

Pianist David Korevaar Discusses the Music of Composer Luigi Perrachio



Luigi Perrachio: Piano Music - Nove Poemetti (1917/1920); 25 Preludi (1927)

Audio CD

MSR Classics



A new issue on the MSR Classics label offers world premiere recordings of two works by the Italian composer and pianist, Luigi Perrachio (1883–1966): *Nove Poemetti* (1917–20) and *25 Preludi* (1927). The works are performed by pianist David Korevaar, an international performing artist, and a member of the faculty at the University of Colorado Boulder. We discussed Dr. Korevaar’s career, and the exciting discovery of Perrachio’s music.

Many of your recordings have been reviewed in Fanfare, but I believe this is your first interview for the publication. Please tell us a bit about yourself, and in particular, your dual career as a concert pianist and educator.

I’ve been performing for most of life, with some early landmark moments being a joint performance in Boston with Earl Wild when I was just 16 years old, entering Juilliard at 17 in 1979, and giving my “official” debut at New York’s storied Town Hall in 1985. I’ve always had a strong penchant for every aspect of being a pianist—lots and lots of chamber music, solo performance, a wide variety of recording projects, beginning with a disc of Lowell Liebermann’s music for the venerable Musical Heritage Society issued in 1989. (At this point, the count is at about 45 commercially released CDs, from Bach, Beethoven and Brahms to Dohnányi, Harsányi, and Perrachio.) And, I began teaching at a community music school—The Westport School of Music, in Westport, Connecticut—in 1987; this

was my first regular exposure to teaching. I had had thoughts of being a university music professor early on (I actually applied for the DMA at Juilliard in 1983, when I'd just turned 21; fortunately for me at that point in my life, I didn't get in), but got more serious about that as I was starting a family and looking for a more stable career platform than the freelance world and for a way to work with a higher caliber of students. In 1998, I began my DMA at Juilliard, graduating in 2000 and immediately starting my current position at the University of Colorado Boulder. Landing in a top-notch music program in a major public research institution located in one of the most beautiful cities in the U.S. was pretty hard to beat for my first real job, and I haven't looked back: It turns out (maybe because of my childhood background growing up around university professors in math and physics) that I love the university life. And, I've learned so much from my students: The virtuous circle of teaching is amazing: The better my students become, the better I become. I can say in all honesty that I have learned more about what it means to be a musician and a pianist in the 18 years I've been at the University of Colorado than I did in all of my career prior. Perhaps the most important thing I've (re)learned is the importance of collaboration at every level. Teaching, chamber music, and recording all feed my hunger to work with others and learn from others.

*Your new CD for MSR Classics features two works by the Italian composer Luigi Perrachio. His name will be new to many of our readers (a check of the Fanfare Archive indicates no prior reviews of recordings of his music). And yet, Luigi Perrachio was an important and influential musician in 20th-century Italy. When I came across the score of the *Nove Poemetti* in the University of Colorado library back in the early 2000s, I knew I would have to do something with these pieces eventually. I'd never heard of Luigi Perrachio, but the music spoke to me immediately: fascinating textures that, while clearly reminiscent of Debussy and Ravel, had their own characteristic feel in the hands and in the ear. When I finally found the time to do more investigating, I discovered a composer who'd been pretty much completely forgotten since his death in 1966, but who made an important contribution to the flowering of Italian music, especially in the 1920s. I joke that Perrachio has no YouTube presence—a remarkable achievement for any obscure composer, actually. But what is so fascinating is that the music is actually wonderful and original and deserving to be played and heard. There are dribs and drabs of written material out there—a couple of articles in Italian conference proceedings in particular—but it's challenging to find much at all in the way of information about him. I'm looking forward to traveling to Turin (his birthplace and the city where he spent most of his life) to investigate the library there and see what other music turns up. Perrachio published relatively little. From dictionary article mentions, it is clear that there are more pieces out there waiting to be*

performed in the modern era—I'm particularly intrigued by the possibility of finding the unpublished First Violin Sonata as well as a piano quintet that he apparently composed in the late 1910s. Perrachio had his supporters in Italy of course, but it seems that he himself wasn't all that anxious for fame and fortune and was content enough with his life in Turin. In the early 1920s he started a group, the Double Quintet of Turin (strings, winds, piano, harp), that performed new music and had many works composed for it. Later he taught piano and composition at the conservatory there. So, his influence was quiet, but certainly felt by his students as well as by the composers whose music he championed.

