

The Music of a Spiritual and Transparent Language
Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco's Unpublished Settings
of Whitman and Shakespeare
and Rare Settings of Modern American Poets

Aloma Bardi



Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco (1895-1968) at his desk, working on a score; Florence, early 1930s. Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco Papers, The Library of Congress Music Division, Washington, D.C., Box 143, Folder 14/5; reproduced by permission.

Opening Remarks

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Aloma Bardi. I direct ICAMus - The International Center for American Music, the Organization offering this session—illuminated with live performance—on Florence-born American composer Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco (1895-1968).

Our warmest thanks to:

the "Intersections" Conference and its Organizing Committee, for having us here today, in the beautiful Palazzo dei Cerchi;

to the Library of Congress Music Division, where the Castelnuovo-Tedesco Papers are located, and to curator Kate Rivers;

to Dr. James Westby, longtime scholar of Castelnuovo-Tedesco's biography, music, and catalogue of works, for his generous encouragement, and for providing constant historical advice and research materials.

Special thanks to the composer's family, for their support to the research.

We are honored by the presence of Marinetta Piva from Florence, and Diana Castelnuovo-Tedesco, the composer's granddaughter, from New York. Her mother, the late Ms. Lisbeth Castelnuovo-Tedesco (1936-2014), was for many years the copyright manager for this composer's music. Today we remember her.





Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Photographic studio portrait; A. Cattani & Figli, Florence, 10 October 1921. Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco Papers, The Library of Congress Music Division, Washington, D.C., Box 143, Folder 6; reproduced by permission.

This session focuses on a prominent figure of the 20th century. Italian Jewish composer Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco was born in Florence in 1895 and lived in his beloved city until—after the promulgation of the Racial Laws—he was forced to expatriate with his family to the United States, shortly before the outbreak of World War II. In America he would live for the rest of his life, and only occasionally would he return to Florence.

A cosmopolitan polyglot of wide cultural horizons, in the 1920s and 1930s he had a brilliant Italian and European career as a concert pianist, a widely-published composer and music critic. His works were performed by the most prestigious soloists, conductors, orchestras, institutions: Jascha Heifetz, Arturo Toscanini, the New York Philharmonic, the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino.

After the enforcement of the Racial Laws, with the help of Heifetz, Toscanini, and of violinist Albert Spalding, Castelnuovo-Tedesco and his family left Italy in the summer of 1939. They eventually settled in Beverly Hills, California, where he started a new career as composer for film scores at the MGM Studios in Hollywood. An American citizen since 1946, he died in Beverly Hills in 1968. A life—and a career—divided in exactly two parts.



Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco in his studio; Beverly Hills, 1960s. Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco Papers, The Library of Congress Music Division, Washington, D.C., Box 144, Folder 15; reproduced by permission.

Castelnuovo-Tedesco composed for virtually all genres, for vocal and instrumental ensembles: operas, oratorios, concertos for solo instrument and orchestra, chamber music, songs. Influenced by his teacher Ildebrando Pizzetti (1880-1968), he was profoundly interested in setting poetry to music. In his art songs, he integrates a musical style of lyrical immediacy, with an intense love for literature and the arts. In his important 1944 article *Music and Poetry: Problems of a Song-Writer*,¹ he wrote: «My ambition—even more than that, a profound urge within me—has always been to unite my music to poetic texts that arouse my interest and emotion, [...] to stamp them with the authentic and therefore undetachable seal of melody, to give utterance to the music that is latent within them, and, in doing so, to discover their real source in the emotions that brought them into being».² A straightforward statement of poetics; equally striking is this composer's lifelong loyalty to it.

Among the several languages and literatures he drew inspiration from, the English language has special prominence, as well as the English and American literature. In *Music and Poetry*, he wrote: «I am surprised that its musicality [of the English language] is so often doubted [...] To be sure, English does present some remarkable difficulties to the song-writer. One, for example, is the great number of monosyllabic words, which it is difficult to distribute over a melody in an expressive fashion and, at the same time, with correct accentuation. But, on the other hand, it is perhaps just this—its very lack of “sonorous substance”—that lends English its charm, and makes it one of the most “spiritual” and transparent languages I know».³

In the summer of 1936, in Florence and other locations in Tuscany, Castelnuovo-Tedesco discovered and fell in love with Walt Whitman. He set 12 Whitman poems; these songs comprise his Opus 89. In the order of composition, they are: *Louisiana*, Opus 89a; the 10-song cycle *Leaves of Grass*, Opus 89b; and *Ocean*, Opus 89c. All of them are unpublished except *Louisiana*,⁴ which is the opening song on our musical program today.

