

Sunday, May 5, 2019, 3pm
Zellerbach Hall

Michael Barenboim, *violin*

PROGRAM

- Giuseppe TARTINI (1692–1770) Sonata in G minor, Bg. 5, *The Devil's Trill*
Larghetto Affettuoso
Tempo Guisto della Scuola Tartinista
Sogni Dell'autore
- Salvatore SCIARRINO (b. 1947) Six Caprices
No. 1 Vivace
No. 2 Andante
No. 3 Assai agitato
No. 4 Volubile
No. 5 Presto
No. 6 Con brio

INTERMISSION

- Luciano BERIO (1925–2003) *Sequenza VIII*
- Niccolò PAGANINI (1782–1840) Selections from 24 Caprices for Solo Violin,
Op. 1
No. 1 in E major, Andante
No. 6 in G minor, Lento
No. 17 in E-flat major, Sostenuto andante
No. 16 in G minor, Presto
No. 9 in E major, Allegretto
No. 24 in A minor, Tema con variazioni –
Quasi presto

Cal Performances' 2018–19 season is sponsored by Wells Fargo.



The guiding idea behind this recital program, which Michael Barenboim initially developed for his second solo album, is to trace a history of the spell his instrument has cast over Italian composers. For all their variety, the works gathered here—as Barenboim explains in an interview with Martin Hoffmeister that appears in the album’s booklet—exemplify “the repertoire’s technical and stylistic spectrum” and “the rich, expressive possibilities of the instrument.”

Giuseppe Tartini Sonata in G minor, *The Devil’s Trill*

Giuseppe Tartini, who was born in present-day Slovenia in a town that then belonged to the Venetian Republic, explored this potential not only as a composer-performer but in his widely influential theoretical writings, some of which found their way into Leopold Mozart’s textbook for violinists. From a prolific output almost exclusively focused on concertos and solo works for the violin, Tartini’s most famous composition is the Sonata in G minor, known above all by its programmatic title “The Devil’s Trill.”

The piece is accompanied by a good deal of myth—even surrounding the issue of when Tartini wrote it. Instead of 1713, the year often claimed for this composition (when Tartini would have been a mere 21), scholars date it from his maturity, likely in the 1740s. But it’s impossible to know for sure, since Tartini’s extant manuscripts conspicuously lack dates—and he made a habit of coming back to pieces many years later to rework them.

The G minor Sonata did not appear complete in print until after the composer’s death, though a supernatural aura was already associated with it. In 1769, the astronomer and writer Joseph Jérôme Lefrançois de Lalande published what became the canonical account of the sonata’s origin in his Italian travelogue, in which he attributes the following statement to Tartini: “One night I dreamed I had made a bargain with the Devil for my soul. ... I gave him my violin to see if what he could do with it. How great was my astonishment to hear him play, with such consummate art and intelligence, a sonata more

exquisitely beautiful than anything I had conceived in my boldest flights of fantasy. I felt enraptured, transported, spellbound. My breath failed me, and I awoke. At once seizing my violin, I tried to retain the sounds I had heard in my dream. But it was in vain. The music I then composed is indeed the best that I ever wrote, and I call it the ‘Devil’s Sonata,’ but it is so inferior to the one I heard in my dream that I would have destroyed my instrument, bidding farewell to music forever, if it had been possible for me to live without the enjoyment it gives me.”

No marketing genius could have devised a more effective campaign to enhance the reputation of this sonata, which Brahms ranked among his favorites. It’s crucial to note that the “diabolical” element here is by no means limited to fiendish technical challenges—double stops, trilling on one string while executing a separate line of cantabile—but also refers to the enchanting beauty produced by these feats.

The piece was published as a violin sonata with basso continuo accompaniment, but Barenboim explains that “nothing substantial is missing without the continuo part” and that he attempted “to integrate aspects of the continuo” into the solo part, adding that as a result, “the sonata’s intensity is far greater as a solo work,” giving the interpreter a freer rein.

Beginning with a striking G minor melody cast in a lilting 12/8 rhythm, the opening movement is answered by an Allegro “in the tempo suited to the School of Tartini”—a pattern of dreamy, slow music followed by faster and more agitated writing that is replicated in the last movement, where Tartini depicts his famous dream. For Barenboim, the “Devil’s Trill” Sonata traces a course that leads inevitably to the diabolical as it moves from “canonic beauty” and becomes increasingly “scratchy, rough, and harsh, and the trills send you to hell—at least when they are performed in a subtle manner.”