Your new CD features two compositions by Perrachio for solo piano, both receiving world premieres on disc; Nove Poemetti and 25 Preludi. Tell us about the works, and how you discovered them.

Shortly after arriving at the University of Colorado, my colleague Carlo Caballero, a distinguished musicologist specializing in French music, pointed out to me and to Laurie Sampsel, then our head librarian, that there were a number of piano scores in our circulating collection with the bookplate of Ricardo Viñes. I had done my doctoral thesis on Ravel's *Miroirs*, and Viñes, a close friend of Ravel's, had done the premiere of the piece. I'd done quite a bit of research on Viñes, and was quite surprised to find his scores in Boulder, given that he'd never made it anywhere near. It turned out, as Laurie discovered, that Storm Bull, a longtime piano professor at CU, had come across an auction catalog offering of a significant number of items (800 at least) from Viñes's library, put on the market by his family. At Bull's urging, the music library purchased the lot for a pittance. Most of the music was very obscure indeed—every composer in Europe and many in the South America had wanted Viñes to play their music, and had sent him scores for perusal.

As part of my research for the article on the Ricardo Viñes Piano Music Collection at the University of Colorado that Laurie Sampsel and I coauthored for *Notes* (December 1, 2004; reproduced here:

<https://www.thefreelibrary.com/The+Ricardo+Vines+Piano+Music+Collection+at+the+University+of...-a0126236860>), I went through all of the scores in the collection and set aside a few for further investigation. Perrachio's *Nove Poemetti* struck me as outstanding, but a project to record music from the collection only got as far as a CD of works by French composers ([amazon.com/Ricardo-Vi%C3%B1es-Collection-David-Korevaar/dp/B000WC38K0](https://www.amazon.com/Ricardo-Vi%C3%B1es-Collection-David-Korevaar/dp/B000WC38K0)), and recording Perrachio was put aside for a while.

The opportunity arose to put together a recording session when I was planning to record my third volume of Lowell Liebermann's piano music (released last year, [msacd.com/catalog/cd/MS1688](https://www.msacd.com/catalog/cd/MS1688)) and piggy-backed time to do a Perrachio session. I'd done some investigating and discovered the existence of the 25 Preludes in the

meantime, and was intrigued by the number 25 (instead of the canonical 24). I got ahold of a score (out of print—Inter-Library Loan is my friend) and fell in love with these as well. For a composer who is essentially unrepresented on CD (there is one disc featuring harp music) and who has no presence on YouTube or other platforms, the surprise was to find that this music was absolutely first-rate and represented something personal and (to me at least) artistically important.

The Nine Poems and 25 Preludes, while by the same composer, seem to explore different artistic approaches and aesthetics.

The *Poemetti*, written in the late 1910s and early 1920s, reflect Perrachio's fascination with French music, fed in part by his time spent in Paris, where he met many important musical figures (including, I understand, Ravel and Debussy along with Ricardo Viñes). They are in a style that certainly relates to the styles of both of these composers, with elements of Impressionism as well as programmatic titles. Like Ravel and Debussy, Perrachio was a pianist, and his music reflects his own pianism as well as a somewhat different aesthetic in spite of the surface resemblance to the French composers' works. He certainly wasn't alone among Italians in exploring this style—his younger compatriot Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco's piano works of the same period investigate similar territory. Perrachio's approach has its own flavor for sure, including the quirky harmonic language and gallant dance rhythms of a piece like "Settecento" (1700s) the idiosyncratic notation and sound of "Libellule" (Dragonflies; dedicated to Viñes), the completely seductive simplicity of "Danzatrici a Lesbos" (Dancers of Lesbos) or the chant-like flavor of "La notte dei morti" (The Night of the Dead). His investigation of gorgeous stasis in "Pioggia" (Rain) is unlike anything else I've performed.

