Unaccompanied...

George Zacharias

Masterpieces for solo violin by
Bartók, Paganini, Skalkottas, and Ysaÿe

Niccolò Paganini (1782-1840);

"Nel cor più non mi sento", Op.38, MS 44 . . . . . **(tracks 01 to 09)**

"God Save the King", Op.9, (Op. Posth.) . . . . . **(tracks 19 to 25)**

Rossini, once wrote about his close virtuoso friend: *"I wept three times in my life: the first on the failure of my first opera, the second in a boat when a cooked turkey fell overboard; and the third when I heard Paganini play his violin for the first time!"* Indeed, Paganini's performance on stage is legendary and has attracted all kinds of comments by his contemporaries who attributed to it no less than a *"demonic quality"*. According to Meyerbeer: *"where reason ends there Paganini begins..."*

Paganini is considered as the first great virtuoso of the violin in the modern sense. His singlehanded influence on the development of the instrument's repertoire remains unsurpassed and extends beyond the violinistic world. In the words of Schumann *"Paganini is the turning point of virtuosity"* while Liszt declared that *"there will never be another Paganini!"* In his biographical notes as published by Fétis, Paganini explains: *"I composed difficult music; constantly studying the difficulties I had invented in order to master them."* While it is questionable whether Paganini invented many of the violinistic effects that defined his music (like the left-hand *pizzicato* and the artificial harmonics), it seems certain that his mastery of these techniques was instrumental in popularizing their use in other compositions and stretched the potential of the instrument further than any of his predecessors or contemporaries had even imagined possible. His influence on the development of the violin repertoire was radical, as he broadened the conception of the violin as a solo instrument, preparing the ground for future composers.

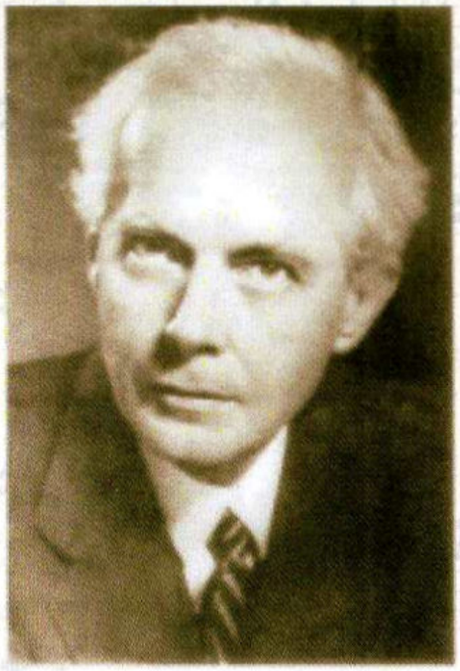
***"Nel cor più non mi sento"* — *My heart does not feel anymore* — ranks as one of Paganini's most celebrated sets of variations. Second only to *God Save the King* in terms of virtuosity, it opens with a startling introductory capriccio that lets the audience take a peek on what there is to follow while establishing a wonderfully picturesque background of birdsong. The theme comes from the homonymous aria in Paisello's operetta *La bella Molinara*. During the *Tema*, Paganini manages to create the unique effect on the violin of a singer being accompanied on a guitar. The six variations that follow explore in turn some of the most difficult violin techniques: rapid multi-voice chords, double trills and tremolos, multi-stop harmonics, left-hand *pizzicato*, spiccato bowing and the sonority of the G string. The piece ends with a vibrant seventh variation in ricochet bowing that concludes with a ferocious coda.**

"*God Save the King*" is a set of variations on the renaissance plainsong melody that became the British national anthem in 1792 under the Hanover dynasty. Paganini probably composed it after his *Fourth Violin Concerto* and during his stay in Berlin in 1830, where he obtained the sponsorship of Spontini, who was in charge of the musical activities of the Prussian King. It was premiered the following year, as an encore piece, at his fare-well (20th consecutive!) concert at the King's Theatre in London when he proclaimed: *"I have composed a piece to test all violinists and prove what I can do"*. According to Fétis *"In the variations upon God Save the King, Paganini seems to have intended concentrating all the new effects he had discovered and all the enormous difficulties over which he had triumphed"*.

