

The True Story of NICOLO PAGANINI

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
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PAGANINI, NICOLO, born at Genoa, February 18th, 1784, died at Nice, May 27th, 1840, the most extraordinary fiddler of modern times. His father, Antonio Paganini, variously described as a ship broker, mercantile clerk, small trades-man, etc., was a great lover of music, and performed creditably on the mandoline.

Having discovered that his son possessed musical talents of uncommon order, he immediately set about to develop them, and young Paganini began to study the violin at the age of six. The combined severity of the father and firm determination of the child to become a great player caused him to practice so incessantly that he soon got beyond the tuition of his father. He was then placed under G. Servetto, the leader of the theatre at Genoa, and two years later was instructed by Giacomo Costa, the principal violinist and conductor in the Cathedral at Genoa, under whom he made rapid progress. He also studied harmony and counterpoint under Gnecco. Scarcely nine years of age young Paganini composed his first sonata, which production is unfortunately lost. He was also desired by his violin master to perform every Sunday in church a violin concerto, a circumstance to which Paganini himself attached much importance, as having forced him to the constant study of fresh pieces.

In 1793, the young virtuoso appeared in public for the first time, in a concert of the principal theatre of Genoa, on which occasion he played variations of his own composition on the French air "La Carmagnole," with immense success. About 1795 Paganini the elder took his gifted son to Parma with the intention of placing him under Alessandro Rolla, then famous as a conductor and composer. Paganini in a Vienna periodical thus relates their first meeting.

"On arriving at Rollas house, we found him ill and in bed, and appeared little inclined to see us. His wife, however, conducted us into a room adjoining the bedroom until she had communicated with her husband. Finding on the table of the room into which we had been ushered, a violin and the music of Rolla's last concerto, I took up the instrument and played the piece at sight. Surprised and astonished at what he heard, the composer enquired the name of the player, and when told it was a mere lad, would not believe it unless he had seen for himself. Having satisfied himself on this point, he told me to go to Paer for instruction in composition, adding that he (Rolla) could teach me nothing."

Whether or not Paganini ever went to Paer for instruction is doubtful, Paer being then in Germany, but it appears he studied some time under Ghiretti. It is also stated on good authority that for several months he had regular lessons from Rolla, but for some unaccountable reason Paganini in later years was unwilling to admit that this was so.

Already bent on finding out new effects on the violin Paganini explored paths then unknown to contemporary fiddlers and developed a new style of fingering and bowing peculiar to himself. After his return to Genoa he composed his first studies, which are of such unheard-of difficulty that he himself is reported to have practiced a single passage during ten or twelve hours. This intense study naturally resulted in the acquisition of unlimited execution, and also operated considerably against his health.

Up to this period he was wholly under the control of his father, a harsh and mercenary man, whose only thought was how he could but turn his son's remarkable talent to his own advantage. This treatment soon engendered in the breast of the young man a desire for freedom, an opportunity, however, soon presented itself. He had, by repeated requests, managed to obtain from his father permission to attend the annual musical festival at Lucca, where he had obtained an engagement, and accordingly started on his journey in November 1798. Here he was received with so much enthusiasm that he resolved not to return to his parent, but set off to fulfill engagements at Pisa, and other towns, in all of which he performed with great success. In vain the angry and mortified parent endeavoured by all the means in his power to reclaim the young runaway who had thus set him at defiance.

The young artist determined not to go back again into bondage, though for some time he remitted his father a portion of his earnings. The youth, intoxicated with the license of his life, plunged into all kinds of dissipation, especially into gambling, at this time much in vogue in Italy. Alternate fits of gambling and study, both of which he pursued with equal zeal, operated dangerously on his naturally enfeebled frame, and frequent illness prevented him fulfilling many engagements. More than once he wasted in one evening the proceeds of several concerts, and was obliged to borrow money on his violin, the source of his livelihood, in order to pay his gambling debts.

