

The Classic Accordion

A solo accordion project with Spencer Wagner

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This project features a collection of classic international songs that have been arranged for solo accordion performance. The artist is Spencer Wagner, a seventeen-year-old high school student from Colorado Springs, Colorado.

1. *Mantillas*, by Mindie Cere (c 1957 by Pietro Deiro Publications, NY)

Mantillas is one of Spencer's personal favorites to perform. Composed by Mindie Cere in 1957, this piece captures the essence of the Spanish paso doble song style which is prevalent in many original works composed for the accordion. Although little is known about the piece itself or the composer, this hasn't stopped it from becoming a favorite among accordionists of all levels and the audiences for whom they perform.

2. *Domino*, music by Louis Ferrari, French lyrics by Jacques Plante, English lyrics by Don Raye, special accordion arrangement by Charles Camilleri, (c 1950).

Domino is a French love song composed by Louis Ferrari and arranged for the accordion by the famous Maltese composer Charles Camilleri. Don Ray provided the English lyrics. The American heart-throb, Tony Martin, launched the song on to the pop charts in 1951 with his powerful voice and easy, romantic style. It's origin as a French love song is easy to see even in the English lyrics:

Domino, Domino, you're an angel that heaven has sent me,
Domino, Domino, you're a devil designed to torment me,
When your heart must know that I love you so,
Tell me why, tell me why, why do you make me cry, Domino,

Domino, Domino, won't you tell me you'll never desert me?
Domino, Domino, if you stay I don't care how you hurt me,
Fate has made you so, you can't change, I know,
You can't change, though you try, but then neither can I, Domino,

Just one look in your eyes and I melt with desire,
Just a touch of your hands and I burst into fire,
And my whole world fills with music when I'm lost in your embrace,

But I know that you're fickle and I'm not misled,
Each attractive new face that you see turns your head,
And it scares me that tomorrow, someone else may take my place,

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Domino, Domino, you're an angel that heaven has sent me,
Domino, Domino, you're a devil designed to torment me,
When your heart must know that I love you so,
Tell me why, tell me why, why do you make me cry, Domino,

Domino, Domino, I'll forgive anything that you do,
Domino, Domino, nothing matters if I have you.

Charles Camilleri, Malta's leading 20th century composer, made *Domino* a classic piece for the accordion with his arrangement. Musical instruction came at an early age for Camilleri, having studied with his father, Joseph Abela Scolaro, Paul Nani, Carmelo Pace and with John Weinzweig at Toronto University. His early exposure was as a performer, virtuosity on the accordion and improvisations on the piano, which led to this arrangement of *Domino* for the accordion.

We get an interesting glimpse of Camilleri's early musical career from this June 24, 2001 interview in *MaltaToday*:

"I have always had music in my house," Camilleri said. "My mother used to play the guitar, we were all quite musical. But from the very beginning I remember that I wanted to create my own music and not just play someone else's! This rebellious streak of creativity often got me into trouble with my piano teacher. I would always re-arrange the pieces she gave me to practice at home to suit my own liking."

And so his early childhood was spent practicing the piano and being told off for daring to "re-arrange" Mozart or Beethoven.

"My father used to say I had crooked ears!" The composer said, laughing affectionately at this recollection.

Then came the young pianist's eleventh birthday and the creativity which had till then been bubbling under the surface was allowed a free reign. The result was a lively 'festa' march which was played at the village feast. This seemed to seal Camilleri's fate: even at such a young age he knew that his future was with music.

"I actually got paid a pound note by the band for that composition," he said, the pride of recollection lighting up his eyes.

Perhaps surprisingly, the Camilleri family were not too keen to have their son choose that particular road, with both his mother and father scared that the teenager would abandon his academic studies in favor of the arts. It was a frequent occurrence for the composer's father to give away the boy's piano, hoping, as it were, to dampen his enthusiasm.

Just as frequently, the pianist's mother would rent it back while her husband was away on business.