Indeed, due to its stupendous technical difficulty, this is one of the most rarely performed pieces in the virtuoso repertoire. It pushes the technical ability of the instrument to the absolute limit, far beyond any other of Paganini's compositions. It is surely the perfect example of the kind of innovative virtuoso techniques he pioneered in the instrument's repertoire. It consists of six variations in the same key throughout, where Paganini demonstrates nonetheless a great variety of moods and rhythms through the skilful use of displaced accents and changes in note values. Left-hand *pizzicato* is literally reinvented in a complete variation, accompanied by the bow. Triple-stop harmonics, outrageous intervals like tremolos on elevenths, *ricochet* bowing where the chord changes before the bow rebounds, all sort of jumps between multiple-stops and so on, complete the daunting picture.

As was the case with most of his pieces, should the occasion arise, Paganini would always perform them by heart, through fear of his unique style being copied. The survival of these two extraordinary sets of variations is attributed to his famous contemporary violin virtuoso and admirer, Wilhelm Ernst who reportedly wrote the compositions down from memory, after listening to them being performed by the composer. This is the main reason why the existing orchestral accompaniment in the case of *God Save the King*, is often omitted as inauthentic.

Doctor Bennati, a physician and good friend of Paganini, wrote that the latter's hand looked like *"a handkerchief tied to the top of a cane when he performed"*. Perhaps it is the only way...



Béla Bartók (1881-1945);

Sonata for Solo Violin, Sz 117, original version . . . . . (tracks 10 to 13)

The winter of 1943 found Bartók in self-exile in New York. His beloved motherland, Hungary, was yet again in turmoil. The Second Balkan War had broken her apart, leaving his birthplace and most of the towns in which he had spent his childhood, to Romania. World War II was raging, leaving behind a trail of blood and destruction. Although his music was widely acclaimed in the music world, Bartók still had to struggle financially, surviving from modest royalties from his works being published and performed in England and the US. Most importantly his health was gradually letting him down. Leukaemia was in its final stages, allowing him little time and strength to concentrate on composition.

The *Sonata for Solo* Violin would be his last complete chamber music work. He had just finished working on Contrasts and his *Sixth Quartet* when his close friend the famous violinist Yehudi Menuhin commissioned the work, which was completed in March 1944. Even according to the welcoming critics at the premiere of the work, given by the dedicatee in November 1944 in New York, the *Sonata* is one of Bartók's most demanding works – for both performer and audience. Being a pianist himself, Bartók had to discover new possibilities on the violin in places where his musical conception seemed on the verge of rendering the piece unplayable.

The *Sonata* is composed in four movements. The first is marked *Tempo di ciaccona*. This characterization refers to the pace of the movement rather than its form, which is of the sonata type. Its main divisions are clearly identified by the appearance of the broad multi-stopped motive that opens the piece in the dotted ciaccona rhythm. Bartók treats the G major/minor tonality with extreme chromatic freedom leaning heavily upon seconds, fourths and sevenths, thus revealing the derivation of its idiom from his native *Magyar* folk music. This influence is clearly portrayed by the distinctly Hungarian rhythmic patterns (inverted dotted rhythm).

The Fuga that follows is more of a fugal fantasy due to its style, which is freer than a typical baroque fugue. It is composed in four voices that become clearly distinct in the exposition as their entries are in a surprisingly traditional order: C-G-C and G. The subject itself however is of characteristically Bartókian style. It is chromatic, of limited compass (B to F#) internally separated by progressively shorter rests as it gathers momentum. Bartók allows no exact repetition after the first answer and the variation progress sets in immediately. The theme is presented in both *rectus* and *inversus* form and even as cannon *in motu contrario*. The subject eventually dissipates leaving behind only segments of its episodic material up to the end of the movement on the sudden two-note cadence.

