

**BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE OF  
NICOLO PAGANINI, WITH AN  
ANALYSIS OF HIS  
COMPOSITIONS, AND A SKETCH  
OF THE HISTORY OF THE VIOLIN**

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Biographical notice of Nicolo Paganini, with an analysis of his compositions, and a sketch of the history of the violin by F.J. Fétis

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**F.J. FÉTIS**

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### Index.

	PAGE
SKETCH OF THE HISTORY OF THE VIOLIN . . . . .	1
ART AND ARTISTS . . . . .	15
NICOLO PAGANINI . . . . .	26
PAGANINI APPRECIATED AS A COMPOSER. ANALYSIS OF HIS WORKS . . . . .	79

### Illustrations.

PORTRAIT OF PAGANINI, AFTER POMMAYRAC, 1838.

ENGRAVINGS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS OF PAGANINI'S VIOLIN IN THE  
MUNICIPAL PALACE AT GENOA. (*From "THE VIOLIN: ITS  
FAMOUS MAKERS AND THEIR IMITATORS," by kind permis-  
sion of MR. G. HART.*)



SKETCH OF THE  
HISTORY OF THE VIOLIN.

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The Instrument.

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**D**ESPITE all contrary assertions, based upon pretended monuments, Oriental, Greek, and Roman antiquity was unacquainted with instruments played with a bow. Neither India nor Egypt furnish the least traces of them; nor do Greece and Italy; nor, in fact, does the whole of the old civilized world. As I stated in the "Résumé Philosophique de l'Histoire de la Musique," the bow comes from the West; it was introduced into the whole of Europe by the western nations. Though Viols are found among the modern Arabs in Persia and Turkey, they were taken there by Europeans in the time of the Crusades. The Goudock of the Russian peasant, and the Crwth of the ancient Irish, appear to proceed from the highest antiquity, and to have been the type of instruments of this nature. The Irish chroniclers speak of musicians who, in the sixth century, were celebrated for their talent on the Crwth, a species of Viol with six strings; and Venance Fortunat, a Latin poet who wrote in 609, states distinctly that this instrument belonged to Great Britain.

It is not my intention to follow up here the various transformations of bow instruments in the middle ages; it will suffice to observe that there were frequent changes in them from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century; as much in the common kinds, vulgarly called in French Rebec, and in German Geige



ohne Bunde (Violins without band or side pieces), which possessed only three strings, as in the improved Viols, the body of which was formed of belly and back joined by side pieces, as in our Violins, Tenors, and Bases. The smaller kinds also possessed only three strings; the larger kind had four; there were also others with five, six, and seven strings.

In the middle ages, the Rebec, called Rubebbe, possessed but two strings. It is the same instrument which in Arabia acquired the name of Rebab. From the fifteenth century it is found with its three strings. This instrument took nearly the form of a mandoline; the neck and the body being formed of a single piece, the finger-board being as wide as the entire instrument, and reaching within a short distance of the bridge. No passage was left for the bow in the body of the instrument, but the body was very narrow, and the bridge formed a point for the middle string to rest upon, so that this string could be touched by the bow without touching the others. Like all instruments later than the fifteenth century, the Rebec was made of four different sizes, the smallest of which was called Discant, or upper; then followed, in progressively larger proportions, the Alto, the Tenor, and the Bass. The dancing-master's Kit, of the latter years of the eighteenth century, was all that remained of the ancient Rebec.

The Viol was called Vielle in the middle ages. This is the Viola of the Italians, and the Vihuela of the Spaniards. There were several kinds. As early as the fifteenth century, one of this kind had a flat belly, and a place for fixing the strings similar to that of the Guitar. As in the Lute, and all stringed instruments played with the fingers, the finger-board was divided into distances for placing the fingers. From the fifteenth century the bellies of Viols assumed the raised or vaulted form, the backs remaining flat. The cavities at the side, which had formerly been very large and straight, were made in the shape of a section of a circle, and were reduced to the dimensions necessary for the use of the bow. The raised bellies rendered it necessary to alter the bridge into the bridge-shape, so as to incline towards the ribs. Hence the term Bridge, which is called by the Italians, from its

form, Ponticello. The divisions for the fingers on the finger-board were retained on the Viols up to the second half of the seventeenth century. During the fifteenth century the vaulted form of Viol possessed five strings; in the commencement of the sixteenth it had six. The first string was called in Italy *Canto*, the second *Sotana*, the third *Mezzana*, the fourth *Tenore*, the fifth *Bordone*, and the sixth *Basso*.