Louisiana (set on May 26-27, 1936) was Castelnuovo's first Whitman song. The composer perceives a secret sequence in Whitman's poetic imagination. *Live Oak, with Moss* was indeed among the first “germinations” of Whitman's *Calamus*, being a part of,

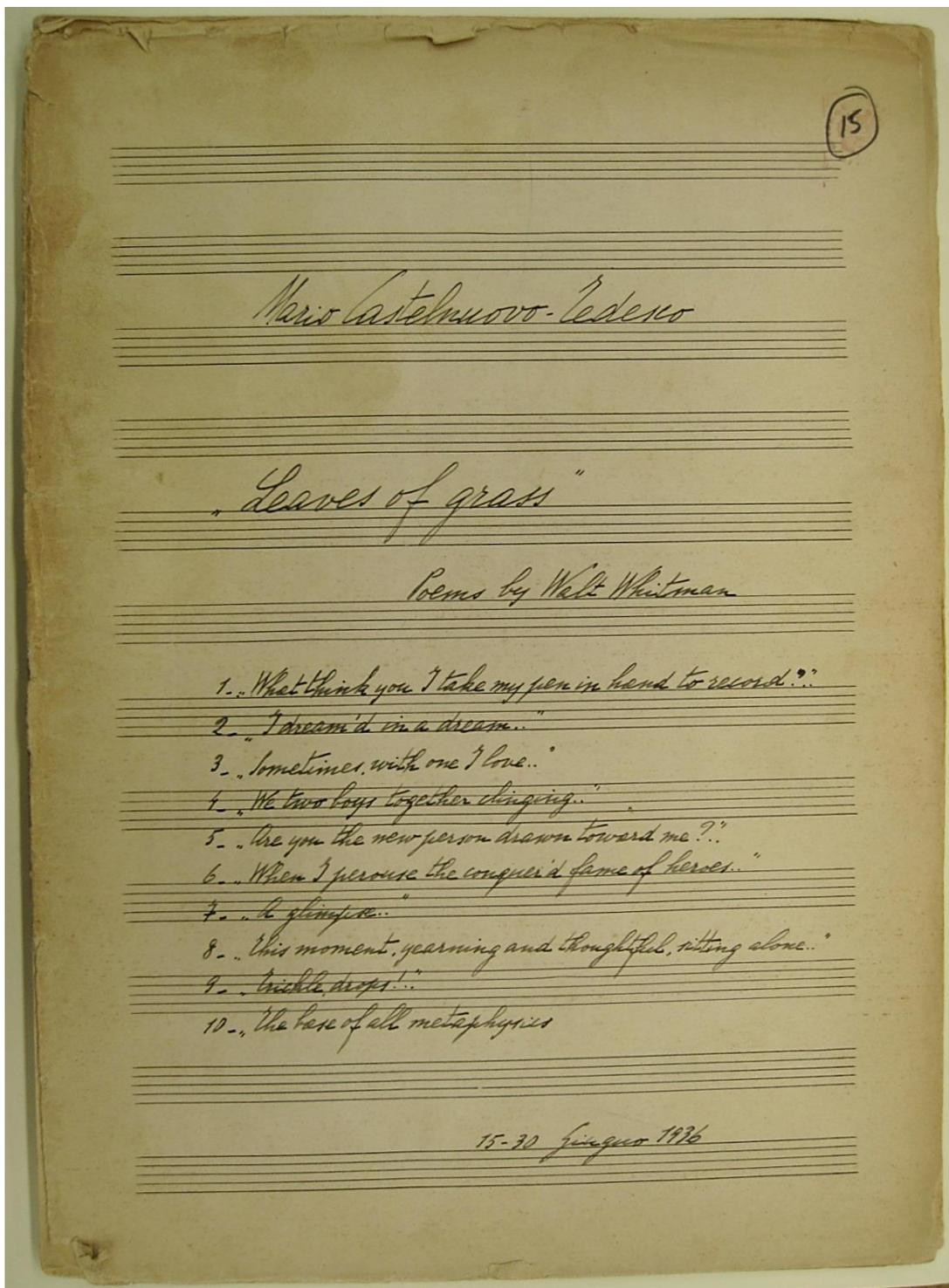
¹ Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *Music and Poetry: Problems of a Song-Writer*, «The Musical Quarterly», Vol. 30, No. 1 - Jan., 1944; pp. 102-111.

² Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *Music and Poetry*, p. 102.

³ Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *Music and Poetry*, pp. 107-108.

⁴ Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *Louisiana* (Walt Whitman), Galaxy Music Corp., 1940.

and giving the original title to the set of poems constituting, as early as the late 1850s, the prehistory of this fundamental cluster within the genesis of *Leaves of Grass*.



Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *Leaves of Grass*, Op. 89b: Cover Page and Index; holograph manuscript; Florence, dated 15-30 June 1936; unpublished. Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco Papers, The Library of Congress Music Division, Washington, D.C., Box 17, Folder 10; reproduced by permission.

The attention of Castelnuovo-Tedesco to the poetic text and the musicality of the English language stands out in the 50-page unpublished *Leaves of Grass* song cycle.⁵ Here, he set nine poems selected from the *Calamus* cluster of the 1860 edition of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, plus one poem (set as the final song, *And now gentlemen - The Base of All Metaphysics*) that was added by Whitman in 1871.

The significance of Castelnuovo Tedesco's re-reading of Whitman's *Calamus*, his creation of a new sequence, is illuminated by the fundamental values he devised in the great American poet: attraction and fraternal love, between individuals and among countries.

In Italy there was a lively interest in American literature, especially among antifascist intellectuals: it meant modernity and freedom from the rhetoric of the fascist regime.

Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco expressed his views on musical freedom in Italy in the fascist era. On September 14-17, 1944, the composer participated in a conference of The Musicians Congress Record at UCLA. He lectured in the session "Music Under Fascism"; The other participants were Theodor W. Adorno, Hanns Eisler, Paul Nettl, and Walter H. Rubsamen, Chairman.

In his unpublished conference paper *Music under Italian Fascism*,⁶ Castelnuovo-Tedesco mentions a second phase of music under fascism, after «the period of organization» (1922-1933), «that of the absorption by the State of all musical activities» (1933-1938). He composed his Whitman settings in Italy during that time period, the time of suppression of free enterprise in every art field.

He devotes noteworthy pages of this paper to the analysis of the fascist attitude towards music in Italy during those years that, in his analysis, appear to have been crucial for the development of the fascist aesthetics. Also, they were the years of expansionism and conquest. On the other hand, he observes, in contradiction with the intent of the absorption by the State of all musical activities, there was no attempt to create a specific "Fascist Music", and fascism was more "open" than one would have thought.

⁵ Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *Leaves of Grass*, Op. 89b; holograph manuscript; Florence, dated 15-30 June 1936; 50 pages, unpublished. Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco Papers, The Library of Congress Music Division, Washington, D.C., Box 17, Folder 10.

⁶ Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *Music under Italian Fascism*, unpublished conference paper; the manuscript and typescript are housed at The Library of Congress Music Division, Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco Papers, Box 116, Folder 17.

The composer notes that, for instance, two intelligent musicians were named as superintendents in Florence and Venice, Mario Labroca and Goffredo Petrassi: «They were both composers of the most advanced trend, both had very broad and progressive views.». On the other hand, he writes that «until 1933, the personal political opinion of the teachers had been, at least in private life, respected; now they were compelled, under menace of being dismissed, to join all the Fascist Party and to swear allegiance to the Régime!... I know it was a hard moment and a bitter choice for many ones; a few, in the Universities, refused; none, as far as I know, in the Schools of Music.»⁷

Castelnuovo-Tedesco then continues his comments, observing that the period between 1933 and 1937 «was also, in the political and international field, the “period of folly,” which led to the Ethiopian War and to the Intervention in Spain... By 1937 the “regimentation” was complete; every branch of music was under State’s control, except... for the brains of the composers!» Exactly here he observes how «the Fascist Government had made no attempt to create a specific “Fascist Music”» or at least there were not many and successful attempts, while that happened in literature and the arts.⁸

Such was the environment, as described by Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco himself, in which he created his 1936 Whitman settings, *Louisiana* Opus 89a, *Leaves of Grass* Opus 89b, and *Ocean* Opus 89c. In these songs, Castelnuovo-Tedesco, in his quiet way, certainly opposed dictatorship «as it endangers the most sacred and elementary right of men (both as individuals and as communities): the “freedom of thought and of work”».⁹

The text-oriented musical poetics of Castelnuovo-Tedesco in the *Leaves of Grass* cycle dictates its lyricism, its modernist but free approach to composition. It is a true cycle of inseparable songs, like Schubert’s or Schumann’s cycles of Romantic Lieder, developing a narrative, with an increasingly explicit reappearance of musical themes, especially notable in the final transition from Song IX, *Trickle drops!*,¹⁰ into Song X, *And now gentlemen – The base of all metaphysics*.¹¹ On today’s program, we will listen to Song No. IX, *Trickle drops!*

⁷ Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *Music under Italian Fascism*, p. 12 of the revised manuscript.

