

THE COMMISSION

by

Woody Vasulka

Text and character of Paganini	Ernest Gusella
Text and character of Berlioz	Robert Ashley
Text and character of The Mortician	Cosimo Corsano

Paganini's son	Ben Harris
Narrator	David Ossman
Voice	Andrea Harris
Set design	Bradford Smith
Camera	Steina
Video tape editor	Peter Kirby
Audio mix	Baird Banner

Special electronic tools:

Vocoder	Harald Bode
Scan Processor	Rutt/Etra
Digital Articulator	Jeffy Schier

## DEATH OF PAGANINI

Narrator:

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 Conte 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 leper house on the Rocky Coast.

Soon stories began to circulate: the wails 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 cemetery in Parma.

Narrator:

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.

Paganini approached Berlioz after the concert, knelt on the platform to kiss the hand of Berlioz. His beloved and illegitimate son, Achillino, then a child of ten, had to stand on a chair and put his ear to Paganini's lips in order to interpret his father's inaudible words, and how he presented Berlioz, nearly destitute as usual, with a draft for twenty thousand francs as a commission for a piece of music.

The real thruth about the above incident.....the donor of the money was not Paganini but Armand Bertin, the rich proprietor of the Journal des Debats. Berlioz was on the staff of that paper. Bertin had a great opinion of his talents and was looking for an opportunity to help him. He thought that a gift of money would be more acceptable to Berlioz if it took the form of a presentation from some other celebrated musician. He, therefore, persuaded Paganini to act as a donor. Only two friends of Bertin were let in on the secret, and Berlioz remained ignorant of his true benefactor.

Berlioz:

What brings us to this movie?

A commission...

...from Fandango Spagnuolo

Look at that Sheila...!

How nice...

"In the earthly copies  
of justice and temperance  
and other ideas  
which are precious to souls  
there is no light  
but only a few  
approaching the images  
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organs of sense  
behold in them the nature of  
that which they imitate".  
I don't understand that.

Any way

later

from Scepis

says Strabo

came Metrodorus

BERLIDZ

I think of myself very much as an organization man.

It is all outside me,

If you know what I mean (she said).

I think there are either 5 kinds of character  
or 7 kinds of character.

One might be called the organization man.

Another might be called the interpreter.

Another might be called the helpful woman.

Another might be called the woman of the different voice  
or different way of speaking.

And so on.

Each of these characters has its equivalent, I suppose,  
in the world of unrehearsed knowledge.

The question of whether we mold our characters  
to satisfy that requirement -

is a question

I could not possibly answer here.

it could be answered,

and I could answer it,

but not here (She said).

it is enough to point out the importance of those equivalencies,  
assuming that the fact has crossed every person's mind -

if only as an answer to why movies -

and to remind us that this movie,

no less than any other,

depends on the vision of archetype

for its believability.

We are not interested in skin as such,

or hair as such,

or bone structures as such,

we are not interested in those lessons.

We can hardly bring ourselves

to look into the mirror in the morning.

It is a truth

that to reconstruct our image,

of ourselves,

individually,

each day,

to return from dreams -

is difficult.

So,

it is not an interest in skin and hair and bone structure

that brings us to this movie.

a man who changed from his pursuit of philosophy  
to political life  
and taught rhetoric  
for the most part  
in his written works  
and he used a brand new style and dazzled many.  
He seems to have played  
a considerable political  
as well as cultural  
role  
at the court  
where he was  
for a time  
in high favor  
though Plutarch hints that  
he was  
eventually put out of the way  
by his brilliant but cruel master.  
I think I understand that.

## I N T E R M E Z Z O

Narrator:

Lived in Paris for the next two years. Sir Charles Halle, a young student provides best description of Paganini in those years: "The striking, awe-inspiring, ghostlike figure of Paganini was to be seen nearly every afternoon in the music shop of Bernard Latte, Passage de l'Opera, where he sat for an hour, enveloped in a long cloak, taking notice of nobody, and hardly ever raising his piercing black eyes. He was one of the sights of Paris, and I had often gone to stare at him with wonder until a friend introduced me to him, and he invited me to visit him, an invitation I most eagerly accepted.

I went often, but it would be difficult to relate a single conversation we had together. He sat there, taciturn, rigid, hardly ever moving a muscle of his face, and I sat spellbound, a shudder running through me whenever his uncanny eyes fell upon me.

He made me play to him often, mostly by pointing with his bony hand to the piano, without speaking, and I could only guess from his repeating the ceremony that he did not dislike it, for never a word of encouragement fell from his lips.

