

## Biography of Paganini

(From the Correspondence of an Amateur)

Prague, 8th December, 1828,

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I have just returned from the Chevalier Paganini's great concert. Though the terms of admission were quintupled, a numerous audience were assembled; and, to my mind, they had every reason not to repent of the cost of the entertainment.—for Paganini is a meteor, even in these days of scientific refinement, whose splendour we are not likely to gaze upon again.

I admit that his exterior is rather forbidding than inviting, and yet there is something very remarkable about it. He is thin; his clothes hang loose about his limbs; and when he stoops to make his bow, his body wiggles after so extraordinary a fashion that the spectator every instant expects the upper part of his-figure to sever itself from the lower, and both of them to tumble to pieces into a heap of bones. When playing, he throws his right foot forward, and, on the occurrence of lively movements, beats time with it in a most ludicrous manner.

His features, however, never lose their livid look, save when thundering plaudits draw them up into a smile, and then his lips move about in every direction, and his eye beams with self-complacency, winking and leering from side to side, with a slight expression of good humor. When intent upon a difficult passage, his body shapes itself into a sort of triangle, the stomach forming a sharp, indented angle, whilst the head and right foot are thrust outward. A stranger would pronounce him to be in the last stage of starvation, were it not notorious that he often pockets three hundred pounds and more at a single concert.

The sum total of his personal qualifications stamps him as having few corporeal endowments which are not his own peculiar property; it would grieve me if there were a larger sprinkling of human nature about him; he is technical dexterity personified; passion is the spring and soul of his every movement; and wretchedly would Mother Nature have blundered, had she gifted him with a pound weight more of fat.

I cannot fancy, my good friend, that you will feel much enraptured with this portrait, such as I give it you from the living model; but I venture to affirm, that you would instantly forget the absence of every external advantage so soon as your ear caught the first notes from the masterly hand of this locomotive skeleton. Never were movements, the most difficult which can be conceived so perfectly, so gracefully, or so readily mastered, his violin emits tones such as never broke before upon mortal ear; at one time they resemble the chirp of the simplest of the feathered choir, at another, the thrilling jug of the nightingale, or the round tone of the chiming bell; again, they melt into the soft, silvery tone of the flute, and then break out from his double chords with a burst which paralyses the accompaniment of the surrounding orchestra.... His cantabile is inimitable. In a word, he stands alone and unrivalled; and I have heard the first violinists declare, they could have formed no conception, before his appearance, of the perfection to which such an instrument could be raised.

The only piece of his own conception which he gave us this evening was a Concerto of three movements: 1. Maestoso, adagio appassionata e brillante; 2. Sonata on the prayer of Moses, out of Rossini's Mose in Egitto, (played entirely- on the G string); and, 3. a Larghetto on Mozart's thema in Don. Juan, "Give me thy hand, my life." I have now one event in my life to look back

upon, to which I shall always recur with unmixed delight; and I feel confident, that Paganini's wonderful talent will not only create an epocha in that branch of the liberal arts, the rank and character of which his genius has so eminently exalted, but that his name will survive in the history of music so long as "the concord of sweet sounds" shall unclasp man's heart.

12th December

When I paid my first visit to Paganini, I found him in a black night-cap, fur boots, without a waistcoat, but with a species of brown hussar vest thrown over his shoulders, sitting on his bed, and busied in assisting his black, sparkling eyed, darkhaired cherub of a boy to draw on his little red: boots. . . . (Unfinished; end of page 491; hence we are unable to give name of the author of this: most interesting letter.)—Literary Gazette, London.