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### Feature Article by Robert Schulslaper

## Bridging Cultures, Shaping Sound: The Da Vinci Publishing Odyssey

Ten years ago, in 2015, Edmondo Filippini founded Da Vinci Publishing, an independent publisher of music recordings and scores. Initially a small-scale enterprise, it rapidly expanded to the point where it now publishes approximately 150 recordings and 200 scores every year, with a focus on classical, jazz, and contemporary music (reviews of many of their CDs can be found by consulting the Labels section of the *Fanfare* Archive). With 10 successful years behind it, what does the future hold? I spoke with Edmondo to find out.

*Welcome to Fanfare, Edmondo. Before going on to discuss Da Vinci Publications, I thought we might revisit your childhood to trace your love of music to its origins.*

First of all, thank you for this interview. Music has always been a fundamental part of my life, for as long as I can remember. My mother loved Bach, my father loved Brahms and Bruckner, and my grandfather—whom I never met—loved opera. None of them were musicians and they worked in fields completely unrelated to music, but they passed on a profound love for music that later influenced both me and another family member so deeply that she became a musician and I became a musicologist. Without that influence, I suspect everything would have been very different. Even now, at 40, looking back, I can hardly imagine having taken a different path. Perhaps I wish I had grasped certain aspects of this world sooner or explored other passions and interests that I developed over time, but I don't believe I would have chosen any road other than a musical one.

*Did you play any instruments as a child?*

When I was quite young, I became very passionate about the piano and studied it for several years with great enthusiasm. But enthusiasm alone isn't enough; you need two fundamental things to continue on the path toward becoming a professional instrumentalist. The first is a prerequisite, the second must be sustained over time: talent and interest. I seriously doubt that I possessed significant talent—and I admit that without difficulty. I was just an average pianist, lacking any particular gift, struggling where others achieved results with half the effort. Around the age of 18, I realized that this wasn't my path, but rather a preparation for what truly interested me: the history of music in the broadest sense. Even now, looking back, I'm certain it was the right choice. By sparing the world a mediocre pianist and instead (perhaps—I'll leave it to others to decide if I have fulfilled this task adequately) giving it a good music historian, I've never regretted that decision for a single day.

*Who were the people who most influenced or encouraged your musical pursuits?*

There were several, for different reasons. Two people in particular helped me understand what my path should be: The first did it unintentionally; the second was far more deliberate. The first was my piano teacher, who introduced me to my first mentor, Claudio Ricordi. At just 17 years old, he hired me at a newly founded classical music radio station in Milan, and that experience was a true turning point. For the first time, I came into contact with the recording world in its broadest sense—

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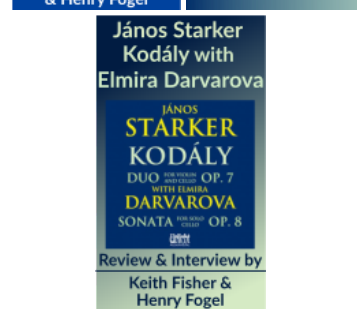
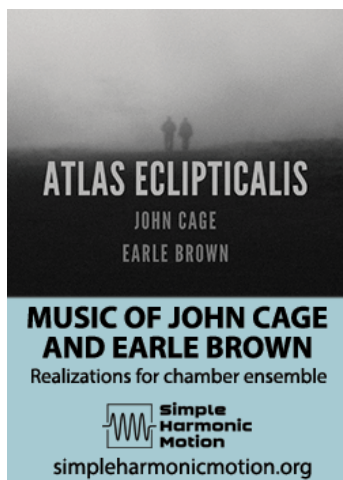
## NOT TO BE MISSED!

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### Music Matters





discovering the sheer amount of music and composers I still didn't know, the recordings I had never listened to, and beginning to understand how the process of music broadcasting worked. That's when I realized that the piano wasn't my path, that there was something else I was meant to do, though at the time I wasn't entirely sure what it was. I only knew that things had to change. It was a feeling I've only experienced a few other times in my life—one of those times being what eventually led me to Osaka.

