



Italy's Man with the Golden Flute: *Il Flauto d'oro*

A new translation of the autobiography of virtuoso Severino Gazzelloni will be available early next year. The translation was written by NFA Lifetime Achievement Award recipient Harvey Sollberger.

The NFA Special Publications Committee is proud to announce that the National Flute Association is publishing an English translation of the autobiography of Italian flute virtuoso and recording artist, Severino Gazzelloni (1919–1992). The translation of the original, which was published in 1984 as *Il Flauto d'oro* (the golden flute), is the work of Harvey Sollberger, a name familiar to the flute community as flutist, composer, teacher—and now translator. The book will also contain an introductory essay by noted music historian Anne Schreffler, James Edward Ditson Professor of Music at Harvard University, and photos and other documents helping to paint a clearer picture for NFA members of Gazzelloni's place in the constellation of international flutists of the 20th century.

In honor of the 100th anniversary of Gazzelloni's birth, the Special Publications Committee gave a presentation at the 2019 NFA Convention in Salt Lake City to celebrate the remarkable career and lasting influence this prominent flutist has had, not only on Italian musicians and audiences, but all over the world. In addition to his activities as an orchestral musician, concerto soloist, and teacher, Gazzelloni's lasting influence was his dedication to brand-new repertoire by Italian and international composers, which he championed, premiering and commissioning many new important works that have entered the modern flute repertoire.

The "Impeccable" Severino Gazzelloni

Gazzelloni was born in the tiny Italian village of Roccasecca, not far from Rome, where he started the flute at age 7. According to the account in his autobiography, his flute was purchased with money won from the local lottery after the boy had a vision of his dead mother giving him the winning number. His father played euphonium in the local

by John Bailey





Severino Gazzelloni in 1948.



Gazzelloni playing a wooden flute in 1946.



Gazzelloni played or shepherded more than 150 premieres.

band. Primarily self-taught, Gazzelloni studied with Tassinari at the Conservatory of Santa Cecilia in Rome from 1934 to 1942 and played flute in the RAI (Italian Radio and Television) Symphony Orchestra of Rome for 30 years, starting in 1944, becoming principal flutist soon after. A historic recording of Gazzelloni performing the solo from [Ravel's *Daphnis and Chloë*](#) under the direction of a young Claudio Abbado is available on YouTube.

In addition to his orchestral playing, Gazzelloni had an extensive recording career, performing on numerous film soundtracks after World War II. He became good friends with Ninto Rota—who wrote the soundtracks to numerous films by celebrated Italian director Federico Fellini—and composer Bruno Maderna. He made many recordings and appeared frequently as concerto soloist.

His recordings garnered 7 Grand Prix du disque awards: He was a superstar. Said one Italian music critic, “He was the first artist who redeemed the humble flute from the inferiority complex that plagued wind instruments, achieving fame usually reserved for keyboard or string virtuosos.” Another characterized his playing on a [1968 recording of Vivaldi concertos, op. 10](#), as “impeccable in clarity, phrasing and beauty of sound.”

His recorded repertoire of flute classics includes all the Mozart concertos and Beethoven's Serenade. It includes works by Bach, Veracini, Scarlatti, Handel, Albinoni, Marcello, and Boccherini as well as those by Doppler, Debussy, Saint-Saëns, Ravel, and Varèse. It also includes transcriptions of works by Brahms, Liszt, Tchaikovsky, Grieg, and Schumann. A live recording from 1984 of the [Donizetti Sonata](#) reveals his easy communication with the audience, at age 65.

New Music Legacy

Gazzelloni's greatest legacy is his passionate engagement with and support of new music. In 1947, he toured Italy with a chamber group performing Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, which sparked his intense interest in modern music and new sound combinations. From 1949 he dedicated himself to the

study of extended techniques and in 1952 participated in the Darmstadt (Germany) International Summer Courses for New Music, teaching there every summer from 1956 to 1962.

Darmstadt is where he met major composers of the time, including Pierre Boulez, Karl Stockhausen, Luigi Nono, Franco Donatoni, Olivier Messiaen, John Cage, and Luciano Berio. According to his entry in the *Dictionary of Italian Biography* (*Dizionario biografico degli italiani*), “His virtuosity and synthesis of the musical language of contemporary music led many composers to write for him.”

The first concerto written for Gazzelloni was in 1951 by Mario Zafred. In Darmstadt in 1954, with pianist David Tudor, Gazzelloni performed the fiendishly difficult *Sonatina* by P. Boulez, written in 1946 for Jean-Pierre Rampal, who never played it. All told, more than 150 compositions received their world premiere or their Italian premiere through Gazzelloni, with many of these pieces having been dedicated to him. Most were premiered by him at the *Biennale di Venezia* festival (founded in 1930), beginning in 1952. From 1961 on, there was a regular concert dedicated to new literature for flute. By the way, the 63rd Biennale Festival of Contemporary Music took place in September and early October, 2019.

