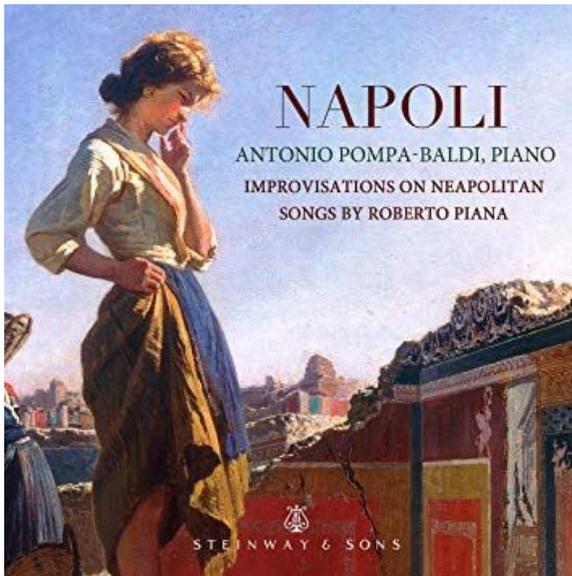


CD Review —**Antonio Pompa-Baldi in *Napoli*:
Improvisations on Neapolitan Songs**

by Mike Telin



On his 2013 recording, *The Rascal and the Sparrow — Poulenc meets Piaf*, pianist Antonio Pompa-Baldi delighted listeners with his captivating interpretations of music from two stalwarts of the 20th-century French *chanson*. On his latest CD, the pianist looks to the music of his native Italy for inspiration — specifically the emotionally charged Neapolitan song.

Released on the Steinway label in September, *Napoli* is 73 minutes of listening pleasure. The album is also a follow-up to the 2013 collaboration between Pompa-Baldi

and composer and pianist Roberto Piana, a fellow Italian whose magical improvisations turn these songs into shining gems.

In his liner notes, Piana says that with so many popular songs to choose from, “it was inevitable to leave out some favorites.” Spoiler alert, the disc does not include *O sole mio*. However it does begin with an ear-catching performance of *Funiculi funicula*, which Pompa-Baldi plays brilliantly.

Many of Piana’s improvisations retain the Salon Romance style, such as *Te voglio bene assaje* and *Serenata medioevale*, both of which the pianist performs with tenderness. However, others have a virtuosic tinge, like the improvisation on *Serentella*. Here, Pompa-Baldi discreetly shows off his impressive technique while maintaining the song’s simple charm. Of the twenty tracks, a standout is Pompa-Baldi’s beautifully phrased interpretation of *Il cardillo* — a performance certain to melt your heart.

Napoli concludes with the aptly title “Napoli.” Here Piana inventively weaves together the lesser-known songs *Taggio ditto*, *M’allicordo*, and *Lo ninno mio*, a combination which Pompa-Baldi plays with grace and Italian passion.

If you are already a lover of Neapolitan song, this is a must have for your collection. If you’re not familiar with the style, this makes for a wonderful introduction.

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