On one occasion he was announced for a concert at Leghorn, but he had gambled away his money and pawned his violin, so that he was compelled to get the loan of an instrument in order to play in the evening. In this emergency he applied to M. Livron, a French merchant of Leghorn, and an excellent amateur performer, who possessed a Guarneri del Jesu violin, said to be one of the finest in the world. This valuable instrument was readily lent to young Paganini. After the concert, when Paganini returned the instrument to M. Livron, the latter who had been to hear him, exclaimed, *"Never will I profane the strings which your fingers have touched ! That instrument is yours."* The astonishment and delight of the young artist may be more easily imagined than described. This instrument Paganini used at all his concerts, and at his death he bequeathed it to his native town, Genoa, where it is preserved in a glass case in the museum. The possession of this violin had the effect of causing Paganini to relinquish for a while the allurements of the gaming-table. Paganini himself tells us that a certain nobleman once offered for it a sum equivalent to four hundred dollars; but would not sell it even if one thousand dollars were offered for it, although, he admits, he was at this period, greatly in need of funds to pay off certain gambling debts.

About this time came the turning point in Paganini's life so far as gambling was concerned. He was invited to a friend's house where gambling was not only tolerated but encouraged. *"All my capital,"* he says, *"consisted of thirty francs, as I had disposed of my jewels, watch, rings, etc.; I nevertheless resolved on risking this last resource, and, if fortune proved fickle, to sell my violin and proceed to St. Petersburg without instrument or baggage, with a view to adjusting my affairs. My thirty francs were soon reduced to three, and I already fancied myself on the road to Russia, when luck took a sudden turn, and I won one hundred and sixty francs. This saved my violin and completely set me up. From that day forward I gradually gave up gaming, becoming more and more convinced that a gambler is an object of contempt to all well-regulated minds."*

From 1801 to 1803 Paganini lived in comparative retirement, dividing his attention between composition and the guitar, on which instrument he also exhibited great proficiency. In 1804 Paganini returned to Genoa and public life, composing, teaching, and concert giving with great success.

The following year Paganini was appointed director of music and conductor of the opera orchestra at Lucca; and it is said that it was at the numerous concerts given at Lucca during his sojourn there, that the great violinist first elaborated many of those curious effects, such as performances on one string, harmonic, and pizzicato passages, which afterwards rendered him so famous. Paganini was ever averse to the trammels of regular engagements, but chose rather to seek his fortune in the indulgence of a roving life.

About this period our artist devoted much of his time to composition. He was then twenty years of age, and wrote in his native town four grand quartets for violin, tenor, 'cello, and guitar, also variations for violin, on an original theme, with guitar accompaniment. He also at this period gave lessons to a young girl of Genoa, Catarina Calcagno, born there in 1797, who when only fifteen years of age astonished Italy by her wonderful performances. This young girl continued her artistic career until the year 1816, after which all trace of her appears to be lost.

In 1805 Paganini, having secured the patronage of the Princess Eliza, sister of Napoleon, and wife of Prince Bacciochi, was appointed director of her private music, and also teacher of the violin to Prince Bacciochi. The spirit of unrest, however, soon began to assert itself in the breast of Paganini and he determined to quit his position and travel. In 1808 he obtained the desired leave, and set out on a wandering career of concert giving, visiting the towns of northern Italy, performing with wonderful success, and reaping a rich harvest thereby. During his wanderings he found himself once more at Leghorn, where he had previously met with so much success.

Paganini related a series of incidents which happened on the occasion of his first concert in this town. He came on the stage limping from the effects of a nail which had run into his heel, whereat the audience laughed. Just as he was prepared to play his concerto, the candles of his desk fell out, which increased the hilarity. No sooner was this rectified than his first string broke, which caused an uproar; but, says Paganini, *"I played the piece on three strings, and the grins quickly changed into acclamations of applause."*

From Leghorn he went to Turin, where he was received with unbounded enthusiasm, thence visiting other towns in Northern Italy. At Ferrara he met with an adventure which might have resulted in his death. It had been arranged that Signora Marcolini should sing at one of his concerts, but, at the last moment, indisposition prevented the fulfillment of the engagement. In this predicament Paganini appealed to Signora Pallerini, the principal dancer of the theatre, but possessed of a most agreeable voice, who ultimately, after great persuasion, consented to sing at the concert. The lady, however, became nervous when she appeared before the audience, and as a consequence she sang with timidity, and her efforts were only rewarded with hisses. At this contretemps Paganini became furious and vowed to be avenged. Towards the close of the concert he announced to the audience that he proposed imitating the noises of various animals and birds. After he had imitated the mewing of a cat, the barking of a dog, etc., he advanced to the foot-lights and called out