How I longed to hear him play, it is impossible to describe, perhaps even to imagine. From my earliest childhood I had heard of Paganini and his art as something supernatural, and there I actually sat opposite to the man himself, but only looking at the hands that had created such wonders.

On one never-to-be-forgotten occasion, after I had played and we had enjoyed a long silence, Paganini rose and approached his violin case. There passed in me what can hardly be imagined; I was all in tremble, and my heart thumped as if it would burst my chest; in fact, no young swain going to the first rendezvous with his beloved could possibly feel more violent emotions. Paganini opened the case, took the violin out, and began to tune it carefully with his fingers without using the bow. My agitation became more intolerable. When he was satisfied, and I said to myself, "Now, now he will take the bow", he carefully put the violin back and shut the case. And that is how I heard Paganini".

BERLIOZ

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of ourselves,  
individually,  
each day,  
to return from dreams -  
is difficult.  
So,  
it is not an interest in skin and hair and bone structure  
that brings us to this movie.

## PAGANINI

Narrator:

Already at the time of opening concerts in Paris, ailing in health, suffering from ravages of disease which killed him, tubercular affection of the larynx, noticeable in his voice and sparseness of diet (soup or camomile tea). Taciturn, spoke no more than necessary. On concert tours would hardly eat at all. No longer practiced but would lie out for hours on a sofa on the day of a concert, with a mandolin beside him.

## THE COMMISSION

Paganini and son:

As one of the enigmatic geniuses  
of our time  
I recognize one  
who speaks with the tongue of angels.  
Taking advantage  
of this unbelievable opportunity  
I throw myself on your moment of glory  
not with intent of distraction  
but with an inner desire  
to further illuminate  
the glory of this moment.  
Though money may be the devils' lucre,  
it is also the food to sustain the angels.  
Knowing that this money is a commission  
through which my genius will be further enhanced,  
I wish this stipend would send you, Hector  
to boundless flight  
so the union of the opposites  
of thunder and lightning  
can be accomplished for ever and ever more.

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OVERTURE

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## LAMENT

Here I am sitting here  
Thinking about live in all its forms  
It is one of those days so far where nothing fits  
Breakfast at the Holiday Inn Hotel  
Where I live  
Ordinarily  
Especially where I live in other places  
I look forward to breakfast  
I eat six cups of tea plain  
Three pieces of toasted bread  
Margarine and honey  
And time to think about myself  
Coordination of body and mind  
That I can do in a single form  
I don't take the tea to my table  
I pour myself a cup in one place  
And carry my tea to my table  
Where I sit to drink it  
Then I go back to the place for another cup  
And so forth  
Six trips more or less  
Six cups of tea  
Same for the three pieces of toast

The End

## The Mortician:

Ecce homo.

E una povera creatura morta! Corpo morto.

Poverino.

Morto?

Toh, vedo corpo morto.

Ecco l'uomo.

Nulla! Morto.

Ma che noia. Cervello. Misuriamo.

Cervello... tre. Povero cervello che non canta piu.

Il naso? Due e il naso. Che bellino.

La boccuccia? Pure due!

Facciamo un piccolo duetto.

Ma che noia.

Affanculo.

Sto povero cretino morto. Misuriamo sto petto.

La coscia e cosi lunga, figlio mio, la coscia che non ti serve; mettiamo un quindici. Eppure l'altra coscia. Puo essere differente. E chi lo sa?

Eh si. La coscia destra e molto piu lunga!

Quindici e mezzo.

Le povere ginocchia. Oh, ginocchia.

Son due; son altre due. Due. Due.

E sti piedi, sti piedi di sto povero cristo,

Son lunghi, pero quanto ha camminato! Uffa! Undici.

E sara lo stesso, no? Undici.

Misuriamo l'uomo. Ah, sto povero uomo che e crepato.

Facciamo un tre.

Cerebrum: Unus duum treum. Eh!

Nasum: quantum? Dum! Tambien!

Os: dos.

Tettine: octo.

Pectus: unum duum treum quattrum circum, etcetera.

Quattro l'ombellico. Sto povero cristiano.

L'anca: Undici. Cazzo! (niente).

Aspetta, aspetta. Chesta e 'na sturbatina.

Me so stufato.

Acqua santa.

La gamba: venti pollici, la gamba.

E il ginocchio me sembra de due.

Mettiamo due.

E sti pedini, sti poveri pedini.

Son de dieci e mezzo.

Tutt'e due te li vendo per un poco.

Ecce homo. Morto. E ube. ?

Chi se ne frega?

Mater dolorosa. Requiscat in pace. Povero bambino.

Paganini, bello mio.

Dormi. In pace

Stronzo. Dormi

## DEATH OF PAGANINI

Narrator:

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