

PINA NAPOLITANO





Pina Napolitano made a splash with this debut CD in 2012: Norman Lebrecht shortlisted it for his Sinfini Music Album of the Year; Guy Rickards in International Piano Magazine called the CD “outstanding”, citing the “tensile strength to her playing that is distinctly hers”, and Calum MacDonald in BBC Music Magazine gave it five stars for its “rare penetration, understanding, grace and elegance”.

Pina Napolitano is, through her teacher Bruno Mezzena, a grand-student of Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli. Her recent focus has been the music of the Second Viennese School, which she considers not as a primarily intellectual venture, but a highly emotional and expressive one – “wholly saturated with expression” (*Österreichische Musikzeitschrift*), a “perfect conjunction between microcellular dissection and almost heartbreaking expressive sensitivity” (*Ritmo*), a “heady romanticism both irresistible and unsettling” (*Arts Desk*).

She is especially interested in the retrospective view looking from today, via early modernism, at the works of the romantic and classical period. She enjoys programming the music of Schönberg, Berg and Webern alongside works of Mozart and Brahms for instance. Not only does she impress her public with intellectual clarity, elegance and beauty of tone, but also with her virtuosity and an unusual feat of memory: she plays everything by heart – not to impress her public, but to create an atmosphere of utmost concentration, that, in her own experience, captures the public’s intense attention throughout.

Her second disc *Elegy* was built around the Schoenberg and Bartok Third Piano Concerto. “Pina Napolitano allows the listener to be able to feel utterly at home in the work with what seems like little effort” (Gramophone), “a performance as musical as it is crystalline” (Thierry Vagne), “proof that dodecaphonic music can be both melodic and moving” (Graham Rickson), “a little as if we were dealing with scores of the nineteenth century reshaped into modern works” (Crescendo), “an account no less impressive than Uchida’s or Brendel’s...” (Guy Rickards, *Musical Opinion*).