The *Melodia* is written in a simple A-B-A′ form. Its long-breathed chromatic line is exemplary of Bartók's variation *modus operandi*, which always functions as the centrepiece in his music. The line of A and its originally muted variation at the end are full of typical Bartókian elements like augmented fourths and seconds and a constant chromatic inflection that nevertheless does not disrupt the sense of tonality. The middle section employs primarily double and triple stops with inner lower trills, which disguise the melody's folk-like simplicity.

The last movement is marked *Presto*. It is composed in a rondo form but with the character of a scherzo. Bartók's original intention for the muted principal motive (that is related to the *Prestissimo* of his *Fourth Quartet*) incorporated the use of quarter and third-tones. Menuhin dismissed the idea after some correspondence with the composer and offered him a simplified semitone version of it. In this performance the original text is performed as it survives in the RAM Foyle-Menuhin Archive, since many of the folk-music idioms and colours that only a string instrument like the violin can execute, would be lost otherwise. The first episode is in the Phrygian mode with the feeling of hemiola being apparent throughout. The second one employs a simple songlike theme, which is immediately inverted. All of the three subjects are combined in the final coda.

Nikos Skalkottas (1904-1949);

Sonata für Geige allein A/K69 . . . . . (tracks 14 to 17)

Although Skalkottas belonged to Schoenberg's elite composition students — according to the latter's own admission — it has been forgotten that he was first (and remained) a violinist of concert-artist level.

The *Sonata for Solo Violin* is the earliest composition of Skalkottas that survives to date. Nevertheless, it is regarded as one of his most influential and assertive works that clearly defines his unique charisma as a violinist-composer.

It was dedicated to Nelly Askitopoulou, a violinist and the composer's own muse — *"la belle Nelly"* as he himself would call her — with whom he maintained frequent, rich and revealing correspondence. The surviving second copy-manuscript bears the date *Sommer* 1925 that points to the fact that the Sonata was composed just before Skalkottas entered Jarnach's compositional class at the Berlin Hochschule, while he was still studying orchestration under Kurt Weill. Although, Skalkottas had not yet met Schoenberg, this work clearly demonstrates that he had already shaped and secured his personal musical language and in particular his characteristic use of multiple series in advanced tonality, as opposed to Schoenberg's solid serial system.

Indeed, Skalkottas entered Schoenberg's composition class in the winter semester of 1927-28 and continued studying with him, up to the summer of 1932. Schoenberg was apparently immediately impressed by the commitment and compositional development of his student. The compositions that Skalkottas presented during the opening semester were the *Sonata for Solo Violin* (with no apparent corrections or additions to the earlier original) and his *First String Quartet*. In the next half year, during which he composed his *Concerto for Violin* and his *Symphony for Brass* he was graded "*Excellent*" (extraordinary by Schoenberg's standards).

The *Sonata* is composed in four movements. The opening *Allegro furioso (quasi Presto)* follows the familiar sonata form and abruptly introduces the thematic material of the entire piece (a descending note-series), while the following lyrical *Adagietto* is written in an elegant and seemingly effortless A-B-A′ form. The same form is transformed in the ensuing *Allegro ritmato* where the opening and closing A sections — that are again based on the prime note-series — bring to mind the strict military marches then prevalent in Berlin. However, Skalkottas immediately offers his own opposing idea to this confining militaristic music by introducing a jazz-like off-beat melodic B section. This was after all his extra-curricular idiom as he would often play violin in popular Berlin Jazz-theatres just before the rise of Nazism would deem them forbidden.

The final movement is certainly the most impressive. Skalkottas demonstrates what would eventually become one of his signature compositional techniques, the fractal form. The overall form of the movement is again an A-B-A, where the identical A sections are clearly reminiscent of Greek traditional pan-flute songs. The B section however is further developed in its own right. It is a complete reversed and *stretto* fugue in four voices. Skalkottas cleverly utilises a theme interrupted by rests, where the rests subsequently provide the necessary space and flexibility for the thematic answers. It is a unique and original solution to the problem of multi-voicing for solo violin which Bartók also adopts in the Fuga of his violin Sonata, some nineteen years later.

It is worth pointing out that the *Sonata for Solo Violin* is the only surviving work of Skalkottas for an unaccompanied instrument (excluding the piano).

