

Gilda Ruta: Piano Works

Elisa Rumici, piano

Da Vinci Classics

Fecha de lanzamiento: 26 de Septiembre de 2025

Da Vinci Classics offers a new recording that even insiders may consider extraordinary. It is “*Gilda Ruta - Piano Works*”, Elisa Rumici, piano, the first ever recording of a series of pieces by Gilda Ruta (1853-1932), the now forgotten Neapolitan pianist and composer, which had not been heard, not even in concert, basically since the end of the 19th century. Gilda Ruta, born in Naples in 1853 into a family of musicians, earned a clear reputation as a concert pianist from a very young age and considerable credit as a composer of pieces for her instrument and of salon romances that were highly appreciated commercially by the publisher Giulio Ricordi, who published a large number of them. Gilda shone in her own light in the broader context of the great names of the Neapolitan area (Martucci, Westerhout, Rendano), and of her valid women colleagues more or less of the same age - Luisa Cagnetti, Tina Filippini, Lisa Ciccodicola, Eugenia Castellano, Gemma Luziani, Ida Bosisio Mantia - who, looking back today, revealed in Italy in the second half of the 19th century a certain openness to career opportunities, other than just singing, for women as well.

The disc, as mentioned, is a completely new offering and proposes a significant number of pieces that finally give substance to the judgements expressed on Gilda's piano art by the critics of the time but which had remained unmatched for over a century: *‘a miracle of a pianist who is now an artist, a young girl full of fire and flair, whose touch is frank, agile, delicate and clear’* (Gazzetta Musicale di Milano); *‘true chamber music compositions, with very notable merits: spontaneity, clarity, the melody that stands out, slender forms, good conduct, correct harmony, the ability to evoke ancient models with ingenuity and harmonic taste’* (Filippi); *‘strong, serene, rhythmic and full of fire performing style’* (Soffredini).

The music proposed by Elisa Rumici dates back to the decade 1884-1894. It covers a wide range of genres and historical-musical areas, which emerge with clarity from the naturalness and strongly mimetic ability with which the composer-concertist evokes the main pillars of musical culture: certainly Bach (various passages of the Suite a Canoni), Scarlatti (Capriccio brillante) and romantic models such as Chopin (Polonaise), Schubert (Allegro agitato) or Mendelssohn (Scherzo).

Elisa Rumici delivers a luminous, crystal-clear reading, in which the phrasing is logical and natural; the performance is technically transparent and devoid of any nebulosity, yet rich, virtuosic, and colorful, while rigorously respecting the texts according to the indications in the score. Overall, the listening is also favored by the excellent quality of the recording. This highlights Ruta's decidedly brilliant, articulate piano technique, which is nevertheless capable, when required, of releasing power or nuances, i.e., of generating, on the one hand, “imposing” pieces clearly intended for the concert hall, and on the other, music suitable for more intimate contexts such as musical salons. Her writing integrates elements that, while still conventional for the time, such as chords, trills, arpeggios, and scales, are treated with a mastery and naturalness that reveals a profound

identification with the instrument, the fruit of her dual nature as composer and virtuoso pianist. Ruta's mastery emerges in the way she combines and develops musical materials. Polyphonic and harmonic structures support imaginative and sometimes poignant melodic lines. It should not be forgotten that Ruta also studied singing and was the daughter and granddaughter of sopranos; this is reflected in the special attention she pays to the cantability of phrases, which proves the significant influence that vocal chamber music—the other half of her creative sphere—had on her piano.

This recording, therefore, represents a unique opportunity to bring to the attention, not only in Italy and Europe (Gilda Ruta in fact emigrated, widowed and with two teenage children, to New York, where she worked for the next forty years and where she died), a comprehensive look at a category of artists, and female artists, deserving of a more careful and affectionate remembrance.

Giovanni Vigliar

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Giovanni Vigliar es musicólogo y autor de libros como *Gilda Ruta - Le due vite di una musicista napoletana* (Colonnese, Napoli, 2018), *Paolina Leopardi e la musica* (Edizioni ETS, Pisa, 2019). Ha publicado estudios sobre la obra de Jommelli, Mozart o el pensamiento musical de Leopardi, en revistas como *L'aversano di nome Jommelli*, *Rivista Internazionale di Studi Leopardiani*, *Mozart-Jahrbuch* y *L'Intermédiaire des casanovistes*. También ha escrito entradas enciclopédicas sobre pianistas como Glenn Gould, Vladimir Horowitz y Arthur Rubinstein.