

A Short biography of Nicolo Paganini 1782-1840

Nicolo PAGANINI, violinist, was born at Genoa, October 27, 1782. His father, Anthony Paganini, mandolin player, taught Nicolo at an early age to play the violin; his mother had always prayed that Nicolo would become a great violinist.

After two years of study, the lessons of his father became inadequate; Servetto, musician at the theater in Genoa, took charge of the musical education of the young prodigy. At the age of eight years, the young artist was heard at the Grand Theater of his native city. Paganini played his variations on the "Carmagnole." After this success, his father took Nicolo to Parme for further study with Alexandre Rolla.

Paganini tells of his first meeting with the master: "On arriving at the home of Rolla, we found him sick in bed, and he seemed little disposed to receive us. I noticed on the table a violin and the last concerto of Rolla; took the instrument and played the piece at sight. Surprised at what he heard, the composer asked the name of the virtuoso. When he saw I was only a young boy, he did not believe it. He told me that he could do nothing and advised me to take lessons in composition.

For six months he took three lessons a week in counterpoint under the direction of Ghiretti. On his return to Genoa, he wrote his first compositions. His music was so difficult that he had to work some time on it himself before playing it. He began his tours in Parme in 1797 accompanied by his father.

The St. Martin gave a musicale every year at which numerous strangers appeared. Paganini begged his father to allow him to assist at this fete accompanied by his brother.

Becoming free, the young artist went on his way with dreams of success and happiness. Many cities gave him enthusiastic welcome.

His education having been neglected, he profited by his freedom. At the time Paganini went to Livourne he had lost everything, even his violin in card playing and it was Mr. Livron, amateur musician, who presented him with an excellent Guarnerius (1743). This is the instrument that Paganini used for the rest of his life and on which played at all his concerts.

Pasinhi, distinguished painter and an amateur musician, could not believe the facility with which Paganini played the most difficult pieces at sight. He gave him a very complicated concerto in manuscript and put a wonderful Stradivarius in his hands and said: "This instrument is yours if you can play it in a masterly manner at sight." "In that case you can say farewell to it," replied Paganini whose wonderful execution put Pasinhi into rapturous admiration.

The life of Paganini at this time was woven with adventures of all kinds. His imagination gave free course to the intense emotions of the art; love and play; his frail constitution warned him to be careful of his strength.

The following anecdote is told by Paganini: "I will never forget that I found myself one day in a situation which ought to decide my career. A prince for a long time desired to possess my violin, the only one that I possessed then, and that I have today. One day, he begged me to give him a price; but as I did not wish to part with my instrument, I declared that I would give it up for 250 gold napoleons (a French gold coin worth 15s. 10 1/4 d.) A short time after, the prince told me he would pay me 2,000 francs. I found myself in need of money that day and I had almost decided to give up my violin for the sum offered me, when a friend invited me to a party for the evening. All I had was 30 francs, and already I had disposed of my jewels: watches, rings, pins, etc. I made a

resolution to risk this last resource, to leave for Petersburg without my instrument and in the end re-establish my affairs. My thirty francs were reduced to three. Then I found myself on my way to the great city, when fortune, changing in a twinkling of the eye, made me keep my violin and go on foot.

"From that day, convinced that a gambler is always despised, I gave up my unlucky passion." Paganini came back at this time to Lucca. His success was such, at a night fete given in the church of the convent, that the monks had to go to their places in the choir, to reproach the applause which kept up at the end of the concert.

Paganini, stricken by illness, passed several months in Milan before he was able to reappear in public. His concerts took place at the Theater Carcano, at the Scalla; and several were given at the Theater Royal in 1814.

In October of this same year he left for Cologne and there he met Rossini; they developed a great friendship. He traveled exclusively in Italy, making three tours up to 1828. He spent a year at Venice (1816) to reestablish his health and left for Genoa, his native village. In 1817 he again met Rossini at Rome.

The following are some observations made by Guhr on the manner of Paganini's playing: Paganini employed the weak chords; the left arm of Paganini was strongly placed against the body; the right arm the same, the wrist alone being of extreme mobility, his tones were superb. In the adagio, the tones came out of his instrument Like the sighing of the sad; they acquired so much force, that one trembled. Paganini died at Nice on May 27th, 1840 By his will, he left his Guarnerius to the city of Genoa.

He composed twenty-four Caprices for violin alone; six sonatas for violin and guitar (arranged for violin and piano by F. David) three quartets for violin, alto, cello and guitar; Les Charmes de Padou, trio for violin, cello and guitar; six duos for violin and guitar, Sonate concertante for violin and guitar, Grand sonate for guitar, Pot-Pourri Sonate militaire, Meuet for guitar; three minuets: Valse, Rondoncino for guitar, Le Couvent de Saint Bernard (with 57 parts for orchestral), La Pandule Sonate and Prier; Sonate Amoureuse et Galante; Sonatine et Polachetta Napoleon, variations on the chord sol, Varsovie, sonata, Cantabile and Valse, Tarentelle with orchestra (43 pages); Ballet Campetre, La Tempete with orchestra, Marie-Louise variations; and many others.