string quartet repertoire, and even arranged and played Mozart symphonies on four concertinas. Regondi saw the concertina as a superb medium for the full range of musical expression, but although he came to regard it as more effective than the guitar for concert performance, not everyone concurred: Richard Hoffman always thought that Regondi’s guitar playing was his most remarkable achievement.

The earliest compositions Giulio played on the guitar were by his father, and later by some of the best known names of the day: Sor, Carcassi, Carulli and Giuliani. Giulio undoubtedly met the first two, probably in Paris, for they each dedicated works to the young boy, that by Sor being published in 1831. Later Regondi was to play concert pieces by Leonard Schulz (1814-1860), an older, brilliant guitarist also living in London. Regondi must have completed his Rossini and Thalberg transcriptions by 1840, since he was playing them on the Continent by the end of the year. The “astounding ease” with which Regondi apparently threw off the performance of his concert works is an obvious indication of the technique necessary for their proper effect, and helps to understand why his pieces, especially those for the guitar, disappeared from the repertoire. There were nevertheless many allusions over the years to the great beauty yet difficulty of the opus-numbered guitar works, and one is reminded of the saying that a piece of music is either easy to play or it is impossible!

A measure of Regondi’s devotion to the concertina was the care and dedication he exercised in teaching the instrument, manifested in his two remarkable and rigorous



JULES REGONDI.

âgé de 8 ans.

Où je bien joué? .....

Methods. His enthusiasm and talent inspired a host of both amateur and professional players, and many of his pupils became noted performers. His first Method, *Rudimenti del Concertinista*, published in 1844, was on the lines of a violin tutor, and used Kreutzer Etudes and a Bach violin fugue. Some of the exercises, showing an instrumental methodology that Regondi alone had developed over the previous ten years, take technique to the limit. The second, the *New Method* of 1857, contains 24 original studies covering various aspects of concertina playing. What seemed to interest Regondi particularly here, according to his introduction, was the "...most agreeable and novel effect (which) results from florid counterpoint in two or three parts...". Presumably to accompany the *New Method* the same publisher that year produced Regondi's *Leisure Moments—Twelve Studies for Beginners on the Concertina*. Regondi obviously had high expectations for his acolytes. One imagines he began this didactic project with the best of intentions, but by the second study had let his musical expression and nimble fingers get the better of him—mischievously keeping the sub-title anyway! In truth, for Regondi this was beginner's music. His startling powers would reach their zenith in his two transcendently difficult concertina concerti—works which have not been heard since the last century.

Little by little most of Regondi's concertina publications were taken over by Wheatstone's, a long-established general musical trade family that eventually devoted itself almost entirely to the concertina. Charles Wheatstone (1802-1875), who was knighted in 1868 for his many contributions to British science, was at various times closely involved in the business. In the mid 1820s he invented a kind of mouth organ, which he called the Symphonion, as an improvement on the German varieties then being imported into Britain. This he patented in 1829 utilising a button fingering system which, with the later addition of bellows separating the two fingerboards, produced a primitive—yet unnamed—concertina. This was the instrument which Giulio adopted as a child and which he introduced in public for the first time (by now given its fanciful name) in early 1837, effectively launching it at the

Birmingham Music Festival that year. It soon became a commercial and fashionable success. Its design was standardised in a further patent in 1844, and not only its manufacture but also the publication of its music accelerated, many other makers joining the race. Although other fingering systems became commonplace later, it was the original Wheatstone idea (initially known as the "Patent", and later as the "English" concertina) that Regondi popularised. This normally has a range of three and a half octaves, and produces the same note on push and pull (unlike mouth organs and some other concertinas), so that management of the bellows is similar to bowing a string instrument. The notes on the lines of the staff are on the left keyboard, and those in the spaces are on the right. It is fully chromatic and capable of great "flexibility of expression" as Regondi put it. It is particularly effective in concerted music—George Bernard Shaw admired the instrument and frequently recommended it to amateurs too old or maladroit or impatient to adopt the violin.

