

Vincenzo Scaramuzza and his Science of the Soul

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WHO IS SCARAMUZZA?
Born in Crotona in 1858, of precocious talent, Scaramuzza was admitted to the "San Pietro a Majella" Conservatory in Naples at the age of twelve, where he studied piano with Floriano Rossomandi and chamber music with Beniamino Cesi, keeper of the teatillon of Sigismund Thalberg. The latter was the initiator of the successful Neapolitan Piano School.

Scaramuzza, guided by Rossomandi and Giuseppe Marrucci, with determination, diligence, and meticulousness for studying, soon gained significant recognition of his kind. Rossomandi was also a student of Cesi, a careful teacher to prepare musicians to public performances. Instead, Marrucci, and by the ability of the young Scaramuzza, was, from 1902 on, the Director of the Conservatory of Naples.

The passion for teaching, inherited from Rossomandi, led him to take the exam for his Chair of piano, which took place at the Royal Academy of Santa Cecilia in Rome and the commission for which, in 1906, consisted, among others, of Giovanni Sgambati (presiding) and Francesco Bajardi (teacher of Carlo Zecchi, and a pupil of Sgambati). Among two vacant positions, he was assigned one for teaching piano as a secondary instrument in Naples. The other was given to Attilio Brugnoli, who preceded him on qualifications and age.

Not satisfied with his position, fascinated by a new world where he could apply his experimental, inviolable programs and "bureaucratic" fees, and encouraged by the presence of branches of his institutes, Vincenzo Scaramuzza left Naples in 1907 to go to Buenos Aires, teaching during the first years at the Conservatory of Santa Cecilia in Argentina's capital. In these years, Argentina resented the presence of foreign and Italian masters and interrupted by the real founder of Argentine remained active and intense and took him to play and to teach with extraordinary gifts, as a pianist in the Americas and even in Europe, where he gave his last tour in 1923. The passion of teaching prevailed over that as a performer, because of stress and anxiety he suffered during performances. Thus, he founded a conservatory in his name, in which rigor and discipline reigned, directed by his tireless passion for research. His pupils were so many and made his school one of the best in the world. Among these were Martha Argerich, Bruno Gelber, Daniel Levy, Maurizio Kagel, Fausto Zadra, and Enrique Barenboim (father of Daniel).

WHY SCARAMUZZA?

The most relevant teacher I have studied with is Franco Scala. He is the Founder / Director (and Teacher) of (at) the International Piano Academy in Imola (Italy), one of the most renowned piano academies in the world. During our lessons, he talked about an Italian pianist, who emigrated to Argentina and who was a teacher of great pianists, and one of them was Fausto Zadra. The latter taught at the Accademia Santa Cecilia in Rome as the assistant of Carlo Zecchi. Franco Scala studied with both, Zecchi and Zadra. The first offered a precise sense of the musical structure of the phrase, the second a precise and deep knowledge of the musical techniques used in Argentina with Vincenzo Scaramuzza. After hearing this story, I spent one year trying to understand and achieve the best results, even if I was twenty-five years old. My hands (with the other parts of the body involved in the act of playing) had been already trained differently along the years.

I can say that my life totally changed, and I acquired a different way of thinking about how to play piano. I started to do research on Scaramuzza, and I found, in the Imola Piano Academy Library, an out-of-print book (translated into Italian) by Maria Rosa Obibia de Castro*, which describes Scaramuzza's method

in detail. From that moment, I could not stop to reach for information on this topic and, hopefully, I won't stop for the rest of my life.

But the reason of "Why Scaramuzza?" is not only personal: over the years, and everywhere, I have found many students (I did not conduct a survey on it, but I can guess 80% of the pianists I know) do not know, practically, how to play piano. This is not a joke. They have all kinds of doubts about relaxation, methods to approach the keyboard, how to make passages faster, how to memorize, etc. If there is such a lack of knowledge, it is mostly because their teachers have had the same kind of deficiency during their studies. In addition to having a psychological barrier, students may also have physical ones, due to an incorrect way of practicing. The method of Scaramuzza is not the only one in the world (my students can have access to an incredible amount of information from the internet and can, therefore, use it), but maybe it is the only one that relates a deep knowledge of the human body and its production.

