



these essays is planned and, should it come to fruition, will make the findings of these scholars readily available to all.

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NICOLÒ PAGANINI: DIABOLUS IN MUSICA

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‘Paganini-O-Rama’: *Strings Magazine* ran this headline in its July 2009 issue (number 171, page 17) after a member of the Philadelphia Orchestra’s violin section performed all of the Twenty-Four Caprices in a marathon performance in May. The neologism serves just as well to describe this conference. Organized by the Società dei Concerti (La Spezia) and the Centro Studi Opera Omnia Luigi Boccherini (Lucca) in association with Musical Words, <<http://www.musicalwords.it/>>(Cremona), the event drew together scholars and music lovers from across Europe, Russia and the United States to share in a wide variety of perspectives on the diabolical violin virtuoso.

Sessions proceeded more or less in chronological order – leading from precursors of Paganini towards his own time and then to his posthumous legacy – and gave a broad historical overview. They were organized around the following themes: biography, Paganini and violin schools of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, his works, the bravura tradition, the reception of his music and, finally, Paganini and the piano. The presentations, given in English or Italian, reflected a variety of historical and analytical approaches, and each deepened our understanding of some aspect of the violinist.

Many of the papers shed light on Paganini’s historical context as a composer, as a performer and as an Italian musician. One focus was the reception of concerts Paganini gave – in Milan (Matteo Mainardi, Civico Liceo Musicale Malipiero, Varese), in Paris (Rosalba Agresta, École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris) and in Poland (Renata Suchowiejko, Uniwersytet Jagiellonski, Krakow). Another was evidence of the strong links of Paganini with violinist Sivori (Flavio Menardi Noguera, Biblioteca Mediateca Finalese), with Ole Bull (Harald Herresthal, Norges Musikkhøgskole, Oslo), with cellist Gaetano Ciandelli and violinist Onorio di Vito (Enrica Donisi, Università degli Studi di Roma Tor Vergata) and with the Polish ‘Paganinis’ Lipinski, Wieniawski, Kontski and Lotto (Renata Suchowiejko). Paganini’s precursors were also discussed: Francesco Zannetti as an important figure in the Italian violin tradition (Gregorio Carraro, Università degli Studi di Padova), Alessandro Rolla’s ‘Solfeggi’, or counterpoint exercises, and their contribution to nineteenth-century violin didactics (Paolo Sullo, Università degli Studi di Roma Tor Vergata), Viotti’s emphasis on vocality over technical virtuosity (Diane Tisdall, King’s College London) and the genealogy of the Neapolitan ‘partenopea’ violin school, including Fiorelli (Antonio Carocchia, Conservatorio S. Giacomantonio di Cosenza). Joseph Gold (Piedmont, California) displayed Paganini’s favourite steel bow and a model replica of Paganini’s right hand – to the delight of all present.

Some speakers gave detailed musical analyses, pointing out thematic affinities between the concertos of Viotti and Paganini (Tatiana Berford, Novgorod State University Yaroslav the Wise), Paganini’s more extensive use of the chromatic scale as compared to Viotti’s (Philippe Borer, Société Suisse de Pédagogie Musicale), thematic coherence and episodic construction in the first movement of the First Concerto (Rohan H. Stewart-MacDonald, University of Cambridge), the originality of Paganini’s *Caprices* balanced against his borrowings from Locatelli and Nardini (Margherita Canale Degrassi, Conservatorio di Trieste,



Università di Padova) and Paganinian influences in the *Etudes*, *Caprices* and *Cadenzas* of Sivori and Antonio Rolla (Renato Ricco, Università di Salerno).

Others presented the fruits of painstaking archival work: the sources for and performance history of the Second Concerto (Mariateresa Dellaborra, Istituto Superiore di Studi Musicali F. Vittadini, Pavia), chamber works by Paganini, including duos for violin and bassoon or guitar recently discovered in the course of researching Sivori (Italo Vescovo, Conservatorio di Musica G. B. Pergolesi, Fermo), and virtuosi in Genoa such as Pedevilla in the late 1700s to the early 1800s (Carmela Bongiovanni, Conservatorio G. Nicolini, Piacenza). Danilo Prefumo (Comitato Artistico Premio Paganini, Genoa) authenticated a study for violin solo previously listed as ‘dubious’ in the Moretti-Sorrento catalogue.

Paganini’s tremendous influence on the development of piano virtuosity in the works of Liszt, Chopin, Schumann, Moscheles, Thalberg, Brahms, Rachmaninov, Fumagalli, Dallapiccola and others was shown with numerous (not to mention impressive) illustrations at the piano by Andrea Malvano (Conservatorio G. Verdi, Turin), Klimis Voskidis (Goldsmiths College, University of London), Adalberto Riva (Conservatorio Guido Cantelli, Novara), Veronica Gaspar (Universitatea Națională de Muzică, Bucharest) and Marina Esposito (Università di Lecce).

