

Paganini's Compositions

A Chronological Survey with Facts and Anecdotes about his violins and other Stringed Instruments.

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PART VIII

Paganini was a brilliant performer on the guitar, with a mastery of its technique of playing as complete as was his virtuosity on the violin. His compositions for the guitar were numerous; some have been described. Schottky mentions that Paganini was able to play chords and arpeggi of utmost difficulty, employing a particular fingering of his own. When composing, he was wont to whistle or sing the melody or theme, accompanying himself meanwhile on the guitar, to the exclusion of either the violin or the piano.

A series of articles entitled "New Light on Paganini," from the pen of Alfred W. Alver, which had Paganini's connection with the guitar as the principal topic, appeared in *The Strad* in its issues from December 1929 to April 1930.

From Hector Berlioz' memoirs we learn that during the last years preceding his death, Paganini often turned to the plucked instrument to find solace; the exertion of violin playing gradually became more taxing than his weakened body could endure. He is said to have, as early as 1837, invited a violinist named Sina to play duos with him and, after the performance of one of the many that enriched his mss. collection, would take up the guitar, to amaze his friend with his expert handling of that instrument.

Paganini's last appearance was on June 9 1837, at Turin, with Luigi Legnani, famous guitarist. Legnani was born at Milan about 1790, concertizing on the instrument in Italy and Austria before settling in Geneva in 1825. He wrote extensively for the guitar, as did also another famous

guitar player, Mauro Giuliani, who was born at Bologna in 1780, died 1830. Both were mentioned by Fetis, who wrote: "Nobody can equal the excellent playing of this renowned artist [Legnani], not even Giuliani himself."

Paganini employed the guitar in a number of his compositions for ensemble; he wrote 15 quartets for violin, viola, guitar, and 'cello, of which six were published by Ricordi in 1821 together with the 12 violin sonatas (violin and guitar op. 2 and 3). In 1851 Schönerberger, Paris, published Paganini's 60 Variations for violin and guitar on the popular song, "Barucaba" as "Oeuvre posthume op. 14." Outside of the above, no other guitar compositions of Paganini's have ever been published. He never played the quartets in public, but reserved them for home recitals which he organized for the benefit and enjoyment of intimate friends.

Schottky, repeating a statement of Imbert de Lavaleque, contemporary author (see "Notice sur le celebre violoniste N. Paganini") wrote:—"At these home musicales, Paganini could be seen playing the violin and alternately the guitar, changing so rapidly from one instrument to the other that it would be hardly noticeable; when playing the plucked instrument he would hold the bowed one between his knees."

There are about 140 small unpublished guitar mss., which include 28 duos for guitar and violin, 4 trios and 9 quartets with string accompaniment.

Under Miscellaneous, the Heyer Catalogue lists the following pieces:

HEYER CATALOGUE 897—Concertpiece in E for Oboe and Horn, with orchestral accompaniment. It is dedicated to the oboist Antoine Nicolas Henry of Paris; the horn part was probably written for Louis Francois Dauprat, or for his pupil and successor Jacques Francois Gallay, all of the Paris Conservatoire.

HEYER CATALOGUE 898 is an Albumblatt featuring a violin Prelude presented by Paganini to Ferdinand Baake, conductor of the Magdenburg Singing Academy, dated October 21, 1829.

HEYER CATALOGUE 899 is “Ghiribizzo vocale,” a vocal phantasy marked No. 1 (for voice and orchestra). It begins with an andante in B, 2-4 time, with the following Italian text:— “Da voi cari lumi dipende il mio stato, voi siete i miei numi.” Bonaventura writes erroneously that this is the only Paganini composition for voice in existence, but Kinsky informs us that there are other ones. One is “Chant Patriotique,” with chorus accompaniment, written both in French and German, published by Bachmann & Nagel at Hanover in 1830. The mss. is in the Kestner Museum in Hanover and is entitled “Chant patriotique, compose a l’occasion de l’avenement en Trone de Sa Majeste Britannique et roi d’Hanovre Guillaume IV. Musique de Niccolo Paganini.” The words are by George Harrys, an Englishman who, in order to study Paganini, became his secretary and interpreter. He wrote a book, “Paganini in seinem Reisewagen und Zimmer, in seinen redseligen Stunden, in gesellschaftlichen Zirkeln und seinen Concerten.” (F. Vieweg, Brunswick, 1830.)

HEYER CATALOGUE 900 is entitled “Romance de Beauplan” for voice and piano. The text begins with the words “Ah, qu’elle est douce au coeur la voix de ceux qu’on aime.” Amedee de Beauplan was the nom-de-plume of Rousseau (1790-1853), French librettist and writer of popular songs.

HEYER CATALOGUE 901 is a Canzonetta in C, 6-8 time, for voice, with guitar accompaniment (no text). The mss. also bears several annotations

and sketches of violin compositions, viz., a Polacca in C, a Gavotte and another movement, both for two violins, the latter written in strict canon form. The last page, marked “Ghiribizzi,” is a study for difficult violin chords.

HEYER CATALOGUE 902 is entitled “Scena e Cavatina Ah, che forse in tai momenti” (for soprano voice), taken from the opera “Adelaide e Comingio” by Pacini.

Another Paganini composition for voice is the Canzonetta “E pur amabile,” the mss. of which belongs to the Society of Music Friends of Vienna.

The foregoing has described the mss. which were in the Heyer Museum at Cologne. After the death of Wilhelm Heyer, his heirs sold the mss. at auction in 1926 and 1927. Some went to Italian libraries, others to private ownership.

The English journal *Music and Letters*, in its issue of April-June 1940, carried an item from the pen of Michael Zacharevitch which was reprinted in *The Strad* in the May 1940 edition. Under the title “A Paganini Manuscript” Zacharevitch related that one of his Italian friends, Signor Di Pietro Dorio, had made an “exciting discovery” in finding an original Paganini mss. previously unknown, and that Dorio did bring it to London in 1939 to establish its authenticity. The article goes on to state that the signature is plainly in Paganini’s own hand, and the composition bears title “Fantasia” but is undated. The front page of the manuscript appears to have had wine spilled on it, over the upper part of the page, partly obliterating a number (either 41 or 47 as nearly as could be made out) which may have been Paganini’s own system as the opus numbers of his works which were published during his lifetime were only up to 5. The mss. was found by Dorio at Genoa inside a much worn volume belonging to the Sivori family; it was for the violin alone, of considerable length and full of enormous technical difficulties. Using the words of Zacharevitch: “Not only is it immensely difficult to play, but there is a mysterious quality about the music itself—an atmosphere of witchcraft (much more strange and sinister than in ‘Le streghe’), and that kind of romantic diabolism which almost makes me feel that I can see the shadow of Paganini’s gaunt figure when I play the ‘Fantasia.’ And the more intimate I become with it, the more convinced do I grow that it is anything but the work of a charlatan—as some of Paganini’s contemporaries called him—but of a genius whose like did not exist before or since . . . it is inconceivable that this music could have come from any pen but Paganini’s.” (To be continued)