

Frederic Mompou

Yesterday we received two new CD's with piano music from the Spanish (Catalan) composer Frederic Mompou (1893-1987). For us, Mompou's music is very special. It transmits exactly what we experience on a daily level in our awareness: the wholeness of all. So, these CD's are treasured. I discovered Mompou twice earlier in my life, around 2005 and again in 2015. The first time I was not spiritually matured enough to fully capture the magic of his work, but in 2015 both Debbie and I were ready for his musical message of stillness. So we were already well acquainted with all of his known piano work. But it turned out, there was more to discover still! Grace arrives in waves as well.



Mompou, like Frederic Chopin after whom he was named, composed almost exclusively for the piano. He tried to captivate the spiritual silence he later found in the mystical poetry of St. John of the Cross (a Spanish mystic and saint, 1542-1591). He wrote little pieces of music, miniatures, and became famous with his set of *Musica Callada* (silent music). His composing sprung from pure inspiration rather than from a system. It has a lot of clarity and simplicity. Music from the heart, not from the mind. Mompou said his was “the least composed music in the world” (although he could ponder over just one chord the entire day). Living in Barcelona for most of his life, he was also inspired by the sounds and smells of the harbor, like the cries of seagulls, the sound of playing children and the popular Catalan culture. For instance, one of his popular pieces, from the cycle *Scènes d’Enfants* (children’s scenes) is titled *Jeunes filles au Jardin* (young girls in the garden), and it’s really a lovely composition that has no equal

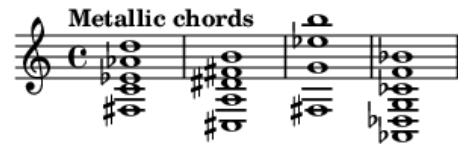
in the entire piano literature. There are several recordings to be found on YouTube, of which the one by the Russian pianist [Arcadi Volodos](#) is one of my favorites.

He also loved the sound of church bells, no doubt due to his family bell foundry. From these sounds he discovered a special music chord, he named the *acorde metálico* (the metal chord), that became the base of his oeuvre. “*Este acorde es toda mi música*” he said, the nature of his work summed up in one single chord.

Often he walked in solitude on his beloved *Montana de Montseny*, a mountain that lies about 30 miles north of Barcelona. He had one brother (Josep), who became a famous impressionist painter (1888-1968). His paintings were used on the cover of some of Mompou’s CD’s.



Although he was a good pianist, he was shy and had an introspective nature which prevented him from becoming a concert pianist, so he dedicated himself to composing in stead. He described himself as “a man of few words and a composer of few notes”. He often performed his own compositions on the piano, but only in a small setting of private soirees (just like Chopin did 100 years earlier). One of his early miniatures is titled *El repòs dins del temple* (the quietness in the temple), indicative of a love for meditation by the young Mompou. Also, another one is called *L'Ermita del Garriga* (the Hermitage in La Garriga). His family had a little holiday cottage in this little mountain village, where the young Mompou used to convene with his *tertulia*, a literary circle, and he would often retreat for hours with his friends to discuss art, religion and literature.¹ The village named a street after him, “*Carrer Frederic Mompou*”.



In Paris where he studied, he became popular and was considered to be the successor of Claude Debussy, although Mompou realized his own, distinguished style that had no predecessors or successors. We think the music of Eric Satie (1866-1925) occasionally conveys a hint of the emptiness which Mompou so clearly intuited.

It was already later in his life, 1941, when Mompou met the Spanish concert pianist Carmen Bravo (1923-2007) at a competition, where Frederic was one of the jurors. They became friends, and later lovers. In 1944 he expressed his love to Carmen in *Romança*, a short and fragile song. The dedication says: “On our third anniversary I write these notes to you because our lives will be forever shared” and “*Al unison dels nostres cants*” (to the harmony of our songs). It took Mompou until 1957 to dare propose to his 30 years younger bride. For both of them it was the only marriage, 30 years later to be dissolved by Mompou’s death. They had no children.

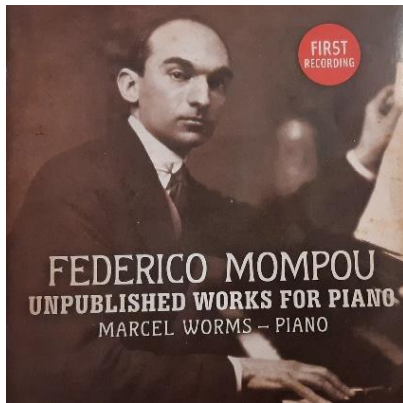


After his death, Carmen Bravo made sure his name and work was promoted for eternity. Shortly before her own demise, she founded the Fundacio Mompou to ensure his legacy would not go wasted. After her death, a bundle of still unpublished works was found, also mostly for the piano. Mainly they dated from his early period as a composer (1901-1919), but also some works were from the 1940’s. This was a time when Mompou, after a decade long composing crisis, found the love with Carmen to be

his great muse, and he started to compose his main work, until a few years before he died. One of these 1940’s composition is titled *El Pont de Montjuic* (1941), which he wrote as a tender remembrance of the first stroll with Carmen through Barcelona. There is a beautiful [recording of this on YouTube](#).

¹ Information and photo of Marcel Worms and Carmen Bravo obtained from the booklet that comes with the CD of Marcel Worms. Ferderico Mompou, unpublished works for piano, zefirrecords Marcel Worms (piano) Zefir ZEF 9620 • 79' • Opname: sept. 2009, Zeeuwse Concertzaal, Middelburg.

Yes indeed, these unpublished works were recorded on CD as well, after 2007, and two of these CD's we received by mail yesterday. The pianist Marcel Worms (a fellow Dutchman) made a masterful recording of extremely high quality of the yet unpublished solo piano works. In the course of his musical life, he developed a keen interest in the music of Mompou. He contacted Carmen Bravo in 2002 and played Mompou's music for her, on which she commented and gave him directions how it could be played best.



We ordered the CD's directly from him and we had a lovely little correspondence by e-mail about it. The scores of the piano music have been published lately as well, and I ordered three volumes of them already. I expect to receive these next week. This piano music is, technically, not too difficult I think. I already played some of his more known pieces, recordings of which are to be found on our website. Debbie is very inspired by Mompou's music as well, and loves to draw and paint while listening to its clear sounds. Isn't it miraculous, how the inspiration that created Frederic Mompou's music of last century finally reached our little apartment now and turned into pictures? It's unfathomable.

The winter will be too short for us.

Grathem, 16 november 2021

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