"Questo e per quelli che han fischiato"

(This is for those who hissed, and imitated the braying of an ass.) At this the pit rose to a man, rushed towards the stage, which they scaled, and would have killed Paganini on the spot had he not made good his escape. It was not until he was safely at home that he learned the cause of this fearful uproar. It appears the people of Ferrara had a reputation for stupidity, and were generally greeted outside their town with a loud hee-haw. Hence, the audience, at Paganini's concert, considered they had been greatly insulted. He was never heard again at Ferrara.

About the year 1813 his position at the Court came to a sudden termination. It appears that on a certain occasion, Paganini appeared in the orchestra of a concert preceding a ball in his uniform of captain of the royal gendarmerie, which, as a privilege, he was allowed to wear. On this occasion, however, he was requested to replace the uniform for plain evening dress, but this he refused to do, and in the result was dismissed from his position.

In the year 1813 Paganini composed his celebrated variations "Le Streghe" (The Witches). This is taken from a ballet by Sussmayer, called "Il Noce di Benevento." He played this piece for the first time at La Scala theatre, and excited unbounded enthusiasm and he ever afterwards entertained a great liking for Milan.

He not only resided there during the greater part of 1813, but nearly the whole of 1814. In the month of October of that year he went to Bologna, and made the acquaintance of Rossini, which subsequently ripened into friendship.

In 1816, occurred his musical duel with Lafont the famous French violinist. Paganini was then at Genoa and hearing that Lafont was giving concerts at Milan he immediately proceeded to that city for the purpose of hearing him play. "His performance," said Paganini, "pleased me considerably." A week afterwards Paganini gave a concert at La Scala, at which Lafont was present, and the next day proposed that Paganini and himself should perform on the same evening.

"I excused myself," said Paganini "on the ground that such experiments were always impolitic, as the public invariably looked upon such matters as duels, in which there was always a victim, and that it would be so in this case; for as he was acknowledged the best violinist in France, so the public indulgently considered me as the best of Italian violinists. Lafont not looking at it in this light, I was obliged to accept the challenge. I allowed him to regulate the programme, which he did in the following manner:

We each played a concerto of our own composition, after which we played a duo concertante by Kreutzer. In this I did not deviate in the least from the composer's text while we played together, but in the solo parts I yielded freely to my own imagination, and introduced several novelties, which seemed to annoy my adversary. Then followed a Russian air, with variations, by Lafont, and I finished the concert with my variations on 'Le Streghe.' Lafont probably surpassed me in tone, but the applause which followed my efforts convinced me I did not suffer by comparison."

It is generally conceded that Paganini was the victor. Two years later Paganini entered into a similar contest with the Polish violinist, Lipinski, at Placentia.

In the year 1817 the great artist was at Rome during the Carnival, and renewed his acquaintance with Rossini who was then engaged in producing his "Cenerentola," and Paganini gave several concerts always with great success. He then went to Naples, where he found several artists unfavourably disposed towards him. They professed to doubt the wonderful abilities attributed to him, and desired to put his talent to the test. A young composer named Danna, fresh from the Conservatory was engaged to write a piece of music containing unheard of difficulties, convinced that the great violinist would fail in his endeavour to master them. He was then invited to a musical gathering and met the violinist, Onario de Vito, Danna, the violinist Festa and the 'cellist Ciandelli. He was then asked if he could play the piece at sight, at the same time the music was handed to him. The wary Italian however, suspected the snare that was laid for him and consented to perform the music which he at once accomplished without the slightest effort. Amazed and astounded at what they had heard his would-be detractors thereupon accorded him the highest approbation and applause.

It was during his stay at Naples that Paganini met with a most singular adventure. About this time he suffered greatly in health, and becoming worse he engaged an apartment in that part of the town called Petrajo. His complaint increasing in severity it was reported that he was consumptive. The opinion then prevailed in Naples that consumption was contagious. His landlord became alarmed at having in his house one whom he thought was dying of this malady, and in the most brutal manner turned the sick violinist into the street. Fortunately, the 'cellist Ciandelli, a friend of Paganini was passing by, and incensed at this act of cruelty, which might have proved fatal to his friend, came to the rescue and belaboured the barbarous landlord unmercifully with a stick he carried, and conveyed the invalid to a comfortable lodging where he was carefully attended to.

