

Paganini

Quartets for Strings and Guitar

Nos. 3, 8 & 12



Paganini Ensemble Vienna

Mario Hossen, violin | Marta Potulska, viola
Liliana Kehayova, cello | Alexander Swete, guitar

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Nicolò Paganini (Genoa, 1782 - Nice, 1840)

Quartets for Strings and Guitar

Nos. 3 Op. 4, 8 & 12

Quartet No. 3 in A Major Op. 4 No. 3 M.S. 30	21:41
01 Pot-pourri - Allegro	05:59
02 Minuetto alla Spagnola - Andantino	02:19
03 Romance - Adagio non tanto	06:35
04 Rondo - Allegretto	06:48
Quartet No. 8 in A Major M.S. 35	24:42
05 Allegro	10:18
06 Minuetto, Andantino	04:39
07 Cantabile molto adagio	03:43
08 Rondo, Allegretto	06:02
Quartet No. 12 in A minor M.S. 39	24:55
09 Allegro giusto	08:37
10 Tenuto con precisione	05:17
11 Minuetto (Allegretto mosso)	11:01
Running Time	71:24



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PAGANINI.

Quartets with guitar Nos. 3, 8 and 12

After having been forgotten for a long time, today Paganini's chamber music is enjoying a welcome revival, being more frequently published, performed and recorded. This is especially true for the 15 quartets with guitar (plus a 16th work entitled *Sonata con variazioni*, for the same forces but not included in the composer's original numbering). Only 6 of these 15 quartets were published during the author's lifetime, in two collections: Ops. 4 and 5. The nine that followed – generally of a higher musical quality – remained unpublished. Except for Quartet No. 7, which has long been known thanks to an old Zimmermann edition, all the others only began to circulate after 1972, when the posthumous collection of Paganini's manuscripts finally returned to Italy and was made available to scholars. Some of these quartets' manuscripts were and still are in possession of the Washington Library of Congress, so that, actually, anyone could have published and played them. But times were probably not ripe, and "Paganini's rediscovery", if we can call it so, is a relatively recent affair.

The three quartets for violin, viola, guitar and cello Op. 4 were first published by Ricordi in 1820, but their date of composition is several years prior to the date of publication. Unfortunately, it cannot be exactly ascertained, because the works are never mentioned in Paganini's letters, nor do we have tangible

references that can lead us back to it. From a stylistic point of view, we notice a certain indecision between a dialogic style of writing (especially evident in the first two works of the series) and a more pronounced propensity to give the lion's share to the violin, as in Quartet No. 3 in A major M.S. 30; this work is undoubtedly the best and most original of the collection, fruit of a moment of authentic creative buoyancy. Its violin writing is more brilliant, varied, and virtuosic than in the two prior quartets, but there are also fine concertante passages for the viola and cello. It also differs from the preceding ones because its movements are broader.

The first section, *Pot-pourri, Allegro*, opens with a tranquil and subdued theme that gradually becomes more animated, quickly leading to the second theme; this is initially exposed by the viola and has, for the first time, a decidedly contrasting character to the first one, in a successful alternation of lively passages and more relaxed and lyrical ones. The *Minuetto alla Spagnola, Andantino*, as is often the case in Paganini's quartets, is much more unassuming and conventional, as if it were meant as a pause, an instrumental diversion before getting to the slow movement's more lyrical and sentimental moment; not without interest, then, is the *Trio*, entrusted to the cello and accompanied by the arpeggios of the guitar and the pizzicato of the violin. The lovely *Romance, Adagio non tanto* features indisputably original writing, substantiating the French-style inspiration of this quartet; dominated by the violin, the theme

of this movement is first exposed in pizzicato and then in bowing, and the entire piece is full of inventiveness, up to its beautiful conclusion in *ppp*. Similar considerations also apply to the final *Rondò Allegretto*, the main theme of which, first exposed by the viola then picked up by the violin one octave higher, calls to mind the finales of Kreutzer's and Rode's concertos.

