

Pavel Steidl was born in the Czech Republic and moved to Holland in 1987.

Since he won first prize at the Radio France International Competition in Paris, he has become one of the most widely celebrated soloists of his generation.

His highly expressive performances of rare 19th-century guitar literature on authentic instruments add a wonderful dimension to his already exceptional performances.

Pavel Steidl also composes himself and his own compositions are often played in his concerts. He has played in more than 30 countries over the world including Canada, Cuba, Spain, Italy, Poland, Austria.



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Pavel Steidl è nato nella Repubblica Ceca e si è trasferito in Olanda nel 1987. Premiato col 1° premio al Concorso Internazionale di Radio France, da allora è divenuto uno dei più celebrati solisti della sua generazione. L'eccellenza espressiva delle sue interpretazioni di pagine rare della letteratura ottocentesca eseguite su strumenti storici, ha aggiunto un tocco speciale alle sue già straordinarie esibizioni. Pavel Steidl è anche compositore e sue opere appaiono spesso nei programmi concertistici. Steidl ha già suonato con entusiastico successo di pubblico e critica in più di trenta paesi del mondo, incidendo finora nove CD.

PAGANINI

*Sonate & Ghiribizzi
for guitar*

Pavel Steidl

Guitar *'nach dem Modell Luigi Legnani'*
Nikolaus Georg Ries, Vienna c. 1830



The guitar accompanies Paganini's dazzling violin career with loyalty, continuity and confidence, yet also with extreme discretion- almost as if it were a domestic, private or even secret matter.

With Paganini, however, there seems to have been no clear separation between the brightly lit part of his career and the part left in the shadows: indeed the resulting chiaroscuro reveals an essentially complementary perspective.

Violin and guitar are the indivisible souls of Paganini's genius: you cannot evoke one without the other.

With perfect interchangeability, both instruments resort to a similar arsenal of bravura procedures (consecutive and broken thirds, sixths, octaves and tenths extending up to the instruments' highest reaches; the alternation of chords and rapid flights of scales; continuous changes of position, etc.).

Identical is the compositional approach: it favours the mono-thematicism of the early sonata and its idea of development is to generate a kaleidoscopic outgrowth of variations around a thematic nucleus. Also identical, finally, is the feverish notation: it tends to disregard the notes' real durations in passages where various

musical lines are engaged, often conceals the tune beneath a dense web of arpeggios and likes to leave matters of colouring and articulation in the accompaniments to the player's improvisatory verve.

What, then, was Paganini's guitar playing actually like? To judge by the comments of his contemporaries, it was somewhat like his violin playing.

But he never played in public. It was a policy he scrupulously respected: part of the image-building and *marketing* that turned him into the first great international *star* in the performing arts. The only Paganini allowed to exhibit his skills in the theatres and concert halls was the violin professor: the soloist, the unique and inimitable virtuoso. In the drawing rooms, on the other hand, at those exclusive reunions when artists and select members of polite society joined forces to cultivate amateur music-making, then Paganini the chamber musician allowed himself to play either the violin or guitar. Berlioz wrote: "...sometimes...he would take up his violin to play trios and quartets by Beethoven in concerts organised on the spot at secret meetings, at which the performers were also the only spectators. On other occasions...he

would pull out of his bag a collection of duos he had composed for the violin and guitar...and finding a worthy colleague in the German violinist Sime...he would play the guitar part, drawing from it some utterly new effects. Thus the two concert artists -Sime the modest violinist and Paganini the incomparable guitarist- would spend long evenings at which no one was ever admitted." Elsewhere we find: "It is not generally known that Paganini was an excellent performer on the guitar and that he composed many of his melodies for this instrument, later arranging them and developing them on the violin according to his fancy."(F. Carulli, *Méthode complète pour la guitare*, Paris, c.1827); "...on the guitar Paganini is about the same as he is on the violin..." (I. De Laphaleque, *Notice sur le célèbre violoniste N. P.*, Paris 1830); "Paganini plays the guitar extraordinarily well; he plays difficult and marvellously arpeggiated chords. On this instrument he uses a fingering that is utterly peculiar to him."(J.M. Schottky, *Paganini's Leben und Treiben als Künstler und als Mensch*, Prague 1830); "...Paganini was perhaps as skilled on the guitar as on the violin. It is very difficult to get an idea of the extraordinary agility of his

