

NICOLÒ PAGANINI DIABOLUS IN MUSICA

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DIABOLUS IN MUSICA

EDITED BY
ABDREA BARIZZA AND FULVIA MORABITO



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PREFACE

THE ART OF NICOLÒ PAGANINI — and by the word ‘art’ we mean his way of composing and playing music, and of interpreting the compositions of other artists — burst like a bomb in the musical world of the time. It impressed the most prominent musical personalities and generated a long track of admirers, emulators and even detractors, as it is often the case with occurrences so significant as to defy indifference. In any case, in a temporal perspective, we can say that his impact was so great as to leave a deep mark in the history of music.

For these reasons, last year an international meeting titled *Nicolò Paganini. Diabolus in musica* was organized in Liguria — the region where Paganini was born — and specifically in La Spezia. The event was organized by the *Società dei Concerti* of La Spezia and by the *Centro Studi Opera Omnia Luigi Boccherini* from Lucca, in collaboration with the online magazine *MusicalWords.it*. It took place within the VIII Festival Paganiniano di Carro between July 16th to 18th. The thirty-three participants, including Italian and foreign scholars, had been selected by a scientific committee composed by Andrea Barizza, Roberto Illiano, Lorenzo Frassà, Fulvia Morabito, Luca Sala and Massimiliano Sala¹, and they gathered at the CAMEC (Center for Modern and Contemporary Arts).

Thirty of those papers, representing some of the freshest and most actual contributions in the extensive bibliography concerning Paganini, have been included in the present volume, and arranged along six main thematic areas: *Paganini and the Bravura Tradition*, *Paganini’s Works*, *Paganini and Italy*, *the Reception of Paganini’s Music*, *Paganini and Violin Schools of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, *Paganini and the Piano*. All this in the awareness that the contents of many articles address more than a single area.

We chosed to start the book with the topic *Paganini and the Bravura Tradition* because the Genoese artist was especially prominent in this area. The first article, from Robin Stowell, first keynote speaker at the Congress, addresses a topic that sheds some light on the title of the volume itself: ‘The *Diabolus in Musica* and *Paganini Redivivus* Phenomena’². We

¹. Two reports have appeared about the meeting: the first from KAWABATA, Maiko. ‘Nicolò Paganini: Diabolus in Musica’, in: *Eighteenth Century Music*, VII/1 (2009), pp. 189–191; the other from RICCO, Renato. ‘«Nicolò Paganini Diabolus in Musica» La Spezia, CAMEC (16–18 luglio 2009)’, in: *Ad Parnassum. A Journal of Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Instrumental Music*, VII/14 (October 2009), pp. 232–236.

². STOWELL, Robin. ‘The *Diabolus in Musica* and *Paganini Redivivus* Phenomena, with Some Thoughts on Their Relevance to the ‘German Paganini’ [August Wilhelmj (1845–1908)]’, pp. 3–21. Sul mito di Paganini si veda anche SALA, Massimiliano. ‘Paganini and his Myth’, in: *Henryk Wieniawski and the Bravura Tradition in the XIXth and Early XXth Centuries*, edited by Maciej Jabłoński and Danuta Jasińska, Poznań, Henryk Wieniawski Musical Society, forthcoming in 2011.

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come to know that the term *diabolus in musica*, used in ancient times to indicate the specific interval of fourth augmented, since the eighteenth century became a presage of ominous events, evil deeds and forthcoming death. At the same time, both in the pictorial and the literary domain, a custom arose of depicting the Devil holding a violin and a bow in his hands. And Paganini burst into the European stage like a perfect incarnation of Satan... or rather, he was able to personify, at first unintentionally and later on purpose, almost craftily, an atmosphere imbued with demonic, mephistophelic and spectral suggestions. His countenance added to the mood:

Alors on vit que sur l'estrade, au milieu du salon, il s'était levé de terre une figure inconnue, fantastique, impossible, tout ce que le remords, la passion et la douleur peuvent accumuler à l'envi de témoignages désolants, profonds, épouvantables. C'était un squelette habillé de noir, qui se tenait debout en tremblant sur ses os décharnés, et dans sa tête géante, verte et creuse comme une tête de mort, sous ses longs cheveux tristes et larmoyants, il y avait deux yeux ternes et sans vie. Ses mains grises, noueuses, interminables, tenaient un archet et un violon, et sur ce violon, une seule corde était tendue, la quatrième. Les trois autres pendaient au manche. Le frisson courait dans toutes les veines, la peur sur tous les visages. Le fantôme vit cela, et de ses yeux de cadavre partirent deux éclairs, ironiques et froids, qui flamboyèrent longtemps autour de lui. Ensuite il leva son archet [...].

