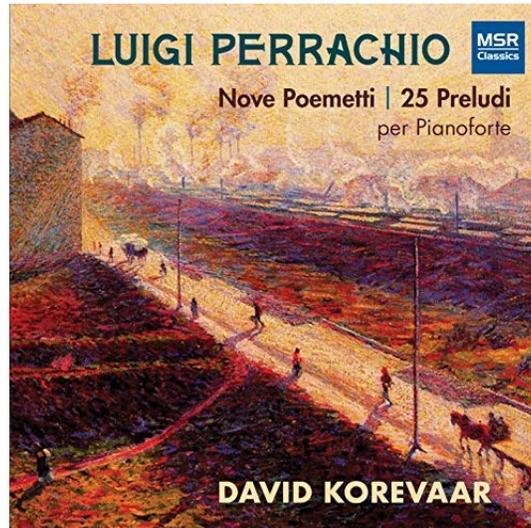


FEATURE REVIEW by [Huntley Dent](#)

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



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

AUDIO CD

MSR Classics



The all-but-forgotten Italian composer Luigi Perrachio might be less obscure if he hadn't been so modest. Born in 1883 in Turin, the same time and place as Alfredo Casella, Perrachio was earning critical praise before any of his pieces had been published or performed in public. It took "significant arm-twisting from his supporters" to persuade Perrachio to publish, and we are the latest beneficiaries. He clearly has an individual voice and an appealing style. Moreover, the genre of Italian piano music in the exciting dawn of Modernism has been almost as neglected as Perrachio himself.

Sojourns in Paris made a critical difference in the music of major Spanish composers like Falla, Turina, and Albéniz, but the city's allure wasn't lost on Italian composers, either. As one immediately hears in Perrachio's *Nove Poemetti* (Nine Little Poems), he was entranced by the new piano language of Debussy and Ravel that he encountered in Paris. Composed between 1917 and 1920, these character pieces have the trappings of French music from that era: literary epigraphs and titles referring to ephemera (No. 2, "Zephyr"; No. 4, "Dragonflies") or Debussyan moods (No. 1, "Evening"; No. 9, "Sea"). There are

Impressionistic keyboard gestures like sprays of glittering decorative notes, a soft bass line of pedal chords, and nods to whole note and modal scales.

Perrachio handles these elements with unusual delicacy—as befits such a modest person, this is often overheard music rather than public utterance. Sometimes, as in No. 3 “Night of the Dead,” it’s impossible not to notice a close resemblance to the solemn, processional “Engulfed Cathedral” of Debussy, while several of the scintillating pieces like “Dragonflies” echo Ravel’s *Miroirs*. Most of the time, however, we hear a composer who is not quite a follower and not quite an original. There’s no harm in that when you have charm at your fingertips.

The rediscovery of Perrachio represented by this disc is owed to its performer, the accomplished pianist David Korevaar. An admired recitalist and recording artist, Korevaar teaches at the University of Colorado Boulder, and it was in the university’s archives that he discovered a very rare bound copy of the *Nove Poemetti* inscribed by the composer. As he tells us in his readable and informative program note, Korevaar was much taken by these pieces, and he applies sympathy and sensitivity to music that needs both. His touch is worthy of Debussy and Ravel, his phrasing captures the melodic line with an unerring ear, and he incorporates the quicksilver Impressionist gestures with delicacy. The result is that the poetry intended by Perrachio comes through perfectly.

After writing a 300-page monograph on *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, Perrachio was inspired in 1927 to compose his own set of Preludes—the number is 25 instead of 24 because he gives two enharmonic keys, F♯ Major (six sharps) and G♭ Major (six flats), separate preludes in order to show their different coloration. Korevaar points out that although the *Preludi* refer explicitly to Bach in a written note, the model for the sequence of keys is the circle of fifths adopted by Chopin. Perrachio made a modification by arranging the keys as major-major-minor-minor rather than Chopin’s major-minor-major-minor.

Korevaar also feels that the idiom is Neoclassical, as opposed to the Impressionism of the *Nove Poemetti*. As I hear these mostly modest pieces based on a single idea, it would be the rather utilitarian Neoclassicism of Hindemith, eliminating superfluous notes, with a touch of didactic études. Perrachio isn’t adventurous harmonically or colorful in the manner of Preludes by Debussy and Scriabin. I don’t mean to imply that these pieces, which last between 29 seconds and three minutes, are dry. They are each engaging, often suggesting improvisation, and mostly light-hearted—Perrachio’s *jeu d’esprit* comes through. There are moments of gravity and self-reflection, too. Korevaar captures the whole spectrum artfully. Great composers eventually get the acclaim they deserve; many good-to-very-good composers do not. Perrachio, who died in 1966, teaching piano lessons to the end, falls into that category. One is grateful that he has re-emerged, not because his

music is so startlingly original but because it is so personal—that's worth celebrating in its own right. **Huntley Dent**

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