About 200,000 concertinas of all fingering types had been produced in England by 1914. The best quality instruments were always expensive, but in Regondi's time only the well-to-do could afford even the cheaper ones. At one time there were many expert players and professors—about thirty methods and nearly 700 works were published. With Regondi two others formed a triumvirate of conspicuous talent: Firstly Richard Blagrove, one-time professor of viola at the Royal Academy of Music and brother of England's premier violinist, Henry. He also began playing at a very young age—probably having heard Regondi at one of his brother's concerts; and secondly George Case (1823-1892), who was a prodigy on the violin as well as a pianist, impresario, and manufacturer of excellent concertinas. The most popular size after the normal treble was the baritone, which like the guitar, transposes down one octave. This instrument was always seen as being useful for solemn or sacred music—the concertina is, after all, a kind of hand held harmonium. The baritone's balance in chord work is perhaps better than the treble, and it is, therefore, with its innate richness of tone, more suitable for unaccompanied pieces. It was for the bari-

tone that Regondi published frighteningly complicated but masterly arrangements of oratorios—Handel's *Messiah* and Rossini's *Stabat Mater* for example. Ominously, perhaps, he began to compose a series of solos for it in the late 1860s with such titles as *Ricordati di Me*; *Souvenir d'Amitié*; and the work on this recording, *Remembrance*. Is it too speculative to combine the sentiment of these titles with the religious connotations of the baritone and come to wonder if Giulio's response to his deteriorating health found voice in the deeper serenity of this plangent instrument? Perhaps it is, but in these final pieces lie a summation of Regondi's talent, expressed in a medium combining the self-sufficiency and warmth of the guitar with the key-versatility and *sostenuto* of the concertina—the instruments that he had made so much his own.

—Douglas Rogers

#### Four Songs

Though Regondi arranged concertina obbligati for a great number of songs (Mozart, Schubert Spohr etc.), the four songs included here are his only known original vocal works. The songs were first published in 1854 (*Absence*) 1855 (*Tell me Heart!* and *As Slowly Part*) and 1860 (*L'Avviso*). In these songs Regondi breaks no new ground in either his setting or choice of texts, or in the forms he employs. The songs are strophic (with the exception of *L'Avviso*), and are elegantly melodic and of moderate range. Like many songs of the period, they make a pleasing first impression, but these in particular reveal uncommon subtleties on repeated hearings.

In the first verse of *Absence* there is an ironic downward turn of melody at the words, 'upward eye' (mitigated somewhat when the text is repeated); the often ascending movement in the vocal line is defeated by two decisively falling fifths at the end of each verse, sounding a note of despair. *L'Avviso* openly reveals the Italianate elements that are always part of Regondi's style, evidenced here by simple accompani-

mental figures that recall Bellini. In *As Slowly Part the Shades of Night*, there is a surprising richness of harmony at the words, 'The raging tempest', and also in the piano interlude between verses. The distinctive, ornamental rhythm of the accompaniment gives the song an energy that allows the words to be set deliberately.

*Tell me Heart!*, is, perhaps, the most "Victorian" of Regondi's songs. The text, quasi evangelical in theme, is given a setting that is clear and comprehensible. An alteration of both accompaniment and melody at the beginning of the third strophe ('Be thou like the graceful willow'), answers the questions of the previous two verses with Regondi's gentle yet sure faith.

### Song Texts

#### *As Slowly Part the Shades of Night*

*Words by Newman Smith, Esq.*

As slowly part the shades of night,  
How I love to be  
Where morning sheds its beaming light  
O'er the azure sea;

The raging tempest howls no more;  
And the silvery wave  
Curls toward the rugged shore  
It shall softly lave.

While nature round me seems to smile,  
Gently breaths the gale  
Which wafts us to fair Albion's Isle  
With a flowing sail.

Let genial Spain her olive boast  
Or her tangling vine,  
The sturdy oak that shades yon coast  
Is dear England thine.

And Lusitania a pride may feel  
In her golden stream,  
Fair the scenes its shores reveal  
Bright as Poet's dream;

But let us hail thy cliff so white,  
Land that I love best,  
Thy rural fields so green and bright  
Home with freedom blest.

#### L'Avviso

Quando brilla in cielo azzuro  
Del mattin la dolce stella  
Sempre sempre mi favella  
Un suave spirto al cor

Ne' miei sogni or mesti or lieti  
Mi commove il' caro accento;  
Ah! ripetere lo sento.  
Queste note in suon d'amor

E innocenza un gentil fiore  
che nudrito e un paradiso  
La bellezza e un breve riso  
che perisce nel dolor

Serba un' alma ingenua e pura  
Se tu brami eterno bene  
La virtude infra la pene  
Si ricinge di splendor.