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"My mother was always the softer one!" he said, laughing. "More often than not she'd give in to my musical demands. Dad, on the other hand, would caution me and re-iterate time and time again that if I weren't careful I'd end up playing the piano in Valletta's notorious Strait Street! Today I don't blame him. If you look at what most musicians of the time did, playing in Strait Street was exactly it. After all, it was the sole entertainment spot on the Mediterranean island."

Luckily, his father's fears never materialized: the worried parent, in fact, managed to persuade his son to complete his academic studies at the Lyceum before dedicating his life to music. Not that Camilleri's interest waned: at the Lyceum he would spend most of his money on buying biographies of well-known composers.

"Reading these biographies was almost like seeing my life in print, or rather the life I wanted to make for myself. Even back then I used to tell myself that I wanted to do for Malta the same as these composers had done for their countries. I wanted my brand of music to be known," Camilleri continued.

I asked whether he considered himself to have been lucky.

"I believe that if you believe in something strongly enough in life, if you are really determined to succeed at what you set your mind to, then you'll make it. The important thing in life is the journey and not the destination," the maestro replied.

3. *Waltz Allegro* composed and arranged for accordion by Charles Magnante (as played by Charles Magnante on Columbia Records).

Charles Magnante, more than any other artist, helped transform the accordion from a folk instrument for polkas to a serious instrument capable of a wide range of music including classical tunes and orchestras.

Magnante came from humble beginnings being born in Harlem, New York. It could be said that Magnante's musical career began at the age of five when he sang along with his father, a popular amateur accordionist, who used to play for many Italian weddings. At the age of seven, he was stealing his father's prized accordion from the closet and teaching himself to play by ear. He received his first accordion lesson on his ninth birthday and started playing professionally by age fourteen. At sixteen he was turning down many offers to tour professionally as he felt traveling would take time that should be spent continuing his studies.

During the peak of his career he reached the point where he was doing as many as thirty-one radio broadcasts and an average of about eight recording dates in a single week. His audiences ranged from small intimate groups to packed auditoriums of three thousand. One of his greatest thrills was at the Civic Stadium in Buffalo, NY when he played for an audience of over forty thousand people.

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Throughout his long and fantastic career, Magnante was considered by many to be the most finished accordionist of all time. He was famous for many years as a top radio performer, television star, and recording artist. He was associated with some of the world's finest conductors and orchestra leaders performing either as a soloist or a member of the orchestra.

His textbooks, arrangements, and original compositions are numbered in the hundreds and include popular, classical, jazz, and boogie-woogie. In addition to *Waltz Allegro*, two of his other arrangements are featured on this project: *Gitanerias* and *Torna A Surriento*

4. *Gitanerias* from “Andalucia” Suite by Ernesto Lecuona, arranged for accordion by Charles Magnante (c 1956 by Edward B. Marks Music Corp)

Gitanerias is one of six pieces that comprise the Andalucia Suite composed by Cuba's most renowned pianists and musicians.

Ernesto Lecuona was the most important musician in Cuban musical life during the first half of the 20th century. Born in Guanabacoa, a suburb of Havana, in 1895, Lecuona was the son of a newspaper editor and was taught piano by his older sister, Ernestina. All of his siblings—two sisters and two brothers—were musicians, and he was a child prodigy, debuting at the age of five. Lecuona first established himself as an outstanding pianist, graduating from the National Conservatory in Havana with the Gold Medal in performance at the age of seventeen. He went to New York City to concertize and there, in 1916, made his first public appearance outside of Havana.

International success as a pianist occurred seven years later, once more in New York but by then composition had become his primary musical activity. Among Lecuona's many achievements were the founding of the Havana Symphony (with Gonzalo Roig), the Lecuona Cuban Boys Band, and La Orquesta de La Habana. Lecuona wrote a great deal of film music in the '30s and '40s for such major studios as MGM, 20th Century Fox and Warner Brothers and, in 1942, was nominated for an Academy Award.