fingers when they advanced over the vibrant strings of his beloved guitar: there was something magical about his improvisations." (Escudier, *Vie anecdotique de Paganini*, Paris 1836). Once we have taken in the common denominator of all these remarks (that Paganini played the guitar roughly as he did the violin and was thus a remarkable guitarist as well), we should try to get a slightly more specific idea of his performing style by referring to the violin, about which the accounts are much more copious and detailed. According to Ole Bull, the great Norwegian violinist who had heard Paganini and knew him and who, as a very young man, was the first to play his *Capricci*, he especially excelled in "giving the sound the quality of the human voice, in the contrasts of light of shade and in the expression, which could be either querulous or gay, brilliant and fanciful" -in short, in the art of giving life and expression to melody. This opinion reveals the angelic side to Paganini's style, an aspect often stressed by Schubert, Schumann, Liszt and many other musicians and one that coexists with the boundless literature on his demonism, which belongs to the

histrionic, derisory, ironic and funambulatory side of his personality. To these we must add another component: that of the unprecedented, i.e. the capacity to evoke transcendental feelings of stunning purity which belong to the category of the acknowledged good. "Never in my life had I understood that music could contain such sounds. He spoke, wept, sang", writes one witness. Even Paganini himself admits as much to his friend Germin: "The effect of my playing is so magical as to make the most noble personages go mad, as well as the gentle ladies...the oscillations of my strings makes them all weep". We shall never know how much of the angel and how much of the devil Paganini possessed. Nor shall we ever know the exact nature of his music, so interwoven it was with the personality of its virtuoso-creator. But Berlioz does help us a little: "An idea is generated and the form is outlined, but the sense of the performance cannot be fixed; it is elusive; it is the genius, the soul, the vital flame which, on dying down, leaves behind it a darkness that is all the more profound the more that flame had shone with splendour." The meaning of statements such as this can only be grasped if we

follow our intuition and try to apply it to their deeper message. And when such an exercise of bravura is accomplished by a true virtuoso like Pavel Steidl, by enchantment the music is illuminated and remarks that might appear nebulous (*he uses a fingering that is utterly peculiar to him*), vague (*he plays difficult and marvellously arpeggiated chords*) or general (*there was something magical about his improvisations*) acquire the clarity of truth and help us to experience the miracle of a guitar that speaks, weeps and sings like an angel.

The corpus of Paganini's works for solo guitar consists of at least 104 compositions, which modern musicologists customarily group into three categories: the 43 *Ghiribizzi* (MS 43), the 37 *Sonate* (MS 84) and 24 sundry works (MS 85-105). If to these we add the numerous chamber works with guitar (quartets, trios and duets with violin), we have an imposing output that makes Paganini one of the most prolific composers for the guitar ever. And also one of the most important: surely the equal of his contemporaries Giuliani, Carulli, Sor, Aguado, etc., whose works

have been -and are still- played much more assiduously by guitarists. The same imbalance is reflected in present-day recordings, despite the astonishing gap between Paganini's fame and that of the others - a truly singular occurrence if we remember that the guitar repertoire is notoriously short of great composers who devoted their energies to it with any continuity.

There are at least two good reasons, however, that explain this neglect. The first: Paganini's works for solo guitar were published complete only from the 1980s, with the sole exception of a collection of 26 works published by Zimmerman in 1925.

The second: critical opinion -starting with that of his contemporaries- has never been indulgent towards Paganini the composer: he is often accused of superficiality and weakness of form, in direct consequence of his wish to astonish through instrumental virtuosity.

The only works by Paganini to be printed during his lifetime (by Ricordi in 1820) were the 24 *Capricci* for solo violin op.1, two sets of *Sonate* for violin with guitar accompaniment opp.2 and 3, and the two sets (opp.4 and 5) that include the six *Quartetti* with guitar.

When Niccolò died without succeeding in the aim (several times declared) of completing the publication of his works, it fell to his son Achille to perform that duty. As a result, in 1851 the publisher Schonenberger in Paris issued the compositions from op.6 through to op.14 (following on from the Ricordi catalogue): *Concerto in Eb*, *Concerto in Bb*, *Le streghe*, *God save the King*, *Carnevale di Venezia*, *Moto perpetuo*, *I palpiti*, *Non più mesta* and the *Variazioni sul Barucabà*.

Not a trace, therefore, of the works for solo guitar, which indeed were not even mentioned in the *Elenco di pezzi di musica da stamparsi*, a list drawn up by the composer himself.