To conclude, my choice is determined by the fact that it is the only one that, as much as I can, this topic, to ensure that my students will understand and explore, as well as playing the piano better from a young age on, growing up with fewer questions than I had.

THE NEAPOLITAN PIANO SCHOOL

Whenever you hear of the name "Neapolitan School", your mind goes straight to that school formed at the end of the seventeenth century in Naples, of which the first excellent master was Alessandro Scarlatti. This school had its more prominent role in the Opera, for its melodic richness and treatment of the melody (*bel canto*) without equal. From the Neapolitan school was created the Opera Buffa and the dramatic movement (Jommelli, Piccini, Traetta), from which Gluck's reform was born and led directly into the mastery of Mozart.

When the Swiss-born pianist (but of Viennese adoption) Sigismund Thalberg (Piaqui, Geneva, 1812 - Naples, 1871) arrived in Naples in 1858, after the marriage with the daughter of the Neapolitan bass-baritone Luigi Lablache, he found a fertile musical ground, not only regarding Opera, but also instrumental music. In fact, for example, the son of Alessandro Scarlatti, Domenico, was the author of more than five hundred sonatas for harpsichord, in which he developed the basis for future piano compositions: virtuosic formulas, intersections of hands, swirling speed, extended arpeggios, trills, etc. Thalberg was the Director of the San Pietro a Majella Conservatory, which had a valuable faculty (among others, Florestano Rossomandi and Alessandro Longo) and in which Thalberg could begin his didactic activity, that we call today *Scuola Pianistica Napoletana* (The Neapolitan Piano School). Thalberg was renowned for introducing a series of

revolutionary technical formulas (especially in his Fantasias on Opera arias), which made his pianistic abilities able to set itself against the supreme authority of Franz Liszt. Technique was one of the aspects to which Thalberg was particularly attentive. He tried to overcome the limitation of the piano (such as the inability to achieve a vibrato or the impossibility to sustain a sound for a long time), imitating the human voice. The name of his collection, *L'art du chant appliqué au piano*, Op. 70 (The Art of Song Applied to the Piano), is not casual. This work "stands apart as one of the earliest examples of piano pedagogy which directed the performer's attention toward tone production rather than virtuosic technique (which this music in reality presupposes), and as such becomes something of a precursor to that of Tobias Matthay (1858-1945), who treated the subject exhaustively in *The Art of Touch* (1926)."

Thalberg spent the last years of his life in Posillipo and Naples, where he taught pianists like Beniamino Cesi, who taught other students, building a "not indifferent" family tree, which includes Vincenzo Scaramuzza. The School had the greatest splendor in the years 1864-1950.

Photos: G. Scaramuzza, "L'arte del canto applicato al piano", 1870; G. Scaramuzza, "L'arte del canto applicato al piano", 1870; G. Scaramuzza, "L'arte del canto applicato al piano", 1870; G. Scaramuzza, "L'arte del canto applicato al piano", 1870.

LA SCUOLA PIANISTICA NAPOLETANA



Photos: G. Scaramuzza, "L'arte del canto applicato al piano", 1870; G. Scaramuzza, "L'arte del canto applicato al piano", 1870; G. Scaramuzza, "L'arte del canto applicato al piano", 1870; G. Scaramuzza, "L'arte del canto applicato al piano", 1870.

I have studied with Master Scaramuzza from 6 to 10. It was a good relationship, but in the meanwhile unhappy, because of the difficult and unstable nature of the Master. The five years that I attended his lessons built the base of my career.

The methodology of the Master allowed even children to achieve concertism. Any difficulties for a young pianist are true problems, to the Scaramuzza School they were being exceeded naturally. The Master knew very well all the secrets of the piano.

