

Sonata in G minor op.2 no.5

Nicolo Paganini
(1782-1840)

Adagio Con Zelo - Allegretto con moto

Nicolo Paganini was born in 1782, smack in the middle of the classical era: Haydn was 50, Beethoven was 12 and Schubert had yet to be born. His birthplace was in Genoa, and his prodigious talents were developed by a series of ever more eminent local violinists. At the same time he was taught the mandolin by his father, whose skill on the instrument had been sufficient to allow him to supplement his income as a trader by moonlighting on that instrument. At the time of Paganini's birth Genoa had been a republic in its own right, but the region was invaded in 1796 by Napoleon, who installed his sister Elisa Baciocchi as ruler of the area, by then called Lucca. Nicolo became a violinist at her court, as well as giving lessons to her husband. He was also at this time enhancing his reputation as a gambler and womaniser. In 1809 he resumed his freelance career, touring Parma and Genoa with great success, although fame outside Italy eluded him, until Pope Leo XII honoured him with the Order of the Golden Spur, whose other recipients included Mozart and Titian and (perhaps more tellingly, Casanova).



Paganini by Ingres

His heavy round of engagements and extravagant lifestyle brought Paganini to an early death. After he had opened a spectacularly unsuccessful casino in Paris he had to sell his very valuable musical instruments to cover the losses. He retired to Marseilles and then Nice, where he died aged 58. Because of his widely rumoured association with the devil the Church refused for 36 years to grant him a burial, but this was eventually conceded to his remains by the Pope, and they were buried, in Parma, in 1876.

Paganini's compositions were numerous (the opus numbers run up to 134). Although modern listeners are used to hearing the duets with piano practically none of them were written as such, but with guitar accompanying the violin. Tonight's concert, which features some of the sonatas, restores some period authenticity.