Lecuona's piano music is an important and very significant contribution to 20th century music. In all, the composer wrote 176 pieces for piano solo. Among the most famous are the six songs of the *Andalucia Suite* (*Cordoba, Andaluza, Alhambra, Gitanerias, Guadalquivir and Malagueña*). *Andalucia* was first published in 1930 and was later reintroduced with English lyrics as “The Breeze and I” in 1940.

5. *Quick Silver*, by Pietro Deiro (c 1938 by Accordion Music Publishing, NY)

Pietro Deiro was one of those cultural pollen seeds that migrated accordion music over the oceans from Italy to America at the turn of the twentieth century. Born in a small village near Torino, Italy, his father decided he should work in his grocery store instead of spending too much time on his accordion. Pietro was not too fond of the idea and decided to work, even down the mines, to save up all he could to go to America.

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He left Italy in 1907 for the states and settled in San Francisco with family friends. He quickly learned all the American favorites and was discovered by a Vaudeville booking agent. He soon appeared in a local theatre where his mix of popular tunes, light classics, classical music, and warm personality was a huge success.

He arranged and wrote music for his beloved instrument and wrote one of the first tutor books for instructing students. He appeared at the New York Winter Garden a remarkable 42 times. Following his Vaudeville career, he set up a teaching studio where he encouraged prolific artistry of the instrument for a whole new generation of musicians. *Quick Silver* and *Fantasia Albania* are two examples of Deiro's amazing musical talent on the accordion.

6. *Medley of Strauss Waltzes* arranged by Bill Palmer and Bill Hughes, (c 1956 Alfred Music Co.)

Some call it classical music, others call it ballroom dance music, still some call it pop songs. But no matter how you classify it, people just never get tired of them – the waltzes from Vienna Austria by Johann Strauss. For over 100 years, you can still hear them in movies, concert halls, skating rinks, parties, TV shows, advertisements, and supermarkets. And, artists from big Symphonic Orchestras to night club bands to street musicians and marching bands - all play them every now and then. The Medley includes selections from *The Blue Danube*, *Die Fledermaus*, and *Tales from the Vienna Woods*.

This medley of Strauss waltzes was arranged for the accordion by Bill Palmer and Bill Hughes. The names Palmer and Hughes are inseparable in the minds of accordionists the world over. Indeed, some do not even realize that these are the names of two men not one.

Theirs was a lifetime of accordion achievements. Innovative, talented, personable, they left an indelible print on accordionists everywhere. It was Palmer and Hughes who perfected and extended the perimeters of concert accordion work well beyond the limits of their day.

Bill Palmer was a child prodigy. At 13, he played the piano on the radio. He studied both piano and accordion, which were to form the basis of his musical endeavors. Palmer's association with Bill Hughes began in Jackson, Mississippi in 1938. Bill Palmer was 21 and Bill Hughes became his student at the age of 12. Hughes was one of those rarely gifted students called a natural musician. With no previous musical training he was playing professionally in less than six months after his first lesson. After just one month of study he was featured on radio station WJDX in Jackson, playing 15 minutes of accordion solos. They were not simply student pieces, but works like the overture to *The Barber of Seville*, and popular pieces like *Night and Day*.

At the age of 14, Hughes hosted a weekly amateur contest and show at one of the Jackson theatres, filling in with accordion solos. In 1940 he performed with Anthony Galla-Rini's Octette at the NAMM convention in New York City.

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After the war, Palmer and Hughes joined together professionally and organized The Concert Trio with Len Manno, who was contrabassist with the Houston Symphony Orchestra. With two accordions and a string bass, they rehearsed faithfully for at least four hours daily, five days a week. They maintained this schedule for more than 10 years. Their concert debut was made with the Houston Summer Symphony in 1950, when they played Vivaldi's *Concerto in D Minor*, and one of Handel's organ concerti. They also presented a full concert that year at the Music Hall in Houston.

Palmer and his partner, Bill Hughes, can be credited with the high point in accordion performance in the United States. Audiences were treated to their white-tie-and-tails performances as they played one prestigious engagement after another in the 50s and 60s. They were the ultimate inspiration to serious young accordionists of the day.