⁸ Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *Music under Italian Fascism*, pp. 14-15.

⁹ Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *Music under Italian Fascism*, conference paper conclusion, p. 19 (last page of manuscript).

¹⁰ *Trickle drops!*, Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *Leaves of Grass* (Walt Whitman), Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco Papers, The Library of Congress Music Division, Washington, D.C., Box 17, Folder 10; pp. 37-43 of unpublished manuscript.

¹¹ *And now gentlemen – The base of all metaphysics*, Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *Leaves of Grass* (Walt Whitman), Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco Papers, The Library of Congress Music Division, Washington, D.C., Box 17, Folder 10; pp. 44-50 of unpublished manuscript.

The inspiration from Schubert is a Romantic trait of the Whitman settings. Before immigrating to America, the composer was a concert pianist; he frequently accompanied singers such as Lotte Lehmann and Elisabeth Schumann in Schubert and Schumann Lieder recitals.

In his 1932 essay on Schubert,¹² which is an expanded review of the first important book on Franz Schubert published in Italian, by Mary Tibaldi-Chiesa, Castelnuovo-Tedesco extensively comments on the Lieder, that he regards as Schubert's highest creations: «The balance between the voice and the accompaniment, between the word and the sound, is nearly always perfect». Of Schubert's Lieder he praises «the simple immediacy, the innocence and candor, the overwhelming power». This description would equally apply to his own Whitman Songs.

Although the article reflects an early stage of serious, documented consideration of Schubert, with residual underratings and hurried judgments (for instance, about the Piano Sonatas; but at the time so little was known about Schubert!), its conclusive paragraph is deeply felt and illuminating: «If a modest artist of today were permitted to envy a great man of the past [...] I would wish to have composed—rather than a passionate opera, a sonorous symphony or a masterful fugue—one of these pure and simple melodies: one would say that *Du bist die Ruh* or *Litenei für das Fest "Aller Seelen"* were dictated by God for the consolation of men».¹³

In conclusion, the prominence of Whitman from the New World, Whitman the «great fraternal soul»¹⁴ was passionately stated in a song cycle whose style pays homage to Schubert, Schumann and Brahms, and to the melodic gift of the Italian vocal tradition. The American poet acquires the status of a classic.

¹² *Schubert*, review of Mary Tibaldi-Chiesa, *Schubert. La vita - L'opera*, Treves-Treccani Tumminelli, Roma 1932, in the series "I grandi musicisti italiani e stranieri" directed by Carlo Gatti; Castelnuovo-Tedesco's review appeared in «Pegaso», Anno IV, No. 11, Novembre 1932.

¹³ Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Review of Mary Tibaldi-Chiesa, *Schubert. La vita - L'opera*, p. 629.

¹⁴ Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *Music and Poetry*, p. 108: «Walt Whitman, that great fraternal soul».



Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco beginning life in America, outside his new house in Larchmont, N.Y.; autumn 1939. Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco Papers, The Library of Congress Music Division, Washington, D.C., Box 144, Folder 1; reproduced by permission.

In the US from 1939, Castelnuovo-Tedesco also set to music contemporary American poems, by Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892-1950) and Arthur Guiterman (1871-1943), both well known in their time. By St. Vincent Millay, he set *Recuerdo* and *Tavern* (unpublished manuscript). By Guiterman, he set *The Legend of Jonas Bronck* and *New York*.

These songs date from 1940-1941. Among Castelnuovo-Tedesco's earliest American works, they express the composer's settling in the United States. He captures the humor of the poems, with a sentiment of discovery, and with reminiscences of American musical styles.