In March of 1820 Paganini was again in Milan, and took part in organizing a society of musical amateurs called "Gli Orfei," for the performance of classical music. He conducted several of these concerts, and the Society presented him with various tokens of admiration and respect. From Milan the great violinist proceeded to Rome for a short stay, and in 1821 went to Naples, thence to Palermo, where he gave concerts, but not with his usual success ; his stay in that town was consequently of short duration.

We next find him at Venice, then at Placentia. In April of 1822 he again visited Milan, his return being hailed with the warmest enthusiasm. About this time he had serious thoughts of visiting Germany, but the bad state of his health rendered it inadvisable to quit his native country, at least just then.

In January, 1823, whilst at Pavia, he was seized with an illness, which was thought would prove fatal. On his recovery he journeyed to Turin and scored one of his usual successes. He then proceeded to his native town and passed several months there in quietude and repose, after which he found himself well enough in health to give concerts in the theatre, which were numerously attended by the inhabitants. In 1824 he again went to Milan and performed at La Scala with unbounded enthusiasm, after which he returned to Genoa and gave two concerts, proceeding to Venice shortly afterwards.

From 1825 to 1827 Paganini revisited many towns, the scenes of former triumphs, and in the latter year Pope Leo XII decorated him with the *Order of the Golden Spur*, as a mark of appreciation of his great talent. He now decided to visit Vienna, and arrived there on the 16th March, 1828. He gave his first concert on the 29th of that month, an event which threw his audience into "*an indescribable paroxysm of enthusiasm.*" M. Schilling thus describes the scene.

"The first note he played on his Guarnerius indeed, from his first step into the room his reputation was decided in Germany. Acted upon as by an electric spark, a brilliant halo of glory appeared to invest his whole person; he stood before us like a miraculous apparition in the domain of art."

Even the shopkeepers vied with each other in rendering homage to the wonderful Italian, and the pitch of enthusiasm was carried to so great an extent that goods in the windows were labelled *a la Paganini*. Hats, gloves, shoes, in fact all articles of dress and fashion were named after him; any extraordinary stroke at billiards was called *un coup a la Paganini*; snuff-boxes, cigar cases and the heads of walking sticks were embellished with his portrait; verses appeared in every publication, in fact, the name of Paganini seemed the all absorbing topic of the time. At the termination of his own series of concerts, he gave one for the benefit of the poor, and the Mayor of Vienna thereupon presented to Paganini the gold medal of the St. Salvator; the Emperor also conferred upon him the title of chamber virtuoso. After a lengthened stay in Vienna, the great violinist went to Prague, but his reception there was of so cold a nature that he quitted that town with all speed.

At Berlin he was received with the same fanatical enthusiasm which he excited in Vienna. During the next three years he visited all the principal towns of Austria, Bohemia, Saxony, Poland, Bavaria, Prussia, and in the Rhenish provinces, with unceasing triumphs. In 1831 he arrived in Paris, and gave his first concert at the Opera house on the 8th March. The impression he created on this occasion has been described as a "*positive and universal frenzy,*" which was fully maintained during his stay in Paris.

In the May following he proceeded to London, where his arrival had been impatiently awaited. His first appearance, quoting from some of the contemporary accounts, will give some idea of the extraordinary impression created by the man as well as the artist. A Mr. Gardiner, an amateur of Leicester, thus describes what took place.

"At the hazard of my ribs I placed myself at the Opera door, two hours and a half before the concert began; presently the crowd of musicians filled the colonnade to suffocation, all anxious to get the front seat, because they had to pay for their places, Paganini not giving a single ticket away. The concert opened with Beethoven's Second Symphony, admirably performed by the Philharmonic band ; after which Lablanche sang 'Largo al Factotum' with much applause, and was encored."

