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Feature Article by [Richard A. Kaplan](#)

## An Interview with Italian Clarinetist Antonio Tinelli



Antonio Tinelli was born in Switzerland in 1967. He received his training in Italy, where he is now clarinet professor at the E.R. Duni State Conservatory of Matera. Tinelli's *curriculum vitae* shows him to be an artist of no small accomplishment, with a number of recordings to his credit. He has done a great deal to disseminate the music of Italian composers, notably the 19th-century composer Giuseppe Saverio Mercadante, whose music he features on a 2005 CD; an annual clarinet competition Tinelli founded also bears Mercadante's name. An earlier (1996) recording features music for clarinet and piano by well-known 20th-century Italian composers: Nino Rota, Raffaele Gervasio, Riccardo Malipiero, and Mario Castelnovo-Tedesco. For the Italian DAD label Tinelli has recorded CDs of the music of Gervasio and Sergio Calligaris. He now performs regularly with pianist Giuliano Mazzoccante as the Duo Tinelli-Mazzoccante. Some of their thematically conceived recital programs feature music of 20th-century Italian composers, 19th- and 20th-century masterpieces (Schumann to Bernstein), and the intriguing "musical journey between opera and jazz," with music ranging from Weber and Donizetti to Gershwin and Grgin! Their most recent CD, on the Phoenix label, offers three works that are both at the core and the pinnacle of the clarinet repertoire: the two Brahms sonatas and his Trio for Clarinet, Cello, and Piano, with cellist Giorgio Casati.



Johannes Brahms : Sonate Op. 120:

No. 1, No. 2 / Trio Op. 114

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Interviewing Tinelli posed certain logistical challenges; the language problem made a "live" conversation impractical, so the interview took place via an exchange of e-mails, with the help of a friend of Tinelli's with translations. I slightly altered the language of some of his responses to make them read as smoothly as possible, but did my best not to alter the sense of anything he had written. During the two weeks in which our correspondence took place, Tinelli gave a master class at the Assisi Clarinet Festival, participated in a chamber-music festival in Monte San Pietrangeli, and played a recital with Mazzoccante at the Festival Internazionale dei Duchi d'Acquaviva in Atri.

Interested readers can find much more information on Tinelli's Web site, [antoniotinelli.com](http://antoniotinelli.com). Of particular interest is a recently posted YouTube video, which can be accessed either by a link on the site or directly at [youtube.com/watch?v=0c6xU8B5uyQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0c6xU8B5uyQ).

Given Tinelli's keen interest in the history and tradition of the clarinet in his home country, I thought a good place to start the discussion might be with a question about Italian clarinetists. I noted that many of the leading orchestral clarinetists in the U.S. during my student days had been either Italian or Italian-American: for example, Gino Cioffi and Rosario Mazzeo (Boston Symphony), Anthony Gigliotti and, a bit later, Donald Montanaro (Philadelphia Orchestra), Robert Genovese (National Symphony), and Ignatius Gennusa (Baltimore Symphony). I'm sure there are others I have inadvertently left out.

*Q. Would you say that there is an Italian "school" of clarinet playing? Many Fanfare readers will likely be familiar with the French pedagogical and performance tradition (Klosé, Rose, Jeanjean, Delecluse, Cahuzac), but probably less with the Italian. And yet, Italy has certainly produced many celebrated*



*clarinetists and clarinet teachers.*

A. We have a great pedagogical tradition in Italy with Vincenzo Gambaro (1785–1828), Ernesto Cavallini (1807–74), Aurelio Magnani (1856–1921), Giuseppe Marasco (1860–1930), and Alamiro Giampieri (1893–1963). As can be seen from an excellent piece of research published by my friend Adriano Amore, *Clarinetto in Italia nell'800 (The Clarinet in Italy in the 19th Century)*, AIC Edition, there are many Italians who have enjoyed huge success overseas, such as, in the U.S.A., Angelo Spadina, who from 1870 played in theaters in San Francisco, Giuseppe Norrito, from 1882 at the Columbia Theater in Boston, and Attilio Barbera, from the end of the 19th century at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. Without being presumptuous, I would like to contribute to this great tradition!

*Q. I see from your Web site that you have recently begun a collaboration with the legendary Karl Leister [principal clarinet with the Berlin Philharmonic 1969–89]. How did this come about? What has it been like for you to work with him?*

A. A very special relationship and collaboration, a great pleasure! I have always revered the greatness of Karl Leister and I would never have imagined I would perform with him in concerts one day, or even record a CD. Yes, because we have just recorded for the Japanese label Camerata Tokyo a disc of trios for two clarinets and piano. We have recorded the Concert Pieces opp. 114 and 115 and songs by Felix Mendelssohn, the Andante and Allegro vivace by Bernhard Crusell, and the *Duo Concertant*, op. 33, by Carl Baermann. A dream come true! And to think that in the illustrious career of Karl Leister this is his first disc for this chamber combination. Playing with him means “singing” and breathing music in every single sound; for me it has been a great lesson for life!