The second person was my sister, who, by the end of a not-so-successful high school career on my part, took a decisive step and convinced our parents to let me study musicology at the university. In a way, she also gave me the courage to embark on that journey, which I still pursue with joy and with my head held high.











*Da Vinci Publications' first CD was of the acousmatic music of Biagio Putignano, a very interesting composer. [Acousmatic music is a form of electroacoustic music specifically composed for presentation using speakers.] Why did you choose him for your first release?*

This is a broad question, and I'll try to answer it as clearly as possible. I can say that almost everything started because of or thanks to him. Which of those two descriptions will prove true is something only time will tell.

In 2015–16 I found myself at a crossroads. I had been working for a small Italian recording company (thankfully now closed) while already living in Japan, providing remote consulting for next to no compensation. I discovered that it had made some deals behind my back, using my name in ways I found quite shocking—and, frankly, disgusting. At the time, I was also working steadily as a consultant and teacher at the Italian Cultural Institute in Osaka, so I had no real need to create anything new. However, I did want to continue publishing music scores, since I already had a small network of contacts and a modest international distribution, and my idea was to create an editorial venture only—completely detached from the recording industry.

That's when Biagio Putignano contacted me. He was one of the composers with whom I had previously worked through that now-defunct Italian label. He proposed releasing *Almucantarat*. At that point, I truly had nothing in place. I knew practically nothing about how a label operated beyond what I'd learned over the years as a consumer of recordings. So I told him I was the wrong person, because I had no intention of continuing in the recording business. But Biagio was persistent, telling me he would be happy to wait as long as needed if I were interested, and that he very much hoped to release this album with me and no one else.

So I told him that if we were to do something like this, I first had to figure out how to do it. I also made it clear that I was still missing some key pieces—elements I considered essential to launching any record label, however small—namely, physical and digital distribution. I asked him to give me a month to see if I could set up a company that would be worthy of releasing an album, even as a totally independent venture. During that month, I studied and learned a lot, and most importantly I got in touch with various distributors in Italy and internationally, leveraging some of the contacts I'd made over time. One of them was Egea Music—which remains my distributor—and it agreed to handle distribution of our titles. On the strength of that arrangement, I was able to build the first and subsequent releases, as well as the vision and ethos with which I still run my company. Without a distributor, I probably wouldn't have released that album, and today it

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**Editorial**

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**Is Fanfare Now the Magazine for Serious Musicians?**

By Joel Flegler

might be only a small editorial venture rather than an international label as well.

*Are you still living in Japan?*

Yes, I've been living in Japan since 2012, though I first traveled here in 2008. Back in 2005, I was at one of those crossroads I just mentioned—the second one, to be precise. I was at university, dissatisfied with the direction my life was taking, and I wanted something different, even though, as usual, I didn't really know what or how to achieve it. Then, like a lightning bolt in broad daylight (literally—the idea came to me in the late afternoon), I clearly remember my mind telling me, "What if you went to Japan?" It was a country I already loved at the time, and from that day on, I became interested in its ancient music, eventually focusing my entire academic path on the study of that tradition. I began studying the language on my own—because as a student who was already paying tuition and buying books, I couldn't afford expensive language courses—and visited for the first time in 2008. I vividly remember feeling, when I left, that I was departing a place I didn't want to leave and returning to a place I didn't want to return to.

In 2012, after various events, I decided to leave Italy for good—that was the third crossroads—and then in 2015, the director of the Istituto Italiano di Cultura in Osaka at the time (and still a good friend), Stefano Fossati, suggested creating something musical with him. He called me into his office and told me he had established a company called "Da Vinci" and would like to work together on something. That was the fourth crossroads, the fourth major turning point in my life. It was when I decided to propose that editorial project I had been wanting to build as entirely my own, completely separate from that small Italian music company that, in the meantime, I'd discovered had been using my name and making deals behind my back.

I know the path may sound complicated, but these were my "sliding doors" moments. If I had chosen even one small thing differently at any of those times, I probably wouldn't be here answering your questions, nor would you be talking with me now.