Salvatore Sciarrino Six Caprices

We spring ahead more than two centuries for the Six Caprices by Salvatore Sciarrino, arguably the most prominent living composer of his

generation. Born in 1947 in Palermo, Sciarrino is now based in Città di Castello in Umbria. As a boy, he exhibited precocious talent in painting and music alike. Aside from some private instruction, he avoided academic training to develop his individual voice as an autodidact.

Sciarrino has made meticulous exploration of the expressive potential of harmonics—the overtones of a fundamental tone—a signature of his musical language, together with his attention to the spatialization of sound. Starting with his opera *Amore e Psiche*, premiered in 1973, Sciarrino has created numerous large-scale stage works, but some of his landmark achievements can be found at the other end of the spectrum as well, in pieces for solo instruments (where he has shown a particular fascination for the flute).

According to the *Grove Online Music Dictionary*, Sciarrino began moving away more and more from using extended techniques “in Baroque abundance” during the 1970s, when he opted “to pare down his resources to a characteristic play between sound and silence” found in many of his compositions.

The *Sei Capricci* or Six Caprices presents a vivid example of this development. Alluding to the genre cultivated by Paganini (which we encounter later in this program), these pieces take up impulses from Sciarrino’s concurrent *Sonatina* for Violin and Piano from 1975, when he wrote No. 2 as the first of the set. He took a day to compose each of the other caprices, though work on No. 6, the most extensive of the group, required a month.

Striving for originality became a holy grail—and led to some profoundly problematic attitudes regarding the audience—among composers of the 20th-century Western avant-garde. Yet with the *Six Caprices*, Sciarrino began to trace out an unprecedented universe of delicate timbres and sonorities that don’t require “explanation” so much as open ears ready to listen for the indescribable atmospheres and sound colors that Sciarrino conjures from the violin’s harmonic palette. In the context of conventional writing for the instrument, the effect might be likened to moving from a clearly delineated figurative

painting to a color-field canvas—more difficult to characterize for someone who has not seen it, yet just as powerful in awakening a response when experienced firsthand. Barenboim suggests that a secret of the *Six Caprices* may be that “they should not sound perfect at all” but “as if something is out of control”—both the music itself and the attempt to play it are “experimental—an enticing mystery.”

Luciano Berio

Sequenza VIII

The violin as an instrument of extremes, of a diabolical intensity: our concert continues with Luciano Berio’s fearsome *Sequenza VIII*, in which the pressures of ultra-virtuosity are combined with an omnivorous drive to encompass everything of which the instrument is capable. Indeed, the great northern Italian composer’s passion for music has often been characterized as “omnivorous” in its appetite. Berio was preoccupied by the convergences between musical experience and the rest of human culture, high and low. Inspirations came from literature, theatricality, circus performances, linguistics, anthropology, and even politics.

The *Sequenzas* reach back to 1958 and continued as a work-in-progress totaling 14 solo compositions by the time of the composer’s death, each for a different instrument (including one for female voice), with alternate versions for two of the *Sequenzas* and various companion pieces acting as satellites. These compositions crowd such a density of musical ideas within their frames that they convey an epic character belying their relative brevity. There is also something labyrinthine about the *Sequenzas*, the overall title of which refers to Berio’s process of constructing most of these pieces from “a sequence of harmonic fields from which the other, strongly characterized musical functions were derived.” The result was intended to foster “a polyphonic mode of listening.”

The earlier *Sequenzas* in particular show Berio working out issues of compositional language, but he ultimately came to explore each instrument as a phenomenon in itself, bringing the cultural history and even the physical makeup

of the instrument into play in a sophisticated brand of performance art and self-referential commentary. Berio wrote *Sequenza VIII* in 1976–77 after a break of some years from the series (making it contemporary with Sciarrino's Six Caprices). He composed it for the violinist Carlo Chiarappa, who gave the premiere.

While his Sicilian compatriot alludes to the Paganini tradition with his title, Berio goes much further in integrating his radicalism here with a consideration of the musical past. As Barenboim points out, Berio “tries to present nothing less than the history of the violin” in a dozen minutes. The Chaconne from J.S. Bach's Partita No. 2 for Solo Violin serves as a key reference point—with the notes A and B as the core idea that recurs throughout the piece. The score also includes aleatoric sections that give the interpreter freedom to decide on how to present a subset of passages.

This investigation of virtuosity is multi-layered in a way that recalls a Samuel Beckett monologue or a narrative by Jorge Luis Borges, often with an indefinable touch of absurdism in its demands for virtuosic endurance.