Quartet No. 8 in A major M.S. 35, dedicated to Marquis Filippo Carrega, is first mentioned in a letter to Germetti, from Turin, dated 14th March 1818: "Yesterday I composed a quartet, all violin obligato, on the style of the one for Carrega. It has a very fanciful minuet and a poignant trio". This work's finest passage is perhaps the initial *Allegro*, with that particularly incisive attack of the violin in the first theme. In the second part of the movement, this same theme eases into a broad melodic outpouring, alternating virtuosity and lyricism in a similar fashion to the opening motif of the first violin concerto. Marquis Filippo Carrega (1790-1862), nicknamed Filippino by his family and friends, was a good amateur violinist. Throughout this quartet, the violin is unrivalled in its position of dominance, being also entrusted with the exposition of the second theme, which appears (with the usual *dolce* indication) at measure 47. The entire piece has a virtuosic, almost concerto-like cut, with some difficult passages for the violin, while the viola, cello and guitar are allowed no concertante moments; the ample development section, which here is such in name and fact, is based entirely on the elaboration of the first theme's

second part, while in the recapitulation only the second theme returns, on the tonic.

The customary carefree *Minuetto Andantino* is followed by a *Cantabile molto Adagio* in E major, in which the bel canto vocation of Paganini's adagios once again leads a wealth of embellishments and flourishes. The *fortissimo* chord introducing the melody of the violin reminds us, again, of the slow movement of a concerto. The virtuosic *Rondò Allegretto* ending this work, with its relentless pace, reclaims instead aspects of a folksy liveness; but here too we hear echoes and reminiscences, certainly not random, of the first concerto, and plenty of Rossinian resonances.

The traditional *quatuor brillant* writing, with the first violin soaring high while the other three instruments only accompany except for a few concertante passages, generally prevails in Paganini's quartets with guitar, especially from No. 7 on. There are, however, some significant exceptions.

In the quartets Nos. 11 and 12, the "violin obligato" rule is respected but the writing is only rarely truly virtuosic. This is especially true for the Quartet No. 12 in A minor M.S. 39, the most 'symphonic' of all, a work that has its own originality of form in that it consists of only three movements. The first, *Allegro Giusto*, is a classical sonata-form first movement. But both the beautiful initial theme's character, with its effective octave leap, and the anxiously syncopated accompaniment give the undeniable feeling of an orchestral introduction. The first movement's sonata-like

development is neat and precise, shaped by that instinct for formal balance that always comes to Paganini's aid in the best passages of his chamber output. The subsequent *Adagio tenuto con precisione* is an ample and well-written lyrical moment entirely entrusted to the violin, animated by doleful and declamatory tones of operatic flavour, certainly one of the best slow movements of the Genoese musician's entire quartet production, a passage seeped in melodic inspiration, once again worthy of the slow movement of a concerto. The *Finale, Minuetto, Allegretto Mosso* is another of Paganini's strokes of genius. Despite having all the characteristics of this dance, it has nothing in common with the light-hearted minuets that are usually found in quartets but follows the typical sonata-form canons, with two contrasting themes (the second in the dominant key, E major), a central modulating section, and a recapitulation. The *Finale* has none of the traits of so many sweeping and virtuosic concluding movements: on the contrary, it is one of the most serious and elaborate, with a long central modulating section, and writing, for all the instruments, that is overall less schematic than usual.

Daniilo Prefumo

(Translated by Daniela Pilarz)

Paganini Ensemble Vienna

Founded in 2019, the Paganini Ensemble Vienna is among the first chamber music ensembles devoted primarily to the works of Niccolò Paganini. With a focus on historically informed performance, the ensemble brings new perspective to Paganini's rich and often overlooked chamber repertoire for violin, guitar, viola, and violoncello, offering audiences rare and unique listening experiences. Between 2021 and 2025, the ensemble toured extensively across Europe, Canada, and China, performing at prestigious venues such as the Auditorio Nacional de Música Madrid, Musikverein and Konzerthaus Vienna, as well as major cultural centres in Montreal, Ottawa, Shenzhen, Shanghai, Warsaw, Santander, and Burgos. Their festival appearances include celebrated events such as the Paganini Festival Genova (Italy), Vilnius Festival (Lithuania), Ghent Festival (Belgium), Capuchos Music Festival (Portugal), Liszt Festival Raiding, Concert Spirituel Vienna, Kirchklang Festival Salzkammergut, Gitarrenfestival Millstatt, Jeunesse (Austria), Cantus Firmus European Festival Sofia, Varna Summer Music Festival (Bulgaria), Musikfest Goslar (Germany), Klanglichter Sissach (Switzerland), Classic'A Saint-Raphaël (France), and the Collingwood Music Festival (Canada). In recognition of its artistic mission and dedication to Paganini's legacy, the Paganini Ensemble Vienna has been named a European Paganini Route Ambassador - an official EU cultural initiative of the City of Genoa. The ensemble is also deeply committed to