*Q. In a way, this is a continuation of my last question (perhaps of interest only to fellow clarinetists!): I see that you play French Boehm-system clarinets; what do you think are the most important differences between these and the Oehler-system instruments used by German and Austrian clarinetists, including of course Herr Leister? Do you play German clarinets at all? And do the differences between the instruments cause any difficulties?*

A. I think that rather than the system of the clarinet it is the idea and the sound concept that makes the difference. Obviously there are some physical-acoustic differences between the two systems, but surprisingly I found that in concert and in the recording with Karl Leister, the color and the softness of the sound of the different systems, according to the critics, are very similar and, in particular, “extraordinarily warm and expressive.”

*Q. Several of your recordings feature music by Italian composers; you have focused particularly on recent music by Raffaele Gervasio and Sergio Calligaris. How did you become interested in this music? What do you find especially attractive or rewarding about it?*

A. I am very passionate about research and new high-quality repertoire! The works by Gervasio and Calligaris are, in my opinion, able to give rise to an extraordinary musical emotionality and splendor that I felt should ensure the world premiere recordings. Lately, I've been rediscovering and bringing out other very interesting compositions for clarinet and piano: the Rhapsody by the Serbian composer Ante Grgin and an arrangement of George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. Live videos of these two compositions are available on YouTube, where they are having great success.

*Q. You also have a strong interest in the 19th-century composer Giuseppe Saverio Mercadante. Can you tell us a little about him, and about your work with his music? I see that you have also begun a clarinet competition that bears his name. How did this come about?*

A. Mercadante was born in Altamura, a town about 50 km. from where I live. I wanted to pay tribute to my distinguished fellow-countryman both by recording the famous concerto, op. 101, for clarinet and orchestra and the Concertone for flute, clarinet, horn and orchestra, and by dedicating to him an international clarinet competition. The competition, just five years old, has captured attention all over the world. There are competitors from Italy, the U.S.A., Bulgaria, Israel, Russia, Greece, Romania, Poland, Japan, Lithuania, France, the Czech Republic, Belgium, Germany, Serbia, Holland, Spain, Georgia, Mexico, Austria, South



Korea, Switzerland, Hungary, Monaco, Macedonia, Latvia, Uzbekistan, and Thailand! From October 14 to 17, 2010, we will host the sixth edition; the jury will be chaired by Victoria Soames Samek (U.K.; performer, artistic director of the CD label Clarinet Classics, professor at Trinity College of Music and the Guildhall School of Music, London), and will be composed of Albert Hunt (U.S.A.), Ludmila Peterkova (Czech Republic), Denis Zanchetta (Italy), and myself. The competition is held every year in October, and we award prize money worth over €6,000. You can find all the information about previous winners and the complete rules at [associazioneaulos.com](http://associazioneaulos.com).

*Q. You have been working for several years with the pianist Giuliano Mazzoccante; I find his playing truly exceptional, both technically and musically. Tell us about him, and about your collaboration as the Duo Tinelli-Mazzoccante.*

A. An artistic partnership that has been enthusiastically received by international critics. The artistic relationship with Giuliano is supported by a relationship of mutual respect and friendship that has developed an exceptional unanimity of execution. We have addressed a wide repertoire ranging from Classical to Romantic, from operatic fantasies to jazz with an ease and joy of making music together, with a constant sense of great interpretative responsibility by trying to go deeply into every interpretative detail. Over time, this formula sealed our partnership, meeting with the support and admiration of the great Karl Leister, who began an extraordinary collaboration with our duo.

*Q. Your recent Brahms CD seems to suggest that you are working to expand your international career, although obviously you have already performed extensively throughout much of Europe. How has this CD been received, particularly here in America? Can we look forward to hearing you perform here?*


A. Obviously the Brahms disc has provided us with international exposure, but honestly, even though we were aware that we had done a good job, the success it has achieved has gone beyond our expectations. The CD was awarded the Casa del Cinema prize in Rome out of over 300 multimedia works, including films and shorts, and has received the "five star" award from the most important Italian musical review magazine, *Musica*. The disc has been broadcast several times by the most important Italian radio stations (RAI, Radio Vaticana), and by the national radio in Georgia and Switzerland. Many other Italian and foreign magazines have reviewed the CD, among them *The Clarinet* in America. We are currently considering the possibility of a U.S. debut, but we are waiting for replies from management agencies and professionals interested in our musical proposal and the possibility of diversifying concert programs by including particular works that have received great interest and public acceptance.

*Q. And finally, what's next for Antonio Tinelli?*

A. The Camerata CD with Karl Leister will be published in 2011, and we will be playing promotional concerts in connection with that. The Duo Tinelli-Mazzoccante will also be on tour in 2011 in Finland (our debut there), Spain, and Germany. I have been engaged for some master classes in the United Kingdom, Italy, Romania, and Greece, and I am working toward debuts in Japan and the U.S.A. I also have on my agenda some solo appearances with orchestras. I invite all to consult my agenda on the official Web site for all future information.

Antonio Tinelli is clearly a musician with lots of irons in the fire. Links to any of the activities referred to here, including his recordings, the Mercadante Clarinet Competition, and his forthcoming appearances, can be found on his excellent site, [antoniotinelli.com](http://antoniotinelli.com). We will undoubtedly be hearing more from him in the near future.

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