

sdjan bulat

timeless soundscapes

John Dowland (1563-1626)

1. Semper Dowland Semper Dolens (P 9)	3:10
2. A Fancy (P 5)	2:35
3. A Fancy (P 6)	2:58
4. Lachrimae (P 15)	5:25
5. A Fantasie (P 1a)	3:52

Giulio Regondi (1822-1872)

6. Etude No. 4 in E major	8:29
7. Etude No. 8 in G major	5:59

Isaac Albéniz (1860-1909)

8. Mallorca (Barcarola), Op. 202	7:57
(arr. Srdjan Bulat)	

Slavko Fumić (1912-1945)

9. Nocturno	4:19
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Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)

10. Élégie	5:09
(arr. Srdjan Bulat)	

Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)

11. Sarabande	3:12
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Kristina Arakelyan (b. 1994)

12. Fantasia	6:35
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Srdjan Bulat (b. 1986)

13. Dodecaphonic Meditation	3:31
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Total: 63:11



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What does *timeless* mean in the context of music? If we agree on the basic definition, which states that music is essentially a temporal art, how can such a thing be devoid of its main element? Of course, if we don't take it at face value and look at this concept from a figurative perspective, music can very much become a timeless phenomenon. Time is something we simply cannot escape, and much has been written on this eternal topic, so enjoying a musical performance can suddenly become a very attractive way of (in a very peculiar way) circumventing the effects of the relentless ticking of the clock. It is also a marvellous medium which enables us to effectively communicate with our distant past (slightly over four centuries in the case of this album) and connect with peoples and different cultures previously almost completely obscured by the relentless passage of time.

A human is primarily a social being, so another element we, as members of this species, cannot escape are our immediate surroundings, whether we are discussing our social or natural environment. So, again, what does this environmental element mean in the context of a musical performance? Composers, as social beings, don't create their works in some sort of a vacuum - their output is invariably and fundamentally affected by various cultural, social, and frequently political circumstances. It is also a profession, much like any other, and as such requires a tremendous level of skill, perseverance and discipline, clearly reflected in the composer's output. It is very difficult to ignore these influences when thinking about the pieces we're listening to, and therefore it's paramount to understand their importance in the creation of the final product - a work of art. Musical notes also interact with each other, sometimes in most peculiar ways, so describing a composition as a *soundscape* seems to be a very practical (not just poetic) perspective. More than just a collection of sounds that occasionally sound concordant (or pleasant, as some might say), viewing a musical composition in this way could provide a vital key in gaining a better understanding of the meaning behind each work.

Meaning can become a very difficult issue when discussing instrumental music, perhaps the most abstract of all the arts. Instrumental music, by definition, utilizes almost purely abstract concepts to convey a very concrete message. This makes writing about music a very daunting task - but despite these, almost insurmountable obstacles, it is of vital importance to discuss music through this medium. One of the main reasons why we lack so much crucial knowledge on early music is precisely the lack of effective technologies suitable for transmitting the information of instrumental music in written form. This might lead us to another very interesting question - where exactly does a musical piece exist? How and when does a musical piece become alive?

I would argue that it's the most astounding element of instrumental music - the transfer of all the ideas of a genius composer into the minds and hands of performing artists. This is the essential meaning of concert music - music that truly comes into being in a context of a performance. My goal precisely for this album was to preserve a truly unique moment in time, a form of a concert performance, in a format enabled by the astounding advancements in technology in the past century.

Best known for his songs of intense melancholy, John Dowland (1563-1626) was one of the finest lutenists of his time, and remains one of the greatest composers of lute music, lute songs and consort music. His birthplace is unknown - probably London, but possibly Dublin - he studied at Oxford, receiving a B.Mus. from Christ Church in 1588. Despite a promising start, with his music being played at court occasions, no invitations to official royal positions were proffered. This lack of official recognition is something which will come to profoundly influence his work. Dowland therefore travelled and worked abroad, entering the service of Sir Henry Cobham - the ambassador to the French court - and his successor Sir Edward Stafford in Paris (where Dowland converted to Catholicism), and responding to an invitation to enter the service of the Duke of Brunswick-Luneburg in Wolfenbüttel in Lower Saxony, whence he visited Moritz, Venice, Florence, Bologna and Nuremberg. In 1598 he entered the service of King of Denmark, Christian IV, who valued Dowland so highly as to make him one of his highest-paid court officials. During this time, Dowland often returned to England, where his wife and children (about whom we know almost nothing, excluding Robert, born circa 1591, who was also a lutenist) lived in a house in Fetter Lane near London's Fleet Street. Dowland's music displays an astounding variety and virtuosity, both compositional and performative, perhaps best exemplified in his fantasias, each of them a miniature masterpiece.

