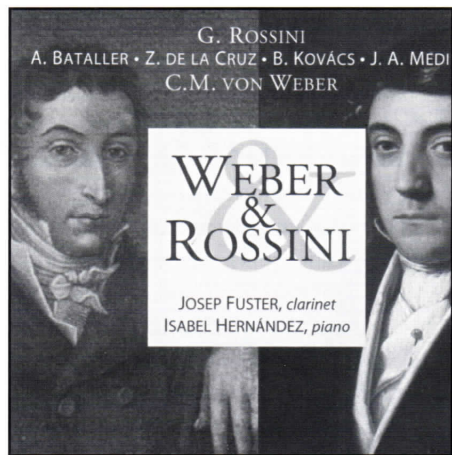


rotechnics of a DeFranco, but he is clearly master of his instrument. I would conclude that the more I listened to this recording, the more I liked it.

Lajos Dudas is a veteran performer who has earned a reputation in Europe and deserves to be heard on this side of the Atlantic. For those wishing to listen to a jazz clarinetist who may be new to them (something that always appeals to me), I am happy to recommend this recording to them.

by *Osiris Molina*

**Weber and Rossini.** Josep Fuster, clarinet; Isabel Hernández, piano. Gioacchino Rossini: *Cavatina "Una voce poco fa"* from *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (Arr. Ivan Müller); Arnau Bataller: *Tre movimenti alla Rossini*; Gioacchino Rossini: *Fantasia para clarinet y piano*; Zulema de la Cruz: *Evocazione Rossiniana*; Béla Kovács: *Salute, Signore Rossini!*; Juan A. Medina: *Pasacaglia von Weber*; Carl Maria von Weber: *Gran Duo Concertante*, Op. 48. COLUMNA MÚSICA ICM0197. Total time 75:44. (available from: <www.columnamusica.com>)



The Spanish clarinetist Josep Fuster has amassed a strong catalog of recordings through the Columna Música label, and his newest release, **Weber and Rossini**, with his duo partner pianist Isabel Hernández, is an impressive addition to his output. The liner notes reminisce about the early 19th-century clarinet, where advances in instrument mechanics and musical aesthetic influenced Rossini and Weber to pen their immortal works. The three contemporary works on the album (all commissioned by the Fuster-Hernández duo) are directly influenced by the compositional styles of Rossini and Weber. In many

cases they quote directly from the masters' works, and add a fascinating counterpoint to the tonal language of the 19th century. Fuster's disc is a fascinating exploration of the clarinet's role in the past and present, and all lovers of the clarinet will find something on this disc they will want to explore or re-examine.

The first work on the disc is Ivan Müller's arrangement of the Rossini cavatina "*Una voce poco fa*" from *The Barber of Seville*. Müller's contributions to all aspects of clarinet life cannot be overstated, and it is a pleasure to experience an opera transcription foreshadowing the contributions of Kroepsch and Lovreglio. Fuster and Hernández capture the lightness beautifully, and the performance never sounds forced. It is a fun, joyous piece that should be in every performer's library. Rossini's *Fantasy in E Flat* for clarinet and piano exploits the dramatic range of the instrument, one of the great strengths of Fuster's artistry. It is surprising that these works are not performed more often. The variations genre influenced many contemporary composers as well as those from the classical era, as is the case with the *Evocazione Rossiniana* by Spanish composer Zulema de la Cruz. A graduate of the Royal Conservatory in Madrid and Stanford University, Ms. de la Cruz has distinguished herself in the area of electronic and electroacoustic music. This dense, probing work recalls similar character shifts to the Rossini *Fantasy* in a modern dialect. Mr. Fuster's altissimo is put to good use here, and the result is a penetrating performance that compliments the Rossini in execution as well as spirit. The other contemporary work offered in response to the Rossini aesthetic is the *Tre movimenti alla Rossini* by the Spanish-born, Southern California-

trained Arnau Bataller. This impressive work incorporates fragments of themes from the *Barber of Seville* cavatina and interpolates them to a modern idiom. The opening tonal piano chords support an eerie quarter-tone clarinet statement that makes one question – in a delightful way! – the journey on which we are about to embark. One of Mr. Bataller's talents is composing for films, and his harmonic treatment of the Rossini fragments simultaneously supports and contradicts the melody. The work ends with a lonely last gasp of the cavatina melody lost in a chromatic field. This is a wonderful new work, and clarinetists will enjoy the challenge of uncovering Rossini in Bataller. A thoroughly perfect caper to the Rossini portion of the disc is the wonderful Béla Kovács encore *Salute, Signore Rossini!* What a fun ride! It is one of those pieces that you can't wait to see a copy of, find a pianist to go through it, and look for opportunities to program it. At just over three minutes, it is a *tour de force* and a spot-on homage to the Italian master. Every theme sounds *just about* familiar, every modulation and turn-of-phrase crafted just right. You can hear Fuster and Hernández smiling their way through it, and it comes through in a delightful reading. This is the only work on the CD with no program notes, but the point is made immediately. Aragonese composer Juan A. Medina's contribution to the disc, *Pasacaglia von Weber*, is a tribute to the variation form. It is a dark, foreboding piece, underscoring the veiled facets of the Romantic spirit. Fuster shapes the lines beautifully here, and his altissimo is again presented to great effect.

Rounding out the disc is a performance of the Weber *Grand Duo Concertant*.

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