

GIAN CARLO MENOTTI

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ABOUT THE COMPOSER

Foreword

Gian Carlo Menotti, Italian-American composer and librettist, was born in Cadegliano-Viconago, Italy, on July 7, 1911, and died in Monte Carlo, Monaco, on February 1, 2007. He studied at the Milan Conservatory and the Curtis Institute of Music, where he subsequently taught. At Curtis, Menotti studied composition with Rosario Scalerò and began a long career of writing operas, first in Italian and later in English. He also wrote his own libretti, two for American composer Samuel Barber (1910–1981), his lifelong companion. Several of Menotti’s operas were written for radio or for television. In addition, Menotti wrote ballets, choral works, cantatas, a Mass, a violin concerto, a piano concerto, a triple concerto, a song cycle, a suite for two cellos, three solo piano works, and several other unpublished works.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Menotti published three works for solo piano: *Poemetti per Maria Rosa: 12 Pieces for Children* (1937), piano selections based on the popular television opera *Amahl and the Night Visitors* (1951), and *Ricerca and Toccata on a Theme from “The Old Maid and the Thief”* (1953).

Menotti’s *The Old Maid and the Thief*

Following the success of Menotti’s opera *Amelia al ballo* (*Amelia Goes to the Ball*), NBC commissioned Menotti for a radio opera. The result was Menotti’s first opera in English, *The Old Maid and the Thief*. The successful one-act opera premiered on April 22, 1939, with Alberto Erede conducting the NBC Symphony Orchestra, and was later adapted for the stage.

The opera is composed in *opera buffa* (comic opera) style with 14 discrete scenes rather than a through-composed form, a format well-suited for radio. The plot concerns Bob, a handsome beggar, who wanders one day to the doorstep of town spinster Miss Todd. Laetitia, the young maid of the house, convinces Miss Todd to talk to him. Taken by his good looks, they convince him to stay the night for rest and a meal. He captivates them with his wit and storytelling, leading them the next morning to persuade him to stay for another week. Confusion later ensues when Bob is mistaken for an escaped thief and suspicions are raised in the town. Frightened by the news but helpless to Bob’s charm and desperate to win his affections, Miss Todd steals money from her neighbors and alcohol from a local liquor store to give to Bob. After a confrontation with him, Bob reveals that he is not the thief everyone suspects him to be. As an argument unfolds between them, Miss Todd threatens to turn him over to the authorities even though he has done nothing wrong. When she goes to get the police, Laetitia convinces Bob to run away with her. They flee, but only after snatching up Miss Todd’s valuables—including her car—leaving her with nothing.

In a 1993 dissertation, Sylvia Watkins Ryan explains how Menotti derived a solo piano piece from this opera:

Twelve years after the successful radio premiere in 1939 of *The Old Maid and the Thief*, Menotti selected a bold three-measure motto theme from the opera’s third scene as the germ for his most advanced piano composition. *Ricerca and Toccata on a Theme from “The Old Maid and the Thief”* was composed in 1951 and premiered on November 1 of that same year in Town Hall by Ania Dorfmann, to whom it was dedicated.¹

¹ Sylvia Watkins Ryan, “The Solo Piano Music of Gian-Carlo Menotti: A Pedagogical and Performance Analysis” (DMA diss., University of Oklahoma, 1993), 103–104.

Toccata

Allegro e sempre a tempo (♩ = ca. 108–112)

The musical score consists of six systems of two staves each (treble and bass clef). Measure numbers 5, 8, 11, 14, and 17 are indicated in boxes at the start of their respective systems. The piece begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic and a tempo marking of "Allegro e sempre a tempo" with a quarter note equal to approximately 108-112 beats per minute. The score includes various dynamic markings: *f*, *ff*, *p*, and *pp*. It features complex fingering (1-5) and articulation (accents, slurs) throughout. A "CNS" marking is present above the first system. The piece concludes with a *pp* dynamic in measure 17.