

## By Hector Berlioz

MAN of much wit, Choron, used to say when speaking of Weber: "He is a meteor!" One might equally say of Paganini: "He is a comet!" for never did flaming star appear so unexpectedly in the heaven of art, or excite, in the course of his immense eclipse, greater astonishment, blended with a kind of terror, before disappearing for ever. The comets of the physical world, if poets and the popular idea are to be credited, appear only in times precursory of the terrible storms that upheave the human ocean.

Assuredly it is not our epoch, nor the apparition of Paganini, that will in this respect give the lie to tradition. This genius, exceptional and unique in his own line, was developing in Italy at the time of the debut of the greatest events that history mentions; he began to play at the court of one of the sisters of Napoleon at the most solemn hour of the Empire; he passed triumphantly through Germany just as the giant had gone to his grave; he made his appearance in France to the noise of a crumbling dynasty and he entered Paris at the same time as the cholera.

The terror inspired by this scourge was nevertheless powerless to restrain the outburst of curiosity in the first place, and of enthusiasm the next, that drew the masses towards Paganini; it is difficult to believe in such emotion being evoked by a virtuoso under such circumstances, but it is an actual fact. Paganini, by affecting so violently the imagination and the heart of the Parisians, made them forget even the death hovering over them. Moreover all things conspired to increase his prestige: his strange and fascinating exterior, the mystery surrounding his life, the tales told concerning him, even the crimes his enemies had had the stupid audacity to impute to him, and the miracles of a talent that upset all accepted ideas, disdained all known methods, announced the impossible, and accomplished it. This irresistible influence of Paganini made itself felt not only in the world of amateurs and artists; princes of the art themselves succumbed to it. It is said that Rossini, that great scoffer at enthusiasm, felt for him a sort of passion mingled with fear. Meyerbeer, during Paganini's peregrinations in the north of Europe, followed him step by step, ever more and more eager to hear him, and vainly seeking to penetrate the mystery of his phenomenal talent.

THE LARYNGEAL disease he was to die of, coupled with a nervous malady that gave him no respite, growing more and more serious, he was forced to give up entirely the



### THE MODERN APOLLO *(not Salvator)*

*Receiving the homage of 5000 Persons, after having pocketed £2000 for 2 hours' performance!  
(Sketches at his last Concert at the King's Theatre.)*

Paganini as seen by English artists during his concert tour of 1831. "Five-feet six," was one critic's description, "the figure of a dragon; a long, pale face with strongly marked features; a prominent nose; long black hair, falling in curls over his collar; extremely cadaverous; two furrows on either side of his mouth, engraved by his playing."

