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CAVATINA AT THE OPERA



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CAVATINA DUO

EUGENIA MOLINER, FLUTE · DENIS AZABAGIC, GUITAR

“CAVATINA at The OPERA”

The Cavatina Duo

Eugenia Moliner, flute

Denis Azabagic, guitar



1) **Fantasia Brillante on Themes from Bizet's “Carmen”** (11:18)

By François Borne (1840-1920). Originally for flute and piano,
arranged for flute and guitar by Joseph Zsapka

2) **Potpourri from “Tancredi,”** op. 76 (13:55)

By Mauro Giuliani (1781-1829) for flute and guitar

3) **Introduction and Variations on a Theme by Mozart** **“O Cara Armonia,”** Op. 9 (8:02)

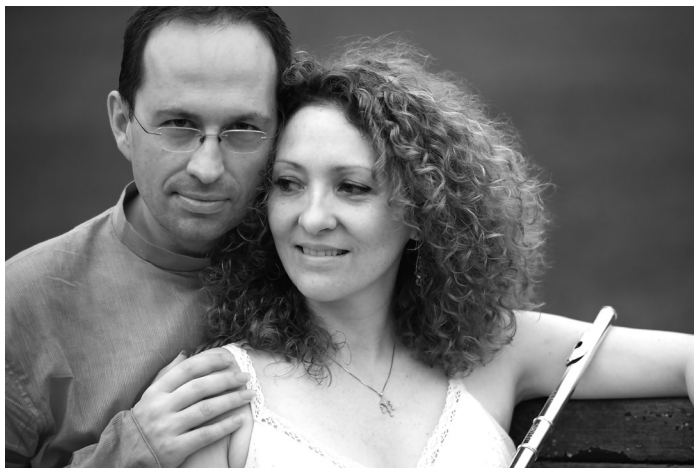
Originally for guitar solo by Fernando Sor (1778-1839)
adapted/arranged for flute and guitar by Alan Thomas

Festival (France), Symphony Center (Chicago), National Concert Hall of Taipei (Taiwan), and National Center for the Performing Arts in Beijing (China).

CAVATINA at the OPERA is the duo's 6th CD; their discography, on the Opera Tres, Cedille, Bridge and Orobroy labels, includes works by Piazzolla, Balkan music, and much more.

Eugenia Moliner has performed with principal musicians from the Chicago Symphony, Rotterdam Philharmonic and Toronto Symphony orchestras and has been featured on radio and television programs in Europe, Asia and the USA. Her discography includes seven CDs. A prize-winner in twenty-four international competitions, **Denis Azabagic** has been described as a “virtuoso with flawless technique” by *Soundboard Magazine*. He has appeared as soloist with the Chicago and Madrid Symphonies. His discography includes 11 CDs. Both Ms. Moliner and Mr. Azabagic are highly respected teachers, and are Artists-Faculty at the Chicago College of Performing Arts at Roosevelt University.





The **Cavatina Duo**—**Eugenia Moliner**, flute (from Spain) and **Denis Azabagic**, guitar (from Bosnia)—has become one of the most impressive combinations of its kind in the world. The *Chicago Sun Times* wrote that "the husband and wife team worked a kind of magic with their instruments . . . the collaborative powers of this couple are extraordinary." *Fanfare Magazine* raved, "it's doubtful that the Cavatina's sophisticated and artistic playing could be surpassed." The Cavatina Duo has captivated audiences around the world with their electrifying performances in major venues including Ravinia (Chicago), the National Gallery (Washington, DC), Da Camera Society (Los Angeles), Aix-en-Provence Summer

4) Variations on “The Carnival of Venice” (10:05)

By Alan Thomas, after *Variations on The Carnival of Venice* by Francisco Tárrega (1852-1909), originally for guitar solo, and *Variations on The Carnival of Venice*, Op. 78, by Giulio Briccialdi (1818-1881) originally for flute and piano

5) Fantasy on Themes from “La Traviata” (9:29)