Of *Reuerdo*, Op. 105,¹⁵ Castelnuovo-Tedesco wrote in his autobiography *Una vita di musica [A Life with Music]*: «It was set to a delightful poem by Edna St. Vincent Millay. Despite its Spanish title, it has a definitely American character, in fact a New York character. It is about a young couple of lovers at dawn on a ferry boat. The music is carefree and indolent, somehow in the manner of Gershwin».¹⁶

As for *The Legend of Jonas Bronck*,¹⁷ the composer was inspired by Guiterman's humorous outlook at American History—and at immigration. *Jonas Bronck* was a 17th-century immigrant who came from the Netherlands or Denmark in search for opportunities, and ended up to found a city: The Bronx. Castelnuovo-Tedesco was a recent immigrant. In this song, the onomatopoeic of the name "Bronck" and of the toponym "Bronx" blend imaginatively, and to a comical effect, with the sonorous comment of the... calling of frogs.

This attempt at creating an "American repertoire" shows Castelnuovo-Tedesco's short-lived hope to begin an American career of classical pianist and published composer, as an extension of his pre-war European career.

In our live performance, today we are going to present these two mentioned songs, *Reuerdo* and *The Legend of Jonas Bronck*.

If Whitman's poetry was a sudden discovery, William Shakespeare was for Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco a constant source of musical interest. Over the years, he produced numerous works inspired by his most admired English poet.

Castelnuovo-Tedesco experienced his love for Shakespeare as answering a call from the poet himself. In his 1940 article *Shakespeare and Music*,¹⁸ he states that

¹⁵ Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *Reuerdo* (Edna St. Vincent Millay), Op. 105; composed: 1941; published: Carl Fischer, New York 1941.

¹⁶ Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *Una vita di musica (un libro di ricordi)*, a cura di James Westby, introduzione di Mila De Santis, cura editoriale di Ulla Casalini, Cadmo, Fiesole 2005, p. 327. Castelnuovo-Tedesco's Autobiography was written in the United States, mostly in the 1950s.

¹⁷ Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *The Legend of Jonas Bronck* (Arthur Guiterman), composed: 1941; published: Galaxy Music Corp., 1941.

¹⁸ Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *Shakespeare and Music*, «Shakespeare Association Bulletin», Vol. XV, No. 3 (July, 1940), pp. 166-174; Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco Papers, Writings, Box 115, Folder 28. The folder in the Collection contains handwritten preparatory notes in French (2 pages) and French text (12 pages) titled

Shakespeare «asked for musical collaboration as a necessary element for completing the poetic expression».¹⁹ He then comments on the Songs. He also explores «Shakespearean music», that is, instrumental music by different authors, inspired by the poet, first of all the Overtures, including his own five Overtures to *The Taming of the Shrew*, Op. 61 (1930), *The Twelfth Night*, Op. 73 (1933), *The Merchant of Venice*, Op. 76 (1933), *Julius Caesar*, Op. 78 (1934) and *The Winter's Tale*, Op. 80 (1934), all of them published by Ricordi.

He finally deals with symphonic poems, incidental music, and operas inspired by Shakespearean subjects.

Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco gave great importance to the full respect of the original Shakespeare text. In *Shakespeare and Music*, he complains that even great Purcell, «although English, did not have recourse to the original text of Shakespeare (a fact which greatly diminishes his importance) but he employed the adaptations of librettists often unfortunate, as for instance, Shadwell, whom his contemporaries called "the assassin of Shakespeare!"».²⁰ Castelnuovo-Tedesco here judges Purcell not from the perspective of baroque opera, but from his own standpoint, that of text-oriented modern music.

In addition, the composer wonders whether opera is «truly the ideal form to express the humanity, the fantasy, the poetic essence of Shakespeare, to realize the musical collaboration which the poet wished». His answer is that he doubts it. In the first place, because of the language.

Shakespeare is, in Castelnuovo-Tedesco's opinion, untranslatable: «His English is a perfectly musical language: I dare say (from my experience with it) that it unites the spiritual subtlety of English with the sonorous splendor of Italian. We must therefore approach him in English (and with the original text) and it is perhaps for the musician whose language is English to say the final word on the subject, to recapture and to complete the heritage left unfinished by Purcell.»²¹

There are other significant writings by Castelnuovo-Tedesco where he explains his relationship to Shakespeare: his program notes to *Much Ado About Nothing*, Op. 164,²² and *Confessione di un autore: Il Mercante di Venezia* [*Confession of an Author: The*

Shakespeare and Music: Outlines for an essay on Shakespearean music, 2 copies of the «Bulletin» reprint, and a photocopy of the «Bulletin» pages; the final article was in English.

¹⁹ Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *Shakespeare and Music*, p. 166.

²⁰ Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *Shakespeare and Music*, p. 170.

