

THE NEAPOLITAN PIANO SCHOOL: FROM ITS ORIGINS TO VINCENZO VITALE

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Abstract: This article is a journey through the Neapolitan keyboard tradition, from its origins to the school of Vincenzo Vitale, whose students still spread his music and pedagogical legacy all over the world, in music academies and on concert podiums. Nearly five hundred years of music: from the pre-classic harpsichord masters and composers, through the development of the music tradition in Naples over the centuries, specifically the evolution of its music conservatories and their first piano teachers, to the fundamental pedagogues and their methods the XIX and XX centuries.

Keywords: Music; piano; Naples; school; method; pedagogue; performer; composer

When discussing the Neapolitan Piano School, thoughts inevitably turn to one of its greatest representatives, the Italian pedagogue Vincenzo Vitale (1908–1984). Vitale's didactic legacy continues to be imparted in music academies both in Italy and internationally, through his direct students.

To find the roots of the great Neapolitan keyboard traditions we must go back several centuries, into the city of Naples. The period between the last quarter of the 16th century and the beginning of the 17th saw the growth of the so-called Harpsichord and Organ School, cultivated among followers of the cultural movement which centered around the artistry of the madrigalist Gesualdo da Venosa. As with most keyboard music of the late 1500s, their first compositions were characterized by polyphonic elements, crafted upon fragments of sacred music.

The close political and cultural relations between Naples and Spain, which ended in 1707 with the Austrian dominion, significantly influenced

their work. Elements of Spanish music, particularly from the blind organist and composer Antonio de Cabezón, shaped their compositions. Cabezón's harpsichord music included preludes and ricercares in an imitation style, along with themes from popular melodies with variations. The musical activity of the Harpsichord and Organ School would express different stylistic concepts from the Venetian harpsichord masters, such as Andrea Gabrieli, anticipating the form and style later developed by Girolamo Frescobaldi.

The first representative of the Neapolitan Harpsichord and Organ School was another blind organist, Antonio Valente. Others followed suit, notably Rocco Rodio, Giovanni Trabaci, and Ascanio Mayone.

The Neapolitan music tradition has been an important part of city life, especially after the introduction of the Opera in the middle of the 17th century. Naples' first theatre, San Bartolomeo, was built in 1654. For decades it allowed its audience to listen to operas solely from the Venetian repertoire, until the advent of Alessandro Scarlatti, who is considered to be the founder of the Neapolitan opera style and the father of the far more famous Domenico.

The four Neapolitan Conservatories – the first public institutions in Europe intended for the professional formation of future musicians – also belonged to that period. This is where the term “music conservatory,” still in use today, originates. At the beginning of the 16th century, the Conservatories were charity institutions with the noble purpose of welcoming and assisting abandoned children, whose musical education soon became a necessity as they were to take part in all religious ceremonies through singing in the choir. In the years between 1620 and 1650 inside the four Conservatories grew real schools of music, as besides taking singing courses, pupils would learn how to play the harpsichord and all sorts of wind and string instruments, and study counterpoint.

In the decades to come, thanks to dedicated musicians, composers, and pedagogues such as Francesco Durante and Nicolo Porpora, the Conservatories attracted students from different parts of Italy. Among them were Giovan Battista Pergolesi, Giovanni Paisiello and Domenico Cimarosa. Alessandro Scarlatti did not teach in any of them, as his main activity was, besides composing, that of the Royal Chapelmaster, a position later occupied by his son Domenico.

Domenico Scarlatti was born in Naples in 1685, the same year as Johann Sebastian Bach and George Friedrich Händel. While Bach never met the other two, Scarlatti and Händel seemed to be on good terms throughout their lives, having met as students in Venice. It is interesting to mention a fact that some musicologists regard as a legend: the public harpsichord and organ playing competition that took place in 1709 between the youngsters,

in which they both won – Scarlatti was declared the best harpsichordist by his elegant and expressive style, while Händel emerged as a far superior organist. In his life, Domenico Scarlatti never achieved the recognition of his famed colleagues, maybe because with the exception of a few operas and sacred compositions he mainly wrote music for a single instrument, the harpsichord, for which he composed over 555 sonatas. Only 30 of them were published during Scarlatti's lifetime. This collection of early sonatas entitled «Essercizi per Gravicembalo» was presented in London in 1739 as a sort of teaching tool, associated with Bach's *Clavierübung*.

