

G. I. Gurdjieff - T. De Hartmann
Echi d'Oriente
Pier Paolo Strona organo

EASTERN ECHOES: music by
G. I. GURDJIEFF (1872?–1949) and
T. DE HARTMANN (1886–1956)

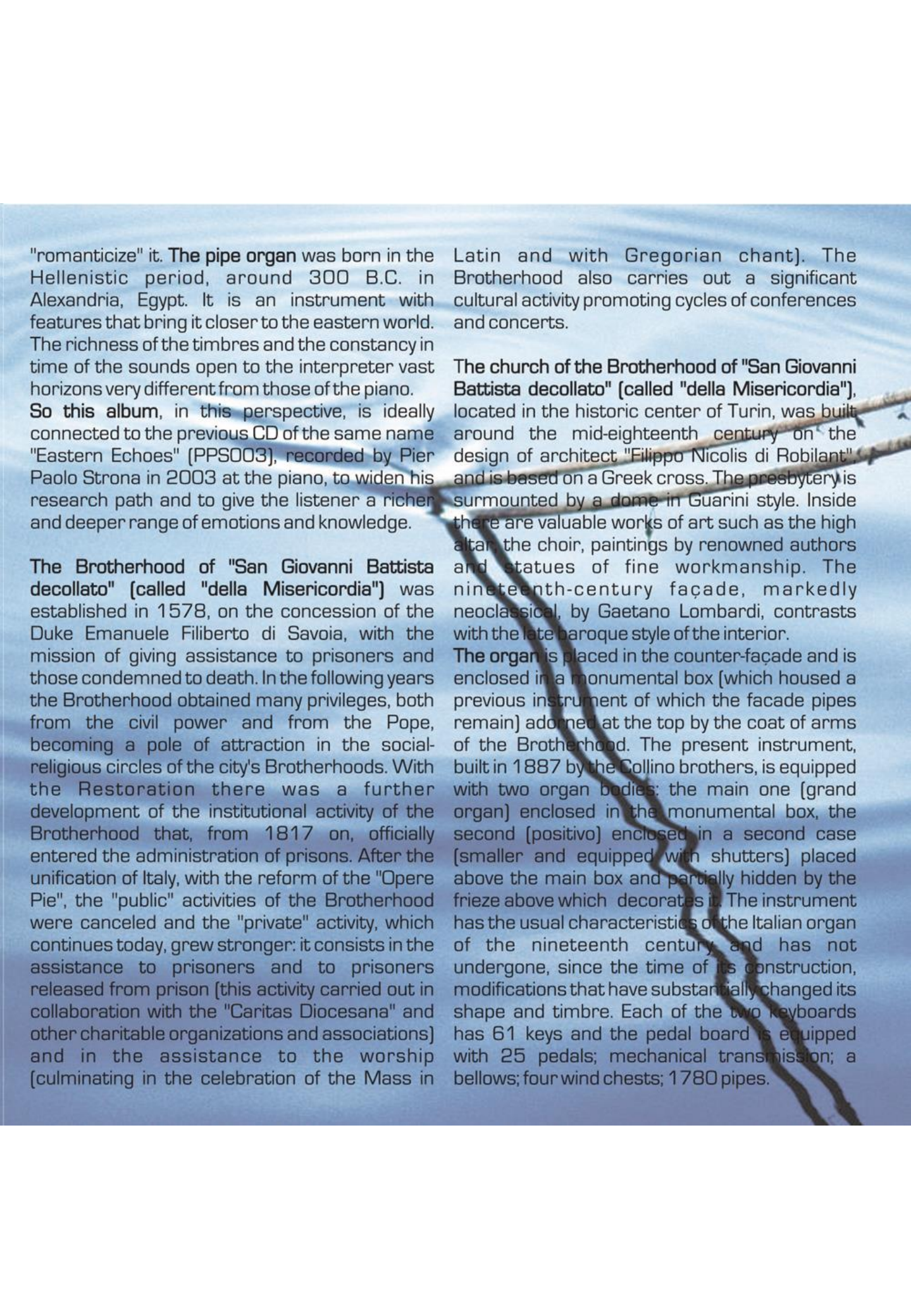
George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff, Armenian-Greek “spiritual” master, author of several books and writings, was born in Alexandropolis and died near Paris. He founded a movement that is currently active mainly in Europe and America, and he composed, with the help of a Russian musician, his student, **Thomas De Hartmann**, a vast collection of music for piano inspired by the folklore and religious traditions of a wide geographical area ranging from Greece to Turkey, from Russia to the Arab and North-African countries, and to Central Asian countries as far as Tibet and India. What we hear are therefore “EASTERN ECHOES” filtered through the sound of a western instrument, the piano, and by tonality, a musical language that was also born in the heart of Europe. Eastern music, unaware of harmonic structures – of vital importance in tonality – is based on rhythmic, melodic and timbre imagination. The piano, a percussive as well as expressive instrument, with great wealth of timbre and which is able to “sing”, is best suited to express its spirit and beauty. Thus, using a western instrument and musical language, Gurdjieff succeeds in what presumably was one of his main aims: bring and spread in the West the culture and knowledge of the East. His idea of writing oriental music for the piano, an idea therefore very far from a philological approach, is placed in a perspective of freedom and openness that belongs to the essence of artistic expression in general. In those years, we are at the beginning of the twentieth century, Western culture interacted

more and more with other cultures, Africa and the Eastern Countries, above all. From this wind of novelty music has been able to find many new ways of development in its path of overcoming the tonal system, just think of Satie, Debussy and his interest in the music of Java, Strawinski and the African rhythms, the Jazz, but also Bela Bartok and the Balkan ethnic music, close to Europe geographically, but far away in its structures and musical forms. It is precisely with this spirit of openness, of freedom and independence from more or less consolidated



conventions, that the idea of this album is born, that is to perform the compositions of Gurdjieff and of De Hartmann, inspired by the Orient and written for piano, with another instrument, the pipe organ, which allows new and different interpretations, which allows to bring to the listener's ear new expressiveness and contents thanks to its own characteristics.