*Now that Da Vinci is firmly established, how many recordings and scores do you publish each month?*

Currently, we release about 15 new recordings a month, ranging from Baroque to contemporary music, with no gaps in between, plus various jazz projects that appear each month. On average, we also publish about 20 new scores every two months, covering everything from critical editions of older repertoire, newly discovered archival works, transcriptions, and arrangements, to pieces by contemporary composers.

The reason I do both stems from what I mentioned earlier: Initially, I intended to distance myself from that small record label that had greatly disappointed me, but I still wanted to maintain the human relationships I'd built over time while collaborating with all the composers and musicians, particularly on the editorial side. Then, it was Maestro Putignano who proposed—and convinced me—that I should venture into recording, which eventually became the main focus of the company.

I had some limited experience in the recording industry at the time, though not nearly enough. But I did have a strong background from having worked at Casa Ricordi beginning in 2005 and continuing until 2012. When I decided in 2005 that I wanted to go to Japan, my first thought was how to finance the trip. I spoke with my music history professor at the Milano State University, Cesare Fertonani, who suggested that I get in

touch with the person who became my second mentor, Riccardo Urli, a sales manager at Casa Ricordi. After a brief interview, he hired me, and I started working externally for them, promoting and selling scores and critical editions to Italian conservatories. That work occupied me for quite some time and provided the foundation and knowledge of the classical publishing world and its key players, until it ended in 2012. Around that time, Casa Ricordi was acquired by Hal Leonard (which still owns it) and dismantled the sales department I was part of. That event prompted me to leave Italy for good.

*As things turned out, it seems you made the right decision! As you alluded to earlier, distribution is crucial to Da Vinci's success, with responsibility split between three companies, Egea Music, Naxos, and Hal Leonard.*

I partly covered this above, but to clarify: Egea Music is my physical and digital distributor for the two main branches of the label, Da Vinci Classics and Da Vinci Jazz. It's thanks to their trust that I was able to start down this path; without it, I would never have launched a recording branch. Naxos joined later, around 2019, primarily to offer digital distribution for its Naxos Music Library platform and other streaming services it manages, which previously I couldn't access.

Hal Leonard, on the other hand, is my distributor for current sheet music publications and books. Our collaboration with it arose out of necessity during the COVID period. Throughout 2020, sales of scores—as well as CDs—basically collapsed. While CDs still managed to keep some activity alive that later rebounded even stronger, scores did not. In 2021, I received the annual sales report from my then editorial distributor—a small company in Brescia—and if I recall correctly, it was just over 20 dollars for an entire year. Although I understood there was a pandemic going on, that figure seemed ridiculously low, and I decided that things either had to change or I'd simply close the publishing division, which no longer made sense under those conditions. Meanwhile, the name of the label was growing in recognition and prestige, and I couldn't allow the publishing side to lag behind. So I reconnected with the people I knew at Hal Leonard, primarily Ilaria Narici, who believed in me and offered to become my distributor from that moment on. Then, in January 2022, I permanently left my small distributor in Brescia and entrusted all of my printing and distribution exclusively to Hal Leonard.

*Looking at your career in retrospect, it's fascinating to see how your various musical experiences and fortuitous personal interactions were subtly leading you to where you are today as the proprietor of a successful record label.*

I've had various jobs, all within the music field. When I was in Italy, my first job was at a classical music radio station in Milan, when I was 17 years old. Then, from 2005 to 2012, I worked for Casa Ricordi and also for a music association that organized (and still organizes) various music festivals. After moving to Japan, I began working as a remote consultant for a small record company, and in 2014 I started a steady collaboration with the Italian Cultural Institute in Osaka, both as a lecturer and particularly as a consultant for musical events. Together with Stefano Fossati, the director, I served as co-artistic director of a music festival where we invited various artists from Italy. Eventually, that collaboration ended as well, and in 2015 I decided to create something of my own. In November 2016 I officially released the first recordings and the first scores under the new publishing house called Da Vinci.