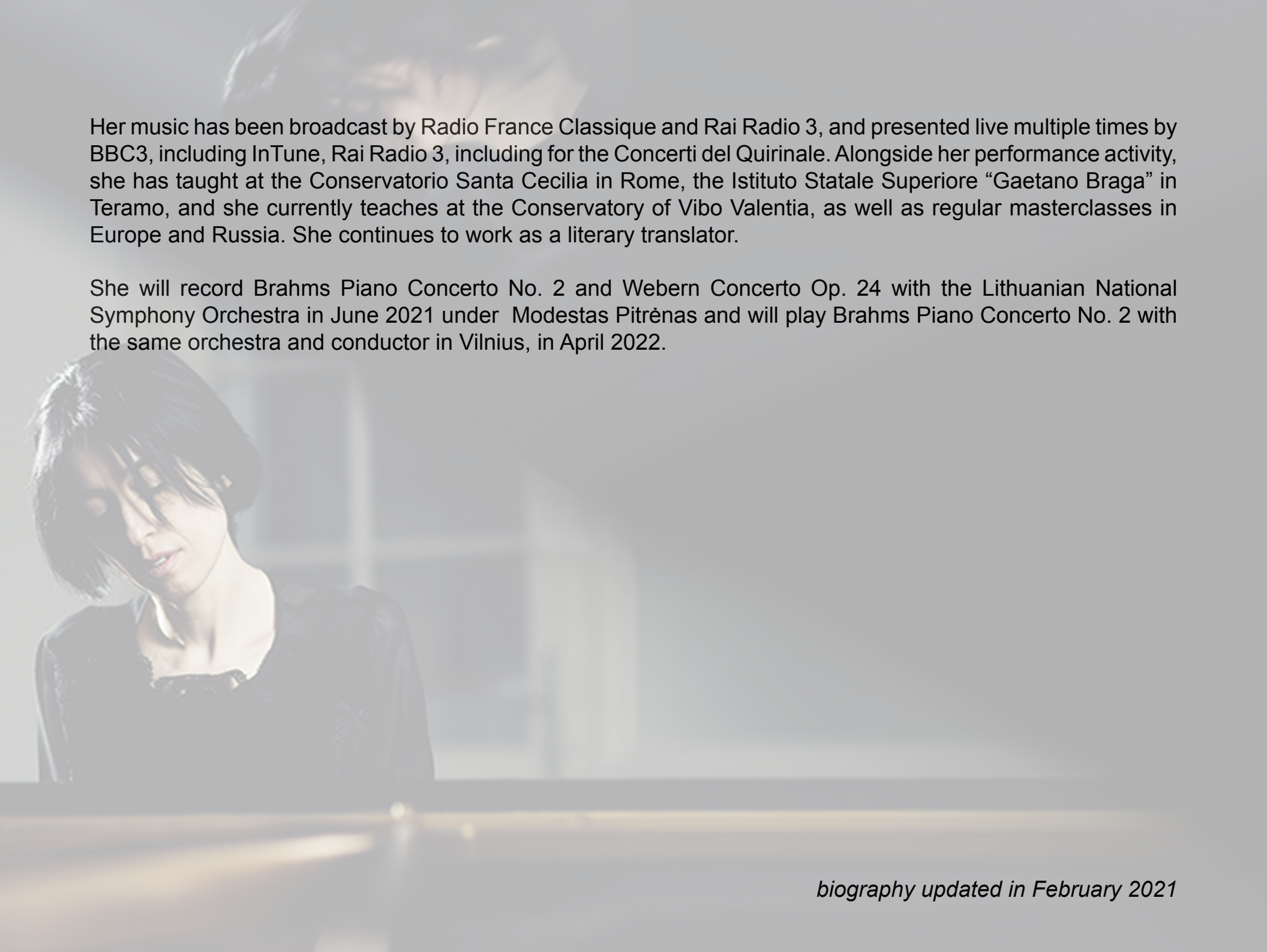
Her enthusiasm for the Schönberg concerto led to the commission of a chamber reduction of the work, arranged by Hugh Collins Rice, which she premiered at the Ehbarsaal in Vienna in February 2015 with the New Vienna International Symphony Orchestra, under the baton of Georgi Nikolov. The arrangement was performed in Italy with Colibrì Ensemble in 2016, with Yoichi Sujiyama directing, and in 2017 with Facade Ensemble with Benedict Collins Rice directing for a tournée of performances in England stopping at Oxford’s Sheldonian, Cambridge West Road Concert Hall, and London Cadogan Hall. She performed the Schönberg’s concerto full original version in February 2020 in Milan, with Orchestra Sinfonica LaVerdi under Pietro Borgonovo.

Her third disc *Brahms the Progressive* explores the connections between late Brahms and the Second Viennese School. “Napolitano’s touch, which is at once forceful and seductive, helps bind everything together on this very enjoyable disc,” (Michael Church, *BBC Music Magazine*), “a masterful disc... where the fullness of timbres is matched only by the mastery of musical conception” (Thierry Vagne). “Superbly produced, recorded and with carefully considered repertoire, this is a disc of intense, infinitely rewarding music... This is great Brahms, up there with Gilels” (*International Piano*). “These seven beautifully played works seek to illustrate the titular essay by Schoenberg... The segue from his Op 27 Variations back into the tonal paradise of late Brahms is poignant” (*Sunday Times*), “ what a magical transition!...” (Gramophone), “the deep Brahmsian affinities of Berg and Webern feel neither forced nor artificial” (*Diapason 5**), in a performance of “incredible sensitivity, understanding, elegant and expressive playing...” (MDR). Her “aerial playing, especially noticeable in Berg’s sonata No. 1, works wonders... Through this disc, the pianist tells us that the past never dies. And we can only agree...” (*Hebdoscope*).