"A breathless silence then ensued, and every eye watched the action of this extraordinary violinist, as he glided from the side scenes to the front of the stage. An involuntary cheering burst from every part of the house, many persons rising from their seats to view the spectre during the thunder of this unprecedented applause, his gaunt and extraordinary appearance being more like that of a devotee about to suffer martyrdom than one to delight you with his art. With the tip of his bow he set off the orchestra in a grand military movement, with a force and vivacity as surprising as it was new. At the termination of this introduction, he commenced with a soft, streamy note of celestial quality ; and with three or four whips of his bow, elicited points of sound that mounted to the third heaven, and as bright as stars. . . . Immediately an execution followed which was equally indescribable, in which were intermingled tones more than human, which seem to be wrung from the deepest anguish of a broken heart. After this, the audience were enraptured by a lively strain, in which you heard, commingled with the tones of the instrument, those of the voice, with the pizzicato of the guitar forming a compound of exquisite beauty."

"Nothing can be more intense in feeling," said a contemporary critic, "than his conception and delivery of an adagio passage. His tone is, perhaps, not quite so full and round as that of a De Beriot or Baillot, for example; it is delicate rather than strong, but this delicacy was probably never possessed equally by another player."

"There is no trick in his playing," writes another critic; "it is all fair scientific execution, opening to us a new order of sounds. . . . All his passages seem free and unpremeditated, as if conceived on the instant. One has no impression of their having cost him either forethought or labour. The word difficulty has no place in his vocabulary . . . etc."

Paganini's lengthened tour through London and the provinces was everywhere attended with the same success, and brought him in a golden harvest. Having heard a few critical remarks from our own countrymen, we will now turn to France with a view to confirming what may appear, at first sight, the outcome of an over-heated imagination.

Here is the text of a criticism by G. Imbert de Laphaleque:

To bring the art of performing upon the violin to such perfection that what is material or mechanical in the process shall no longer be apparent, is a difficult problem to solve. Such a result is only to be attained by those who are born musicians. Tartini, Pugnani, Mestrino, Jarnowick, had each great reputation. They obtained it not only by astonishing powers of execution, but by the soul with which they imbued the sounds they produced. One of the most celebrated of Pugnani's pupils, Viotti (of whom we should have but a poor idea were we to judge of him by the report of a biographer, who, in order to describe his talent, makes use of the following ridiculous image, 'a bow of cotton, governed by the arm of Hercules,') . Viotti, it will be well remembered, knew how to make his hearers participate in the emotions he himself experienced. He was eloquent, pathetic, and sometimes affecting even to tears; nevertheless, in common with Tartini, Pugnani, and Mestrino, he must have been master of all the resources of the instrument on which he possessed such an incontestable superiority. Since this Rhode and Kreutzer, in France who appear to have divided the inheritance of the powers of Viotti, have reached a degree of merit that has been justly appreciated, but without excelling their predecessors.

This glory was reserved for Paganini. In his hands the violin has become a new instrument. Urged by his proper genius beyond the limits of the method taught before his time; he has in the first instance begun his course at the point where others considered they had arrived at the goal. Pursuing with incredible boldness, paths till then unknown, he has created resources and powers that are almost magical, and the spirit of innovation has carried him so far in the sphere he has chosen, that when he only modifies, we are led to believe he is inventing. He has changed, displaced, and augmented everything, and with such benefit to art that it seems as if he had entirely re-modelled it. Paganini has taken exactly the opposite course to certain singers who make an instrument of their organ: he has made an organ of his instrument which amply develops his ideas. In this manner neither bow nor string are objects of consideration; his violin is the aggregate of a great musician of a man of genius. It is no longer a single power which he has learned to employ by ascertained processes. It is, we repeat, an organ, to give articulation to which is a part of his nature. Those who have not heard him can form no idea of what he is. It was not believed that science could go so far. It at once confounds the heart and the understanding, the imagination is bewildered. Anyone who has not experienced the impressions he produces would not conceive such an effect to be possible when they have been experienced, it is still incredible, so much stronger are the effects than the production of mere pleasure.