Between 1752 and 1757, the Infanta of Spain, Maria Barbara, a pupil of Scarlatti who had been followed by him from Portugal to Madrid after her wedding, had 496 sonatas copied by professional copyists. Divided into fifteen volumes, bound in precious leather, the collection was later bequeathed to the famous castrato Farinelli and is now preserved in the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana in Venice, while none of the original manuscripts have come down to us.

Between the years 1906 and 1910, the pianist and composer Alessandro Longo was the first to produce a modern edition of the sonatas. Unfortunately, it contained numerous mistakes and questionable additions and their chronological order had not been taken into account. The American harpsichordist Ralph Kirkpatrick revised the edition fifty years later and through long research established, among other things, an approximate chronology of the sonatas and their presentation in pairs. Scarlatti discovered many ways to make the harpsichord expressive through repeated notes and chords, jumps, hand-crossing, and brilliant runs. His music is highly idiomatic, innovative, and written with a profound knowledge of the virtuosic demands and tonal resources of the harpsichord, utilizing the instrument's different registers. The music's lively and contrasting impulse, engaging rhythms, and harmonies bring out the harpsichord's melodic, dynamic, and percussive attributes. The sonatas often contain elements of Spanish music through an imitation of the guitar and the castanets, as well as echoes of popular and gypsy melodies. Another notable feature of theirs is the typical Neapolitan tradition of incorporating in a chord an external note to create tension. Scarlatti devoted the last years of his life to teaching – among his students was Antonio Soler, a Spanish composer who wrote a great deal of music for harpsichord and organ, mixing Scarlatti's style with the Spanish music tradition. Today Scarlatti is recognized as the true originator of the modern keyboard technique and his sonatas are an important step along the path of every piano student.

During the second half of the XVIII century, Naples witnesses the growth of another great musician, mainly known for his operas and vocal

compositions, but also very important for the development of the keyboard tradition: Domenico Cimarosa. He wrote 38 sonatas for harpsichord and 81 for fortepiano, a new instrument still unknown in Naples which he'd discovered during his stay in Venice. Some of his sonatas are composed in a late baroque style with counterpoint elements and rhythmic and harmonic inventiveness, while others reflect the effervescent Neapolitan tradition present in Cimarosa's operas with melodramatic moments, cavatinas, cabalettas, and duets. A few sonatas have a sacred character, and some were written in the style of a fantasy. Most of them are short individual pieces naturally grouped in sets of three by key and tempo, while a small part was conceived in ternary form ABA (eventually ABA1).

In 1808 the four Conservatories were unified into the Royal College of Music, which in 1826 was moved to a new location which still houses it to this day under the name given to it nearly 200 years ago: San Pietro a Majella. In the city of Naples in the first half of the XIX century, Saint Sebastian Road and the streets surrounding the Music Conservatory were home to the workshops of the first Neapolitan piano builders. Over time, some of these workshops grew into significant enterprises, including those of the De Meglio, Guni, Federico, Napolitano, and Stanzieri families. Along with them stood the shops of famous piano builders from France, Germany, and Russia, who took advantage of the growing instrument requests – Bretschneider, Müller, Sievers, and many others.

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, mainly due to the hegemony of melodrama, the state of backwardness in which instrumental music found itself in Naples reflected the ongoing situation in Italy. The first significant reversal of trend began around the sixth decade which led to the birth of institutions and concert and orchestral societies. Initially at an elite level, and later in a broader public context, the dissemination of the instrumental Central European repertoire facilitated the revival of the Italian instrumental tradition from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This aspiration for renewal also had a stimulating effect on the creativity of many composers, who on one hand align themselves with the culture beyond the Alps and on the other try to reconnect with the music traditions of the past.

Until the third decade of the century, it was possible to learn the piano only through private lessons, as there was only one keyboard class in the College of Music, held by the harpsichordist Giuseppe Elia. This reality changed in 1827, when the pianist Francesco Lanza, who had previously also studied in London with Clementi and his pupil John Field, was appointed as piano teacher.