The Viol was divided into three kinds, which were called Upper or Soprano, Tenor, and Bass. The Tenor was used also for playing the second upper part, or Alto; it was then tuned a note higher: the tuning of the upper Viol was, commencing from the first string, D, A, E, C, G, D; that of the Tenor tuned to Alto, A, E, B, G, D, A; the same instrument tuned to Tenor, G, D, A, F, C, G; and the Bass, D, A, E, C, G, D. At the commencement of the seventeenth century, the use of instruments specially for accompanying the voice became general; there was added to the other Viols a Double-Bass Viol, which was called *Violone*, that is, large Viol. This also had six strings, and was tuned a fourth lower than the Bass Viol, thus A, E, B, G, D, A. Prior to 1650, this instrument was rarely used in France, it was then called "*Viole à la mode de Lorraine*."

In imitation of the vaulted form of Viol, there was made, already in the fifteenth century, a small instrument of the same kind, which the Italians called *Violino*, that is, small Viol. This is the instrument which was called *Violon* in France, and *Geige* in Germany.

It is probable that the Violin originally had the same number of strings as the other Viols; that these were tuned a fourth above the upper Viol, viz., G, D, A, F, C, G; and that the neck also possessed divisions for the fingers; but it was soon discovered that the finger-board of the Violin was not wide enough to allow any one to play with facility on so large a number of strings; and that the space for the fingers to produce the notes was too narrow to admit of divisions. These were removed; the strings, reduced to four, were tuned in fifths; making the first string E, as it is at the present day. It cannot be doubted that these improvements originated in France; for on reference to the

list of instruments employed in the "Orfeo" of Monteverde, it will be seen that the Violin was called in Italy, at the end of the sixteenth century, and the beginning of the seventeenth, "Violino piccolo alla francese."

The oldest maker of Violins on record was a native of Brittany, named Jean Kerlin. He followed his trade about the middle of the fifteenth century. La Borde, author of the imperfect and voluminous "Essai sur la Musique," relates that he saw in Brittany a Violin with four strings, the neck of which did not appear to have been changed, and which, instead of the ordinary tail-piece, had a small piece of ivory inlaid, pierced with four holes. This Violin was thus labelled, "Joann. Kerlino, anno 1449." It was afterwards brought to Paris, and Koliker, a musical instrument maker of that city, had it in his possession in 1804. The belly was more raised than in good modern Italian Violins, and was not equally rounded at the upper and lower extremities; the sides were ill-formed and flattened. Its tone was sweet and muffled, and resembled that of instruments made by Antonio Amati at the close of the sixteenth century. After Jean Kerlin, there is a lapse of sixty years in the history of the manufacture of Violins, for the only maker of this instrument whose name has come down to us is Gaspard Duiffoprugcar, born in the Italian Tyrol, who commenced making his Violins at Bologna about 1510, working afterwards in Paris, and at Lyons. One Violin only of the large pattern which bears his name is in existence; it is dated 1539. The quality of tone of this instrument is powerful and penetrating, but when played upon for some time, it loses its intensity. Like an old man, it needs repose to recover its faculties. The scroll represents the head of a king's jester, with a plaited frill. This Violin belonged to M. Meerts, formerly first solo violinist of the Theatre Royal, Brussels, and professor at the Conservatory of that city.

Gaspard di Salo, thus called from being born in the small town of Salo, on the lake of Garda, in Lombardy, worked in the second half of the sixteenth century. He was specially celebrated for his Viols, Basses, and Double-Bass Viols, then more used than the Violin. Nevertheless, an excellent Violin of his make,