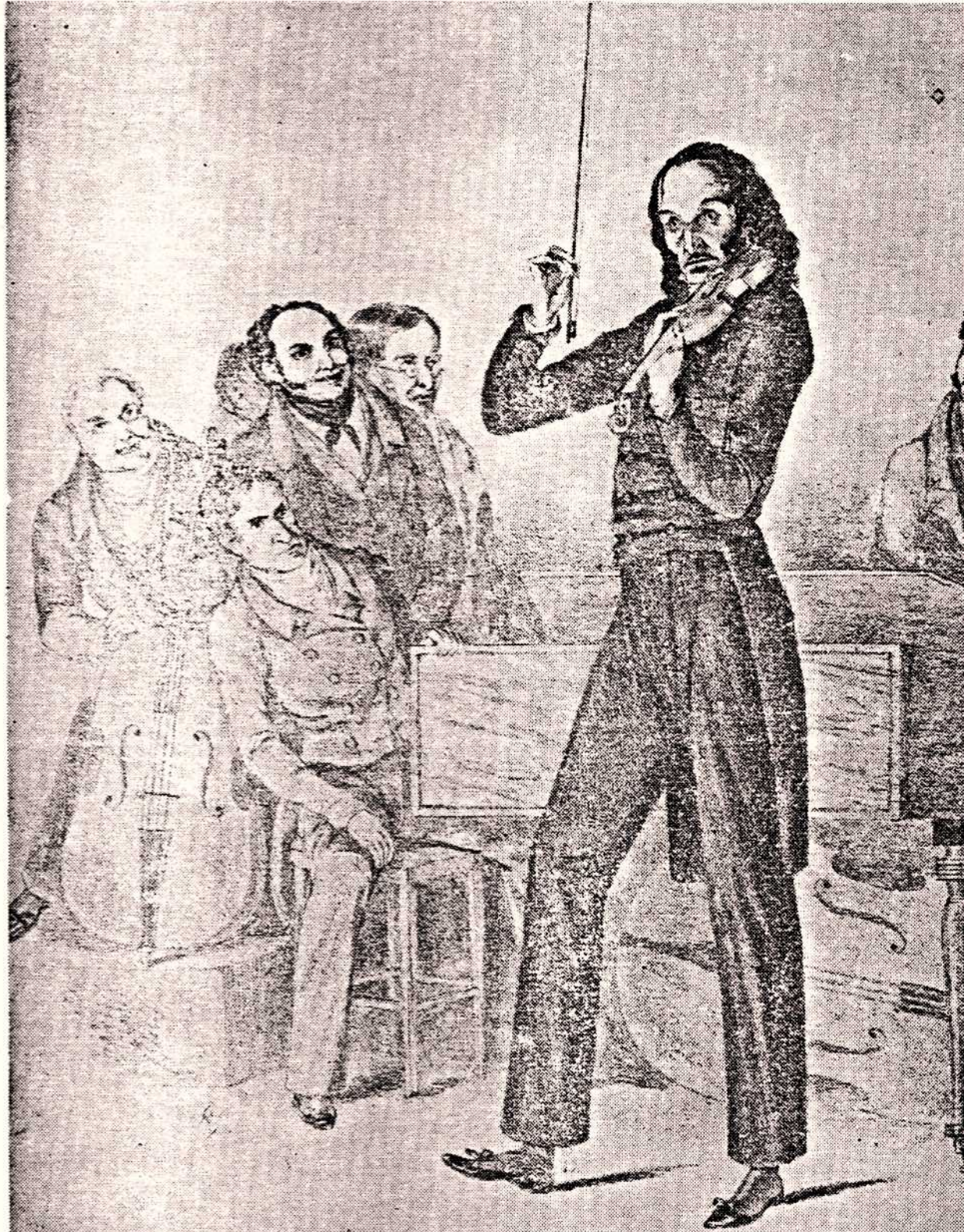
he would occasionally, during the rare moments of respite allowed him by his sufferings, take up his violin again to play in trios and quartets of Beethoven, the performances being organized unexpectedly and strictly among friends, the audience consisting only of the players themselves. . . . In the end his laryngeal consumption made such progress that he entirely lost his voice, and thenceforth he was compelled to give up virtually all social relations. It was with difficulty that it was still possible to hear some of his words by bringing one's ear close to his lips. And when I happened to stroll about with him in Paris, on days when the sun made him want to go out, I carried an album and a pencil; Paganini would write in a few words the subject to which he wished to direct the conversation; I would develop it as best I could, and from time to time, taking the pencil once more, he would interrupt me with reflections that were often very original in their laconism. The deaf Beethoven also used an album to receive the ideas of his friends; the dumb Paganini used it to transmit his own.

**I**T WOULD need a volume to indicate all the new effects that Paganini has introduced in his works, the ingenious devices, the grand and noble forms, the orchestral combinations never even dreamt of before. His melody is the great Italian melody, but generally vibrating with a more passionate ardor than the melody met with in the finest pages of the dramatic composers of his land. His harmony is always clear, simple, and of extraordinary sonority.

He made the solo violin tellingly prominent by tuning his four strings a semitone higher than those of the violins of the orchestra; he could thus play in the brilliant keys of D and A, while the orchestra accompanied him in the less sonorous tone of E-flat and B-flat. It is past belief what he discovered in the use of simple and double harmonics and of notes plucked with the left hand, in the way of arpeggios, in bowing, in passages on three strings, all the more so as his predecessors had not even put him on the track of these. Paganini is one of those artists of whom it must be said they are because they are, not because others went before them.

