



A SICILIAN CELLIST EXPLORES THE MIGRATION OF MUSIC

with

Tsintsadze · Komitas · Coleridge-Taylor · Skalkottas · Bartók · and himself

Rubicon Classics RCD1051 UK Release 26 March 2021

"Deep within my soul there is, of course, music, but there is also Sicily, my birthplace and my homeland. This ancient land, with its layers of tragic history, diverse cultures, startling beauty, decaying grandeur and extraordinary climate are inevitably entwined with my own artistic sensitivity and creativity."

Alessio Pianelli

Sicily, an island in the middle of the Mediterranean, has been a crossroads for diverse civilisations for thousands of years. From conquerors and immigrants it has absorbed manifold cultures and traditions, which still co-exist to this day and define Sicily's unique ethnicity. And so it is for music.

For his debut album on the Rubicon Classics label, cellist and composer **Alessio Pianelli** (Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship winner 2018) conceived the idea that if a land's lineage can be traced through its history or language, it can also be tracked through its folk music. He explores the richness of his own Sicilian roots by comparing the culture and folk music of his homeland with those of Africa, Georgia, Greece, Armenia, and Romania in repertoire from late 19th and 20th century composers whose own musical identities have been enriched by travel but who are also deeply connected to the origins of their cultural heritage. Pianelli directs the young string players of the **Avos Chamber Orchestra**, which he co-founded in Rome where the album was recorded in November 2019.

Pianelli has transcribed and arranged every original score, his sensitivity and profound respect for the spirit of these works enabling him to embrace the many differences in the music while linking them with a common thread of humanity, *"I have made each piece part of my own identity so that I can share them from my perspective with a sympathetic rather than authoritarian approach."*

The journey begins in Georgia with *Miniatures* by **Sulkhan Tsintsadze** who enlivened his classical works with elements from Georgian folk music. Originally for string quartet, *Miniatures* is his most representative and successful work.

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Across the border from Georgia is Armenia, the homeland of **Vardapet Komitas** whose music has preserved human identity and culture despite the horrors and consequences of colonialism, genocide and war. Pianelli has transcribed five songs in which popular folk melodies are imbued with the characteristic rhythmic pulsations of Armenian music and textures that evoke the specific timbres of traditional Armenian instruments.

Survival is also at the heart of the work of **Samuel Coleridge-Taylor**, an English composer of African origin who dedicated a large part of his compositional output to the integration of African elements into European music, illustrated here by two of his *24 Negro Melodies*.

Greek composer **Nikos Skalkottas** studied in Germany with Robert Khan, Kurt Weill and Arnold Schönberg but later returned to Athens to study the folk music of his homeland. By merging indigenous traditions with the modernist European ideals he had assimilated, he generated a totally new style of music. The three *Greek Dances* on this album (from *36 Dances for Orchestra*) illustrate how Skalkottas embraced the melodies and rhythms of folk music to create original compositions that bridge Greek and European conventions.

The father of ethnomusicology is undoubtedly Romanian composer **Béla Bartók** who not only synthesised the folk music of his homeland into his own compositions, but also catalogued and critically annotated folk music and made pioneering field recordings. His scores for *Romanian Dances* detail the precise region from which he drew his source material for every movement. At the heart of his research and creativity was the powerful ideal of brotherhood, peace and humanity.

Pianelli's musical journey ends back home with his own work, *Variations on a Sicilian Folk Theme*. Originally scored for cello and piano, the piece is a set of variations on the Sicilian folksong, *Ciuri, ciuri*, entwined with quotations from the classical repertoire, including Elgar's Cello Concerto, Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* and Paganini's *Moto Perpetuo*. Pianelli describes the piece as fluctuating "between the melancholy longing for one's homeland and the vital impetus towards the unknown, which every migrant and traveller experiences."

