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The Real story of
GUISEPPE TARTINI

Johnstone-music note: the following information is of great interest to us today, for the simple fact that it was written in the nineteenth century and thus much closer to the action and events than we are today. The writing shows a deep understanding and respect of the day towards the musicians that it features ...

From A BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY OF FIDDLERS
by A. MASON CLARKE.
(Author of "The Fiddle Historical and Biographical")

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TARTINI, GUISEPPE, born at Pirano, in the Province of Istna, April 8th (or I2th) 1692, died at Padua, February 26th,* *(* Fetis says the 16th)* 1770. Tartini is the most prominent virtuoso and teacher in the whole history of violin playing, also founder of the Paduan school, the teachings of which have been transmitted through generations of pupils to the present time. He received his first musical education in a college called Dei Padn delle Scuole, and received some lessons on the violin: from one Giulio di Terni. His father, a pious church benefactor, and a man of high position, originally intended that the young Guiseppe should enter the legal profession, and in 1710 sent him to the University of Padua to pursue his studies. The love of music, however, exercised such a powerful influence over him, that he ultimately abandoned all thoughts of the law, and applied himself with assiduity to the study of musical theory, and in particular the violin, upon which instrument he made rapid advances. He also had a strong propensity for the art of fencing, in which, it is said, he eventually equalled his instructor.

Before he was twenty, having married without the consent of his parents, they wholly abandoned him, and he was obliged to wander about in search of an asylum ; which, after many hardships, he found in a Convent at Assisi, where he was received by a Monk, a relative of his, who, commiserating his misfortune, suffered him to remain there till something better could be done for him. Here he practised the violin to keep off melancholy reflections; until an event occurred which led to his discovery, which is generally related as follows: It appears that on a certain great festival, when he was in the orchestra of the convent, a sudden gust ot wind found its way into the Church, and blew aside the orchestral curtain, and exposed young Tartini to view. His recognition, under these circumstances, by a Paduan acquaintance, led to the accommodation of differences, and he settled with his wife for some time in Venice. During his residence there the celebrated Veracini arrived in that city, whose performances awakened an extra-ordinary emulation in Tartini, for though he was acknowledged to have himself a powerful hand, he never had heard a great player before, or conceived it possible for the bow to possess such varied powers of energy and expression, as were commanded by Veracini. In fact, Tartini quitted Venice the very next day, and proceeded to Ancona, in order to study the use of the bow in greater tranquility, and with more convenience than he could in Venice.

It was during his residence at Ancona that by diligence and practice he acquired a reputation sufficient to entitle him, in 1721, to an invitation to the distinguished place of first violin and master of the band to the celebrated Church of St. Anthony of Padua. By this time his fame was so much extended that he had repeated offers from Paris and London to visit those Capitals ; but by a singular species of devotion and attachment to his patron Saint, to whom he consecrated himself and his instrument, he declined entering into any other service.

By the year 1748 he had made many excellent scholars, and had established such a system of practice for
students on the violin, that he was celebrated all over Europe; and his reputation increased until his death, an event which was much regretted by the inhabitants of Padua, where he had resided nearly fifty years. M. de Lalande states, that he had from Tartini's own mouth the following singular anecdote respecting one of his compositions, the well known Trille del Diavolo', which shows to what a degree his imagination was inflamed.

"He dreamed one night, in 1713, that he had made a compact with the devil, who promised to be at his service on all occasions ; and, during this vision, every- thing succeeded according to his mind : his wishes were anticipated, and his desires always surpassed, by the assistance of his new servant. In short, he imagined that he presented the devil with his violin, in order to discover what kind of a musician he was, when, to his great astonishment, he heard him play a solo so singularly beautiful, which he executed with such superior taste and precision, that it surpassed all the music he had ever heard or conceived in his life. So great was his surprise, and so exquisite his delight upon this occasion, that it deprived him of the power of breathing. He awoke with the violence of his sensations, and instantly seized his riddle, in hopes of expressing what he had just heard ; but in vain. He however directly composed a piece, which is, perhaps, the best of all his works, and called it the ' Devil's Sonata ' ; he knew it, however, to be so inferior to what his sleep had produced, that he stated, he would have broken his instrument, and abandoned music for ever, if he could have subsisted by any other means."