#### Absence

*Words by C.M.*

How slowly wear the hours  
When love the vigil keeps  
With bright and upward eye  
That star-like never sleeps.

#### Advice

When in the blue sky sparkles  
the gentle star of morning,  
It ever speaks unto my heart  
with charming spirit calling.

In dreams now glad, now gloomy  
Those dear, sweet accents thrill.  
O! once again to feel that love  
In sounds that echo still!

Virtue is but fragile flow'r  
Of blissful nourishment;  
Brief Beauty's joy is soon condemned  
to final banishment.

Keep soul both pure and childlike  
If Righteousness thy rest.  
Through all thy pain and suffering  
Thou wilt be surely blest!

(translation by Douglas Rogers)

I hear the moaning sea  
I can but pray for thee.  
The glow that ting'd the west  
Has faded into grey,

So dies within my breast  
The last faint hope away.  
To hear thy voice I yearn  
Return, belov'd, return.

### Tell Me Heart! Why So Desponding?

Words by Grace Stirling

Tell me heart! why so desponding?  
Is thy path so void of light?  
Is this world so full of evil,  
That no good appears in sight?

Tell me, trembling tenant, tell me!  
Is thy fabric all so frail?  
Is this life a fleeting shadow?  
Is its beauty but a tale?

Is this bosom like some vessel,  
With its freight of precious ore,  
Toss'd and wreck'd on ocean billows,  
Ere it reach the destin'd shore?

Is regret (that dreary pennant,  
Floating o'er the shatter'd wreck?  
Whilst each wave in angry motion  
Sweeps around the dismal deck!

Be thou like the graceful willow,  
Weeping o'er the stream of time,  
Whilst those storms that rage around thee,  
Tell their mission, their mission is sublime.

Or on hope's bright pinions soaring,  
Waft thy vision to that land,  
Where appear in mystic glory  
Homes not made by mortal hand!

### Concertina Music

Regondi's *Leisure Moments* is a set of 12 intimate miniatures in either one or two movements. First published in 1857, these delightful pieces composed for the amateur concertinist, carry a single idea or technique throughout their brief length, usually eschewing development or contrast.

No. 2 is in two sections, the first a gently swaying dance in thirds and sixths, the second in the relative minor using expressively drawn triads.

No. 3 features a songful concertina line written in two parts against the piano's bubbling accompaniment.

No. 4 is an elfin ABA with a coda that concludes with a cheeky stringendo.

No. 5 in two sections begins with a sweetly nostalgic elegy followed by a jaunty dance with elegant contrapuntal passagework in the concertina.

No. 7 in two parts begins with a folksy dance followed by a nocturnal chorale, the piano playing soft arpeggios against the concertina's sustained chords.

No. 8 is a virtuoso workout for the concertinist, its arpeggios and scales going right to the top of the instrument's range.

*Remembrance* is one of the three solo works which Regondi composed for the baritone concertina toward the end of his life. It was dedicated to the musician Thomas Sears Binfield, Regondi's friend, and the chief beneficiary and executor of his will. The form of this work is typically Regondian—an extended introduction, theme and four variations. The substantial introduction begins with a richly harmonized melody containing a maze of suspensions, which suddenly bursts forth into rapid and playful filligree. Regondi's yearning theme is followed by a flowing variation in two-part counterpoint which in turn is followed by a virtuosic second variation contain-

ing plunging arpeggios and ornamental triplets. A short chordal bridge leads to the core of the work—the glowing and deeply felt third variation, at whose close a sustained cadence against a pedal suggests a church organ. The finale of *Remembrance*, a dance-like Rondo, is interrupted by a passionate cantabile which intensifies the reflective character of the composition, ultimately building to a rapid coda that draws the piece to a whirling conclusion.

### Guitar Music

*Introduction et Caprice*, op. 23, stands as one of the truly outstanding guitar solos of the nineteenth century. Regondi's *Introduction* presents cantabile melodies, rapid-fire left hand ornamentation, extensive use of glissandi and arpeggiandi, as well as a frequently modulating harmonic flow, creating a dramatic prelude to the main body of the work. The *Caprice*, marked *Allegretto scherzando* is light as a feather, utilizing many of the techniques set forth in the *Introduction*. The final pages of this work are among the most technically challenging passages ever composed for the guitar, and are ample proof of Regondi's standing amongst the finest guitarist/composers of his era.