He did real lessons of anatomy so thorough and detailed that you could ascribe them to a doctor.

INTERVIEW WITH SEBASTIAN COLOMBO

Sebastian Colombo is a Piano Professor at the Hogeschool voor de Kunsten in Utrecht and Director of the European headquarters of the "Centro de Estudios Pianísticos". CEP, founded by Maria Rosa Obibia de Castro, a pupil of Vincenzo Scaramuzza.

1. What is your personal (direct or indirect) experience with Vincenzo Scaramuzza?

All my piano teachers in Argentina were linked – directly or indirectly – to the great Scaramuzza:

- * Prof. Eugenia Rozental (a student of two great maestros, Scaramuzza's disciples: Juan Salomone and Francisco Amicarelli).
- * Prof. Maria Rosa Obibia de Castro (in the opinion of many, the ultimate authority on piano pedagogy in Argentina. She received direct teachings from Scaramuzza for two decades, and she was interested in gathering all his wisdom through various didactic materials: two books and a DVD).
- * Maestro Antonio De Raco (also a direct disciple of Scaramuzza and one of the best piano pedagogues of South America).

Since my childhood, I felt a strong interest in this school. I am doing a very deep investigation about Scaramuzza (analyzing his notebooks, scores with

amotations, transcriptions of lessons, etc.). In June 2013, I published the first book, and I am working on the second one. Of course, I apply all this knowledge in my daily work with students.

2. What makes his teaching method revolutionary?

His method has an absolute perfection and allows a total mastery of the piano. It is based on muscular dissociation, the use of the most active energies and the continuous search of equilibrium, through the five basic muscles (arm, forearm, rotation, palm and fingers). The result is a high quality sound, of great richness and variety.

3. Is it still applicable nowadays?

- * Of course, it is entirely applicable nowadays, but some conditions are needed:
 - Students with patience and dedication
 - At least two lessons / week (to "build" a pianist is not an easy task, and it is impossible to do it using a superficial program).

MY NEXT STEPS

One of my next steps will certainly be focused on the comparison between Scaramuzza's and other significant piano schools of the recent past. Moreover, it would be interesting to determine what a piano school is and if we can identify piano schools nowadays.

It would also be fascinating to conduct a survey among undergraduate, master's, or even doctoral students, to find out which percentage of pianists have done (at least) one year of study where these labels come from.

Finally, since such a study is changing faster and faster, many method books have been written for children from five to ten years old, with a consequent increasing of the choice: books for children from five to ten years old, for young adults, for beginner, etc. But more information and more availability of sources, do not mean higher quality. Also, often you will find the prefix "new" on the title of these books. There is a Sicilian idomatic expression that says *L'antichi nun sbagliata mai* (The ancients are never wrong), and I believe it. If Franz Liszt, the best pianist in the history of music, studied Clementi's *Gravola ad Paternum*, studies and Czerny's studies, why can our children not do the same? If Scaramuzza's method worked so well on Martha Argerich, why can it not work as well on our little pianists? Of course, some adaptations are necessary, but are relevant only for the aspect of the cultural psychology, due to the difference of the era. This means that the way how you teach something can be different (for example with the use of technology), but the content would be the same. I would, therefore, do an analysis of Scaramuzza's method in relation to our times, to check if it is applicable, determining "roots" and "surfaces".

To those who studied with Scaramuzza for some time, two things could happen: either being destroyed or becoming a great pianist.

I think a good teacher has to give the tools to allow the pupil to develop his own personality through the technique, and Scaramuzza was a king in that.

What he taught us was a genuine culture of touch.

He was aiming for us to get the right sound and to do this, he worked hard to hand separately, and we can tell, even finger to finger.

Daniel Barenboim states [...] that: All the pianists related directly or indirectly with Scaramuzza have a big sense of naturalness playing piano.*

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