Lanza is also remembered as the first pianist who held a public piano concert in Naples. The event took place on April 6th, 1804 in the Teatro

dei Fiorentini on an instrument especially brought for the occasion from London. His performance aroused great enthusiasm in the audience who, for the first time, had the opportunity to understand the effects that could be obtained from the new instrument and to admire Lanza's pianism. While presenting unprecedented and surprising difficulties, his playing was immensely attractive because of its elegance, timbre, and precision of phrasing. Lanza's impact was not limited to his skills as a concert performer, as he also had a profound impact on the didactic aspects of piano teaching. For over thirty years in the music conservatory, while passing on Clementi's piano method to generations of young pianists, he developed his excellent method which, in some sections, was a "preparation for the study of Frédéric Chopin and homage to the altar of Schumann." During his long teaching career, Lanza composed several works of a didactic nature, collected after his death by the editor Cottrau and published in six volumes in 1864 as *The Piano School in the Royal College of Music in Naples*. The first books included mainly studies and exercises of Clementi's technique teachings, while the last ones show far more romantic influences with a connection to the poetic etudes of Chopin and Cramer. Achille Pistilli, Costantino Palumbo and Giuseppe Lillo were among his students. Lillo, in particular, would organize public concerts in different parts of the city, aiming to engage the masses, because though aristocratic and wealthy families would have a piano in their homes and a tradition of music education, classical music was still struggling to become part of the lives of most Neapolitans.

Lanza's work also went in the direction of dissociating the piano from the world of opera music and the conquest of new repertoires. This long journey was completed only towards the end of the century when Neapolitan students would perform the music of Scarlatti, Bach, Händel, Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Schubert, Schumann, Tchaikovsky, Chopin, and Liszt. In almost every concert program there would be also space for Italian composers, such as Martucci, Sgambati, Rinaldi, Palumbo, and Rendano, due to the impact of Thalberg and Cesi in the last decades of the century.

Other pianists who played a fundamental role in the widespread diffusion of piano practice in concert halls, schools, and homes were Ernesto Coop (senior), Michele Cerimele, Michelangelo Russo, Theodor Döhler, Luigi Siri, Nicola and Guglielmo Nacciarone. At that point the piano's presence in most programs of vocal and instrumental academies was already noticeable, sometimes at a good level, other times rightfully criticized.

In 1863 the Neapolitan pianist Ferdinando Bonamici founded the Bonamici Society, an artistic circle whose main activity was organizing artistic events, including concerts. Along with vocal and instrumental chamber music, piano original compositions appeared with a certain regularity. Neapolitan pianists

would present a repertoire of new piano music, along with romances, arias, and fantasies on opera motifs from the pre-classical, classical, and romantic periods without neglecting contemporary composers.

Bonamici was also the author of the appreciated at the time *The Pianist's Day* piano method, based on transcriptions of progressive difficulty of the most famous themes from the Italian opera repertoire, published by Ricordi in the early sixties.

1864 was an important year for the Naples music community, as the city hosted the first Italian music congress, with eminent guests among whom was the propagator of the romantic piano virtuoso, Sigismond Thalberg.

Thalberg was born in Genève in 1812. From the age of fourteen he had great success as a salon pianist, but his international career began in 1830, when he started touring European countries. The impact of Thalberg's playing mostly depended on his "three-handed technique" where a melody played by the thumbs in the middle register of the keyboard creates the illusion that three hands are required. During his performances, it was also possible to witness his virtuosity through his ability to 'decorate' the most famous melodies from operas: a high-class decoration which was very interesting from a pianistic point of view for the extraordinary development given to the arpeggios, for the long series of octaves and repeated chords, for the alternation of octaves and double chords, double and triple trills. Thalberg settled in Naples in 1866 and lived there until the end of his life, surrounded by a numerous group of talented young Neapolitan pianists. In this period, he published two important works: « *Le soirées de Posillipo* » and « *L'art du chant appliqué au piano* », which had a significant impact on the renewal of the performance technique and on the way of conceiving the piano in concert. In almost a decade spent in his Posillipo villa, between concert tours and tasks linked to his passion for viticulture, Thalberg gave the Neapolitan pianism an imprint of which would remain indelible traces. Thanks to his commitment, the piano achieved an important role in the music activities held in Naples, strengthened both with the presence of a greater number of 'solo' pieces in the programs and with the expansion of the piano repertoire of concert performers.