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Notes to editors

A SICILIAN TRAVELLER Alessio Pianelli cello/director, Avos Chamber Orchestra

Tsintsadze 1925-1991 *Miniatures* Lale · Gandagan · Song · Suliko · Shepherd's Dance · Tsintskaro · Rural Dance

Komitas 1869-19 *Armenian Folk Songs and Dances* Oh, Nazan · Krunk · Al Aylukhs · Erangi · Habrban

Coleridge-Taylor 1875-1912 *24 Negro Melodies Op. 59* No 20 Pilgrim's Song · No 10 Deep River
Bartók 1881-1945 *Romanian Folk Dances Sz.68* I. Stick Dance · II. Sash Dance · III. In One Spot · IV. Dance from Bucsum · V. Romanian Polka · VI. Fast Dance · VII. Fast Dance

Skalkottas 1904-1949 *36 Greek Dances AK11* Series I:III. Ipirotikos · Series I:II. Kritikos · Series III:III. Kleftikos

Pianelli 1989- *Variations on a Sicilian Folk Theme*



Alessio Pianelli cello/composer

<https://www.bbtrust.com/artist/alessio-pianelli/biography/>

- **Born** 1989 in Erice, Sicily to a family of musicians.
- **Studied** in Palermo with Giovanni Sollima and in Basel with Thomas Demenga and also cites Mario Brunello and Wolfgang Boettcher as important influences.
- **Prizes & Awards** include Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship Award 2018, Antonio Janigro International Cello Competition 2006, 1st Prize (*Tanzen Wir!*) International Composition Competition In Clausura (Ravenna Festival and 100cellos, 2016).
- **Soloist** with orchestras including Sinfonieorchester Basel, Kazhak State Orchestra, Lviv Philharmonic Orchestra, Philharmonie Baden-Baden, Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della RAI di Torino
- As a **chamber musician**, regularly invited to festivals including Marlboro, Piatigorsky and Davos and has brought his music into many prominent halls in Europe, Asia and North America including Walt Disney Hall in LA, Auditorium Parco della Musica in Rome, Teatro La Fenice in Venice, Tonhalle Zurich and Hajuko Hall Tokyo.
- **Compositions** include *Tanzen Wir!* for 100cellos and *Sulla Quarta* for two cellos. These works are published by Casa Musicale Sonzogno and Mueller & Schade. He was Composer in Residence at Marianne Piketty's Musique aux 4 Horizons in Ronchamp, France.
- **Co-founder** Avos Chamber Orchestra, Rome.
- **Regular collaborator** at Palermo-based Almendra Music, a think-tank, record label and art collective which encourages collaboration between musicians and artists from different backgrounds.
- **Recordings** include several chamber music collaborations on the Almendra Music label and an ongoing series of albums exploring Bach's six solo cello suites: *Prélude* (2014) features Bach's Cello Suite No 1 alongside works by Thomas Demenga, Sulkhan Tsintsadze and Mieczyslaw Weinberg while the second, *Sulla Quarta* (2018) features the fourth cello suite with Pianelli's own work for two cellos.
- **Professor** of Cello at the Conservatorio di Musica Antonio Scontrino di Trapani, Sicily and Professor of Cello and Chamber Music at Avos Chamber Music Project, Rome.
- **Plays** a 1921 Evasio Emilio Guerra cello.
- **Website** www.alessiopianelli.com

[Pianelli has] "...*imagination, musicality, expression, energy, the ability to convey the emotion of music, recreated as a living thing*" **La Stampa**

"He transported the expressive sounds with fervor and passion, creating an ambience of concentration and intensity over which a special kind of melancholy magic seemed to float in the Kurhaus that evening." **Badisches Tagblatt**

Avos Chamber Orchestra

Founded in Rome in 2019 by Alessio Pianelli, violinist Mirei Yamada and pianist Mario Montore

Comprised of the promising young musicians of the Avos Chamber Music Project, which aims to enhance the growth of young musicians through the practice of chamber music.

The students meet on a monthly basis with members of the Avos Piano Quartet and other internationally renowned musicians, such as Beatrice Rana, Alessandro Carbonare, Enrico Dindo and Filippo Gamba, for professional and cultural growth based on the same spirit of open and rigorous sharing that informs this album.

www.avoschamber.it

Films

A short introduction to *A Sicilian Traveller*: <https://youtu.be/X-cSpapLwEc>

Videomaker Francesco Siro Brigiano • Assistant Andrea Franco • Drone Operator Giuseppe Gucciardi

In the recording studio - Tsintsadze *Gandagan* (full track)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aK-jyp2Ym5w>

<https://rubiconclassics.com>