

Inside the Concert with Albert Combrink
Alissa Margulis & Luis Magalhães - 5 November 2022, 17:00

Giuseppe Tartini (1692-1770): Sonata in G Minor for Solo Violin – *The Devil's Trill*

Larghetto ma non troppo // Allegro Moderato // Andante // Allegro Assai – Andante – Allegro Assai



Born in Baroque Venice, Tartini received the basic training of one intended to become a Franciscan Friar. Instead, Tartini married a young woman who had also caught the eye of the powerful Cardinal Cornaro who promptly charged Tartini with abduction. He narrowly escaped with his life and, disguised as a monk, fled to the Monastery of St Francis in Assisi. It seems that it was there that he heard the playing of legendary violinist Francesco Veracini, and was so displeased with his own playing that he locked himself in a room in the monastery and practised furiously up to ten hours a day for more than a year. The result was that he became a true virtuoso, becoming the first official owner of a Stradivarius Violin. He created a Violin Academy in 1729 and wrote extensively on harmony, acoustics and teaching. Tartini's playing was said to be remarkable for its

combination of technical and poetic qualities, and his bowing became a model for later schools of violinists. His compositions include more than 100 violin concertos; numerous sonatas, including the *Trillo del Diavolo (Devil's Trill)*, written after 1735; quartets; trios; symphonies; and religious works, including a five-part *Miserere* and a four-part *Salve Regina*.

Tartini contributed to the science of acoustics by his discovery of the "difference tone", also called the Tartini tone, a third note heard when two notes are played steadily and with intensity. He also devised a theory of harmony based on affinities with algebra and geometry.

According to a legend Tartini was inspired to write the sonata by a dream in which the Devil appeared at the foot of his bed playing the violin. The complete story is told by Astronomer Jérôme Lalande who wrote in his autobiography "*Voyage d'un François en Italie*":

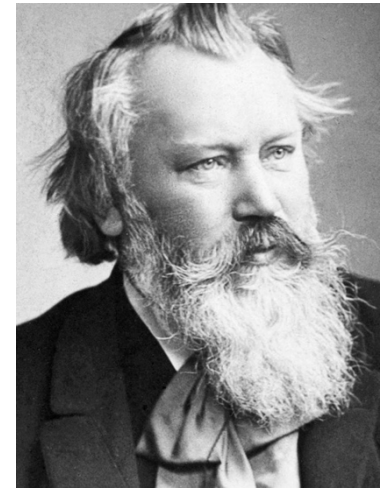
One night, in the year 1713 I dreamed I had made a pact with the devil for my soul. Everything went as I wished: my new servant anticipated my every desire. Among other things, I gave him my violin to see if he could play. How great was my astonishment on hearing a sonata so wonderful and so beautiful, played with such great art and intelligence, as I had never even conceived in my boldest flights of fantasy. I felt enraptured, transported, enchanted: my breath failed me, and I awoke. I immediately grasped my violin in order to retain, in part at least, the impression of my dream. In vain! The music which I at this time composed is indeed the best that I ever wrote, and I still call it the "Devil's Trill", but the difference between it and that which so moved me is so great that I would have destroyed my instrument and have said farewell to music forever if it had been possible for me to live without the enjoyment it affords me."

The first movement begins gently and reflectively, with languid double stops - a very difficult violin technique requiring the playing of two notes simultaneously on different strings - and a flowing violin melody line filled with tasteful embellishment. A crisp and highly decorated section with much bravura, is followed by a brief, songlike slow movement, supposedly depicting a dream-like state, leading inevitably to the dream in the fourth movement where the Devil lets rip with a spectacle of virtuosity which includes such challenges as trilling on one string while simultaneously playing 3 note chords on the other strings. While the Romantic and Modern eras were to bring great advances in virtuosity, this devilishly difficult work remains one of the most challenging of the virtuoso violin repertoire.

The piece was published as a violin sonata with basso continuo accompaniment. Friedrich "Fritz" Kreisler was an Austrian-born American violinist and composer. One of the most noted violin masters of his day, and regarded as one of the greatest violinists of all time, he was known for his compositions and arrangements, many of which have become the standard version for today. The Cadenza presented in this work is composed by Kreisler.

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897): Violin Sonata No. 3 in D Minor, Op.108
Allegro // Adagio // Un poco presto e con sentiment // Presto agitato

The D-minor Sonata, Op.108 was the third of a set of four works for violin and piano, but the fourth was destroyed, and thus the third stands as the final and the most muscular of the set, representing the composer at the height of his powers. He rarely used D Minor – perhaps the spectre of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony was too unsettling. Yet the key inspired some of Brahms' most dramatic music: urgent, strong, and emotionally intense. Brahms here shows himself to be a master craftsman.