²¹ Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *Shakespeare and Music*, p. 172.

²² Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Program notes to *Much Ado About Nothing*, Op. 164; Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco Papers, Box 116, Folder 5.

Merchant of Venice].²³ In this latter essay, he states once again that Shakespeare had always been his favorite poet, and again he stresses the importance of the original text, even at the cost of being accused of snobbery ("snobismo"), as it had happened to him for setting the original text of the Shakespeare Songs.

In his article *Lettera da Firenze*,²⁴ Castelnuovo-Tedesco titles the eighth section of the article *Perché ho musicato Shakespeare in inglese* [*Why I set Shakespeare in English*]. Discussing his *Shakespeare Songs*, he recalls the composer Antonio Veretti asking him why he set the English poet in the original language: did he believe the Italian language to be insufficient, or not beautiful enough? Why did he set a foreign language? Castelnuovo-Tedesco replies in this article that a «mised nationalism (that can also become provincialism) should not set limitations to the creations of an artist, should not prevent him from appreciating the beauties of other literatures, that can be, or are, deeply musical, too. True, the fact that an Italian composer sets English words is quite unusual; but how many among our composers set to music French poems? Did we perhaps criticize them for this?». He affirms the musical quality of the English language from an unprejudiced and cosmopolitan intellectual perspective, much ahead of his time.

Castelnuovo-Tedesco's *Shakespeare Songs* were written in 1921-1925 and published by Chester in 1926. The composer even played a group of them, accompanying Madeleine Grey, on the occasion of a visit to D'Annunzio at Il Vittoriale.

Already in the early 1920s, in Florence, Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco had addressed the question whether Shakespeare should be set in the original English text or in an Italian translation²⁵. The *Shakespeare Songs* offered him the opportunity to approach more closely Shakespeare's style, and to study more deeply the English language.

The decision was made to set the poet's original English text, and Castelnuovo-Tedesco began the composition. In *Una vita di musica*, he writes: «Setting Shakespeare turned out to be so easy and natural to me! With his immense variety, his profound knowledge of the human heart, his concise and perfect form, he was just the poet for me, who had in vain looked for his equivalent in Italian literature! In him I also found that mixture which I had been looking for in comedy: the expression of the tragic and the comic

²³ Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *Confessione di un autore: Il Mercante di Venezia* [*Confession of an Author: The Merchant of Venice*]; published in: *Maggio Musicale Fiorentino 1961*, "Numero Unico" printed by Teatro Comunale di Firenze; Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco Papers, Box 116, Folder 7; handwritten draft copy with corrections, 10 pages, signed; typed copy, 10 pages, signed.

²⁴ Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *Lettera da Firenze*, «Il Pianoforte», aprile 1929.

²⁵ Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *Una vita di musica*, p. 147.

element (and also the imaginary). [...] Soon after completing the *Shakespeare Songs* cycle, I naturally thought of the Sonnets by the same poet. But they presented very great problems of concept and form, and I was not sufficiently mature for this, neither spiritually nor musically. So I waited twenty years, and eventually set them only in 1945. The still unpublished *Shakespeare Sonnets* are particularly dear to me, and are perhaps more intense and profound than the *Songs*, although they do not have their variety and pleasantness.»²⁶

Singing the Shakespeare word, meant for Castelnuovo-Tedesco acknowledging the supremacy of prosody. In his autobiography, he criticizes Stravinsky for his «nearly always arbitrary and incorrect prosody» and the «almost disturbing results in his *Shakespeare Songs*».²⁷ (But, he adds, this is of course true for the entire body of musical setting of poetry by this composer, in various languages.)

Among the pieces inspired by Shakespeare, completed after the *Songs*, are the already mentioned orchestral Overtures to individual plays («The Overtures to the operas I will never compose», Castelnuovo-Tedesco would jokingly repeat), written over a span of decades (1930-1953). Five of them were composed in Italy, mostly in Usigliano and Castiglioncello; in America, he resumed the project with a second series, and composed the Overture to *Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1940. The second series of the Shakespeare Overtures continued with *King John* (1941), *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus* (both 1947).

The last Shakespearean season was in 1953, with *Much Ado about Nothing* and *As You Like it*, followed in the same year by the orchestral *Four Dances for "Love's Labour's Lost"*.

In 1954-1958, Castelnuovo-Tedesco composed the opera *All's Well That Ends Well*, to a libretto in English and in Italian. This was notably followed by *The Merchant of Venice*, written in 1956.