Based on Fantasy on Themes from "La Traviata," Op. 248, by Emanuel Krakamp (1813-1883), and Fantasy on Themes from "La Traviata," Op. 76 by Giulio Briccialdi,
arranged for flute and guitar by Alan Thomas

6) Fantaisie on Themes from “Der Freischütz” (11:58)

By Claude Paul Taffanel (1844-1908). Originally for flute and piano,
arranged for flute and guitar by Alan Thomas

The genre of “salon music” that arose in 19th century Europe saw the explosion of a repertoire characterized by the combination of hit tunes from popular operas with great instrumental virtuosity. Many 19th century virtuosi wrote such pieces, known variously as fantasies, variations and potpourris, bringing together brilliant instrumental technique with charming melodies transposed from the opera house to the homes of the burgeoning bourgeoisie.

While music history books primarily record the pianistic contributions of Liszt, Chopin, Thalberg et al. to this repertoire, there were other important exponents who brought developments in technique to every instrument, from Paganini on the violin to the guitarists and flautists represented on this album. In the hands of Fernando Sor and Mauro Giuliani, the guitar was brought more fully into the realm of “classical music” with the use of increasingly complex techniques and textures, while the development of the metal flute with keys meant that flautists such as Doppler, Krakamp and Taffanel were able to take flute playing to new levels.

The works on this album impressively demonstrate these phenomena. Each is effectively a medley of favorite melodies from popular operas of the day. While the melodies are sometimes presented fairly simply, with the flute taking the vocal line and the guitar handling the orchestral accompaniment in “oompah” form, at other times the tunes are embroidered in breathtakingly virtuosic variations and flights of fancy. It is in these places that the composer-performers were able

Claude-Paul Taffanel (1844-1908) was arguably the foremost flautist of his time, having built a substantial career in Paris as both soloist and orchestral player. His *Fantaisie on Themes from “Der Freischütz.”* is based on an imaginative paraphrase of Carl Maria von Weber’s extremely popular opera. In this intelligent and well-constructed homage to Weber’s lovely and stirring music, the variations seem to grow naturally from the melodies rather than being superimposed as a virtuosic afterthought, demonstrating the operatic fantasy genre at its best. The original version is for flute and piano; I have here transcribed the piano part for the guitar, with no additional material or changes.

–Alan Thomas

Composer/arranger/guitarist Alan Thomas was born in Atlanta and completed his studies at Indiana University. After moving to England in 1997 he quickly established himself as one of the UK’s foremost new music soloists and ensemble players following his First Prize win at the International Gaudeamus Interpreters Competition in Holland (becoming the only guitarist ever to take the top prize). Thomas’s compositions draw freely on a broad range of styles and techniques ranging from Renaissance polyphony to Ligeti and other modern masters.



is really a kind of virtuoso dialogue between the two instruments in five variations of ever-increasing speed and complexity. It is perhaps worth mentioning that Variation 3 is an extended interlude which introduces a programmatic element, as I attempted to musically depict some of the stock characters of the Italian carnival or commedia dell'arte. The guitar imitates a military drum as Rugantino (the gendarme) enters the scene, only to be cruelly mocked by Harlequin (the clown). Harlequin's girlfriend Columbina then appears with her lovely waltz version of the theme, followed by the grumpy and complaining miser Pantalone as the music turns to a minor key. Finally, all is put into perspective by the happy-go-lucky hedonist Pulcinella as the music returns to the "Carnival" theme in the last two variations, followed by a coda which shifts the music into overdrive leading to an appropriately big finish.

The operas of Verdi have provided some of the richest source material for composers of instrumental fantasies. *My Fantasy on Themes from "La Traviata"* was commissioned by the Cavatina Duo, and is based on 19th-century *Traviata* fantasias for flute by Emanuele Krakamp and Giulio Briccialdi as well as Francisco Tárrega's solo guitar version. Many of *La Traviata's* most well-known melodies are there, including "Ah, fors'è lui", "Parigi, o cara," "Sempre libera" and the famous "drinking song."

to show off their compositional skills as well as their most impressive scales, arpeggios and instrumental tricks. As the present recording shows, the marvelous ability of the Cavatina Duo to combine peerless technique with sensitive musicianship makes them the ideal interpreters of this music, and it has been my great pleasure to collaborate with them in composing, arranging and transcribing several of the works on this album.