All the great violinists have a style exclusively their own they are never unlike themselves. Paganini is never Paganini; he is by turns pleasure, despair or rage, he speaks, he weeps, he sings, sounds are to him only the means of expression, and the emotions which he raises with so much energy, he destroys in an instant by the unexpected contrast of a harshness somewhat revolting from the suddenness with which it interrupts and changes the sensation. But he does not suffer this approach to discontent to endure; and at the moment when one would be tempted to complain, he again makes himself master of the heart he binds it with a golden chain, and seems to draw it to him with an irresistible power.

Paganini is not one of those ordinary artists who labour to attain elegant positions; since his whole organization is identified with his instrument, they are the spontaneous effect of the sentiment which inspires him. Were one to hear without seeing him, his gesture might be imagined from the expression of the music. Notwithstanding the continual impulse which governs him, there are characteristics in his manner which are sufficiently marked to allow description.

His bow, which he holds in a more perpendicular direction than usual is easily drawn, its motion is free, neat, and majestic, and the boldness with which he uses it seems as it were to double its length. His manner is so decidedly facile and graceful that he pleases the eye while he charms the ear. All the notes of his scale are of the same quality, pure, full, brilliant, and of a richness wonderfully adapted to the effects which they are intended to produce. They are pearls which detach or which unite themselves to form enchanted wreaths.

In the fertile and brilliant variety of his playing, his forte is most extraordinary and unequalled, and opposed to the lightest and softest piano.

His adagio possesses a grace a softness of expression, which penetrates the heart.

His allegro has now a richness of gaiety, an abandon, a rapturous enthusiasm which carries away the hearer ; now it expresses a witty badinage to the brilliancy and coquetry of which is added a pizzicato, while the power and felicitous application belong to himself alone.

It would be impossible to follow through the details of execution an artist so original as Paganini in his manner of treating the violin. Nevertheless the novelty of some parts of his playing is so striking, that they require notice. We should first signalize the agility and force which he displays in the pizzicato even in *volate prestissime*, which he plays half with the bow, half pizzicato, without ever slackening the time. Lately he has succeeded in making the shake pizzicato; but this is more astonishing than agreeable. Those flageolet notes or harmonics, which, producing the poorest effects, have, until now, been considered as mere trickery, Paganini has so improved, and employs so happily, that he has rendered them one of the legitimate resources of the violin. The grace and expression of the melody he produces, cannot be described, but there are facts which can be stated. One of the most surprising is, that he not only stops double in the harmonics with as much accuracy, purity, and rapidity, as in the usual position, but that he draws powerful effects from these sounds, which hitherto no violinist has been able to employ otherwise than pianissimo. Sometimes too in the midst of a *volata*, he unexpectedly introduces a note in the harmonics, and instantly resumes the original position. Those who are initiated in the mysteries of the harmonics, will understand the daring and address of this innovation. Paganini makes sport of that which to the greatest violinists is the *ne-plus-ultra* of difficulty. Thus in double stopping he executes with more ease and certainty than they do on the single string. He even performs it with equal facility in all positions. In a concerto of Kreutzer's he introduced a *duetto cantabile*, the whole of which he double stopped. No one that we are aware of had yet succeeded in producing a succession of chords in three simultaneous parts. Paganini employs these on organ points, in the most rapid movements and one hears a multitude of the most complicated dissonance, which nevertheless are correct as to harmony and intense in effect.

Paganini, always admirable, is never more so than when he dispenses with the support of the orchestra, and is heard without the accompaniment of any other instrument. It is then he manifests all the power of his miraculous hand, and all the wonders of that polyphonic performance of which he alone possesses the secret. He should be heard when playing on the four strings whilst his bow sustains an enchanting melody, the fingers, by a varied and arpeggio accompaniment, produce sometimes a base, sometimes a complete harmony.

The astonishing commingling of the arpeggios with the sounds drawn by the bow, excites the admiration of the greatest masters. He generally ends by a crowd of arpeggios, the incredible velocity of which, and the active and vehement rapidity of his bow, put him quite out of breath. In a letter dated from London in 1831, Paganini complains of the excessive and noisy admiration to which he was subjected in the streets of London, which left him no peace and actually blocked his passage to and from the theatre.