The Preludes, written just a few years later, show the composer in a very different place: these pieces are aphoristic, non-programmatic, and extraordinarily wide-ranging in their individual characters. While all but the last of *Poemetti* are in soft dynamics, the Preludes begin with several pieces that explore massive sonorities and dynamics up to *fff* (Nos. 1, 3, 4, 6, etc.). And the complex textures of the *Poemetti* have been replaced by a Neoclassical leanness and a striving for directness of expression and characterization. The overall dramatic impact of the set has been well thought out; the final prelude (an homage to J. S. Bach) brings us to a transcendently visionary place at the last, marking a remarkable contrast to the barrage of sound from the first half of the set.

You view Perrachio's 25 Preludes as adopting more of a Neoclassical approach. Do you perceive the influence of particular composers in this music?

I hear all kinds of things happening here: certainly his fellow Italians (Busoni, Casella, even Castelnuovo-Tedesco and the more Neoclassical side of Respighi). There is a nod to a kind of Italian folkloric style at times (No. 21 in particular), and

even to Chopin and the lyrical Liszt (No. 18 with shades of both Chopin's Nocturnes and Liszt's *Au lac du Wallenstein*). Something about the vigorous walk of the First Prelude brings to mind the (very different) Promenade in Mussorgsky's *Pictures*. Some of the harmonic ideas also seem Mussorgskian. I also hear something of the Stravinsky of the 1920s from time to time (the processional of No. 7). That said, it seems to me that what Perrachio has done here is created a kind of catalog of *his own* style: Understanding from his study of Debussy's music (he wrote a monograph on Debussy's piano music) the power of eclecticism, he has brought together all he knows and added his own personality to the mix.

In the 25 Preludes, Perrachio explores all 24 keys, based upon the circle of fifths, but he does so with his own individual twist.

The key scheme is interesting—there are two questions to answer: first, why 25?; second, why he chooses to arrange things in such a way that he can end in B \flat Major. There are 25 because Perrachio clearly believes that sharps and flats are different: He produces two major-key preludes for the enharmonic keys of F \sharp Major (6 sharps) and G \flat Major (6 flats). These, numbered 16 and 17, are given the same tempo indication (*Molto tranquillo e semplicissimo*) but sound completely different in terms of color. Number 16 ends on a half cadence, to make its connection to 17 clearer. No. 17 ends on a striking open fifth, leaving it also somewhat provisional in character. In terms of the larger key scheme, it would seem that Perrachio wants to end on Bach's initial (B \flat in German nomenclature). In order to achieve this while still beginning in the expected C Major, he makes a brief detour in Nos. 2 and 4 into the world of one flat (F Major and D Minor). In a further twist to expectations, he proceeds with pairs of preludes in major keys and pairs in minor keys (with the exception of No. 5), instead of alternating major and minor. Thus: C Major, F Major, A Minor, D Minor, G Major, E Minor, B Minor, D Major, A Major, F \sharp Minor, C \sharp Minor, etc. The first five are irregular, but from No. 6 on the pattern is completely regular until we finish with B \flat Major at No. 25.

What are the technical and interpretive challenges posed by the Nove Poemetti and 25 Preludi?

The biggest challenge for me with this music is that I am the first person to record it, and there is no extant performance tradition from Perrachio's time—no one has written about how to play it, no one has left us a recording. Thus, I need to make any number of educated guesses about what kind of pedaling, sound, and rhythmic approach to take to the pieces based on what I can learn of Perrachio's background (not much, in fact) and the influences he was exposed to. The other thing to mention is that the *Poemetti* show a pianist of idiosyncratic technical habits: His patterns are not like those of (say) Debussy and Ravel, in fact, but still work as

long as I try to imagine how he might have played (that is, they are clearly written by someone who is native to the instrument). In the Preludes, it is evident that his hands were fairly large, and the preponderance of large chords in the early preludes (especially Nos. 3 and 5) is challenging for someone like myself with an average-sized hand.