Palmer collaborated with Hughes in producing a series of accordion method books which have had worldwide impact. Theirs was, and still is, the most successful single publication among accordion materials.

As an educator, Willard Palmer was ahead of his time--instrumental in carving an indisputable niche for the accordion at the university level. He and Hughes took the accordion beyond mere college acceptance, into the realm of establishing an actual accordion department within the University of Houston, where they were faculty members. Students of their program comprise a "Who's Who" for the accordion field in English-speaking countries, much the same as Hohner's Trossingen did for accordion education in Europe.

The *Medley of Strauss Waltzes* and the *Espana Waltz* are two accordion arrangements by Palmer and Hughes included on this project.

7. *Sabre Dance* from "Gayne Ballet" by Aram Khachaturian arranged for accordion by Charles Magnante.

One of 35 separate sections from a 1942 Russian patriotic folk ballet, *Sabre Dance* made composer Aram Ilich Khachaturian a household name when it reached the top of the American Hit parade in 1948.

There are three main characters in the Gayne Ballet - a patriotic wife, her not-so-patriotic husband, and a patriotic "other man". This "other man" presides over the liquidation of the husband and marries the wife. Gayne's breadwinner, Griko, is depicted as a drunken, villainous lout, altogether so undesirable that one wonders what she ever saw in him. Whatever her reason for accepting his bread and board, she almost pays dearly for it. Discovering that Griko has fallen in with a band of smugglers, she denounces him, privately at first, and then, after he set fire to her property, publicly. Griko attempts to kill her, along with their daughter. At the last possible moment, enter the redoubtable Kazakov, of the Red Army border patrol and secret love of Gayne. In the line of duty, he sees to Giko's meeting an appropriate end, which enables the patriots to "plight their troth straightaway". The engagement party is highlighted by a furious round of dances, each

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more brilliant than the one before, culminating in the clangorous bit with flashing metal known as *Sabre Dance*.

8. ***Fantasia Albania* by Pietro Deiro (c 1940 by Accordion Music Publishing, NY)**
(see *Quick Silver*)
9. ***Espana* by Emil Waldteufel arranged by Bill Palmer and Bill Hughes, (c 1956 Alfred Music Co.)**

Espana is a Spanish waltz by a French composer with a German name. How's that for international credentials?

Émile Waldteufel (1837-1915) was born in Strasbourg, France. He studied at the Paris Conservatoire and joined a piano manufacturing firm, until he was appointed pianist to the Empress Eugénie, the wife of Napoleon III. A prolific composer of dance music, several of his waltzes including the *Skaters Waltz*, *Estudiantina*, and the *Espana Waltz* remain popular.

Like Johann Strauss, Émile Waldteufel came from a family of dance musicians, being preceded in the business by his father Louis (1801-84) and brother Léon (1832-84). Despite their Germanic surname, the family was French. This is explained by the fact that they hailed from Alsace, which had strong German traditions but had been fully integrated into France since 1793.

Émile Waldteufel was born in Strasbourg on 9 December 1837, just seven weeks after the elder Johann Strauss gave his first concert on French soil in that very city. When he was seven the family moved to Paris for his brother Léon to take up a place as a violin student at the Paris Conservatoire. Émile Waldteufel was to live in Paris for the rest of his life, and he in turn studied piano at the Conservatoire from 1853 to 1857.

Meanwhile the family dance orchestra was becoming one of the best known in Paris, increasingly in demand for Society balls during Napoleon III's Second Empire. In 1865 Émile was appointed court pianist to the Empress Eugénie, performing at Court functions not only in Paris but in Biarritz and Compiègne. From 1867 the Waldteufel orchestra played at Napoleon III's magnificent Court Balls at the Tuileries.

Yet so far Émile Waldteufel's dances had been known only to a relatively limited Society audience. By the time international fame came he was almost forty. In October 1874 he happened to be playing at a soirée attended by the Prince of Wales, the future King Edward VII. The Prince complimented him on his waltz *Manolo* and agreed to help launch his music in London.