Among the students who gathered around Thalberg was Beniamino Cesi, who is considered the father of the modern Neapolitan Piano School.

Cesi started studying with Luigi Albanesi, who soon realized that the boy's exceptional pianistic attitudes needed a higher guidance and introduced the eleven years old Beniamino to Thalberg. Impressed by his qualities, the Austrian master took him into his home and followed him closely throughout his studies. During these years, Cesi also pursued courses of harmony, counterpoint and composition with Salvatore Pappalardo and

Saverio Mercadante in San Pietro a Majella's music conservatory, where he would soon become the leading piano teacher. He held this position until his death in 1907, with a few years break in Saint Petersburg Conservatory, where he thought the piano between 1885 and 1891, following the invitation of Anton Rubinstein.

His mastodon "Piano method", on which he extensively worked during the last years of his life, had a great success in Italy and abroad. It included 12 books of exercises and about 130 collections of short pieces from different authors revised by him and organized in books by difficulty level. Most of the exercises are still a useful tool to improve students' piano technique, while the anthological part, closely linked to an interpretative taste that history has overcome, is philologically defective also because it's based on incorrect editions from the eight hundreds.

Some of Cesi's pupils and future pedagogues remained rigidly tied to his method, without going beyond the appearances of master's teachings, while others realized that his system neglected the problem of the touch – the formation of sound on the instruments that were in use the end of the century. His most renowned students were Alessandro Longo, Florestano Rossomandi, Giuseppe Martucci and his son, Sigismoni Cesi, the last being Vincenzo Vitale's future piano teacher.

Longo was the most conservative among them. Along with his career as a performing artist, for many years he was piano teacher at S. Pietro a Majella music conservatory. He wrote several articles in the music magazine «L'Arte Pianistica» raising the problematics on piano technique and was responsible for Scarlatti's harpsichord sonatas first edition, as already mentioned above.

He also reorganized Carl Czerny's studies in a collection of ten books arranged in a progressive order of difficulty entitled «Czernyana». His famous method "Piano Technique" is still used by teachers in Italian music conservatories. It consists in twelve fascicles containing exercises to gain technique through scales, arpeggios, octaves, double notes and more. Three of his books are as well dedicated to polyphonic exercises, modulations and dynamics. Faithful to the traditional piano approach proposed by Cesi, he argued lively with the proponents of the new technique, such as Mugellini, Steinhausen, Matthay, but also Brugnoli, maintaining that the alleged so-called "new technique" was in reality "as old as the world" as technique was learned spontaneously through imitation – "who teaches the young farmer which muscles to use to maneuver the hoe? He achieves everything by himself, imitating the grown-ups farmers".

Florestano Rossomandi, composer, performer and piano teacher didn't have the temperament of a systematic researcher. He was though a practical and shrewd man, ready to understand the new proposed technique theories,

to make his own conclusions and exploit them skilfully without completely departing from the tradition of Cesi's school.

Last of seventeen children, he became orphan at a very young age and was then taken care of by his religious half-brother Durante. Florestano had the opportunity to attend the school of fine arts founded by Durante along with other priests in Ascoli Satriano, but since he was able to distinguish himself thanks to his strong musical skills, he moved to Naples at the age of ten, where he was admitted to the Royal College of Naples. In this same place he became piano teacher in 1889 and held this position for over four decades. In 1931 he established the first two-year piano specialization course for graduate students, which attracted a considerable number of participants. A year later he also had the task of establishing a piano literature course at the Conservatory but was unable to comply due to a serious illness which forced him to bed. He died in 1933, in his home in Naples.