*Why "Da Vinci?"*

As I mentioned, the label's name wasn't actually chosen by me. It was part of a larger project—one that never fully materialized except for what survives in my company—that aimed to create a bridge between Japan and Italy via the Osaka institutions, its then director, and my own organization. Da Vinci was supposed to be a much broader entity covering various institutional and artistic activities. That side of the project never took off, but by then, the company I founded had already taken the name and was gaining momentum.

Even though I didn't choose the original name—and probably, if I'd had the chance, I might have picked something else—I did like the idea of a company embracing a wide range of fields. In our case, it's classical and jazz music in their broadest sense, much like Leonardo, who ventured into a great variety of disciplines. And like Leonardo, who lived in an Italy that didn't yet exist as a unified nation, and who eventually emigrated to France, I'm one of the many expats living abroad, and I find the prospect of returning to the land of my birth very unlikely. To paraphrase a famous line from a movie, I see Italy as my cradle, and like all cradles, I was destined to leave it.

*Since Da Vinci Publications includes both Da Vinci Classics and Da Vinci Jazz, can we assume that they represent your musical preferences?*

Not exactly. Although I love classical music in nearly all its forms—ranging from attempts to reconstruct ancient Greek music, to avant-garde experimentation, to the new contemporary tonality, and even music for film and other media—I do have a particular preference for the period from the early 18th century to the early 19th century. As much as I dislike the term “favorite composer” and usually avoid answering questions framed that way, I can't help but think that if I were to draw up a ranking, the first three names that come to mind belong to that era.

As for jazz, it's actually quite simple: I regard it as one form of contemporary music. Although I listen to it less frequently, I see common threads with the classical world, especially in terms of instrumental expertise. Because of that, I believe it deserves its own dedicated branch. Originally, I didn't even want to split the label into two branches, planning to keep everything under a single name. My distributor, Egea Music, suggested dividing it into “Classics” and “Jazz” to avoid confusion, mainly in terms of distribution and commercial organization.

*What sort of relationship do you cultivate with the artists and composers you record?*

It really varies, but I try to maintain as direct a relationship as possible with each one. If they're about to release an album, I prefer to speak to them by phone, to understand their expectations and get a sense of the person I'm dealing with. We have a very clear, transparent publication policy—I make all our contractual conditions available online, so I can talk to the artist from a place of mutual understanding right from the start.

I've often spoken to artists who, by virtue of their status—either earned or perceived—wanted to be treated differently simply because of their name, or because they had performed in certain venues, or had released work on certain labels. I have almost always clashed with such individuals—and inevitably turned down publication projects with them—because I make no distinction between someone fresh out of a conservatory or music school and a world-renowned artist. Some people don't like that and want to be placed on a “gold label.” That mentality is as far from my own as you can get.

Even though we do have prominent artists on the label, none of them has ever insisted that I change our policy for them or for anyone else. If that ever happened, I'd likely have the same disagreement, and in the end, I'd opt not to continue working with them.

*Two musicians you've recorded, guitarist Gabriele Zanetti and musicologist/pianist Chiara Bertoglio, have since gone on to have prominent roles in the company.*

I like to refer to Zanetti as my right-hand man—my “partner in crime,” if you'll allow a playful expression—and he's someone without whom Da Vinci Publishing would look very different today. I owe him a lot: unwavering dedication to the job, a rare sense of loyalty I've been seeking for a long time, and a friendship that, despite the distance and our relatively few in-person meetings, has lasted almost seven years now. He is, de facto, the vice-president of the company and someone I know I can turn to with any professional or personal issue, confident that he'll offer advice and help. On top of that, he serves as the lead engineer for our recording division, and together we built DV Studios, which is evolving more and more into a fully professional recording studio.

My relationship with Chiara Bertoglio is less constant but just as deep in terms of mutual respect. Without her, most of our label's booklets wouldn't exist. She's also someone whose perspective can be quite different from mine, which means that in moments where I face tough decisions, she often provides a balanced, thoughtful viewpoint that can challenge my initial ideas in a constructive way.