In the first four bars, Brahms has presented all the material to be encountered in the entire first movement. Highly concentrated motives are put through a large variety of compositional and emotional transformations. The entire development section is built on particularly ominous sustained notes of *Pedal-Point* while piano and violin rhapsodies above, with strenuous activities eventually resolving in a brighter Major key.

The second movement maintains the major key for a tender *Adagio*. The violin sings a tender love song over hymnlike chords. There is - inevitably with Brahms - one wave of deep of passion, but no obvious hint of tragedy, balancing the tension of what came in the first movement.

The lightweight and relatively short *Scherzo* movement lives up to its name: with, if not humour as such, enliven development of relatively simple melodic material. The piano has centre stage in this movement.

In the *Finale*, the frenzied elements of the Tarantella - offset with a chorale melody - the most virtuosic side of Brahms' writing, creates a lyrical but stormy landscape. It is a kaleidoscope of changing moods, ranging from a prayer-filled chorale, to combustible impetuosity to what Orrin Howard called Brahms' "Hungarian Pensiveness".

The third Sonata is a text-book introduction to the compositional technique of Brahms – using Classical Period form to contain Romantic Period music.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827): Sonata In A Major Op.47 for Violin and Piano The "Kreutzer Sonata"
Adagio sostenuto: Presto // Andante con Variazioni // Finale: Presto



The ninth of Beethoven's ten Violin Sonatas was written in 1803, just before he commenced work on his Symphony No. 3, *The Eroica*. It was Beethoven's most ambitious and technically demanding chamber work to date, and sets itself apart from the other sonatas from the first dramatic notes for unaccompanied solo violin.

The work was published under the title *Sonata per il Pianoforte ed uno violino obbligato in uno stile molto concertante come d'un concerto – (in a concert style)* It would seem fitting that such an auspicious title would describe a work dedicated to one of the great violinists of the time, Joseph Kreuzer. But Kreuzer is rather undeserving of the dedication. That honour should go to the violinist George Bridgetower. The black West-Indian violin virtuoso had caused a sensation in Europe: naturally West-Indian musicians of his calibre were a rarity. In Vienna, Beethoven's patron Prince Lichnowsky arranged for the two stars to meet and the two had an instant affinity. A big concert in Vienna was scheduled and Beethoven decided to write a new Sonata for the occasion.

In the end, the sonata was completed only one day before the concert. It had to go to the copyists first, and when everyone ran out of time, Bridgetower and Beethoven eventually had to play off half copied-out manuscripts with the ink literally not yet dry.

A glittering audience assembled, which included Archduke Rudolph, Prince Lichnowsky and Prince Lobkowitz. At one point, Bridgetower improvised a passage imitating the piano part, and Beethoven got up from the piano, walked up to Bridgetower and kissed him on both cheeks before walking back to the piano and resuming the Sonata! The performance was a triumph, and Beethoven wrote on the manuscript: *Sonata per uno mulattico lunatico*. (Sonata for a Mad Mulatto). However, at the reception afterwards, Bridgetower had too much to drink, and made a rather crude comment about one of Beethoven's woman-friends. Beethoven, not entirely sober himself, lost his temper and grabbed the manuscript back from Bridgetower and crossed out the dedication, replacing it with Kreuzer. The two never spoke again, and all attempts at reconciling the two, failed miserably.

The sonata is conceived on a grand scale, and opens with a serious solo statement from the Violin. It is the only slow introduction of all Beethoven's ten Violin Sonatas, a dramatic cadenza-like section that outlines a half-step interval that recurs throughout the moment. The Presto explodes energetically, and despite some calmer episodes and a chorale-like second theme, remains energetic till the abrupt end.

The Second movement provides some respite. An introspective theme leads to four variations: 1) playful, 2) repeated notes in perpetual motion, 3) with an air of tragedy and 4) ethereally florid, followed by a long and introspective coda. Bridgetower recalled about the premiere: "Beethoven's expression in the Andante was so chaste, which always characterized the performance of all his slow movements, that it was unanimously hailed to be repeated twice."

The third movement crashes in with an A Major chord which erases the modulatory journeys of the variations, and launches a dancing Tarantella which chases through some quasi-fugal terrain, hunting calls, spinning passages and witty restarts. The *sonata-rondo* form shows Beethoven at his ingenious best: the work seems to pause only to relaunch with fresh momentum. This movement was originally discarded as "too dramatic" for an earlier sonata, but here is reshaped to a fitting conclusion of what was, at the time, the most dramatic violin sonata in music history. Violins were undergoing changes in construction during Beethoven's lifetime (longer neck, fingerboard and strings; higher bridge; greater tension on the strings), resulting in greater range and volume of tone. These did not go unnoticed by Beethoven, who made steadily increasing technical demands on the instrument.