Alors Nicolo Paganini remuant ses lèvres blanches comme s'il invoquait Dieu ou Satan, étreignit son violon dans sa main qui craquait; et cette corde unique, cette misérable corde se mit à chanter elle aussi la prière de Moïse, mais bien autrement terrible, bien autrement déchirante et désespérée que n'avaient pu le faire le chœur aux cent voix, et le piano, et Mlle Falcon. Ce n'était plus la prière de Moïse, c'était la prière d'un damné; c'était l'imprécation éperdue d'un coupable mourant [...]. Oh, oui, si quelqu'un osa lever la tête pendant une telle musique et considérer la fascinante figure de l'infortuné qui la jouait, celui-là dut avoir envie de fuir ou de s'écrier! car jamais il n'y eut face plus sublime dans son horreur, jamais l'art et le génie, et la souffrance ne contractèrent plus superbement un visage humain. Vainement, après que l'inferral archet eut cessé de mordre cette corde funèbre, voulut-on reprendre le chœur interrompu, tous les fronts restèrent courbés et vaincus, chacun sentit que la voix était morte au fond de son gosier³.

Leaving aside his outward appearance, Paganini astonished his public thanks to an amazing virtuosity, which he fostered through the study of the masters of the past (from Carlo Farina to Pietro Antonio Locatelli and Giovanni Battista Viotti, to quote only the most famous of them), and through the effort to expand on their work devising original solutions. For a vibrant approach to Paganini's violin technique we can report some of the

³. This is an account from Auguste Luchet (1806-1872), quoted from the article included in this book. PENESCO, Anne. «Il violino del Diavolo» e il gusto musicale dei Francesi, p. 57 n. 37.

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testimonies collected by Clive Brown, second keynote speaker at the congress in La Spezia, quoted in the article ‘Polarities of Virtuosity in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century’⁴. An anonymous reviewer wrote the following notes on the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*:

[...] everyone was astonished to the highest degree. Herr P.[aganini] is, from a certain point of view, undoubtedly the first and greatest violinist in the world. He has certain runs, leaps and double stops that one has heard from no other violinist whatsoever; he plays (with a wholly individual fingering) the most difficult, two-, three- and four-part passages; he imitates many wind instruments; he plays the chromatic scale with the highest notes, right up to the bridge, so clearly that it seems almost unbelievable; he astonishes by playing the most difficult passages on one string, plucking, almost as if in jest, a bass on the others; often it is hard to convince oneself that one does not hear several instruments⁵.

And Gottfried Weber noticed on the columns of the *Cäcilia*:

Everyone agrees that his technical skill, the so-called mechanism of his playing, is unique, not heard until now and, if not inconceivable, yet at least unconceived, in that he achieves things on the violin that are not only of unconquerable difficulty, but also appear absolutely impossible for the instrument⁶.

Finally, here is a report from an anonymous columnist, appeared on the *Berliner Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*:

As far as technical skill is concerned, Herr P.[aganini] is not only a great, but certainly also the greatest known violinists of our time. [...] even in the most difficult passages and double stops [...] double stops in intervals which no virtuoso has achieved [...]; difficult harmonics in double stops, which not infrequently alternate with natural notes; the speed of his arpeggios, through which the hearer who is not a connoisseur believes he is hearing four-part chords; [...] pizzicato with the left hand, mixed in with bowstrokes [...] and melodies accompanied by left-hand pizzicato [...] his trills, simple and double, etc.⁷.

Paganini’s performances deeply influenced the public’s tastes, even those of the erudite and the sophisticated, and like a sort of watershed, they modified the aesthetic perception of the past. Brown reports an excerpt from a letter Fanny Hensel dispatched to her brother, Felix Mendelssohn, on December 1834:

⁴. BROWN, Clive. ‘Polarities of Virtuosity in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century’, pp. 23-49.

⁵. *Ibidem*, p. 41 (*Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, XVI [1814], coll. pp. 231-232).

⁶. *Ibidem* (*Cäcilia*, X [1829], p. 79).

⁷. *Ibidem*, p. 42 (*Berliner Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, VI [1829], pp. 45-46).