He is recognized as a valuable pedagogue mainly due to the important input he gave thanks to his *A Guide to Technical Exercises for Piano* in eight volumes and the *Didactic Anthology for the Study of the Piano* in ten fascicules. His approach to piano technique was innovative from many points of view, one of them being the aspect of combining physiological and musical elements during a performance, from the positioning of the hand on the keyboard and all possible kinds of technique to musical expressive aspects, combined with an overall understanding of music, including self-education. His *Complete Grammar* and *General Notions of the History of the Piano* are also fundamental, aiming at a complete musical education of the student. He was founder of the Rossomandi School, a musical association he directed for over twenty years, which gave his students the opportunity to perform in public.

Cesi's pupil Giuseppe Martucci did not bother to delve into questions regarding piano technique, but above all he was a great master of style. Martucci lived a short but intense life. Born in 1856, he became a pianist of international fame, much admired by Liszt and Rubinstein, as well as a great conductor and composer. His name is also associated with a dramatic episode that occurred in Bologna in 1932: during a concert where Arturo Toscanini was conducting exclusively Martucci's music, the famous Maestro refused to conduct the Fascist Anthem at the opening ceremony, a fact that provoked the anger of the present officials and members of the party. Toscanini was physically hurt during this event, after which he exiled from Italy.

Listening to Martucci's compositions reveals the influence of Brahms and Wagner, who he deeply admired and promoted as a conductor. However, his music certainly does not lack originality, personality, and Italian flavour. Among his work as a composer, there is a piano concerto, transcriptions

for piano and a great amount of chamber and instrumental music, mostly for piano. From his school came out one of the most cultured Italian piano teachers of the time, Bruno Mugellini, whose pedagogical activity took mainly place in Bologna's music high school starting from 1898, where he left deep and lasting traces of his teaching skills in a group of very capable students.

He attempted a substantial renewal of teaching methodologies in academic environments, and while maintaining explicit references to the school of Beniamino Cesi, he was particularly interested in the new theories of Rudolf M. Breithaupt and Tobias Matthay on piano technique.

His teachings, based on the release of the weight of the arm through natural gravitation, established a new relationship, at the same time loose and controlled, between the performer and the production of sound. He was the first Italian pianist to introduce this new technique, which he presented in Bologna in a series of conferences around 1908, also arousing controversy among fellow pianists and piano teachers.

His method was published in 1908 as *Theoretical-Practical Lessons on the New Fundamental Systems in the Pianist's Technique*, followed three years later by his *Method of Technical Exercises for the Piano*, which Mugellini considered his pianistic testament. Of great impact are also the articles published by him in the «*Rivista musica italiana*», through which he brought up the argument of piano teaching in Italy's music institutions, inaugurating a controversy that would last for years on the pages of Italian music magazines. With his theoretical works Mugellini gave a strong innovative impulse to Italian piano teaching: his research, drawn from German theorists, was not original, but thanks to his polemical attitude and a mentality that was both rational and pragmatic he managed to impose it.

Beniamino Cesi had two sons, Napoleone and Sigismondo, who both became valued pianists.

The eldest one, Napoleone, was a very precocious child. He began his concert career when he was just ten years old, also presenting his own compositions. In 1881 with his *Epicedio in the Name of Garibaldi* he won the competition organized by the Musical Archive of Naples and in 1885, having gone to Paris, he won another competition with his piece *Lament in Death of Victor Hugo* for piano. As student in the conservatory of S. Pietro a Majella, he studied the piano with P. Serrao and composition with Rossi and Platania. In 1892 *ex aequo* with Ferruccio Busoni he won the Anton Rubinstein international competition in Petersburg by presenting the *Sonata in D minor for Violin and Piano*, a *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra* and *Four Pieces for Piano*. He became a piano professor in several Italian music institutions (Foggia, Palermo, Rome) and founded and directed the

musical high schools of Caserta and Cassino, not far from Naples. He was an excellent pianist, who emerged for his perfect technique and great musical sensitivity. He was also an appreciated piano teacher – among his students are the musicians Mario Ceccarelli, Eugenio Coppola and Franz Carella. He died in Naples on 20th September 1961.