Eugène Ysaÿe (1858-1931);

Sonate pour violon seul Op.27, no 6 . . . . . (track 18)

Conceived by the great Belgian Master — who was regarded by his contemporaries as the *"Romantic Knight of the Violin"* — in the astonishing period of just a week of frantic inspiration in the year 1924, Ysaÿe's *Six Violin Sonatas, Op.27* have taken their rightful place amongst the masterpieces of the unaccompanied violin repertoire. According to Ysaÿe's celebrated student Gingold, it was the young Szigeti's (later close friend of Bartók's) playing of a Bach Sonata that moved Ysaÿe to compose this set. The latter told of the experience on a journey to his country place Le Zoute: *"[Szigeti] placed his technique entirely at the service of musical expression. When one hears such an artist... one feels how absorbing it would be to compose a work while keeping ever before one the style of one particular violinist".

Upon his arrival there, in the words of Gingold: *"Ysaÿe shut himself in his study. His meals were sent up and he worked steadily. The next evening he emerged radiant..."There, I have sketched ideas for six violin sonatas!".* "Each of them was dedicated to a famous violinist of the younger generation. Strongly influenced by Bach's contrapuntal writing that sparked this frantic day of inspiration, it is nevertheless evident that Ysaÿe delivered on his promise by embedding the personal style of each of the dedicatees in his sonatas, resulting in six pieces of extraordinary diversity in musical language and form.

The ultimate *Sonata no.6* was dedicated to the young Spanish violin virtuoso Manuel Quiroga. It was the only sonata of the six that was not performed in the composer's lifetime as the promising career of the dedicatee was regrettably cut short because of an untimely road accident.

Gingold describes the Sixth as a *"tour de force of virtuosity"*. Indeed this Sonata is widely acknowledged as the most technically demanding of the entire set. As in each of the previous sonatas, the harmonic language and character are distinct and quite individual. With its decidedly Iberian colouring and free, rhapsodic form it is more distant from Bach's influence than the other five of Op.27. Its marked Habanera rhythms, headlong runs and bewitching melodies make a tribute to Spain, the country which for many romantics, was the embodiment of passion and knightly bravery.

Notes on the choice of the recording repertoire

The ostensibly different and – to certain extent – discordant natures of each of the present programme's pieces notwithstanding, there are certain fundamentally strong underlying similarities amongst them that help shape a cohesive and surprisingly homogenous musical environment.

One could argue that every one of these four composers represents a unique, individual and culturally-dependant side of a single polyhedral concept in music, in this case the character of violin-playing. The forerunner Paganini is by all means considered as the paradigm of the Italian violin school, where the instrument is ultimately trying to emulate the *bel-canto* human voice of the then prevailing Italian operatic world. All phrases are woven in a continuous and pleasant manner, easy to identify with. Instrumental playing is tender and delicate, varying according to the mood of the composition, exactly as Paganini's own style was described by his contemporary Imbert de Laphaleque: *"Through his* [Paganini] *violin he speaks, he sings, he laughs, he laments..."* This entailed in instrumental terms a light approach to bow and left-hand pressure that allowed for all emerging virtuoso techniques – like the *ricochet*, double trills or double-stop harmonics — to materialize in the best possible way.

Ysaÿe — who followed — was a leading figure of the renowned Franco-Belgian violin school. In the words of David Oistrakh: *"Ysaÿe stands out as the greatest innovator after Paganini"*. The century that separates him from Paganini had seen many a change on the operatic stage. By 1920, hyper-romanticism was well-established and was in fact nearing its nadir. The fates of both the violin as an instrument and its repertoire that had been interconnected for centuries with the development of the human voice, needed to keep up. Ysaÿe responded to the new trend by making the violin score rhythmically and harmonically denser. The light-bowed and fingered *bel-canto* playing would no longer suffice. Musical phrases overextended the physical dimension of a single stroke while rich harmonic chords outgrew the four-string limit on the instrument. The contact with the string became therefore deeper, denser and almost surrealistic in colours with idioms — best suited to painting, like *lusingando* — becoming commonplace.