He also set the still unpublished *Three Shakespeare Duets* op. 97 for soprano, tenor and orchestra²⁸ for the Duo Clovis-Steele. And he transcribed for violin, for Jascha Heifetz, some *Shakespeare Songs*.

²⁶ Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *Una vita di musica*, p. 156.

²⁷ Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *Una vita di musica*, pp. 410-411.

²⁸ Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *Three Shakespeare Duets*, Op. 97 for soprano, tenor and orchestra; 1937, unpublished; Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco Papers, Box 23, Folders 3, 4, 5.

Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco

SHAKESPEARE SONNETS

- 1 - No. VIII - "Music to hear, why heart thou music sadly?"
- 2 - No. XXIV - "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?"
- 3 - No. XXIX - "When in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes."
- 4 - No. XXX - "When to the sessions of sweet silent thought"
- 5 - No. XXXI - "Thy bosom is endeared with all hearts"
- 6 - No. XXXII - "If thou survive my well-contented day"
- 7 - No. LIII - "What is your substance whereof are you made?"
- 8 - No. LVII - "Being your slave, what should I do but tend?"
- 9 - No. LX - "Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore"
- 10 - No. LXXIV - "When I have seen by Time's fell hand defaced"
- 11 - No. LXXV - "Time breaks, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundary see"
- 12 - No. LXXVII - "That time of year you mayt in me behold"
- 13 - No. LXXXVII - "Farewell! thou art to dear for my possessing"
- 14 - No. XC - "Thou hast me when thou wilt, if ever won!"
- 15 - No. XCIV - "They that have power to hurt, and will do none"
- 16 - No. XCVII - "How like a winter hath my absence been"
- 17 - No. XCVIII - "From you have I been absent in the spring"
- 18 - No. CII - "My love is strengthen'd, though more weak in seeming"
- 19 - No. CTV - "To me, fair friend, you never can be old"
- 20 - No. CV - "Let not my love be called idolatry"
- 21 - No. CVI - "When in the chronicle of wasted time"
- 22 - No. CVIX - "O, never say that I was false of heart"
- 23 - No. CXX - "Let me not to the marriage of true minds"
- 24 - No. CXXVIII - "How oft, when thou, my music, music play'st"
- 25 - No. CXXXIX - "Th'expense of spirit in a waste of shame"
- 26 - No. CXLVI - "Pena, love, the centre of my night and day"
- 27 - No. CLIV - "The little Love-god, lying once asleep"
- 28 - No. CXXVII - "Weary with toil, I haste me to my bed"

Beverly Hills, Calif. 1944-45

Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *Shakespeare Sonnets*, Op. 125: Index Page; holograph manuscript; Beverly Hills, 1945; unpublished. Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco Papers, The Library of Congress Music Division, Washington, D.C., Box 37, Folder 1; reproduced by permission.

In his American years, the composer selected thirty-two Shakespeare's Sonnets out of the 154 comprising the canon. Opus 125 (twenty-eight Sonnets) was composed in 1944-1945 and 1947. In 1963, four more Sonnets were set as Addenda to Opus 125.

Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco's thirty-two *Shakespeare Sonnets*, Opus 125 are a 172-page unpublished manuscript, housed at the Library of Congress.

To the «solitary and proud group of the *Shakespeare Sonnets*», as he defines them,²⁹ Castelnuovo-Tedesco devotes Chapter 89 of his autobiography:³⁰ «Perhaps they do not have the variety and pleasantness of the *Shakespeare Songs* (nor could they have it) but I believe them to be, in the marriage, so to speak, of the voice and the piano comment, more perfect, and I regard them as far as songs go, as my highest accomplishment. It is a work of which (I confess) I am particularly proud, also for its quantity and body. While the Songs have been set to music innumerable times by composers of all ages, very few dared approach the Sonnets, and never in this number (Vanity? Ambition? Perhaps!). Also for this reason I never decided to publish them; in addition to the general objection of the publishers, that these poems are too obscure for the audience and the average singer, no one (at least in America, in these times) would have dared publish, even in sections, a manuscripts that exceeds 160 pages! So, although some publishers offered to print a few pieces, I preferred to decline and leave them unpublished, at least for the time being.