However, there are two other people at Da Vinci Publishing whom I absolutely must mention. The first is my PR person, Yumi Shimizu, a Japanese singer and musicologist who joined us a couple of years ago. She has shown the same loyalty and tenacity, and works hard to promote and ensure the success of our projects and of our company as a whole. The second is my direct assistant, Masahiro Kato, a Japanese conductor who helps me with the day-to-day tasks of running the company, handling things I no longer have time for such as website management, graphic design, and much more. Over the years, he has proven to be a conscientious collaborator, and above all, someone who is deeply devoted and loyal to the company I've built. Together, the five of us form the mind and heart that keeps Da Vinci Publishing moving.

*In 2021 Da Vinci began recording live concerts at the Festival Armonie della Sera. These were then broadcast on the radio, and some were published within a special collection dedicated to the Festival. Would you like to offer these services to other festivals?*

This collaboration arose from meeting the artistic director Marco Sellini and his colleague Salvatore Barbatano, who runs the festival with him. Working on live recordings was a highly instructive experience, something we had never done before. It challenged us in many ways—sound quality, the tension or ease of working with the musicians, artistic standards, and much more. Certainly, if an opportunity presented itself with the right conditions, we would be open to expanding this type of collaboration.

*How do you foresee the market developing? Do you anticipate that downloads and streaming will eventually phase out CDs?*

Just as the internet did not shut down libraries—and I'm sure you recall the headlines predicting that very thing—digital technology hasn't forced record labels or CD producers to close shop for good. There was a slowdown that caused a deep crisis, of course, to varying degrees depending on where labels and distributors were located. But the physical market

for CDs has never vanished. Actually, from the U.S. and other countries that first tried fully transitioning to digital, I'm seeing increasing interest in having a tangible product again, something you actually own and that isn't at the mercy of the whims of a distributor or label deciding whether you can keep listening to that music. (The same goes for movies and many other media.) So, no, I don't expect the CD to disappear anytime soon; in fact, I hope it evolves, because its biggest limitation is having remained the same since its creation, without real innovation. Meanwhile, we've seen the resurgence of vinyl records and even tape recorders, driven in large part by mainstream products like films, TV series, and videogames—and a similar pattern has been emerging with CDs over the past few years. More and more entertainment products are once again featuring CDs as something "cool," or retro, or nostalgic, and from multiple sources I'm hearing talk of a small but steady uptick in manufacturing and sales. So I'm confident we're in an odd sort of "medium-loop," where after vinyl and tape, CDs will also regain the spotlight in the near- to mid-term, instead of simply following in the wake of digital. Digital music has already shown its limitations—especially in the classical market—when it comes to revenue for labels and artists. It has also negatively impacted the listening habits of many younger people, who have forgotten how to listen to an entire CD from start to finish with a booklet in hand. Instead, they're turning to playlists that are often limited, based solely on personal listening pleasure, rather than exploring a new musical world in depth.

*What plans do you have for the future of the label?*

First and foremost, together with Gabriele Zanetti, I want to develop DV Studios into an internationally recognized hub for high-quality classical music recording—not just for Da Vinci Publishing's projects, but for anyone who wants a meticulously produced release. In fact, we've already opened the studio's services to sound engineers and musicians who don't necessarily release their final products with us.

Secondly, in collaboration with Egea, we're intensifying distribution in certain places I consider crucial, such as Japan, where we've already been working successfully for years with Tokyo M Plus. I'll soon be traveling to South Korea to see how we can expand our operations there as well. I'd also like Da Vinci to become an even more international label, embracing not only the widest range of classical genres but also establishing firm roots among the musicians and musical communities in the countries where our products are distributed.

Finally, I'm beginning to explore new markets, such as music for various media (film, gaming, etc.), which could bring greater exposure and opportunities to the musicians who record with us and the composers whose work we distribute. We've already had excellent experiences in the past (collaborations with Netflix, BiBi Film, and various independent productions), and I'm certain it's a path worth pursuing.

All of us are working tirelessly to carry forward the vision I had at our founding in 2016—one that has since been realized—and to achieve new milestones that will allow Da Vinci Publishing to become and remain an increasingly central force in this small but grand world of classical music.

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