contemporary music, having premiered numerous works written specifically for them by acclaimed composers including Tomás Marco Aragón, Rainer Bischof, Richard Dünser, Gabriele Proy, Tristan Schulze, Gheorgi Arnaoudov, and Alessandro Solbiati. Commissioned by the leading Italian record label Dynamic, the ensemble is recording the complete chamber music works of Niccolò Paganini. This ambitious project has not only revived interest in Paganini's lesser-known works but also revealed fascinating connections to other classical, romantic, and modern composers inspired by Paganini's music. The ensemble maintains close collaboration with key institutions dedicated to Paganini's legacy, such as the "Amici di Paganini" Society of Genoa and the Biblioteca Casanatense in Rome, where many original manuscripts are housed. They also regularly consult with leading musicologists including Mariateresa Dellaborra and Danilo Prefumo. Through its performances, the Paganini Ensemble Vienna illuminates the emotional depth and expressive range of Paganini's music - from dazzling virtuosity to tender lyricism - echoing the composer's own words: "We must strongly feel to make others feel."

Mario Hossen is the founder of the Paganini Ensemble Vienna. A Bulgarian-Austrian concert violinist, he is considered one of the leading interpreters of Paganini's music. He made his debut as a soloist with orchestra at the age of eight. A concert soloist of international acclaim,

Mario Hossen has performed with such orchestras as the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, Academy of St. Martin in the Fields, the Tchaikovsky Symphony Orchestra, the Bruckner Orchestra, the Orchestra della Scala di Milano, the English Chamber Orchestra. Hossen's musicological and artistic endeavours are focused, among other things, on source research on Nicolò Paganini. Mario Hossen performs on a G.B. Guadagnini violin (1749) placed at his disposal by the Austrian National Bank.

Marta Potulska is a laureate of several international competitions, including 1st prize at the Johannes Brahms Competition in Austria (2007) and at the International Bled Competition and Festival in Slovenia (2011); she is moreover the recipient of a special award at the Lionel Tertis International Viola Competition on the Isle of Man, UK (2006). Potulska has taken part in many international music festivals, such as: Salzburger Festspiele, Styriarte, Eggenberger Schlosskonzerte, St Gallen Festival, Austria; the Park City Music Festival, in Las Vegas, and the International Suzuki Institute in Salt Lake City, USA. She is currently a member of the Vienna Chamber Orchestra, Wien International Soloists Ensemble, and Varietas Ensemble, as well as a member of the Burgtheater Ensemble in Vienna.

Liliana Kehayova is a fourth-generation musician. She earned her master's degree in cello performance from the Vienna Conservatory,

studying with Lilia Schulz-Bayrova. A passionate soloist and chamber musician, she has performed with leading orchestras including the Sofia Philharmonic, Romanian National Symphony Orchestra (under Christian Mandeal), Mitteleuropa Orchestra Udine, North Czech Philharmonic, and Camerata Orphica. She has appeared at major European venues, such as the Musikverein (Vienna), Athenaeum (Bucharest), Rudolfinum-Dvořák Hall and Smetana Hall (Prague), Palau de la Música Catalana (Barcelona), and Bulgaria Hall (Sofia).

In addition to her performing career, she is co-artistic director of Vienna's La boutique de le Concert Spirituel concert series and has served as Vice President of the Vienna-based "Friends of Niccolò Paganini" Music Association, a sister organization of Genoa's "Amici di Paganini" Association. In 2012, she received the grand scholarship from the Austrian Alban Berg Foundation.

Alexander Swete is one of Austria's leading guitarists, internationally renowned. His expressive playing, sense of sound, and virtuosic skills delight both critics and audiences. His international breakthrough came in 1991 after winning the 1st prize at the International Guitar Competition of Radio France in Paris, the world's most important guitar competition. He has performed throughout Europe, America, China, Australia, appearing at prestigious festivals and concert halls. His extensive repertoire spans from Renaissance to contemporary music, including all the major concertos and a wide range of

chamber pieces. He has worked with, among others, the singers Peter Schreier and Wolfgang Holzmair, the violist Tabea Zimmermann, the violinist Daniel Sepec, members of the Wien Philharmonic and Wien Symphony Orchestras, and the Klangforum Wien.

Alexander Swete is a professor at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna. As a D'Addario Artist he plays exclusively with D'Addario Pro Arte strings.

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