A *Fancy* (P 5) begins with an unusual Pavan-like introduction, before switching into a more characteristic contrapuntal mode. The idea of beginning a fantasia with a brief prelude may have come to Dowland during his trip to Italy, where composers like Simone Molinaro and Lorenzini di Roma were already adding improvisatory flourishes to the beginning of their fantasias. The opening of this *Fancy* uses a motive very similar to that employed by Jeremiah Clarke in the funeral march in his *Ode on the Death of Henry Purcell* of one hundred years later? A *Fancy* (P 6) is another fascinating example of Dowland combining English and Italian elements in an innovative way. The opening is in the style of the Italian *Canzona alla francese*, with its characteristic repeated-note subject, which quickly yields to virtuoso Toccata-like flourishes. A serene cantus firmus fantasia follows, only to be abandoned in favor of a more florid coda in the style of Molinaro and Terzi. Dowland's interest in blending these seemingly contradictory elements produces a kaleidoscopic work unequalled by any of his contemporaries. *The Fantasie* (P 1a) is one of Dowland's most beloved works and perhaps one of the most performed amongst guitarists. Numerous passages in this fantasia bear a striking resemblance to sections in Thomas Tallis's organ settings of *Felix namque*. This delightful piece lends itself beautifully even to contemporary concert repertoires and represents a shining example of many possibilities of transcribing (arranging) lute works for concert guitar. Two pavans, *Semper Dowland Semper Dolens* (P 9) and *Lachrimae* (P 15) showcase Dowland's compositional talent in a most splendid manner, combining his masterful understanding of complex polyphonic textures with a profound emotional impact these works still have on contemporary listeners.

Giulio Regondi (1822-1872), one of the most important composers for the guitar in the Romantic era, was probably born in Geneva (although Lyon and Bologna are also mentioned in some sources as a possible birthplaces).

His mother died giving birth to him, and he was brought up by a mysterious figure named Regondi who taught him the guitar, enforcing a strict regime of practice. By the time he was eight years old, the young prodigy had been exhibited by his supposed stepfather, possibly an abusive and exploitative manager, at most of the courts of Europe. In Paris in 1830 Giulio met the famous guitarists Fernando Sor and Matteo Carcassi, who were so impressed by his extraordinary talent, that they each composed and dedicated concert works to him. Sor's solo, *Souvenir d'Amitie*, Op. 46, was published the following year. Giulio and his stepfather arrived in London in May 1831, where the young boy's performances far exceeded all expectations. Such was Regondi's social and artistic success that he remained in England and for the rest of his life based himself in London. Curiously, he changed his lodgings frequently over the years, but about 1868 he settled in a little house near Hyde Park, where he died of cancer on May 6, 1872, at the age of 49. Regondi frequently organized his own benefit concerts, the last of which seems to be a pair he gave in May 1868. It is clear from the reports that his great powers had in no way diminished, but one senses that by this time, in spite of his great advocacy, his two instruments (guitar and concertina) had had their day, and he seems to have finally retired from the scene at the end of 1869. Like many performing artists of his (and our) day, he had to support himself through teaching, and although it is clear that he developed and nurtured good social relations, this was a very difficult, taxing lifestyle, possibly further aggravating his frail health. In Regondi's obituary in *The Musical World*, the author writes: 'It is not too much to say that Giulio Regondi's performance can never be equalled. All he did has died with him'. It was perhaps not only grief, but prescience which inspired that thought: Regondi had left behind guitar and concertina scores of daunting complexity, and within a couple of decades any idea of how to play this music would be as elusive as the distant memory of his brilliant and poignant performances.

Regondi published only five works for guitar, which, along with his *Ten Etudes* (discovered much later), are all that survive of his guitar music, in telling contrast with the large body of his concertina works still extant. The discovery of *Ten Etudes* is of incalculable importance to the guitar's repertoire, literally doubling in size Regondi's guitar opus, and gives to the guitar that rare vehicle - a full-blooded Romantic score of major proportions. Both *Etude in E* and *Etude in A* represent magnificent, delicate romantic miniatures, ideal for intimate concerts in elegant salons - they reflect an artist who was both a thriving social being and a meditative introvert of almost incomprehensible talent.