Should I therefore regard them among my "unlucky works"? Certainly not! In fact, I believe it very fortunate to have reached (after many years of various experiences) such an accomplished lyrical expression as that of the *Sonnets*; I am also certain that, if they are ever published, they will be considered (I ask pardon for my lack of modesty) among the best examples of the English art songs. But precisely for this reason (because they are my ultimate accomplishment, and because after Shakespeare hardly could I find such high poetry) after the *Sonnets* I practically abandoned the art song. If I were to write more, I would probably set Italian poems. My vocal production has turned to other forms and sources: choral music, the Oratorio, the Bible.»

On July 3, 1944, Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco set Sonnet XXX (*When to the sessions of sweet silent thought*) as a birthday gift for his friend Aldo Bruzzichelli. Others followed: «Not only did I succeed in composing them, but I felt that I was ready, too! And

²⁹ Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *Una vita di musica*, p. 450.

³⁰ Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *Una vita di musica*, pp. 447-454.

so I wrote more; at first in a hesitant manner (that July, I set only four); but when I resumed composing them a year later, I had already found an easy vein, and I should say the "problem" was solved. From August 17 to October 13, 1945, just a few days apart from each other, I set twenty-three more! I was working at a remarkable speed, if you think of the intensity and complexity of those poems. I eventually added another one only much later, in 1947.»³¹

As a continuation of his analysis, he wonders what the *Shakespeare Sonnets* really are, and what they represent in his production. With gentle humor, he also touches on the issue of Shakespeare's private life (are the Sonnets a conversation with a male friend? with a lady lover?), which he considers as of secondary importance. Poetry is what counts!

In this connection, Castelnuovo-Tedesco states that all the critical controversies about identification of characters, composition history and meaning of the Sonnets do not interest him anymore, although he had «read many books about all that».³²

Unique features of some Shakespeare's Sonnets prompted his inspiration to compose three settings for mixed chorus, instead of for voice and piano. *Sonnet XCIV* is scored for mixed chorus and piano; *Sonnet CXXIX* and *Sonnet CLIV* are a cappella (piano for rehearsal only). In *Sonnet CXXIX (Th'expense of spirit in a waste of shame)*, the chorus may be an evocation of the severe moral commentary of a Greek chorus.

Today we are going to listen to *Shakespeare Sonnet XVIII* by Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day?*, one of the first he set to music, in July 1944.

It is admirable how this composer treats the characteristic subjunctives, interrogatives, comparisons, and the innumerable Elizabethan syntactic devices of the Shakespeare Sonnets.

He succeeds in creating endless shades of color and expression within the boundaries of the strophic construction and its rhyming scheme (the metric uniformity of the Shakespearean pentameter) and the sonnet's typical development of the subject matter.

On a number of occurrences, the score reveals an internal musical reference: the piano part explicitly suggests other instruments, as stated in the manuscript score: *dolce* (like lute); *p espr* (like bassoon); *light and crisp* (like harpsichord) [Sonnet CXXVIII]; *mf espr* (quasi cello solo) [Sonnet XXVII].

³¹ Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *Una vita di musica*, pp. 451-452.

³² Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *Una vita di musica*, p. 453.

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a Choro

SONNET N. CXXVIII

William Shakespeare Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco

Moderato - molto gracioso
(in 8)

pp light and crisp (like Harpsichord)

p
How

pp *pp* *pp* *pp* *

oft, when thou, my mu - sic, mu - sic play'st, up on those blessed woods whose mo - tion

Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, *Shakespeare Sonnets*, Op. 125: Sonnet CXXVIII, *How oft, when thou, my music, music play'st; analogy of the piano part with the sound of another instrument: "pp light and crisp (like harpsichord)"; holograph manuscript score, p. 123; Beverly Hills, 1945; unpublished. Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco Papers, The Library of Congress Music Division, Washington, D.C., Box 37, Folder 1; reproduced by permission.*

In answering Shakespeare's call for musical collaboration, Castelnuovo-Tedesco shaped a world of nuances, correspondences, and subtle variety of effects.

In conclusion, both *Leaves of Grass* and the *Shakespeare Sonnets* reveal Castelnuovo-Tedesco's fascination with the English language, and great consideration of the English and American literature. Both manuscripts are significant collections of 20th-century art songs, worthy of being studied, performed, published, recorded.

We are thankful for this opportunity to welcome Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco back to his city he was once forced to leave, and to introduce these remarkable manuscripts of his settings of English and American poetry in this very place, within an international context.



Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco visiting his native city of Florence; ca. mid-1960s. Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco Papers, The Library of Congress Music Division, Washington, DC; Box 144, Folder 15; reproduced by permission.