Niccolò Paganini

Selections from 24 Caprices for Solo Violin, Op. 1

If Tartini was tapping into long-held associations between the devil and the violin—the instrument of dance, once forbidden by the Church—Niccolò Paganini carried these to a further extreme in the context of the new spirit of Romanticism. Wielding a magic touch for the violin that invited rumors of bargains with the devil—when did Satan become so musical?—Paganini anticipated the level of celebrity that performers such as Franz Liszt would unleash in 19th-century Europe. Indeed, after witnessing the violinist in concert, Liszt was inspired to groom his image as the “Paganini of the piano.”

In addition to the dazzling bravura of his technique, Paganini awed audiences by playing his own music from memory—thus giving the illusion of spontaneous inspiration. He jealously guarded the secrets of his scores, rarely pub-

lishing them so that he could maintain exclusive performance rights. Paganini waited until 1820, when he was already 38, to allow Ricordi to publish 24 Caprices for Solo Violin as his Opus 1. He wrote these works in three separate sets between 1802 and 1817.

The cycle as a whole, dedicated *agli Artisti* (“to the artists”), encompasses the new horizons of violin technique and expression that Paganini had opened up. The extremity of his technical demands suggests a radically new concept of the instrument—far outside the bounds of Baroque and Classical tradition. The Six Caprices remain among the ultimate challenges in the solo violin repertoire. They have also left a long-lasting mark on music history—from Chopin, who took up the idea of marrying a particular technical issue with changing moods to create expressive miniatures in the Études, to the many variations to which the most famous caprice (No. 24) has been subjected (Rachmaninoff's *Rhapsody* and Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Variations*, to mention two).

Each caprice radiates a distinctive character, so that the collection as a whole traverses a great variety of emotions along with the techniques it explores; unlike J.S. Bach's encyclopedic *Well-Tempered Clavier*, Paganini had no interest in covering all major and minor keys. Barenboim chooses a selection, presented out of numerical sequence, to suggest connections with Sciarrino's Six Caprices. He explains that he tried to arrange the six selected Paganini caprices “in such a way that they also correspond to the cyclical idea. The intention was to create plausible relationships, both in the internal structure and as a whole.”

Ricochet bow strokes are the focus technically of the restless arpeggios in No. 1 in E major. We encounter Paganini's take on the trill technique in the left-hand tremolo of No. 6 in G minor (the key of the *Devil's Trill*). In No. 17 in E-flat major, Paganini sustains a sense of conversation between rapid-fire runs and double stops in the low registers, while the bow control demanded in the *presto* No. 16 in G minor is genuinely fiendish. No. 9 in E major (a study of double stops known as “The Hunt”) is an example of

Paganini's uncanny ability to mimic sounds of other instruments (flute and horn) with the violin. Caprice No. 24 in A minor in itself encompasses a compendium of techniques (left-

hand pizzicato, multiple stops, string crossing, parallel octaves, and so on), which are explored through the vehicle of a theme and 11 variations followed by a finale.

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ABOUT THE ARTIST

While committed to the core Classical and Romantic repertoire, **Michael Barenboim** is deeply invested and especially recognized for his performances of 20th-century and contemporary music. He celebrates a long history of collaboration with the late Pierre Boulez, whose pieces he regularly performs. Barenboim has recorded both Boulez's *Anthèmes 1 & 2* on Accentus Music. His second solo recording, with works by Sciarrino, Berio, and Paganini, was released in early 2018 and hailed by the critics as "visionary programming" (*BBC Music Magazine*), "breathtakingly compelling, and one that's full of brilliant revelations" (*The Strad*).

Recent highlights included Barenboim's debut with the Berlin Philharmonic, performing Schönberg's Violin Concerto. This followed debuts with the Vienna Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony, and Israel Philharmonic. He has also appeared with London's Philharmonia Orchestra, performing Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No. 1, and with the BBC Philharmonic performing Berg's Violin Concerto.

The 2018–19 season includes debuts with the Los Angeles Philharmonic performing Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 1, with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic playing Berg's Violin Concerto, and with the San Diego Symphony and Dresden Philharmonic, performing Glazunov's Violin Concerto. This season, Barenboim also premieres J. Widmann's *Insel der Sirenen*, as well as Kareem Roustom's Violin Concerto No. 1, with the Boulez Ensemble in Berlin.

Barenboim is a founding member of the Erlenbusch Quartet and is frequently invited to perform at such festivals as the Lucerne, Verbier, Aix en Provence, and Jerusalem Chamber Music festivals. He collaborates regularly with his mother, pianist Elena Bashkirova, as well as with such artists as Franz Helmerson, Julian Steckel, Guy Braunstein, Andras Schiff, and Martha Argerich. He also serves as concertmaster of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra and cultivates a continuous and strong involvement in educational activities. Barenboim is also Head of Chamber Music at the Barenboim-Said Academy and gives master classes around the world.