The result was a long-term publishing contract with the London firm of Hopwood & Crew and access to the musical programs of Queen Victoria's State Balls at Buckingham Palace. For several years Émile Waldteufel's music dominated the programs there,

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generating him world-wide fame as he turned out a string of works that enjoyed huge popularity - including his best-known work *Les Patineurs* ('The Skaters') in 1882.

Waldteufel was recognized as a good-natured person, with a ready sense of humor - characteristics that are readily perceivable in his music. Unlike the music of Johann Strauss, Waldteufel's perhaps scales no great architectural heights, but rather seeks to enchant by the grace and charm of his melodies and their gentle harmonies.

(from *Skaters' Waltz: the Story of the Waldteufels*, Lamb, Andrew; Fullers Wood Press, 1995)

10. *Torna A Surriento* (Come Back to Sorrento) E. De Curtis, arranged by Charles Magnante (c 1941 by O. Pagani & Bro, NY)

Torna A Surriento is an Italian love song, but not the type you might think. The song was written to create a love relationship between a President and a town. The year was 1902. President Giuseppe Zanardelli was on his way to Matera for a tough meeting with local authorities when he decided to stop off in the resort town of Sorrento. During dinner Guglielmo Tramontano, the owner of the hotel where he was staying and mayor of the town, brought Sorrento's terrible roads and lack of public services to his attention and secured a half promise for help. To get president Zanardelli to do something as soon as possible, Tramontano commissioned two outstanding Neapolitan artists, the De Curtis brothers, to write a song that would also serve as a heartrending appeal to the premier and remind him of his promise to help the town. Giambattista De Curtis worked in the hotel as a decorator, and within hours he and his brother Ernesto composed this song that would not only travel to Rome, but around the world.

Lyrics:

Look at the sea, it's so beautiful
it inspires such a strong feeling...
Just like you do to him who thinks of you,
you make him dream even awake!

Look, look at these gardens
smell these orange blossoms
A scent so fine
it goes straight to your heart

And you say "I'm leaving, goodbye!"
you get far from this heart...
from the land of love,
do you really not feel like coming back!?

But don't leave me,
don't give me such a pain...
Come back to Sorrento:

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let me live!

Look at the sea of Sorrento
such treasures in its depths:
Even who traveled the whole world
never saw the like of this.

Look around, these mermaids
look at you as if spellbound
they love you so much,
they would like to kiss you!

And you say "I'm leaving, goodbye!" ...

About the Artist

Spencer Wagner was born in Santa Barbara, California and grew up in Colorado Springs, Colorado with his parents, Dennis and Priscilla Wagner and his two brothers Austin and Skylar. Spencer completed this project during his junior and senior years at Cheyenne Mountain High School. In addition to his accordion studies under Dan and Kim Christian, Spencer has been active in the Rocky Mountain Accordion Society where he has won over 40 trophies in the RMAS annual competition in both accordion and keyboard. He also enjoys live performance opportunities and has performed as part of the YMA Accordion Band, the Cheyenne Mountain High School Band program, CMHS Talent Show, NHS Auction Night, Open Mike Night, private engagements, and at the Broadmoor Hotel. Although he enjoys playing a wide range of music styles, his favorites are classical and jazz.

Spencer is also an outstanding student (National Honor Society, National Merit Finalist), enjoys reading, playing chess, camping (Eagle Scout), and playing field hockey (selected as a member of the Men's Under 16 and Men's Under 20 U.S. National Field Hockey Team). Through his Field Hockey endeavors he has enjoyed international travel to Canada, Mexico, Holland and Germany. Beginning in the Fall of 2004 he will attend Denver University where he plans to major in Math and Music (Lamont School of Music) as a DU Alumni Scholar.

Spencer enjoys performing for all occasions. To book a musical performance or background music for your special occasion contact us at **719-635-4630** or email us at:

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To order additional copies of this CD visit our website at:

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Information and Credits

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Background information for the selections, composers, and arrangers came from many sources. In addition to those referenced in the text, valuable sources include:

Accordions Worldwide (www.accordion.com)
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