The following are the principal works of Tartini :

Sei concerti, Lib. I. e II., Op. 1 (Amsterdam, Roger, 1734) ;

Sei sonate a violino e violoncello o cembalo, Op. 2 (Rome, 1745);

The same, with six others, as XII. sonate a violino e basso (not figured), etc.. Op. 3 (Paris, Leclerc);

Sei concerti a violino solo, due violin i, viola e violoncello o cembala di concerto, Op. 4 (Paris, Venier) ;

VI. Sonates a violon seul et basse continue, also marked,
Op. 4 (Paris, Leclerc) ;

6 do., Op. 5 (ib. 1747) ;

6 do., Op. 6 (ib. 1770) ;

6 do., Op. 7 (Paris) ;

Sei sonate a tre, due violini col basso, Op. 8 (Paris, Meaupetit, Mme. Boivin, M. Leclerc, Mile. Castagneri) ; 6 do., Op. 9 (Paris);

L'arte del arco (Amsterdam, French edition, Paris, Cartier) ;
Concert!
III. a cinque con violino obligate, Lib. I. (Paris, Mme. Boivin,
Leclerc, Castagneri, Laine") ;
VI. concerti a otto stromenti etc. (Amsterdam,
Witvogel) ;
VI. concerti a cinque stromenti, etc., Lib. II. (Amsterdam, Le
Cene) ;
VI. concerti a cinque stromenti, etc., Lib. III. (ib.) ;

Trattato di musica secondo la vera scienza dell 'armoma (Padua, 1754);

De' principii dell' armonia musicale contenuta nel diatonico genere (ib. 1767)

Risposta di Guiseppe Tartini all critica del di lui Trattato di musica di Mons. Le Serre, di Ginevra (Venice, 1767);

Lettera alia signora Maddalena
Lombardini, etc. (Venice, 1770),

Trattato delle appoggiature si ascendenti che discendenti per il violino etc. (Venice, Benzon, 1818).

The following are in M.S. ; 48 sonatas for violin and bass (including the Trillo del diavoio), 127 violin concertos with quartet. Among the most noteworthy of Tartini's pupils may be mentioned Pugnani, Nardini, Pagin, Farrari, and Lahoussaye.

It is worth}' of note that Tartini formed all his scholars on the solos of Corelli.

As a theorist and improver in the art of violin playing the name of Tartini stands out with additional lustre. It was he who first observed the phenomenon of the third sound, which he did in the year 1714, at Venice. This is the resonance of a third note, when the two upper notes of a chord are sounded. Thus, if two parts are sung in thirds, every sensitive ear will feel the impression of a bass, or lower part. This may be distinctly heard if a series of consecutive thirds are played on the violin, they being perfectly in tune. *"If you do not hear the bass,"* Tartini was wont to say to his pupils, *"the thirds or sixths which you are playing are not perfect in the intonation."*

About 1730, Tartini effected considerable improvements in the bow, which contributed in no small measure to revolutionize the art of violin playing. He caused the bows to be made less clumsy, and out of lighter wood than those which had been previously used; he adopted the straight stick instead of retaining the bent form, shortened the head, and made small longitudinal grooves in that part of the stick which is held in the hand, so as to prevent its turning between the fingers. His merits as a composer have been commented upon by Dr. Burney in the following terms:

"Though he made Corelli his model in the purity of his harmony and simplicity of his modulation, he has greatly surpassed that composer in the fertility and originality of his invention, not only in the subjects of his melodies, but in the truly cantabile manner of treating them. Many of his adagios want nothing but words to be excellent pathetic opera songs. His allegros are sometimes difficult; but the passages fairly belong to the instrument for which they were composed, and were suggested by his consummate knowledge of the fingerboard and the powers of the bow. As a harmonist, he was perhaps more truly scientific than any other composer of his time, in the clearness, character, and precision of his basses, which were never casual, or the effect of habit or auricular prejudice and expectation, but learned, judicious, and certain. And yet I must, in justice to others, own that though the adagio and solo playing in general of his scholars are exquisitely polished and expressive, yet it seems as if that

energy, fire, and freedom of bow, which modern symphonies and orchestra playing require, were wanting."

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