Addressing the wider cultural implications raised by Paganini’s emergence, Anne Penesco (Université Lumière Lyon II) examined the role of the devilish violinist in shaping French musical taste; Camilla Bork (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin) claimed that only with Schumann’s transcriptions of the *Capricci* did they become ‘romantic’ – poetic, disruptive, destabilizing, ironized and transgressive; I (Mai Kawabata, University of East Anglia) argued that Paganini’s most potent legacy has been the romantic cult of performance as an expression of a heroic, erotic, ‘authentic’ self; and Cécile Reynaud (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris) chronicled Fétis’s writings on Paganini, which increasingly reflected Fétis’s own musical opinions. Antonio Carlini (Conservatorio C. Monteverdi, Bolzano/Società Filarmonica di Trento) spoke of a fascinating problem: the challenges to the social historian that are posed by the sparse documentation of popular violinists in Paganini’s time.

The two keynote lectures were given by leading experts in the field of nineteenth-century violin music. Robin Stowell (Cardiff University) admirably set the tone for the conference early on with his lecture ‘The *Diabolus in musica* and the *Paganini redivivus* Phenomena, with Some Thoughts on Their Relevance to the “German Paganini” (August Wilhelmj (1845–1908))’. He began by surveying the history of composers’ use of the tritone (the so-called devil in music) and went on to portray Wilhelmj as a curiously conflicted musical figure – Wilhelmj was a virtuoso in the Paganinian mould while also being aligned with the aesthetics of the New German School. In the second paper, ‘Polarities of Virtuosity in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century’, Clive Brown (Leeds University) addressed Paganini’s anomalous position in relation to the development of performing styles (including the use of vibrato, portamento and various bowstrokes) from the late 1700s into the early 1800s. This eminent lecturer persuasively made the case for historically informed approaches to performance today.

The conference concluded with an expedition to Carro, where the house that belonged to Paganini’s grandparents still stands and where the Piazza della Chiesa hosts the annual Festival Paganiniano (with which the conference was timed to coincide). Delegates attended an *al fresco* concert of Paganini’s chamber music performed by ‘I Quartetti di Paganini’ (violin, viola, cello and guitar) in the sloping piazza under the stars. It was a magical and entirely fitting end to the smoothly run conference, for which the hard-working committee (Andrea Barizza, Roberto Illiano, Fulvia Morabito, Lorenzo Frassà, Luca Sala and Massimiliano Sala) are to be highly commended. Based on its success, a similar conference on the topic of improvisation and related matters is projected for July 2010.

Judging from the breadth of topics as well as the high level of interest shown by scholars as well as performers, Paganini continues to fascinate us in many respects, not least as a diabolical personage. Lively discussions ensued after important facts about Paganini’s life, work and significance were established and new evidence presented. In his closing statement Massimiliano Sala expressed his hope that ‘all the presentations have been a stimulus to better shape the figure of Paganini and that some of the aims of the



conference have been met'. This raises the question of what the present state of research on Paganini is in general, and what this conference in particular achieved in contributing to the field of musicology.

It is clear that research activity is as robust as ever. It is conducted with tremendous enthusiasm and, especially among Italians, in a spirit of celebration of Paganini's genius. The conference was an accurate reflection of this. The recent publication of Leslie Howard's new critical edition, *Niccolò Paganini: Primo Concerto per Violino e Orchestra (M. S. 21)* (Edizione nazionale delle opere di Niccolò Paganini, volume 8 (Rome: Istituto Italiano per la Storia della Musica, 2007)) and Roberto Grisley's much-anticipated *Niccolò Paganini, epistolario 1810–1831* (Roma: Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia and Milano: Skira, 2006), the first volume of letters to expand on Arturo Codignola's collection in 1935 (*Paganini Intimo* (Genova: Editore a cura del municipio)), attest to the growing recognition of Paganini as not just a performing curiosity but as a legitimate object of musicological study – no mean feat in a 'voice-mad' country whose people were not noted for being fond of instrumentalists, as Spohr once observed (Scholars have not yet established a 'best practice' with regard to the different spellings of Paganini's first name – both 'Nicolò' and 'Niccolò' are in use and both forms are found in the collected edition.) To establish texts as documents for scholarly inspection is of vital importance, of course – we need to know what we are working with – but what are these texts for if we do not interpret them? What conclusions can we draw from the ample and impressive evidence that has been collected? How can they deepen our understanding of music, of virtuosity, of how meaning is generated? As Joseph Kerman wrote in *Contemplating Music: Challenges to Musicology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985) more than twenty years ago, the way forward for musicology is to move beyond positivism towards historically oriented criticism.

Paganini studies are evolving in new directions, as we glimpsed at this conference – including, for example, the move towards a historiographical perspective reassessing Paganini's characterization as a romantic, a postmodern analytical method addressing matters of style and form with self-reflexive awareness of its inherent Germanocentrism, consideration of issues of gender and sexuality in shaping musical meanings, and a recognition that certain social aspects that would enrich historical perspectives are irretrievably lost. Multiple possibilities thus lie on the horizon. As Paganinians move into closer dialogue with contemporary trends in musicology, so too can Paganini himself move away from entrenched negative valuations as 'just' a virtuoso (he was a musician) or 'just' a performer (he was a composer and improviser). Thus, rather than continuing to be adulated only as a(n anti-)heroic cult figure, he can be subjected to critique. He can take it.

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