

Gotham Early Music Scene (GEMS) presents



MIDTOWN CONCERTS

Thursday September 22, 2022 1:15 pm
St Malachy's Church – The Actors' Chapel in New York City
Live Streamed to midtownconcerts.org and [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/)

The Devil's Violin Part II

Edson Scheid plays Paganini
Edson Scheid ~ period violin

Capricci per Violino solo, Op. 1 (pub. 1820)

Nicolò Paganini (1782–1840)

No. 17 in E-flat Major Sostenuto ~ Andante

No. 3 in E minor Sostenuto ~ Presto

No. 4 in C minor Maestoso

No. 7 in A minor Posato

No. 8 in E-flat Major Maestoso

No. 9 in E Major Allegretto

No. 10 in G minor Vivace

No. 12 in A-flat Major Allegro

No. 18 in C Major Corrente ~ Allegro

No. 19 in E-flat Major Lento ~ Allegro Assai

No. 21 in A Major Amoroso ~ Presto

No. 22 in F Major Marcato

No. 23 in E-flat Major Posato

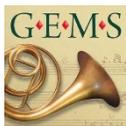
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About the Program

The *24 Caprices* by Nicolò Paganini represent one of the greatest achievements technically and musically for the solo violin in the early 19th century. The collection was published by Ricordi (Milan) in 1820 though the individual pieces were certainly composed over many years prior to that date. Cumulatively, the caprices present the most daunting challenges for violinists, from ricochet bowing to staccato stroke, extensive string crossing and double stops. Paganini makes full use of the violin's fingerboard and extends the usual range for scales and arpeggiation. Far from being simply demonstrations of new daring techniques, however, in the hands of a virtuoso artist, the Caprices do occasionally carry a sense of lyricism. Today the Caprices are often performed on modern violins and bows, but rarely on period instruments. This afternoon, thirteen of Paganini's *Caprices* will be heard on a period violin with gut strings and a classical bow.

About the Artist

Edson Scheid has been praised for his "polished playing" (*The Strad*), for being a "virtuoso violinist" (*The Boston Globe*), and a "violin virtuoso extraordinaire" (*Fanfare Magazine*). His performance of Strauss's song *Morgen* at Carnegie Hall alongside Joyce DiDonato and Il Pomo d'Oro was described as follows: "The concertmaster, Edson Scheid, proved a worthy foil as violin soloist" (*The New York Times*). A native of Brazil, Edson Scheid is based in NY, where he plays with the city's leading period orchestras. He frequently performs throughout the United States on both modern and period instruments, and in Europe, Asia, North and South America with such ensembles as Il Pomo d'Oro and Les Arts Florissants.

Edson Scheid's many performances of Paganini's *24 Caprices*, on both period and modern violins, have been received with enthusiasm around the world. He has been featured live in-studio on "In Tune" from BBC Radio 3 and his recording of the *Caprices* on the Baroque violin for the Naxos label has been critically acclaimed: "Far from being mere virtuoso stunts, Scheid's *Caprices* abound in the beauty and revolutionary spirit of these works..." (*Fanfare Magazine*).

His second solo album, *On Paganini's Trail...H. W. Ernst and more*, has been released under the Centaur Label – the first recording ever of this repertoire on a period violin. *New York Concert Review* writes that "Mr. Scheid is a superb violinist and a musician who can handle the fiendish challenges of this repertoire while finding the music in it.", and *Early Music America* praises Edson Scheid for taking "his time through these works, letting them breathe without losing sight of execution or musicality..."

Edson Scheid holds degrees from the Universität Mozarteum Salzburg, the Yale School of Music, and The Juilliard School, where he was the recipient of a Kovner Fellowship. He is a two-time winner of the Historical Performance Concerto Competition at Juilliard, and a recipient of the Broadus Erle Prize at Yale University.