“Echoes of the past and reflections on modernity are at once conservative in form and progressive in style” (PianoNews). In a raving review of her performance at St John’s Smith Square Mark Berry wrote “Nothing was overstated: instead, we were made to listen.” The disc was awarded the 2018 August “Record Geijutsu” in Japan, 5 Stars in UK’s International Piano Magazine, and Five Diapasons in France.

Her fourth album, released in July 2020, entitled *Tempo e Tempi*, features Elliott Carter’s *Night Fantasies* and *Two Thoughts about the Piano*, alongside Beethoven’s *Sonatas Opp. 110 and 111* and Jeffrey Mumford’s two Elliott Carter tributes. “A provocatively brave album” (BBC Music Magazine, 5* for performance and recording), “... Napolitano shines ...” (Wiener Zeitung), “... brilliantly executed ... Vividly recorded ... vigorous yet precisely pointed...” (The Sunday Times), “Plus qu’intéressant, un disque passionnant.” (Musique Classique & Co), “Touch, phrasing, dynamics are not so much instruments of an expressive intention – also! – but above all the picklock to force open the musical architecture and penetrate into the composer’s workshop, where the intellectual roots of song are finally recognized” (Classic Voice, 5*, Disco del Mese), “Napolitano’s performance of the Carter *Night Fantasies* boasts unflagging confidence and simply exudes authority... one never doubts the greatness of the piece, or of the performance... This is mature Beethoven playing that, Furtwängler-like, keeps the large-scale always in view...” (Fanfare), “...un disco denso ed entusiasmante da ascoltare...” (OperaClick).

After studying with Giusi Ambrifi in her native Caserta near Naples, she attended masterclasses with Tibor Egly, Bruno Canino, Alexander Lonquich, Giacomo Manzoni, and Hugh Collins Rice. She graduated in Piano Solo Performance and in 20th-Century Piano Music with Bruno Mezzena at the Pescara Music Academy. She also earned two B.A.s from the University of Naples “L’Orientale” in Classical Philology and Slavistics, and then a doctorate in Slavistics with a thesis on the poetry of Osip Mandel’štam which won the 2011 Italian Slavists’ Association prize. She published an article on the Šostakovič cycle Op. 143 “Six poems of Marina Cvetaeva” in which she explored the connections between the poetic and musical text, and she translated for the first time into Italian the notebooks of Marina Cvetaeva for Voland Edizioni, awarded the 2014 “Premio Italia-Russia. Attraverso i secoli” for best debut translation at a ceremony at Villa Abamelek, the Russian Embassy, Rome. Her book *Osip Mandel’štam: i Quaderni di Mosca* was published by Firenze University Press in 2016 in the *Studi Slavistici* series. A new book of translations of Mandel’štam is to be published in 2021 with Einaudi Editore.



Her music has been broadcast by Radio France Classique and Rai Radio 3, and presented live multiple times by BBC3, including InTune, Rai Radio 3, including for the Concerti del Quirinale. Alongside her performance activity, she has taught at the Conservatorio Santa Cecilia in Rome, the Istituto Statale Superiore “Gaetano Braga” in Teramo, and she currently teaches at the Conservatory of Vibo Valentia, as well as regular masterclasses in Europe and Russia. She continues to work as a literary translator.

She will record Brahms Piano Concerto No. 2 and Webern Concerto Op. 24 with the Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra in June 2021 under Modestas Pitrenas and will play Brahms Piano Concerto No. 2 with the same orchestra and conductor in Vilnius, in April 2022.

The background of the image is a dark, almost black, space. Two spotlights are positioned at the top, one on the left and one on the right, casting a bright, circular beam of light downwards. The beams are slightly hazy, suggesting a misty or smoky atmosphere. At the bottom of the image, a wooden floor is visible, illuminated by the light from the spotlights, creating a warm, brown glow. The floor is made of many small, rectangular wooden planks arranged in a grid pattern.

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