Isaac Albéniz (1860-1909), one of the titans of late Romantic-era piano music, was born in the Gerona province of Spain. He was a child prodigy, first performing at the age of four. As a boy, after trying to run away from home several times, he travelled the world with his father giving concerts. He continued to perform, but became more and more interested in composition, inspired by the folk music and dances of his native land. Exceptional natural ability and years of learning, both in Spain and other European countries, added distinction to his work, much of the best of it for piano. Although he did not compose for guitar - a Spanish development and key to musical expression there - it was a prominent influence in his writing, and a number of significant classical guitar transcriptions have resulted from the piano pieces. *Mallorca* is from a relatively early period of composition, about which Albéniz remarked, 'I believe that the people are right when they continue to be moved by *Córdoba*, *Mallorca*, by the copla of the *Sevillanas*, by the *Serenata*, and *Granada*. In all of them I now note that there is less musical science, less of the grand idea, but more colour, sunlight, flavour of olives...music of youth, with its little sins and absurdities...' This piece, which lends itself so effortlessly to the guitar, to this day remains one of the most beloved and performed works in my concert repertoire.

Perhaps an unlikely hero of the 20th century guitar music is a Croatian composer and guitarist Slavko Fumić (1912-1945). This artist, of unique sensibility and talent, met his tragic end as one of countless victims of World War II, perhaps the single greatest tragedy of the last hundred years. His modest opus, which of course says nothing of its artistic importance, survived thanks to the dedicated work of his younger brother Rudolf (1915-1951) which transcribed them onto scraps of paper hidden in a parachute while imprisoned on Goli Otok, a concentration camp of the Nazi collaborationist Independent State of Croatia. In these horrifying circumstances, which should evoke a strong sense of deep shame amongst succeeding generations, defying all odds, Slavko produced solo guitar works of extraordinary value. One of the most shining examples of his compositional style is the contemplative *Nocturno*, seeped in a nighttime pensive mood, tugging at our heartstrings, many years after the composer's premature demise.

A true titan of 20th century music, Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971), did not meet his fate in World War II, but was still very much affected by its destructive force. Following the onset of the war and deaths of his wife and a daughter from tuberculosis, Stravinsky moved to the United States in 1939. He delivered a series of lectures at Harvard University, and in 1940 he married artist and designer Vera de Bossett. That year, Stravinsky also finished one of his most important works, *Symphony in C*. Stravinsky was nearly arrested for his rearrangement of the national anthem during an infamous performance in Boston in 1944, but otherwise he found a welcome reception in his new country. It was during this time that he composed his *Elegie* for solo viola, which was dedicated to the memory Alphonse Onnou, the founder of the Pro Arte Quartet and serves as an homage to the victims of World War II. The opening section is in the style of a chant above a rippling accompaniment. The middle section contains elements of a fugue, though there are never more than two independent voices.

After its climax, the *Elegy* closes with a recapitulation of its opening. The viola is directed to play with mute throughout. It is precisely this direction that motivated me to transcribe the piece for solo guitar, which seems to be a perfect medium for such a grave, sombre piece.

Francis Poulenc (1899-1963) lived most of his life in material comfort, able to purchase a 16th-century mansion in Noizay, Le Grand Coteau, where from 1927 he lived and composed most of this music. Yet there was a price to Poulenc's happiness. His early acquired wealth was due to both his parents dying when he was in his teens. His mother, an accomplished pianist who shared her love of Mozart as she gave Poulenc his earliest lessons, died when he was 16, and his father, joint owner of the famous manufacturer of industrial chemicals, died when he was 18. Orphaned when so young, Poulenc relied more than most on the approbation and support of his friends, of whom he had many; the death of any friend or colleague hit Poulenc particularly hard, even before 1936 when he rediscovered his Catholic faith following the violent demise of fellow-composer Pierre-Octave Ferroud in a car accident. It seems significant that nearly half of his chamber music works were dedicated not to a specific performer, but to the memory of a recently deceased colleague or public figure. While in New York in late 1959 Poulenc conceived a brief *Sarabande*, a grave piece in a chordal style typical of his choral music, which he dedicated to the French guitarist Ida Presti. This ascetic miniature beautifully exemplifies Poulenc's late compositional style, in terms of his return to modal harmony and its relationship with contemporary writing. Despite its diminutive form, this is a piece of tremendous spiritual energy, which is showcased most powerfully in its concert performance.