No less appreciated was Beniamino Cesi's second son Sigismondo, who was born in Naples in 1869. He too was a pupil of his father who later continued his piano lessons with Alfonso Viscardi and Alessandro Longo, while also studying harmony and composition with Nicola D'Arienzo. He mainly dedicated himself to a concert career until 1898 when, together with Ernesto Marciano he founded the Music High School of Naples, where he was a director and piano teacher.

Marciano was also a Neapolitan pianist born 1869, who studied at the Conservatory of Naples where he was a student of Romaniello, Martucci, Cesi and Serrao and from where he graduated in 1889. After having embarked on a successful concert career, he dedicated himself to teaching. Ernesto Marciano and Sigismondo Cesi had a long and fruitful working relationship.

Besides teaching the piano in the Neapolitan music high school founded by them, they worked together on the «Prontuario musicale», a guide to music terminology and understanding published in 1918 and on a piano anthology for the youth in twelve volumes still in use in Italian music conservatories and among teachers

Sigismondo Cesi also edited Clementi's «Gradus ad Parnassum», twelve sonatas by the same author and wrote the book *Notes on the History and Literature for Piano*. He was an appreciated teacher and numerous internationally successful students emerged from his school, among them which is Vincenzo Vitale.

Before turning our attention to this great Neapolitan master, it's important to drive the attention to another pianist, pedagogue, music theoretician and composer, who was born in Rome in 1880: Attilio Brugnoli. He started his musical studies at an early age and soon obtained a scholarship in order to continue his studies at the Naples Conservatory, where he studied piano with Florestano Rossomandi and composition with Francesco Cilea and Paolo Serrao. Having graduated with full marks in 1901, he immediately began his concert career, performing both in Italy and abroad not only as a solo performer, but holding some concerts as a member of the Waldemar-Meyer Quartet. His piano career took off after he was awarded the honorable mention for composition at the Rubinstein competition in Paris in 1905, *ex-quo* with Béla Bartók.

He taught the piano at several music conservatories in cities such as Florence, Rome and Parma. Among his students were Renzo Silvestri, Gemma

Cappelletto, Mario Zanfi. Marcella Forti, Siegfried Kinsbrunner and Franco Floris.

During the First World War, Brugnoli held a few concerts in order to raise money for the Red Cross, performing in Naples, Milan and Turin. In the 1920s he published three articles in the magazine *Il Pianoforte*: "Is touch an innate quality of the pianist?" (1920), "Problems of Piano Pedagogy" (1920), "The Paradox in the Art of Ferruccio Busoni" (1921).

In the same period, he dedicated himself to the writing of his most important work – «Dinamica Pianistica» (1926), a voluminous tractate divided into 20 chapters with very innovative pedagogic inputs. In addition to discussing in depth the history of music and the organology of the instrument, he illustrated innovatively the anatomy of the arm and its muscular dissociation, presenting practical and rational technical exercises, useful for the development of the hand and fingers.

In the late twenties, he held three lectures at the University for Foreigners in Florence – "The Fugue", "The Sonata" and "Romantic Music" – through which he aimed to demonstrate the big influence of Italian musical forms, such as the Neapolitan melodrama, on the growth and revolution of instrumental music, also analyzing composers, among which the Neapolitans Scarlatti and Martucci. These lessons were then brought together in the volume published in Turin in 1932 with the title *Italian Piano Music From – its Origins to 1900*.

For a long time Brugnoli was chasing the dream of building a University of Music. The project of his idea was first presented in a music magazine in 1905, in the years to come it was accepted and planned to be built by Mussolini's government, but at the end was never realized.

He also built instruments for the development and training of the muscles of the arm and fingers, such as the «Anasinergograph», «Anasinergometer», «Miargopoiete» and his best-known «Prensile Thimbles».

His are the revisions of Giovanni Paisiello's *Piano Concerto in C Major* and of Chopin's complete works for the Ricordi publishing house.

As a pianist Brugnoli has often been described as a serious, sober, humble, elegant, attentive, effective and balanced performer with a strong, agile and light technical mastery of the instrument.

Vincenzo Vitale was a great admirer of the maestro's art and of his teaching methods. As a pedagogue, he would recommend to all of his students Brugnoli's "exercises for the four fingers".