Skalkottas, who was Ysaÿe's junior by almost half a century, dealt with the problem in a different manner altogether. The violin as an instrument would no longer be confined to colourful representation of dance and song. Rather, it would create its rightfully independent and innovative musical genre that could spearhead the latest of musical ideas, such as serialism. His violin doctrine had been bequeathed by and based largely upon his own Joachim-schooled violin professor, Willy Hess, and therefore was of decisively Germanic origin. This equally famous German violin school – fathered by Paganini's antagonist, Luis Spohr – advocated the scarce use of the vibrato that was in turn substituted by long-breath sonorous and continuous sound. The heavy contact of the bow

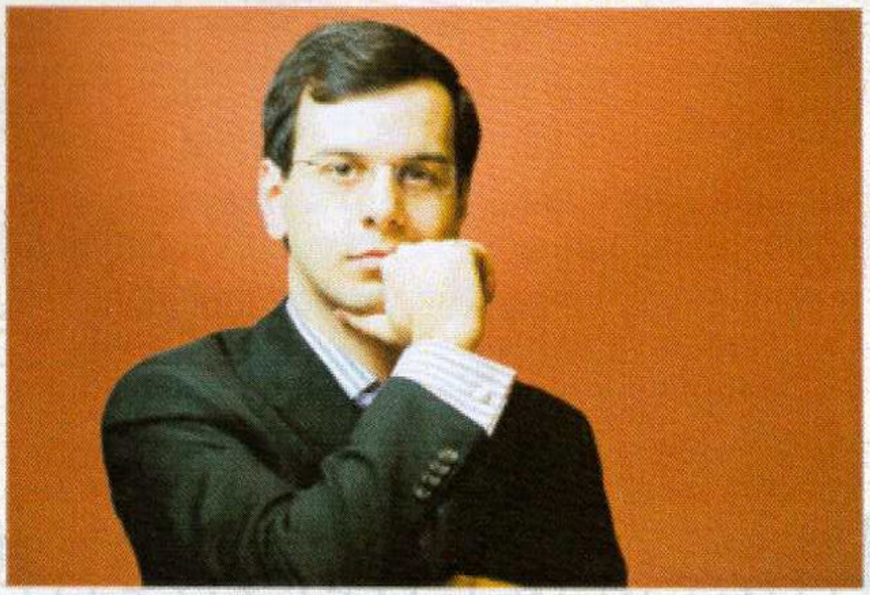
became so quintessential to this school's characteristic sound that such techniques as *spiccato* and *lusingando* would become entirely irrelevant. In Skalkottas' own words: *"the sound of the violin in general, is powerful, lyrical... The reality therefore of beautiful sounds is not enchantment but before all general cleansing..."* This unconstrained perception of the nature of violin repertoire would create entirely new potential for the instrument.

Bartók was the latest and only one of these composers who was in fact not a violinist but a pianist. It was indeed this very lack of knowledge of complex violin mechanics that allowed him to approach the instrument freely and in an unbiased manner. His style was deeply influenced by his native Hungarian music idioms and the violin playing of his close friend and superb Hungarian violinist Székely, which could best be described as a bridge between the temperamental and virtuosic Italian school and the German ideal sonorous sound. The violin is clearly treated by Bartók solely as means of conveying his musical inspiration to the public. It is perhaps the first case where violin-mechanics no longer matter. The technique is therefore forced to adapt to the demands of the text and the original idea of the composer, not vice-versa.

This is how a full circle seems to complete itself. Paganini embarked on a voyage of discovery and innovation on the violin that culminated – for the purposes of the present 70 minutes-long recording — at Bartók, two centuries later. The concept of virtuosity and in particular its fluctuating correspondence with the cultural and musical environment in which these inspired composers lived and created, provided an unanticipated constant for the ever-evolving perception of the violin repertoire.