NEXT WEEK: Brooklyn Baroque
Peace and War: Music from the German Courts

Program Notes by Edson Scheid

“What a man, what a violin, what an artist! Heavens! What sufferings, what misery, what tortures in those four strings!” This is Franz Liszt’s description one of Nicolò Paganini’s performances he had a chance to hear. These words reveal the kind of impact a Paganini concert had on its audience, and what an unparalleled artist he was. By far the most famous violinist of the Romantic Era, Paganini stupefied audiences around Europe with his personal magnetism and virtuosic technique. He contributed to redefine the musical landscape of the time as a touring virtuoso, and influenced many musicians of the time, including Liszt, who strived to achieve on the piano what Paganini had accomplished on the violin, and Robert Schumann, who decided to seriously pursue a career in music after hearing a performance by Paganini. Others affected by Paganini’s unique music and performance style included Frédéric Chopin, Charles Auguste de Bériot, Karol Lipiński and Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst.

How did he manage to achieve such an incredible level of artistry, showmanship and technical proficiency? Many rumors arose at the time, including one that he had a pact with the devil and another that he spent years in jail with nothing else to do other than practice the violin. A more plausible explanation, however, is that Paganini’s own genius and enthusiasm for the instrument were responsible for his astonishing development as an artist. In his own words: “I was enthusiastic about my instrument and studied it unceasingly in order to discover new and hitherto unsuspected effects”. What makes Paganini’s development as a violinist even more extraordinary is the fact that he had an unimpressive violin education in Northern Italy, where he was introduced to the instrument by his father and had only violin teachers of minor consequence. The leading center for violin training in Europe during Paganini’s youth in the 1790’s was Paris. Listening to other violinists including the Polish Auguste Duranowski (a pupil of Viotti) certainly was a crucial factor in inspiring the young Genovese as well.

Paganini’s most important compositions, the *24 Caprices Op. 1*, are surrounded by mystery. When were they composed? When and where did Paganini perform them, if at all? We do know that they were published in 1820 in Milan and that Paganini completed the work by 1817, the date written in the autograph manuscript that was handed by the composer to the publisher. Among the many theories as to when exactly they were composed, perhaps one of the most plausible ones is the version offered by violinist Karol Lipiński, nicknamed by some the “Polish Paganini” and an admirer of the Italian virtuoso (he met Paganini in Piacenza in 1818). According to Lipiński, the Caprices were composed in different times and places, and given as gifts to friends. This could have taken place during Paganini’s employment at the Napoleonic court in Lucca (1801–1809). Regarding performances of the Caprices, Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst, a virtuoso violinist who followed Paganini’s footsteps (he attended many of his recitals and at one point rented a room next to where Paganini was staying so he could hear the master practicing) says that Paganini used to play some of the Caprices as encores in his recitals. Regardless of the exact circumstances of their composition and performances, the Caprices became very popular works. Liszt, Robert Schumann, Brahms, Rachmaninov, Szimanovsky, Lutoslawski, Rochberg and Schnittke are among the composers who wrote pieces based on them. Perhaps the most famous of these works is Rachmaninov’s *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*, Op. 43 for piano and orchestra, which is based on the theme from Caprice No. 24.

Composed before Paganini became the legendary violinist of the European tours, which started in Vienna in 1828, the Caprices reveal a composer seeking to offer the world a torrent of technical novelties. He was certainly inspired by the 24 Caprices of Pietro Locatelli. Written much earlier, these Caprices were published in 1733 as part of a collection of 12 concertos for violin and orchestra entitled *L’arte del Violino*, Op. 3. Here, the Caprices are to be played as cadenzas, following the first and last movements of each concerto. Another set that might have given some ideas to Paganini is the *24 Caprices en forme d’études*, Op. 22, by Pierre Rode, a pupil of Viotti and professor of violin at the Paris Conservatoire. However, Paganini’s Caprices far exceed the technical demands of both collections.

A number of demanding bow strokes are present in the Caprices. The ricochet, a bow stroke in which the bow is dropped and bounces on the string, can be heard in different ways throughout the set. In Caprice No. 1, across the four strings of the violin, with the bow direction being changed every four notes, and in Caprice No. 9, across one or two strings at a time, in groups of five notes. In the middle section of Caprice No. 5, Paganini suggests the use of the ricochet stroke in an ingenious way: in every group of four notes, three are to be played on a down-bow, and one on an up-bow. Since the desired effect is so difficult to be achieved to a satisfactory degree, many violinists choose to play this section with one bow direction for each note, ignoring Paganini’s original marking in the score.