"Although the public curiosity to see me," says he, "is long since satisfied ; though I have played in public at least thirty times, and my likeness has been reproduced in all possible styles and forms, yet I can never leave my home without being mobbed by people who are not content with following and jostling me, but actually get in front of me, and prevent my going either way, address me in English of which I don't know a word, and even feel me as if to find out if I am made of flesh and blood. And this is not only among the common people but among the upper classes."

"Many people," said a contemporary critic, "boast of being able to read music at sight. Whatever may be their powers in this respect, we advise them not to try their strength against Paganini. If he is acquainted with the composer, he does not read it, he knows it beforehand. In his musical travels it has happened several times, that on reaching a town he has announced that he would play any concerto which the professors might choose to put before him. He once made a proposal of this kind at Milan. Rolla, the leader of the band at the Scala, and a celebrated violinist, undertook to reply to it; he composed a concerto on purpose, and carried it to Paganini at the moment he appeared before the public, Paganini took the piece, and either intentionally or otherwise, placed the copy topsy-turvy on the desk. It will be supposed that he instantly turned it, but pretending not even to perceive his error, and apparently not considering the immense difficulty of reading in this manner, he played the concerto as if he was perfectly familiar with the music which he then saw for the first time."

It is of little consequence to Paganini what instrument music is written for; he has sometimes gone into a room, and seizing a tenor which lay at hand, without the least preparation would play a violin part to the exercises which Cramer had composed for the pianoforte. Paganini performs indiscriminately on all violins; although he uses habitually a Guarnerius; but what will appear singular, is, that he strings it with thinner strings than is usual. At one of the concerts which he gave in Germany, envy had induced somebody to substitute a bad violin for the one on which he ought to have played, hoping thus perhaps to have robbed Paganini of some of his advantages; but he was not less brilliant than usual, and it was not even suspected that his instrument had been changed. It is a common occurrence for the strings of a violin to break; Paganini is not the least disturbed by this circumstance. If a string snaps he continues playing without any transposition every note that was written for the four strings. When from any cause his instrument gets out of tune he has a method of concealing the defect. Sometimes he screws up the G string without interrupting the performance, and with such dexterity that it is impossible to perceive it. He does not avow this expedient himself, we heard it from an artist long admitted into his intimacy. The advantages that Paganini derives from this innocent fraud, is that of raising the G string to notes which are commonly beyond its reach. He thus adds to the fourth string, notes which legitimately belong to the second or third, and whilst he is playing he raises or lowers the string as he pleases. In an organ-point or a Coronella, he has recourse to deceptions, by means of which he leads us on from one degree of surprise to another, provokes and ensures the attention of his audience, and when he has excited them to the highest pitch he leads them by a succession of unlooked-for wonders to transports of enthusiasm.

The greatest artists have yet to explain how Paganini produces this multitude of prodigious effects. None have yet been able to discover his double harmonics, nor how he produces the metallic sound which imitates that of a bell, with which he introduces a conversation by the means of a simple harmonic. Some persons determined to interrogate him.

One evening, when the best instrumentalists in Vienna met at his house, the excellent quartett player, Schuppanzigh, and Mayseder, who has composed so gracefully for the violin and pianoforte, pressed him with questions on these subjects. Tell us now, said Mayseder, how you obtain, at the upper end of the neck of your instrument, what we produce close by the bridge, and those staccato pizzicati, which you play with the left hand without the aid of the bow, and those pizzicati, unrivalled for force and rapidity. Paganini, who is averse to making known his manner of executing, answered,

'Miocaro, ognuno ha suoi segreti.' (*My dear friend, every one has his secrets.*).

"I am far from disagreeing with you," replied the German violinist, *"but you may publish yours without any danger ; I promise you they will not be abused."*

It would occupy too much space to notice all the compositions which form the library Paganini daily increases. Amongst those which he performs on the fourth string, are the Senate Militaire, the Priere de Moise of which we have already spoken, Haydn's popular hymn, Serba oh dio, Francesco Aigusto Mozart's air, Ncu piu andrai, in which he displays a freedom in bowing not to be imagined and Weigl's air, Pria che l'itupegno, where, amongst a thousand other surprising things, he plays interrupted octaves with such rapidity that they might be imagined double notes; some have indeed fancied that he produced two sounds at the same time from one string. Paganini revisited England in the following season, playing his farewell concert at the Victoria Theatre, London, June 11th, 1832.