The piano is a "romantic" instrument that reaches its perfection in the second half of the nineteenth century: playing any piano music brings the performer, even unconsciously, to



"romanticize" it. **The pipe organ** was born in the Hellenistic period, around 300 B.C. in Alexandria, Egypt. It is an instrument with features that bring it closer to the eastern world. The richness of the timbres and the constancy in time of the sounds open to the interpreter vast horizons very different from those of the piano.

So this album, in this perspective, is ideally connected to the previous CD of the same name "Eastern Echoes" (PPS003), recorded by Pier Paolo Strona in 2003 at the piano, to widen his research path and to give the listener a richer and deeper range of emotions and knowledge.

The Brotherhood of "San Giovanni Battista decollato" (called "della Misericordia") was established in 1578, on the concession of the Duke Emanuele Filiberto di Savoia, with the mission of giving assistance to prisoners and those condemned to death. In the following years the Brotherhood obtained many privileges, both from the civil power and from the Pope, becoming a pole of attraction in the social-religious circles of the city's Brotherhoods. With the Restoration there was a further development of the institutional activity of the Brotherhood that, from 1817 on, officially entered the administration of prisons. After the unification of Italy, with the reform of the "Opere Pie", the "public" activities of the Brotherhood were canceled and the "private" activity, which continues today, grew stronger: it consists in the assistance to prisoners and to prisoners released from prison (this activity carried out in collaboration with the "Caritas Diocesana" and other charitable organizations and associations) and in the assistance to the worship (culminating in the celebration of the Mass in

Latin and with Gregorian chant). The Brotherhood also carries out a significant cultural activity promoting cycles of conferences and concerts.

The church of the Brotherhood of "San Giovanni Battista decollato" (called "della Misericordia"), located in the historic center of Turin, was built around the mid-eighteenth century on the design of architect "Filippo Nicolis di Robilant", and is based on a Greek cross. The presbytery is surmounted by a dome in Guarini style. Inside there are valuable works of art such as the high altar, the choir, paintings by renowned authors and statues of fine workmanship. The nineteenth-century façade, markedly neoclassical, by Gaetano Lombardi, contrasts with the late baroque style of the interior.

The organ is placed in the counter-façade and is enclosed in a monumental box (which housed a previous instrument of which the facade pipes remain) adorned at the top by the coat of arms of the Brotherhood. The present instrument, built in 1887 by the Collino brothers, is equipped with two organ bodies: the main one (grand organ) enclosed in the monumental box, the second (positivo) enclosed in a second case (smaller and equipped with shutters) placed above the main box and partially hidden by the frieze above which decorates it. The instrument has the usual characteristics of the Italian organ of the nineteenth century and has not undergone, since the time of its construction, modifications that have substantially changed its shape and timbre. Each of the two keyboards has 61 keys and the pedal board is equipped with 25 pedals; mechanical transmission; a bellows; four wind chests; 1780 pipes.

The two CDs contain a selection of compositions chosen in order to give an idea of the musical mainstreams investigated by Gurdjieff, Ethnic, Sufi Muslim and Greek-Orthodox Christian.

In the photograph on the cover, taken by Pier Paolo Strona, you can see the frontal pipes of the Collino organ on which the recorded CD compositions were performed.

The photograph in the screen prints of the 2 CDs, taken by Pier Paolo Strona observing the small waves generated by the movement of the anchor line of a boat in the harbour, conveys an atmosphere of contemplation and meditation in line with the sounds of Gurdjieff and De Hartmann's music. The Geometries of the image are reminiscent of the dances, which Gurdjieff calls the "Movements", a fundamental part of his teachings, where geometries, and particularly the circle figure, are essential elements.

It is the same photograph of the cover of the previous CD PPS003 with Gurdjieff and De Hartmann's piano music.

Pier Paolo Strona, civil engineer graduated at "Politecnico di Torino", researcher in the field of numerical models of structures, photographer, author of books and various publications, graduated in piano at the Accademia Filarmonica di Bologna, is active in Italy and abroad with concerts, exhibitions and conferences. His repertoire ranges from the most important classical composers, from the sixteenth to the twentieth century, to ragtime, Latin-American as well as Asian music.

Acknowledgments

A sincere thanks to the Brotherhood of Mercy,

in the person of Governor Aw. Alberto Tealdi, who made available the church and the organ thus making it possible to record the album. Determinant for the realization of the recording was also the collaboration of the maestro **Massimo Caracò**, titular organist of the Church of Mercy, particularly in the choices concerning the "recording" and the research of the timbric effects.

