

A composer from our city reaching the summit of classical music, José Antonio Bottiroli lived between 1920 and 1990. A disciple of his will record his complete works for a grand international label.

Two sons of Rosario in the big leagues of classical music.

José Antonio Bottiroli, who died in 1990, left a profuse pianistic oeuvre that will be integrally recorded for a grand international label by another talented instrumentalist from our city, Fabio Banegas. The disc will be released the next Friday March 13th simultaneously with another dedicated to unknown works by Debussy.

By Sebastián Riestra

The Rosarian pianist Fabio Banegas is exultant. His eyes shine as he moves with excitement on a chair at a downtown café where he talks with Culture and Books. It is understandable: what at the beginning was for him a simple attempt at homage to his beloved mentor José Antonio Bottiroli became all of a sudden an ambitious recording project for one of the most important labels of classical music in the world, Naxos.

While he sips his espresso, Banegas – who resides in the United States – tells the wonderful story, whose first chapter will take place this Friday, with the release of the first of a series of CD's.

What was it that got you interested in the works of Bottiroli?

I began to study piano with José Antonio Bottiroli in March or April 1984. Not too long after, when I arrived one day to my lesson, I heard him playing a composition that I liked, and I said: “What beautiful music maestro, who is the composer?”, and he answered: “It is I, and if you like it I will make you a copy.” Thus began my interest, and the wonderful thing was that a relationship with the composer was created that went beyond learning to play the piano. It was about learning to play the works with their own creator, having at my disposal the absolute reference of the work, the composer explaining to me what he wanted to express with his music. Since that time, the music of Bottiroli has always been a constant part of my musical life.

Recently, I had staked out a position in my professional life, deciding to distance myself from traditional classical repertoire, first by offering programs of lesser known Czech composers, such as Jiří Benda and Jan Ladislav Dussek – this was a sort of tribute to my Czech ancestry – and later by

integrating Bottiroli's complete piano oeuvre into my repertoire, which then expanded to include not only his works but those of other Argentine composers, such as Alessio, Grau, Pallemmaerts and Ficher. In three years I have now incorporated in my repertoire five piano concertos by Argentine composers.

Tell us something about your piano training....

I have a memory as a very little boy, this is before entering kindergarten, that I wanted insistently to listen to my father's classical music LPs and tapes and almost simultaneously I began to ask to be taken to violin lessons. But my grandmother Angela recommended that I should not be sent to learn music until I knew how to read. Because finding a violin teacher was not easy, on a rainy September 1st, after almost having completed first grade – I omit the year for vanity – a month before my birthday, my parents took me to my first piano lesson with Norita Irene Rosari, a neighbor living close by who took her students for final annual exams to the Chopin Conservatory of Prof. Mario Miglietta.

Norita was then my first teacher. Bottiroli was my first academically trained teacher. He was a multi-faceted musician; he was a composer, a pianist, and an orchestra and choir director who had graduated as the best student of music in his class from the National University of Littoral. When I finished high school I entered the School of Music of the National University of Rosario (UNR), one of the divisions of the University of the Humanities and Arts. My first piano teacher at the UNR was Prof. Nelly Gabús, a close friend of Bottiroli, who was the adjunct professor of Professor Aldo Antognazzi. Therefore, although I was a student of Nelly, I was occasionally supervised by Maestro Antognazzi. Nelly Gabús gave me something invaluable for music training: the Germanic rigor and meticulousness applied to learning a composition. Afterwards, I continued my studies the following three years, finishing with Prof. Ana María Cué who added to my training a great creative flow in the sense of interpretation as sound exploration while opening an infinite panorama of the science of fingering a work, lessons that she herself received as a protégé of Antonio de Raco; therefore, I could say that my pianistic school derives from de Raco.

I feel very proud of my professors at the National University of Rosario. I believed myself to have had the most prominent piano teachers of that time, because they were not only competent in their knowledge but also because they demonstrated it with their professionalism as interpreters, performing in recitals, chamber music recitals and as soloists in piano concertos with the Provincial State Orchestra of Rosario. For me this is a sine-qua-non requirement to be able to coach student interpreters.

Because academic music training is not only limited to the instrument, a great professor of mine was Luis Angel Machado, who was in charge of the music analysis class. Machado had been the only Argentine student of the great French composer Olivier Messiaen. In his class we were taught how to break down each element of a music score and understand the precise function of each note and each chord, its constitution and function within the harmony. This served me enormously in my work as music editor. I must also remember the contribution of Prof. Ricardo Vidal, who was in charge of the chamber music class where I worked on a duet with soprano Alicia Caruso from Rosario.

From the UNR I graduated with two degrees: the Bachelor in Music Specializing in Piano Performance and a National Professorate of Music. My last piano exam lasted about three hours and I played it all from memory. In fact, the curriculum of these two degrees was of the upmost exigency. As soon as I graduated from the UNR, I traveled to the United State on a concert tour in collaboration with an outstanding, music fellow and friend, soprano Alicia Caruso, who had been invited to perform at the Schubert Club of Saint Paul, Minnesota. I then travelled to California, where I was admitted to California State University Fullerton (CSUF) and where I obtained my Masters of Music Degree (MM) under Dr. Susan Svrček, one of the most important proponents of the interpretation of contemporary music in the United States.