As a professional concert artist, one of my main goals is to champion concert works by young composers, so it was my great honour and pleasure to commission a new solo guitar piece at the very start of my studies at the Royal Academy of Music in London in 2013. It was there and then that I met Kristina Arakelyan (b. 1994), a young British-Armenian composer, at the beginning of her undergraduate studies in music theory and composition. I am very honoured to say that our professional collaboration over the past decade has been very fruitful, resulting in many exciting solo and chamber music pieces which I have been performing at almost all of my international recitals. *Fantasia* is the first piece composed as a part of our collaboration, and it remains one of my favourite contemporary pieces (music composed in the 21st century). A beautiful musing on a very simple motive, which makes an appearance in a lot of her choral and orchestral work, this free-form musical composition reveals both an extraordinarily talented and mature mind, significantly beyond the composer's age at the time of writing the piece. It utilizes Britten's *Nocturnal after John Dowland* as one of many musical inspirations and creates a unique texture, both atonal and tonal (or even modal), and very much proves there is still so much more to be composed in these traditional formats. It is of paramount importance to support the upcoming generations of composers, and I'm very honoured to be a small part of that story.

One of my own, however modest, contributions to the landscape (or soundscape?) of contemporary concert music is a short piece I composed as a graduate student at the Academy of Music in Zagreb, Croatia. *Dodecaphonic Meditation* is the result of my experimentation with the twelve-tone technique, originated by Arnold Schoenberg, and in a way serves as an homage to the great composer. One very interesting detail I discovered while researching his opus is the fact that he suffered from triskaidekaphobia, a fear of number thirteen.

Why would this be important in this context? Schoenberg clearly states that the tonal concept of an octave needs to be divided in a randomized series of twelve semitones in order to achieve the so-called emancipation of dissonance, in a way in which neither tone makes a consecutive appearance until all individual tones (or semitones) have been expressed. In this way he has managed to completely circumvent the octave (itself consisting of thirteen semitones) and therefore break free from the restraints of tonal harmony. Schoenberg died on 13th July 1951 (a Friday, of course, at the age of 76, which digits add to thirteen), unable to break free from his phobia, making his invention even more beautiful, at least in my opinion. With all of our daily rationales, aren't we all just trying to impose a certain order onto our world and make some sense of its apparent complete randomness?

I hope that this album will provide an interesting perspective on the interplay between the self, the environment (both spatial and aural), and time, those three eternal, unescapable elements. Music is a wonderful medium in which we, as both listeners and performers, can explore these daunting concepts. Instead of trying to escape their strong gravitational pull, we can embrace this ethereal siren call and fully immerse ourselves in all of the amazing possibilities of our lives, illuminated by the powerful charisma of art.

In the end, I would like to dedicate this album to the loving memory of my mother, Jagoda Bulat, who has always been my guiding light.

Srdjan Bulat, 2024



biography

Srdjan Bulat (1986) is an award-winning concert classical guitarist from Split, Croatia. He is one of the most successful classical guitarists of the new generation and the top prize winner at almost all of the most important international classical guitar competitions. He has won top prizes in Benicassim ('Francisco Tarrega'), Almeria ('Julian Arcas'), Alessandria ('Michele Pittaluga'), Valencia ('Alhambra'), Madrid ('Gredos San Diego), London ('London International Guitar Competition'), Rome ('Fernando Sor'), just to name a few; and has also won numerous special awards for the best interpretation of Spanish music as well as contemporary concert music, which are featured prominently in all of his recital programmes.

He has graduated summa cum laude from the Music Academy in Zagreb as the best student of his generation. He also has a Master of Arts in Performance degree from the Royal Academy of Music in London, which he has successfully completed, with high distinction, in July 2014. He was awarded the prestigious ABRSM scholarship as the only international student of his generation to be given this honour. In September 2015 he completed his second postgraduate degree at the Music Academy in Zagreb, Croatia, where he specialized in classical guitar music written by contemporary Croatian composers.

He has given many solo recitals and masterclasses around the world (London, Paris, Rome, Madrid, Oslo, Kopenhagen, Helsinki, New York, Chicago, Toronto), and has recorded two full length solo albums - his first for RTVE (Spanish National Radiotelevision), and his second for the prestigious recording company Naxos, which was released in 2012. His latest album is scheduled for release in March 2024.

He is currently working as a freelance concert artist in Zagreb, Croatia.

For more information, please visit: www.srdjanbulat.com



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