

Death of Paganini (text) :

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On the morning of Paganini's death, the bishop of Nice gave instructions prohibiting the tolling of the "passing bells". A few days later, when it had been embalmed, his body, dressed in the black coat and trousers in which he appeared on the concert platform, was put in a coffin with a glass pane above his face. A dealer in second hand objects offered the comte Cessole, who had been appointed trustee for Achillino, the sum of 30,000 francs in order to exhibit the corpse in England.

The body, shabbily embalmed was left on his death-bed for the two following months, then removed down to the cellar for a year and eventually on the order of the health authorities expelled from the city, ending in a cell of an abandoned lepper house on the Rocky Coast. Soon stories began to circulate: the vails of a violin... other terryfying noises. The body was moved again, first to a cement vat of an olive oil factory, then into the garden of a private house. Four years after that the body was encased into three coffins. Taking no chances, friends transported the body by ship to Genoa (there had been a cholera epidemic in the French Riviera), then by vagon to his family house, where as a boy he helped to plant the vegetables. Still, the church refused to receive him. Thirty years later the body was finally transferred from the private garden to the cemetary in Parma.

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Is that a man brought into the arena at the moment of death, like a dying gladiator, to delight the public with his convulsions? Or is it one risen from the dead, a Vampire with a Violin, who, if not the blood out of our hearts, at any rate sucks the gold out of our pockets?

The friendship of Berlioz was his rare intellectual adventure. Berlioz had composed his symphony Harold in Italy for Paganini, but the latter refused it when he discovered too many rests in the solo viola part. Later, after hearing both "Harold" and "Fantastic" symphonies, Paganini suddenly became extatic about Berlioz' work and surprised him by a gift of twenty thousands francs. This was an extraordinary event in artist to artist relationship in general, and some were firmly convinced, that the commission did not come from Paganini, but from someone, hiding behind this publicity stunt.

Before his death, Paganini acquired yet another illness - the loss of his voice. Desparately, he grasped for help. He would wisper to the ear of his son, who accustomed to the sounds, would speak out for him.

He was so thin that once an innkeeper expelled him from his establishment in the belief that a person so slender must be tubercular.

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a macabre episode took place again sixty years later. Czech violinist Franz Ondricek persuaded the grandson of Paganini to exhumate the grave. "Paganini's features were still recognizable, but... the lower part of the body was nothing but heap of bones", wrote one observer.