Vitale was born in Naples in 1908. The family member who introduced him to keyboard music and who recognized him as young talent was his aunt, Anna Arena, who he would listen to playing the piano for hours showing a strong passion for the instrument. When he was thirteen, despite his parents' opposition, Vitale began studying piano with Sigismondo Cesi and composition with Gennaro Napoli at the Liceo Musicale in Naples,

graduating in 1931, at the age of 23. A year later he left for Paris, where he continued his studies with Alfred Cortot at the École Normale de Musique. Back in Italy he started teaching piano in numerous music conservatories starting in Udine at the Jacopo Tomadini Conservatory from 1932 to 1936, then straight to Palermo at Vincenzo Bellini Conservatory for four years. In the Naples Music Conservatory, he taught piano for nearly three decades, starting in 1942. He spent his last years as piano professor in Rome at the Santa Cecilia Music Conservatory.

During the Second World War, Vitale contributed to the cultural and musical recovery of Naples through the creation, of the Young Neapolitan Chamber Orchestra in 1944. It was formed by a group of musicians who performed twice a week for 30 minutes in a radio program called "Half an Hour of Chamber Music". After the initial successes, some disagreements within the group pushed Vitale to resign as artistic director and leave his orchestra into the hands of the Scarlatti Association based in the San Carlo Theatre. A few years later the orchestra changed its name to Alessandro Scarlatti Chamber Orchestra, maintaining some of the original instrumentalists including Vincenzo Vitale as pianist. The new chamber orchestra had a big success through radio programs, record productions and national and international tours.

Another important activity, which Vitale dedicated himself to, was the direction of «Gazzetta musica di Napoli», a music newspaper abandoned since 1870, which he helped to recover by writing several articles between 1955 and 1956. Starting from the 60's, Vitale held plenty of regular national and international seminars and master classes at Indiana University in Bloomington (1962-1963), at Santa Cecilia in Rome (1965-1970), in Venice (1965-1972), at «Accademia Chigiana» in Siena (1967-1968) and in other cities such as Florence, Ravenna, Belgrade, Sofia, Buenos Aires, Dubrovnik, Ravello.

In 1968, thanks to his great commitment to musical education, he was awarded with the gold medal of Merit from the Ministry of Education of Italy.

He also dedicated himself to writing books: *Piano. Hammers and Dampers* (1975), *The Piano in Naples in the Nineteenth Century* (1983), and the posthumous work *Salvatore Di Giacomo and Music* (1988).

For a long period, Vitale studied different piano teaching methods from various authors, such as Ludwig Deppe, Tobias Augustus Matthay, Attilio Brugnoli, Rudolf Breithaupt, Bruno Mugellini, Alfredo Casella, and others, searching for an effective method that he could offer to his students. According to him, it was essential to have a good technique in order to best interpret a piece of music, which would include the right use the muscles of the arms and hands in the two fundamental actions of weight and articulation of the fingers on the keyboard, avoiding superfluous movements.

Vitale used to theoretically and practically demonstrate the necessary correspondence between musical intention and technique. He would argue that a pianist, who is not able to produce the sound suitable for the author's different musical intentions, cannot be an interpreter. The interpretation necessarily passes through the analysis of the contractions and relaxation of the muscles to the observation of the attitude of the fingers, the hand, the arm, and the trunk. Vitale's teaching would push his students toward an achievement of awareness, which would permit them to master what was happening at a muscular level in order to equip their interpretative ideas with suitable tools.

While he had great admiration for Clementi, founder of the pianism, in his vision piano history began with Mendelssohn and Weber, passing through Brahms and Saint-Saens to reach its peak with Chopin, Liszt and Schumann. In Debussy and Ravel he saw the end of the road, with Ravel being the last explorer of the instrument's resources.

A man of vast culture, with a sensitive and attentive nature, Vitale was a respectful interpreter of the text, composed, scrupulous and rational. He became known as a "healer of tendonitis", because many pianists, especially in the last period of his life, turned to him to fix incorrect positions and acquire a good study method. He had numerous renowned students, for example, Pina Buonomo, Michele Campanella, Riccardo Muti, Laura De Fusco, Maria Mosca, Bruno Canino, Aldo Tramma, and Carlo Bruno.