After Achille's death in 1895, his heirs decided in 1908 to sell the posthumous collection of unpublished manuscripts, and to that effect they also printed a detailed catalogue of the works in their possession. To examine these works an Italian government committee, consisting of Luigi Torchi, Enrico Polo and Ettore Pinelli, was appointed.

Certain passages of the report drawn up by these three sages still make highly instructive reading. On the violin works: "...Paganini was a wizard on the violin,

and there was something portentous about his art; but since he devoted his entire genius to disclosing the instrument's most recondite secrets, and also because his desire to excite the amazement of the masses was greater than the higher and more elevated desire to satisfy the exacting taste of the intelligent, the works he left us (if we except the wonderful *Capricci* for solo violin) do not have great value in strictly musical terms, whereas they have an immense importance for the art of the violin."

About the nine *Quartetti* with guitar that were still unpublished (in addition to the six already printed by Ricordi), the two *Terzetti* with guitar, the *Grande Sonata* for guitar with violin accompaniment and the *Sonata Concertata* for violin and guitar: "...they are of even more tenuous value than the previous ones...perhaps with some of these compositions one could make a reduction using the piano as a means of extracting some use from them for students..."

About the solo guitar works: "... even these works are devoid of all value, antiquated, infantile and of a kind that is today utterly rejected..."

While perhaps one could hardly expect the writers of this report to have much

knowledge of the guitar at a time when the instrument was going through one its long (and recurrent) periods of obscurity, it is undeniable that the tone of the review is thoroughly saturated with the kind of bigoted academicism that is institutionally hostile to the unprecedented - until, at least, it becomes the rule.

The net result was that the Italian state declined to buy the collection. So in 1910 the heirs held an auction and the works were bought by the Florentine publisher Leo Olschki, who promptly resold them the next year to Wilhelm Heyer, a collector from Cologne. Heyer's heirs subsequently dismembered the collection and sold the manuscripts to various buyers in 1922. The task of recomposing the collection fell to Fritz Reuther of Mannheim, who succeeded in repurchasing almost all the originals from collectors scattered all over the world. In 1963, at Reuther's death, the collection passed to Hans Schneider, a Bavarian antiquarian, from whom the Italian state finally bought it in 1971, housing it in the Biblioteca Casanatense in Rome.

A few years later the manuscripts could finally be consulted by scholars, and since 1980 various editions of Paganini's solo

guitar works have been published. The *Ghiribizzi* can be dated fairly securely to 1819-1820, a period in which Paganini lived in Naples. It was the composer himself who presents them in a letter to his friend Germi: "The Ghiribizzi for guitar were to be for a little girl in Naples, and my intention was not to compose but to scribble; but you should enjoy some of the familiar motives..." Though short pieces belonging to the genre of Pieces for the Young, in which the instrumental exuberance is deliberately restrained, they nonetheless display Paganini's very personal fantastic style. As R. Chiesa very justly points out, "...the *Ghiribizzi*...strongly feature melodic ideas that give wide scope to the cantabile style, to research into dynamics, to vibrato and to expressive intensity". As for the "familiar motives" found in the pieces on this record, two are drawn from Paisiello's *La molinara* and Mozart's *Don Giovanni* (16 and 20), while *Le streghe* (17) is an arrangement of a piece of the same name for violin and orchestra (MS 19), and the theme of the *Larghetto* (22) also appears in *La primavera* for violin and orchestra (MS 73). The theme of the *Adagetto con espressione* (37), which bears Rossini's name at the start and

Paganini's at bar 16, is taken from Rossini's *Gazza ladra*, in which Rossini's original *Allegro* is remarkably transformed into an *Adagetto*. Finally, the theme of the *Andante* (8) is used in Giuliani's *Variazioni* op. 118 without attribution, though in a late manuscript we read: "Variazioni per chitarra/Sopra un tema favorito nel ballo/Cesare in Egitto/composte da/Mauro Giuliani". It would be a mistake to expect any resemblance to sonata-form in the *Sonate*, for Paganini uses the term in the etymological sense of a "piece to be played". In this case they are works that are prevalently in two movements of contrasting character. The first is always a *Minuetto*, though in fact the only distinguishable feature of that dance is its triple time. The second is given various names, ranging from *Valtz* to *Perligoldino* and also including mere indications of tempo (*Andantino* or *Allegretto*). The dating of the *Sonate* is much more complicated: the most likely hypothesis is that they were written at various moments over a long stretch of time from 1803 to 1823.

Paolo Paolini
Translated by Hugh Ward Perkins



Nikolaus Georg Ries fecit in Vienna, c. 1830
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