Στην πολυαγαπημένη μου σύζυγο Σιμόνα

George Zacharias



"Bookending the evening was Greek violinist George Zacharias, nimbler fingered than a pickpocket. He opened with vintage Paganini, creating enough pizzicatos and staccatos to test anyone, even Paganini himself...always with his charming and haunting sound..." **(Observer, UK 10/7/07)**

"Mr Zacharias' performance had the audience nailed to their seats... utterly captivating and impeccable musical performance that proved yet again his quality as a great virtuoso... His three bedazzling encores commanded one more ecstatic standing ovation..." **(Herald, Australia 20/11/2003)**

"Violinist George Zacharias... bedazzled his audience and performed with unique virtuosity and sensibility... certainly a name to watch out for..." **(Belgian State Radio broadcast, 17/7/2001)**

Born in Athens, Greece, George studied violin at the Athens Conservatory of Music (class of Pantelis Despotidis) as a full scholar, up to his graduation (First Prize and Special Virtuosity Prize) in 1997. In the same year he was accepted at an advanced year of study at the Royal College of Music, London (class of Yossi Zivoni) where he was admitted to the Bachelor's Degree in Music and two Postgraduate Degrees in Advanced Solo and Ensemble Performance. His studies abroad were supported by a full Greek State Scholarship for Music. In June 2004 he was awarded the Master's of Music Degree in Performance with Distinction at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, Australia (class of Wanda Wilkomirska), where he studied as an Australian Government Scholar. In early 2009, he is completing his original research on Skalkottas' Concerti for Violin, towards a PhD in Music Performance at the Royal Academy of Music, London, supervised by Dr. Neil Heyde and Maestro Kun Hu and supported by the A.G. Leventis Foundation (Paris). In 2006 George had the exclusive honour to be given a master class by Maestro Gaccetta, the only direct grand-pupil of Paganini himself.

Since his debut at the age of thirteen, George maintains a busy international performance career and has appeared as a soloist extensively throughout Greece and the UK, the US, Australia, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Poland, Romania, Spain and Switzerland, receiving the highest accolades from critics and audience. His discography for radio includes Paganini's Concerto in D major and Britten's Violin Concerto, as well as Ysaÿe's complete set of Violin Sonatas. George has been the dedicatee, premier performer and recording artist of numerous contemporary compositions for violin.

Unaccompanied...

George Zacharias

Recorded on the 28th of June and 2nd of July 2008
At All Saints Parish Church (1277)
Leighton Buzzard, England
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George gratefully acknowledges the loan of a Ceruti violin (Cremona 1810) from the *Royal Academy of Music* (London) Instrument Collection as well as the kind financial support by the *Royal Academy of Music* (London) Research Board for the purposes of this recording

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Niccolò Paganini: *"Nel cor più non mi sento", Op.38, MS 44* (14.11)

1. Introduction — A Capriccio ad lib. (1:34)
2. Tema — Andante (1:59)
3. Var.1 — Brillante (1:36)
4. Var.2 — (1:26)
5. Var.3 — Più lento (1:50)
6. Var.4 — Allegro (0:55)
7. Var.5 — (1:04)
8. Var.6 — Appassionato (1:39)
9. Finale — Vivace-Coda (2:08)

Béla Bartók: *Sonata for Solo Violin, Sz 117, original version* (27.28)

10. Tempo di ciaccona (10:01)
11. Fuga (4:53)
12. Melodia (6:40)
13. Presto (5:54)

Nikos Skalkottas: *Sonata für Geige allein A/K69* (11.59)

14. Allegro furioso (quasi Presto) (2:36)
15. Adagietto (2:20)
16. Allegro ritmato (1:49)
17. Adagio quasi Recitivo - Allegro molto moderato - Adagio quasi Recitivo (5:14)

Eugène Ysaÿe: *Sonate pour violon seul Op.27, no 6* (7.50)

18. Allegro giusto non troppo vivo - Allegro poco scherzando - Allegro tempo primo

Niccolò Paganini: *"God Save the King", Op.9, (Op. Posth.)* (7.50)

19. Tema — Andante (0:57)
20. Var.1 — Un poco più spiritoso (0:52)
21. Var.2 — Con molto di dolcezza (0:55)
22. Var.3 — Lento (1:12)
23. Var.4 — Vivace (1:03)
24. Var.5 — Larghetto (1:36)
25. Finale — Presto (1:15)

Total CD duration 69:18

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