He recorded several albums together with some of his best students, including two albums, both entitled «La scuola pianistica di Vincenzo Vitale», one published in 1974 and the other in 1979 (in honor of his 40th birthday of teaching), as well as a disc of all 100 studies of Muzio Clementi's «Gradus ad Parnassum» in 1981.

During the seventh and eighth decades of last century there was a movement of piano students that from the Eastern European countries would travel to Italy in order to study with Vincenzo Vitale. A few of them were Bulgarians who, through scholarships from the Ministry of Culture, managed to find their way to the Maestro.

Among them was Viktor Chuchkov who, at the end of his studies, came back to Bulgaria and became a professor at the Bulgarian State Conservatory, known today as the National Academy of Music "Prof. Pancho Vladigerov" in Sofia, spreading the Neapolitan maestro's teachings among his students. He also was responsible for introducing Scarlatti's music in the students' repertoire.

Another young Bulgarian pianist, who left Bulgaria to study with Vitale and managed to complete his studies at the Santa Cecilia Music Conservatory in Rome thanks to an Italian scholarship, was Alexander Hinchev. At the end

of his studies, he was invited by Vitale to move to Naples, where he still lives, performs and spreads his music and piano knowledge.

This article provides an overview of over five centuries of keyboard music in the city of Naples, examining the lives and legacies of its most celebrated pianists, composers, and pedagogues. However, it also prompts questions about the meaning of the term “Neapolitan piano school.”

A great deal of time was spent examining the evolution of piano playing and teaching, as well as the influence of famous pedagogues on their pupils. It was observed that pupils of these pedagogues often incorporated elements of their own experience into their teaching, leading to the development of new ideas, new repertoire, and new approaches to music interpretation. These developments in turn gave rise to new methods. From the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, we observed that many young pianists from Naples often travelled abroad to specialise with foreign pedagogues. Conversely, foreign pianists, such as Thalberg, also brought their music and teaching experience to Naples.

It would be more appropriate to consider the Neapolitan keyboard tradition, which originated in the 1500s and has been influenced by centuries of foreign domination, cultural exchange, and the contributions of numerous talented pianists and pedagogues. This tradition culminates in the pianistic school of its last famous representative, Vincenzo Vitale.

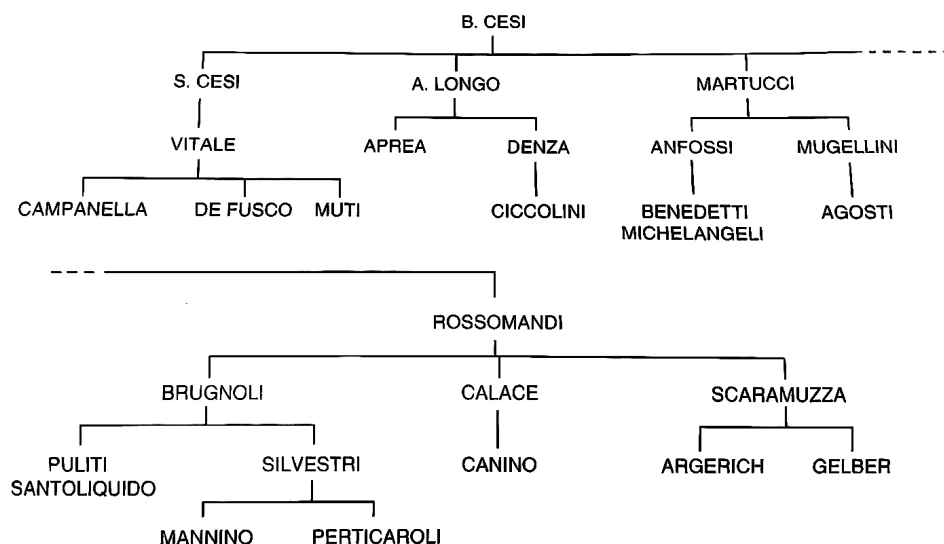


Fig. 1. Title, P. Rattalino, *Le grandi scuole pianistiche*, 1992 Ricordi, p.32

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