A short, representative list of the important works championed by Gazzelloni includes *Y su sangre ya viene cantando* (1952) by Luigi Nono (one of Gazzelloni's favorite pieces); *Mei* (1962) by Kazuo Fukushima, premiered April 23, 1962 at the 35th Venice *Biennale*; *Sequenza per flauto solo* (1958) by Luciano Berio—and, according to the composer, “made to measure for Gazzelloni”; *Flötenstück neunphasig* (1959) by Ernst Krenek; *Souffle* (1969) by Goffredo Petrassi; *Puppen-spiel 2* (1966) by Franco Donatoni (which received the Marzotto Prize in 1966); *Concerto per flauto e orchestra* (1967–68) by G.F. Malipiero; *Honeyrêves* (1961) *Hyperion* (1964), and *Grande aulodia* (1970) by Bruno Maderna; and *Rhymes for Gazzelloni* (1966) by Yori-Aki Matsudaira.

Gazzelloni recorded many of these works, and many of these historic recordings are on YouTube. A recording from [1962 with pianist Aloys Kontarsky](#) contains works by Evangelisti,

(*Proporzioni*), Berio (*Sequenza*); Matsu-daira (*Somaksah*), Castiglioni, (*Gymel*), Messiaen (*Le merle noir*), and Maderna (*Honeyrêves*).

Mass Media

Another major contribution by Gazzelloni was as one of the very first cross-over artists. His numerous Italian radio and television appearances, especially of lighter music, made him popular with an especially wide audience and made the flute and its music famous. One biographer notes, "He was the first musician in Italy to comprehend the possibilities of mass communication to spread music at all levels."

Numerous recordings on YouTube document this, including those of tunes from Nino Rota-Fellini soundtracks (*Amarcord* and *La Strada*), "Torna a Surriento" (a popular song in Neapolitan dialect), and pop tunes (including "Isn't She Lovely" and "I Just Called to Say I Love You"). Gazzelloni even made a recording in 1973 of [Bach's celebrated Air as a rock anthem](#), with drumset and electronic keyboard and bass.

Gazzelloni said in an interview with his former student and biographer, Gian-Luca Petrucci, published in *The Flutist Quarterly* in winter 1993, "I have always been convinced that music is a sphere in which absolute democracy reigns, for a sound is no less interesting if it belongs to a popular melody rather than to a symphony. As long as it is true music, it is the duty of the interpreter to accomplish a miracle and reveal its hidden aspects so that it can reach the widest audience possible. Music is joy and spectacle. One can—and must—play everything one believes in."

Gazzelloni became a celebrity on Italian television. In a [televised performance from 1983](#) with a guitarist and the Italian singer and actress Milvia, Gazzelloni steals the show with his introduction and cadenza, lasting several minutes before the singer's entrance.

Popular Teacher

Gazzelloni was an active and sought-after teacher. He taught at the Rossini Conservatory in Pesaro starting in 1955, then the Academy of Santa Cecilia in Rome



Gazzelloni (left) with Bruno Maderna, Edoardo De Filippo, and Gian Carlo Menotti.



Gazzelloni with members of I Musici in 1974.



Salvatore Accardo, Uto Ughi, Gazzelloni, Franco Petracchi, Bruno Giuranna, and Riccardo Brengola.



From the 1977 art book, *Ugo Nespolo-Severino*.
Gazzelloni.



Gazzelloni in Sienna with an unknown flutist in 1974.



Gazzelloni in 1980.

for many years. He taught summer courses in Darmstadt (1952–66), masterclasses at the *Accademia chigiana* in Siena (regularly from 1966), the Sibelius Academy, Helsinki, and in Cologne (where he taught Bach and Mozart), the *Hochschule Freiburg im Breisgau*, and the summer course in Darlington, England, where he concentrated on avant-garde music).

Among his notable students from around the world are jazz flutist Eric Dolphy, Italian flutist Gian-Luca Petrucci (who has written two books about Gazzelloni, in 1993 and 2018), Carol Wincenc, Claudia Anderson, and many others.

His Life and Times

In sum, the soon-to-be-available English translation of Gazzelloni's autobiography provides a fascinating look into the life and times of a major international figure, whose influence is still felt in the musical world, as recording artist, orchestral

flutist, new music specialist, cross-over artist, and teacher. The NFA's newest publication is a valuable contribution to understanding this "Man with the Golden Flute."

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