

## VINCENZO SCARAMUZZA

Vincenzo Scaramuzza was born in Crotona on June 19th 1885 from a family of musicians. He was introduced to the art of playing the piano by his father Francesco, a renowned piano teacher. Since an early age, Vincenzo proved to be very talented. He was only seven when he started performing in a series of successful piano concerts.

After passing a difficult exam, he won a scholarship that allowed him to continue his studies in the prestigious Accademy of Music of "S. Pietro a Maiella" in Naples. There he studied with the best teachers of the time, like Florestano Rossomandi, Alessandro Longo and Beniamino Cesi. He was still very young when he got his diploma with the congratulations of the jury and began his career as a concert pianist, performing in the biggest Italian towns.

But his great aspiration was teaching. At his time, it was very difficult to get a teaching post in any of the Italian Academies of Music. Scaramuzza had to take part in a very difficult National Competition, a real challenge for the best piano students of Italy. Among all the contestants, only Scaramuzza, and another student, Brugnoli, could get the highest marks. But, for some bureaucratic reasons and because he was older than Scaramuzza, it was Brugnoli who got the major teaching post in the Academy of Music of Parma, while Scaramuzza was awarded a consolation prize, a minor teaching post in Naples.

Disappointed and annoyed by the excessive bureaucratic rules of the Italian educational system that in his opinion hampered the freedom of expression of a teacher, after only two months teaching in Naples, Scaramuzza decided to leave Italy. It was the year 1907 when he moved to Argentina.

In Buenos Aires, far from the sharp judgments of the stern old school music teachers, free from the binding bureaucracy and strict syllabus of the Italian Academies of Music, Scaramuzza found the perfect environment to develop a new technique in playing the piano that he had already experienced in Italy .

He started a collaboration with the Argentinian branch of the S. Cecilia Academy of Music, bringing some fresh air in the traditional piano teaching system: a new methodology of the piano that he took partly from the influence of the modern European researches and studies of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century and partly from his personal experience as a result of a skilful and original personality.

In 1912 , after getting married to one of his students, Sara Bagnati, he founded in Buenos Aires the Scaramuzza Academy of Music and at the same time, he resumed his career as a concert pianist, performing not only in Argentina, but also in Europe. He soon became famous as a virtuoso of the piano.

He was well known all over South and North America and Europe for the absolute confidence with which he was able to perform even the most challenging pieces of the repertoire thanks to his formidable technique that allowed him a complete mastery of the instrument.

But his pedagogical calling was stronger than his concert artist career. So in 1923 he kept his last concert and from that moment on he dedicated himself exclusively to teaching, perfecting his extraordinary innovative method for piano teaching. This method, based on an accurate study of the anatomy of the pianist, allows a complete relaxation of the muscles and tendons of the hands and the arms even when the pianist performs the most difficult pieces of music. As a consequence, the sound is always smooth and round, never metallic, not even in the fortissimo, and the performer is never troubled by any muscular stiffening.

Thanks to his teaching method, Scaramuzza acquired immediately a great notoriety all over the world. He was admired and held in high esteem by the greatest pianists of his generation (like Arthur Rubinstein, for example) to whom he gave very precious technical advise.

He left no record of his teaching system in book form, but a student of his, Maria Rosa Oubiña de Castro, reconstructed it from material he wrote down in his lifetime. The resulting book is called "Enseñanzas de un gran maestro" published in 1927.

As a teacher, he was extremely strict and demanding, always wanting the best from his students. Some of the greatest pianists were Scaramuzza's disciples, like Martha Argerich, Bruno Leonardo Gelber, Fausto Zadra, Enrique Baremboim (Daniel Baremboim's father) and Horacio Salgan.

Vincenzo Scaramuzza was also a composer. He wrote pieces for piano and for piano and orchestra, some chamber music, a singing lyric poem, *Bosco Incantato*, and the unfinished opera *Hamlet*.

In the last years of his life, he was compelled to stay in bed by a serious sickness, but he never gave up teaching: he had the piano moved in his bedroom and from his bed he kept on giving lessons to his students until the end. He died in Buenos Aires in 1968.

Crotone, September 2008

Rossana Consentino

By courtesy of the author.

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