How did the contact with Naxos, the prestigious classical music label, occur?

It was through the initiative of the Argentine musicologist residing in Belgium, Mr. Diego Orellana, who made the decision to write to the director of Naxos Germany, whom he did not know, with a brief description of the material. He became interested and requested that we send three tracks, which were also selected by Orellana himself. Diego is a leading Argentine musicologist who earned his Masters at the University of Cologne, Germany. He is a great champion of academic music from Argentina. He has recently published through the Belgian music publisher Golden River Music an anthology of twenty four masterworks from the Argentine academic repertoire, all of which were unpublished and never recorded works, comprising symphonic works, a ballet, chamber music, choral music, and, importantly, the two volumes comprising the complete piano works by Bottiroli.

Diego knew that I had recorded sixteen works by Bottiroli: his fifteen waltzes for piano plus a piece entitled Papirola, which carries the indication Tempo di Valzer, which Bottiroli had dedicated to Mr. Alberto Muzzio; but, as is frequently the case with me, I did not promote it, nor did I seek out representation from a music label. Therefore, it was Diego who took care of it because he desires that the works he publishes receive their premier and ultimately be recorded.

After Diego chose and sent the three sound tracks required by Naxos, from Germany they were sent to Hong Kong, where Naxos headquarters are located. All of this occurred starting in February 2019. In July Naxos informed Diego that they wish to release the album with waltzes, but not only that, in addition, they indicated they wanted to release in subsequent recordings the complete works.

I was overwhelmed with happiness, and I could not believe it until the contract reached me and was signed. This recording project was assigned to Naxos Grand Piano, a branch of the Naxos Group that specializes in unknown repertoire. Grand Piano later wanted the recording to be at least one hour long, and given that it originally only ran fifty minutes, they asked me to add another ten minutes. In the end, I added fifteen minutes based upon a curatorial vision of complementing the waltzes with other works by Bottiroli inspired by the waltz, such as the his collection of Ten Microwaltzes and his Paraphrase on a Theme of a Waltz by Anton Arensky.

This first disc will be released internationally on this March 13th simultaneously with an album of unknown and unfinished works by Claude Debussy entitled *The Unknown Debussy* interpreted by the talented French pianist Nicolas Horvath. It is very touching to me that our dear Bottiroli will come out through Naxos alongside Debussy. It is amazing. He, of course, would never have imagined such a thing.

What are your expectations in relation to this disc?

My biggest desire with all of the works constituting the oeuvre of Bottiroli is that they transcend and inspire other pianists to study them and feature them in recitals. With the international release of this first disc and the availability of the music through the music publisher Golder River Music in Belgium, I am certain we will achieve this aim. If we achieve it, we will know for sure that the works of our dear Maestro will continue resounding forever and that they no longer need me. Besides this, for me professionally, it is an encouragement to continue my work on the path I have chosen for myself: I am doing what I must to do.

Between the Neoromanticism and the Impressionism

By Diego Orellana

The Rosarian José Antonio Bottiroli, composer, pianist and poet (1920-1990) belongs to one of the last groups of musicians that came up under the European postromantic school at the end of the 19th Century. He was musically trained in piano by José de Nito (1887-1945), one of the pillars of the

music of Rosario, and by José Francisco Berrini (1897-1963) in harmony and counterpoint. He broadened his knowledge with his friend and contemporary Nicolás Alfredo Alessio (1919-1985).

Bottiroli was an intimate composer, intimism which is reflected in his poetic works, whose message is especially expressed in his piano works, by narrating his emotions, moods, and life experiences, always in a constant dialogue with Nature and his loved ones and in an ambiance of sensitivity and profound melancholy.

His piano oeuvre, composed in a style nearing the French and Italian schools of the XIX fin du siècle, especially with his waltzes, recalls the saloons of Justino Clérice, fusing neoromantic and impressionistic harmonies and textures (for example Fauré, Respighi). In this, Bottiroli was partial to brief pieces, which comprise the main corpus of his pianistic works, with melodies of beautiful contour and contrasting and unpredictable harmonies.

In his works one can also appreciate a dazzling taste for elegance and delicate sound nuances (something very familiar to his mentors), without being simplistic, the renunciation of instrumental virtuosity, and the experimental vanguard. He did not use the folklore as a source of inspiration, except for some early works, such as his *Small Northern Suite* which he dedicated to Julián Aguirre, and his *Vidalita for Four Mixed Voices*.

Equally important to mention are his works for orchestra, such as *Ulysses* and *Brief Poem*, in which emerge some characteristic glimpses inherent in the symphonic poem and the lyric drama, with passages of profound passion and emotion recalling the overtures of *Tannhäuser* and *Rienzi* by Wagner. In these orchestral works one can appreciate his marked chromatic harmony provided by varied melodies and festive ambiances, which are distinctive features of his orchestral works.

In his vast music legacy, he also composed chamber music, works for diverse instruments, works for choir, and songs, among which it is worth mentioning *Belgrano March-Song* the only work dedicated to the national hero of that time.

Bottiroli received numerous awards, such as: the Rotary Club Award presented to the best music alumnus of the National University of Littoral, the Crisio Award in Composition, and a post-mortem merit from the City of Rosario, among others.