*Rêverie (Nocturne pour la guitare)*, op. 19, is Regondi's most popular guitar solo, utilizing, perhaps for the first time, the three note tremolo technique. Initially published in 1864, *Rêverie* gained such favor that a virtuosic transcription for piano was made by the composer Frédéric d'Alquen and published in 1871. Composed in four sections and a coda, the introduction begins as a florid yet dreamy evocation and builds to a remarkable passage of perpetual arpeggiandi. The hauntingly beautiful tremolo section which follows is a model of two part counterpoint. The long melodic lines of the third section, in the sub-dominant, build to the work's impassioned climax. Thereafter, the return of the tremolo leads to a coda, bringing Regondi's fantasy-poem to a peaceful conclusion.

### Biographies

The **Giulio Regondi Guild** was formed in 1992 in order to perform and record the music of Giulio Regondi and his contemporaries. Volume 1 of *The Great Regondi* was released by Bridge Records in 1993 and includes first recordings of Regondi's 10 *Etudes* for guitar, as well as "*Les Oiseaux*", Op. 12 and *Serenade in A*, for concertina and piano.

**D'Anna Fortunato** has been widely acclaimed for her vocal beauty, her superb musicianship, and for her extraordinary stylistic versatility. Ms. Fortunato has made numerous appearances with Roger Norrington, and has been a favorite soloist with such orchestras as Boston, San Francisco, New York Philharmonic, Cleveland, Dallas, and Houston. Ms. Fortunato recently recorded Stephen Jaffe's *Four Songs with Ensemble* on Bridge BCD 9047.

**Douglas Rogers** is highly regarded for his pathbreaking research on and performance of the 19th century concertina repertoire. He has lectured and performed on the concertina in Europe, North America and the Middle East, and has written a series of biographical articles about Giulio Regondi published in *The Guitar Review*, and in *The Royal Academy of Music Magazine*. Rogers has also broadcast on radio and television both in recital and as a concerto soloist, giving performances of little known 19th century repertoire and recently composed concertina music. Primarily a guitarist, Rogers is currently Professor of Guitar at the London College of Music. On this recording he performs on a C. Wheatstone & Co. 48 key treble concertina with steel reeds, manufactured in London in 1858; and a George Case 48 key baritone concertina with brass reeds, manufactured in London ca. 1860.

In recent years, **David Starobin** has performed complete recitals of Giulio Regondi's guitar music throughout Europe, and North and South America. Performing on reproductions of 19th century guitars, Starobin's recordings (Giuliani, BRIDGE



BCD 9029) (Sor, Coste, Regondi, GHA 126022) (Regondi BRIDGE BCD 9039) have received considerable critical acclaim. Starobin's performances and recordings also center on a large body of solo, chamber and concerto repertoire that has been composed for him by such composers as Elliott Carter, Poul Ruders, George Crumb, Gunther Schuller and Milton Babbitt. He currently heads guitar departments at the Manhattan School of Music and at the State University of New York at Purchase, and is the founder and President of Bridge Records, Inc. On this recording David Starobin plays a copy of a guitar by Johann Georg Stauffer, ca. 1830, Vienna, built by Gary Southwell, Nottingham, 1989.

**Julie Lustman** has accompanied major artists in recital throughout North America and Europe, and tours with the Ariel Chamber Ensemble and Souvenirs of the Opera. Ms. Lustman has been active as a performer of contemporary piano music, giving first performances of solo and chamber works in the U.S. and abroad. On this recording, Julie Lustman performs on a Steinway piano, 1912.

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Lithograph of Giulio Regondi by Edward Gunstone, 1852, from a daguerreotype by Laroche, courtesy of Stuart Button

Cabinet photograph of Giulio Regondi, ca. 1868, by Elliot & Fry, courtesy of Stephen Chambers

Lithograph of 8 year old Giulio Regondi, 1831, "Ai - je bien joué?" ("Did I play well?") by Engelmann from portrait by Weber, (collection Douglas Rogers)

Standing concertinist: Illustration from Joseph Warren's *Complete Instructions for Concertina*, 1855

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