He then returned to Paris, and remained there two years. During this period the great violinist made a request to Berlioz, with whom he was on terms of great friendship, to write a concerto for his Stradivarius viola, which re-suited in the famous composition "Harold en Italie."

Four years after this Berlioz received from Paganini a present of twenty thousand francs as a testimonial of his admiration for the composer.

In 1834, after an absence of six years, Paganini once more set foot on his native soil. He now desired to rest a little from his labours, and the wealth he had amassed during his travels enabled him to purchase several charming properties. One of these, the Villa Gajona, near Parma, became his residence for two years. Here he lived in comparative quiet, occasionally, however, giving concerts. On his return to Italy he was almost worshipped by his countrymen, and was received everywhere with every manifestation of respect. On the 14th of November of this year (1834) he gave a concert at Placentia, for the benefit of the poor, and on the 12th December following, he played at the Court of the Duchess of Parma, from whom he received the Imperial Order of St. George. In 1835 the great artist divided his attentions between Genoa and Milan. About this period his health always weak began to show signs of giving way, his complaint, Phthisis of the larynx, rendering him a complete shadow of his former self.

In 1836 he was induced by some Parisian speculators to embark in the establishment of a Casino for music and gambling. This club, which was situated in the most fashionable quarter of Paris, was opened towards the end of November, 1837, under the name of Casino Paganini, but as the Government refused to allow gambling, and music was not sufficient attraction, the venture turned out a great failure. A law suit arose out of this unfortunate business and Paganini, in the result, had to pay between forty and fifty thousand francs.

The career of the great violinist was now fast drawing to a close. The medical men advised him to proceed to Marseilles, as they feared his death would result should he remain during the winter in Paris. He accordingly journeyed South and stayed for some time at the house of a friend. From Marseilles he proceeded to Genoa, and shortly afterwards decided to pass the winter at Nice, which was destined to be his last journey.

The great violinist died on the 27th of May, 1840.

The compositions of Paganini (the greater portion of which he left in a sadly incomplete state) display considerable merit. Written solely for his own performance they abound with almost overwhelming difficulties. During his life-time the great artist always exhibited great precaution in the safe keeping of his orchestral parts the violin part he never allowed to be seen, and it was not until after his death that any idea could be gained concerning his position as a composer.

Among the earliest works which appeared were

Ventiquattro Capricci per Violino solo, dedicati agli Artisti, Op. i." The studies or capriccios, in various keys, consist of arpeggi, staccati, trills in octaves, and scales in octaves, tenths, combinations of double, triple, and quadruple chords, etc.;

Sei Sonate per Violine e Chitarra, dedicati al Signor delle Piane," Op. 2;

Sei Sonate per Violino e Chitarra, dedicati alia Ragazza Eleonora," Op. 3;

Tre gran Quartetti a Violino, Viola, Chitarra e Violoncello," Op. 4,

Idem, Op. 5, Paganini said of this work to Mr. Harrys, that it was not his, but was formed from some of his themes, badly arranged.

The following works are from the catalogue of M. Conestabile, who obtained the list from Paganini's son:

Four Concertos for the Violin with accompaniments;

Four other concertos, the orchestral parts unwritten. The last was written a short time prior to his death at Nice;

Variations upon a comic theme continued for the orchestra;

Sonata for the large Viol, with orchestral parts;

"God save the King" varied for the Violin, with orchestral parts;

"Le Streghe," variations on a ballet air, with orchestral parts;

Variations upon "Non piu mesta," theme from Cenerentola;

Grand Sentimental Sonata;

Sonata, with variations;

« La Primavera," (Spring) Sonata without accompaniments;

"Varsovie," Sonata;

La ci darem la mano;

« Le Carnaval de Venise";

"Di tanti palpiti ";

Marie Louise ";

Romance pour le chant;

Cantabile for Violin and Piano;

Polonaise, with variations;

Fantaisie Vocale;

Sonata, for Violin Solo;

Nine Quartetts, for Violin, Alto, Violon- cello, and Guitar;

Cantabile and Waltz;

Three duetts, for Violin and Violoncello;

Other Duetts and small Pieces for Violin and Guitar.

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