**H**E HAD been compelled to fly from the Paris climate; soon after his arrival in Marseilles, that of Provence seeming also to be too severe for him, he settled for the winter in Nice, where he was welcomed as he deserved to be and surrounded with the most affectionate care by a wealthy lover of music, himself a virtuoso, the Comte di Cesole. None the less his sufferings went on increasingly (although he did not consider himself in danger of death), and his letters breathed a deep sadness. "If God permits," he wrote to me, "I shall see you next spring. I hope that the state of my health is going to improve here; it is the last remaining hope. Farewell, love me as I love you." I was not to see him again. . . .

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## THE MODERN ORPHEUS,

Opera House June 3<sup>rd</sup> 1831.

*Sketches of the Musical World No. 1, to be continued*

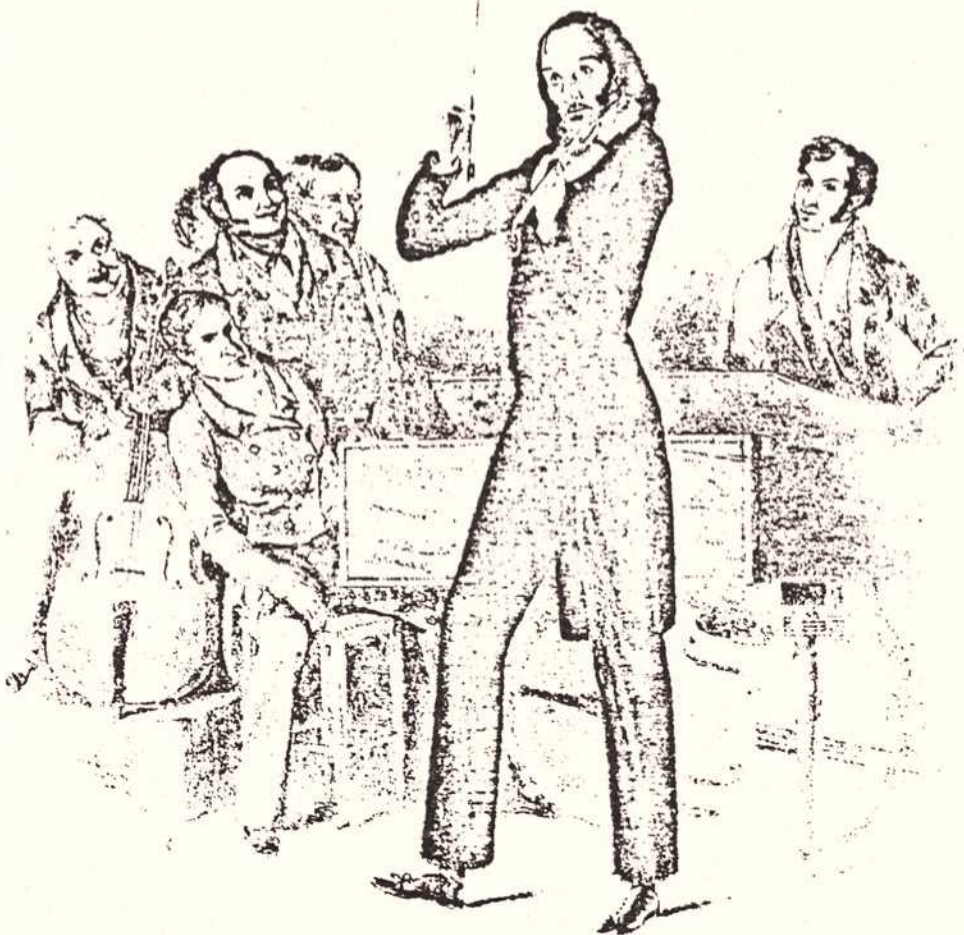
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*Paganini*

Charcoal portrait by Jean Ingres, Rome, 1819.

Cabinet des Dessins, Musée du Louvre, Paris.



THE MODERN ORPHEUS,

Opera House June 5<sup>th</sup> 1831

*Lyrics of the Orpheus, by Mr. J. C. F. ...*

*Original by the ...*

Londra 1831

Litografia anonima

(Genova, Liceo Musicale N. Paganini)