Your Perrachio recording makes me want to explore other works by this composer. Can you recommend a few? Do you have plans to record more of his music?

Here the big problem is that we have access to almost nothing—as I said before, the only other recording out there is of a few harp pieces. He published relatively little of his music, which means that sheet music is very hard to come by. I'm hoping to visit the library at the conservatory in Turin to explore its archive—in the hope that, among Perrachio's papers, I can find the scores to some pieces that I've read about that were not published, particularly a piano quintet and his First Violin Sonata (both from the late 1910s). If I find this music, I definitely would like to perform it and (if it is up to the quality of these piano pieces) record it. Here is a composer who actually wrote quite a bit, but almost nothing is in print and almost nothing has been recorded. I see this CD as offering a tantalizing first glance at an excellent composer, and hope to spark more interest in his music as a result.

What other concert and recording projects are on the horizon for you?

I'm taking a moment to think and catch up with myself, but am excited by the prospect of a proposed recording of the Rochberg Piano Quintet (an absolute masterpiece that I performed for the first time last fall) as well as further exploration of the chamber works of Joseph Jongen (I've performed his gorgeous Trio for Piano, Violin, and Viola a couple of times, and am interested in exploring the violin sonatas with my colleague Charles Wetherbee). Meanwhile, I'm also playing plenty of standard repertoire (the Second Book of the Debussy Préludes, plenty of Beethoven, etc.).

 **PERRACHIO** *Nove Poemetti. 25 Preludi* • David Korevaar
(p) • MSR 1710 (68:28)

One of my great pleasures in reviewing for *Fanfare* is the opportunity to hear first-rate recordings of worthwhile, but little-known, repertoire. And that is precisely what a new disc from MSR Classics provides. In my interview with David Korevaar, he outlines his discovery and recording of two works for solo piano by Luigi Perrachio (1883–1966). Born in Turin, Perrachio received his education both in his native city and Bologna. Perrachio traveled to France, where he was exposed to the music of such composers as Debussy and Ravel. Upon his return to Turin, Perrachio championed new music, and taught at the city's Music Conservatory. It seems that Perrachio, a modest and self-critical composer, published only a small

portion of his works. This recording features the world premiere of two Perrachio compositions, the *Nove Poemetti* (1917–20), and *25 Preludi* (1927). The *Nove Poemetti* (Nine Poems) are a collection of short works composed between 1917 and 1920. Most are accompanied in the score by a brief verse that complements the music. The 25 Preludes are in the tradition of like works by Bach, Chopin, Scriabin, and other composers. The *Poems* certainly evoke the artistic approach and sound world of such Impressionist composers as Debussy and Ravel. Like them, Perrachio is a master at manipulating rhythms, tonality, and keyboard color and technique in furtherance of the musical narrative. But while the influence of Debussy and Ravel is present, I never found Perrachio's music to be an attempt to copy his more famous colleagues, or at all derivative. The writing is often quite challenging technically (it appears Perrachio was a highly accomplished pianist), and at all times demands a master colorist. David Korevaar proves himself a superb advocate. His playing is technically brilliant, with a wonderful plasticity of phrasing and colors, and at all times displaying a captivating flow and momentum. Korevaar finds a more Neoclassical approach in the 25 Preludes, but also hears echoes of such composers as Respighi, Chopin, Liszt, and Mussorgsky. I agree, and might throw in a bit of Manuel de Falla for good measure. But once again, we have an accomplished composer speaking in his own voice. As in the case of the *Poems*, I found the Preludes to be highly attractive and compelling listening. That is a credit both to the composer, and of course, Korevaar's superb playing and interpretation. It's clear that discovering, learning, and performing Luigi Perrachio's music has been a labor of love for David Korevaar. His superb liner notes include an essay on Perrachio and the works included on the disc, including the various texts (and translations) of the verse that inspired the *Poemetti*. The recorded sound is as admirable as Korevaar's performances, offering a superbly realistic reproduction of the piano's (an SK-EX) sound, and placing the listener in a center orchestra seat. I loved this disc; I both give it my highest recommendation, and look forward to including it on my next Want List. **Ken Meltzer**

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