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One can't really deny that times change, and that taste changes with the time, and that we also change with the taste of the times. At the same time, there is definitely a positive Good in the arts, and I hope you will never think me so godforsaken as to believe that Fashion could overturn what I have recognized as the Highest, and always will recognise as such. [...] You remember as well as I that there was a time when we were completely enraptured by Spohr's music. Now we no longer feel it to the same extent, though his music is the same and we are still the same people, but our relationship to him has changed. Let's take the case of violinists, which we've considered before. Spohr certainly possesses infinite positive Good in his playing, which won't fade away, but at the same time he has a certain sweetness [*Süßlichkeit*], a tendency that perhaps contributed much to his fame at that time. Now along comes Paganini playing wildly, fantastically, powerfully, and all young violinists strive to imitate him and tear the G string dreadfully. Then, after several years, I hear Spohr again and involuntarily I am even more aware of his sweetness than before, assuming it has not increased, because my ears are now full of an opposing style. The public at large is especially susceptible to this influence, individuals more or less, but I don't think anyone can be totally free of it. [...] Such change naturally affects the highest and best of its kind, but I am convinced that the Good too can appear more or less good depending on its relationship with the time⁸.

Some of the innovations introduced by Paganini passed away with him, since they were intimately connected to his physical complexion: his posture and his dismissal of the notion of 'position'. The latter was due to the over-extensibility of his left hand and to the extreme flexibility of the wrist and all of his joints, to the point that modern analysts suspect the presence of the Ehlers-Danlos syndrome. Unfortunately the virtuoso never wrote the promised treaty on the art of violin, which perhaps would shed light on the legendary *secret*, that is, a method to achieve in three years the progresses normally accomplished in a ten years period. Yet, many aspects of his art stroke roots and found emulators all through Europe: in Belgium Charles-Auguste de Bériot (1802-1870) and his pupil Henri François Joseph Vieuxtemps (1820-1881), in Czechoslovakia Josef Slavík (1806-1833), in Norway Ole Bull (1810-1880); in Moravia Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst (1812-1865), in Poland Karol Józef Lipiński (1790-1861) and Apolinary Kątski [Kontsky] (1825-1879). The first generation was followed by a second wave, represented by Ferdinand Laub (1832-1875) and Jan Kubelík (1880-1940) in Czechoslovakia, Henryk Wieniawski (1835-80) and Izydor Lotto (1840-1927) in Poland, August Wilhelmj (1845-1908) and Willy Burmester (1869-1933) in Germany. The Genoese Ernesto Camillo Sivori (1815-1894), Paganini's only pupil, obviously stands out among all other names.

Another outstanding feature of the 'Paganini Legacy' consists in the fact that he raised the musician, especially the performer, to a kind of hero or even a superman, and so boosted

⁸. *Ibidem*, p. 44 (HENSEL, Fanny. *The Letters of Fanny Hensel to Felix Mendelssohn*, translated and edited by Marcia Citron, Stuyvesant [NY], Pendragon Press, 1987, pp. 482-483).

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his social status to the same level of opera singers. And this trend contributed to assuage the genius' dependence from his patrons and protectors.

The editors wish to express their thanks to the institutions which made possible the realization of the Congress *Niccolò Paganini. Diabolus in musica*: the *Società dei Concerti* of La Spezia and his Board of Directors — particularly Ernesto Di Marino, vice-president of the Society, who enthusiastically approved the idea from start — and the *Centro Studi Opera Omnia Luigi Boccherini* from Lucca. We heartily thank Clive Brown (University of Leeds) and Robin Stowell (Cardiff University) for accepting our invitation to be keynote speakers at the Congress. Our sincere thanks to Danilo Prefumo e a Mariateresa Dellaborra, who presented each a monograph addressing the congress' topics, along with the editor of this volume, Fulvia Morabito⁹. Credits are also due to the Trio (violin, viola and violoncello) Gabriele Pieranunzi, Simonide Braconi and Francesco Pepicelli, along with Giampaolo Bandini (guitar), who concluded the congress with a concert titled “I Quartetti di Paganini, composizioni per chitarra ed archi”, included in the program of the VIII Festival Paganiniano di Carro.

The editing work necessary to publish this volume has been realized by Lorenzo Frassà, Roberto Illiano and Massimiliano Sala, who deserve our sincerest thanks. Finally, we thank Maiko Kawabata, Rohan H. Stewart-MacDonald, Diane Tisdall and Lorenzo Papini for their careful help with editing different languages.

Andrea Barizza & Fulvia Morabito
June 2010

⁹. DELLABORRA, Mariateresa. *Giovanni Battista Viotti*, Palermo, L'Epos, 2006 (L'amoroso canto, 4); PREFUMO, Danilo. *Niccolò Paganini*, Palermo, L'Epos, 2006 (L'amoroso canto, 5); MORABITO, Fulvia. *Pietro Antonio Locatelli*, Palermo, L'Epos, 2009 (Constellatio musica, 9).