The album's opening work is the *Fantasie Brilliante on Themes from Bizet's "Carmen"* by **François Borne** (1840-1920). Borne was a professor of flute at the Toulouse Conservatory with an interest in creating new repertoire for his instrument, and like many other composers was enchanted by Georges Bizet's operatic masterpiece *Carmen*. Originally scored for flute and orchestra, the piece is heard here in a transcription by Jozsef Zsapka, and features some of the opera's most enduring melodies including the *Song of the Toreadors*, the *Chanson bohème* and of course Carmen's sultry *Habanera*.

Mauro Giuliani (1781-1829) was the greatest guitarist of his generation and one of the finest composers for the instrument. Moving from the Italy of his birth to Vienna in 1806, Giuliani was acquainted with the highest figures of Austrian society and became well known in Viennese musical life. One of Giuliani's chief musical inspirations was the great Italian opera composer Rossini, many of whose operatic melodies Giuliani used as bases for his compositions, most notably in his six sets of *Rossiniane* for solo guitar. His *Potpourri* from *Tancredi*, Op. 76, uses tunes from Rossini's 1813 heroic opera *Tancredi*.

Along with Giuliani, **Fernando Sor** (1778-1839) is the other great guitarist-composer of the 19th century. Sor's *Variations on a Theme by Mozart "O cara armonia,"* Op. 9, is the prolific Spanish composer's most well-known solo guitar work, played by every classical guitarist as a delightful display of some of the guitar's best sounds and tricks.

Surprisingly, the melody from *The Magic Flute* on which Sor's piece is based is one of the least interesting and inspired melodies from the opera—a little tune sung near the end of Act I called *Das klinget so herrlich* which Sor seems to have known in its Italian version *O cara armonia*. Nonetheless, the tune's melodic and harmonic simplicity have proved attractive to a great many composers as the basis for virtuosic variation sets (scholars say that over 300 versions have been composed for all manner of instruments).

Given its connection to *The Magic Flute*, it seemed fitting to adapt Sor's piece with the addition of a flute part. In doing so, I have had great fun not only dividing up Sor's material between the two players, but also in adding various counter-melodies and virtuosic additions for the flute. The listener familiar with *The Magic Flute* may also notice a number of other quotations from Mozart's opera, mainly related to the comical fife-playing bird-catcher Papageno.

The melody known as the *Carnival of Venice* has been used by numerous composers as the basis for variation sets. Among the most significant versions

are pieces by Paganini (for violin), Chopin (piano), Arban (trumpet), Briccialdi (flute), and Tárrega (solo guitar). Each of these uses this simple tune and its very simple harmonies as a springboard for a pyrotechnical display of the scales, arpeggios, trills and tricks that feature the instrument at its virtuosic best. While the melody of Paganini's 24th Caprice (to take another example which has been extensively used as a theme for variation sets) has qualities of virtuosity and harmonic tension built into it from the start, the *Carnival of Venice* melody is almost comical in its simplicity and lack of tension and pretension. But perhaps it is this quality that makes it so useful for pure exuberant displays of instrumental prowess.

The Cavatina Duo initially commissioned me to make an arrangement more or less combining the famous versions of *Carnival* by Briccialdi and Tárrega. While I have indeed used large portions of these two works in various combinations and forms, I have also added a substantial amount of new material of my own (as well as throwing in the odd quote from other celebrated carnival-related pieces). The piece is therefore a sort of "recomposition," combining existing works and original composition to create a new take on an old chestnut.

After an extended introduction derived from Tárrega (which in fact the great guitarist "borrowed" from an opera by Julius Benedict, hence fully justifying its inclusion on this album of opera fantasies!), the "Carnival of Venice" theme is introduced by the guitar and then taken up by the flute. From there the composition