The staccato stroke can be found in several Caprices, including Nos. 10, 15 and 22. It’s a bow stroke in which the violinist plays several notes on one bow direction, with a separation between each note. In Caprice No. 7 we find an

extensive passage of five measures in which Paganini writes a sequence of notes to be played both in staccato and ricochet, or entirely in staccato – once more revealing the creative genius of the composer. String crossing is a technique that Paganini elevated to new heights. It is featured throughout most of Caprice No. 2. Here, one finds extensive passages in which Paganini combines string crossing with extensions for the left hand, creating passages extremely uncomfortable to play, such as one towards the middle of the caprice in which the violinist has to go back and forth with the bow between the lowest and the highest strings of the violin, while playing notes at a very high register.

String crossing also takes a central role in Caprice No. 12, this time, combined with the legato stroke and left-hand extensions. Paganini's music makes use of the full length of the violin's fingerboard. Caprice No. 5 opens and closes with a section of arpeggios and scales, culminating with a high note to be played at the edge of the fingerboard. In No. 7, there is actually a note to be played beyond the limits of the fingerboard, and in No. 19's middle section, there is a passage to be played entirely on the G string. We learn from Carl Guhr, a violinist and conductor who had a chance to hear Paganini several times in concert, and who is the author of a treatise on Paganini's technique entitled Paganini's *Kunst die Violine zu Spielen*, that playing passages entirely on the G string was one of Paganini's signature "tricks". He would sometimes even tune his G string a minor third, or even a major third higher to increase the impact of this effect on his listeners.

Paganini makes frequent use of multiple-stops, that is: two, three or even four notes simultaneously. In Caprice No. 4, often considered the most difficult to play, we find a great number of double stops, ranging from seconds to tenths. The middle section of Caprice No. 17 deserves special attention: it is to be played entirely in octaves, in a passage that contrasts with the humorous character of that caprice's opening and closing sections.

There are several passages in many of Paganini's showpieces that require the violinist to pluck the strings with the fingers of the left hand ("pizzicato") while they simultaneously define the pitches—their normal function. Such works include the variations on *Nel Cor più non mi sento* and *God Save the King*, and the last movement of his second violin concerto, known as *La Campanella*. We can get a taste of this effect in the 9th variation of Caprice No. 24, the only passage in the entire set to be played with left-hand pizzicato.

Also present in the Caprices is Paganini's lyrical side. After one of his performances in Vienna in 1828, Franz Schubert remarked that he "heard an angel sing". Friedrich Wieck, Clara Schumann's father and Robert Schumann's piano teacher remarked that "he had never heard a singer who so touched him as the violin of Paganini in an Adagio". Gioachino Rossini, the famous bel canto composer, who knew Paganini personally, praised him for his ability to compose in an operatic manner. In Caprices Nos. 4, 11 and 21, we experience this lyricism in wonderful ways.

Several of the Caprices received nicknames due to their popularity, such as "The Hunt" referring to the imitation of the horns in Caprice No. 9, and "Devil's Laughter", referring to a sequence of descending thirds in the opening of Caprice No. 13. "Pastoral" is the nickname attributed to Caprice No. 20 because of its use of the D string as a drone, resembling the sound of a rural bagpipe, and "The Trill" is attributed to No. 6, as the violinist plays a melody over a trilled accompaniment. No. 14 is also known as "The March" because of its rhythmic patterns, and No. 1 as "L'Arpeggio". Here, Paganini quotes the opening of Locatelli's Caprice No. 7, perhaps as a nod to Locatelli's set.

Today the Caprices are often performed on modern violins and bows, but rarely on period instruments. This afternoon at the Actors' Chapel at St. Malachy's Church in NYC, the Midtown Concerts audience will have the rare opportunity to hear the Caprices on a period violin with gut strings and a classical bow.