

New to the Library



'Paganini Technique'

Revealing the Secret Behind His Masterpieces

Author: Gregory Shir

Gregory Shir, a professional violinist and violin maker, has always been fascinated by Paganini and how he was able to sight read and master the most difficult pieces and play them by memory. After being a successful music teacher with many successful and recognized students, he came to the realization that he had been using and teaching the incorrect techniques. "It was later that I recognized the mistakes in my teachings," Shir said, "and after three decades I finally broke the secret code and was able to expose all of Paganini's secrets."

In the original manuscript of the 24 Caprices, Paganini did not assign titles or fingerings. The numbers that we know as "titles" were simply the order of the series in the portfolio as presented to the publisher. Was this intentional or not?

"I believe Paganini purposely concealed the correct order, deceiving even the greatest musicians," Shir said. "Since the Caprices were Paganini's showpieces, he would naturally want to protect the source of his fame and fortune." It is known that Paganini hastily wrote the notes out in 1817, more than 10 years after he had finished composing the last of them. Shir contends Paganini intended to conceal the secrets behind his extraordinary technique, including the cycle of the 24 caprices, the formulated fingering, and the bowing technique.

When Paganini was a young boy, he hated practicing. However, he showed great promise at a young age; even the most famous musicians recognized his talent. But his father, understanding that raw potential was insufficient, forced his son through beatings and starvation to master musical exercises. As Paganini grew into his late teenage years, he thought there would have to be a different way to play challenging pieces by memory with less practice. Legend goes that Paganini rarely practiced his violin after the age of 30.

"Though it's possible he simply put on a façade, I feel it's more probable that he had designed a particular training

circuit for himself that was superior to simple exercises," Shir said. "For Paganini, the Caprices were a song circle of etudes for his secret practice regimen — thus the only violin lesson for us!"

Most people assume the Caprices are numbered in playing order. However, according to Shir, the published "titles," numbers 1 through 24, are simply the order of the series as Paganini presented the manuscripts to the publisher, and are not intended to be played in numerical order.

In the original manuscript he even had different opus and number designations: Opus 1 consisted of the first six Caprices, Opus 2 the next six, and Opus 3 the last 12. These were the folders he presented to the publisher as he wrote them out; later the publisher consolidated them into Opus 1, and numbered the Caprices 1 through 24. Paganini knew the correct and exact order of the Caprices, but he was not about to disclose such vital information to anyone. Therefore, he created three separate folders and presented them to the publisher as such.

"Each Caprice contains a lesson to learn," Shir said. "This information is revolutionary. By learning the Caprices with my corrected fingering and bowing, and following the pieces in the order I have designated, I can assure you that any violinist will become a master musician."

The 24 Caprices are a training cycle. For a beginning violinist, Shir discovered a system which will help you master the caprices like Paganini as long as you follow the training cycle. He discovered that if you start with Caprice 16 and follow the training cycle clockwise, using the fingering and bowing techniques he is implementing, you will master the Caprices with ease in no time. If the pieces are learned and practiced in this order and played with the correct fingering, it will become immediately apparent to an advanced player that these new fingerings are consistent and vital. The full song circle of etudes can be memorized and played easily once the player gains awareness of this new technique. It is important to remember that in order to learn the correct technique, it is imperative to learn and practice the Caprices in the correct order that Paganini originally intended.

It is Shir's suggestion for beginners to break the Caprices



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into three parts and start learning them eight at a time, and when one feels comfortable enough to give a performance, the Caprices should be played in two parts: 1–12 and 13–24. It is also imperative to understand that one cannot go back and start playing from the beginning without taking at least 30 minute break. In other words, keep playing the Caprices, starting from any of the Caprices in a forward direction until the end, or if need be take at least a 30 minute break and then start from the beginning.

"Paganini Technique: 24 Caprices" is now available in the Local 47 Library. For information on how to purchase the book, visit www.paganinistechnique.com.

About Paganini

Niccolò Paganini (1782–1840) was an Italian violinist, violist, guitarist, and composer. As one of the most celebrated violin virtuosos of his time, he left his mark as one of the pillars of modern violin technique. Paganini composed his own works to play exclusively in his concerts, all of which had profound influences on the evolution of violin techniques. His 24 Caprices were probably composed in the period between 1805 to 1809, while he was in the service of the Baciocchi court. Also during this period, he composed the majority of the solo pieces, duo-sonatas, trios and quartets for the guitar.



Courtesy of Gregory Shir

INTERNATIONALLY RENOWNED VIOLIN VIRTUOSO Daniel Shindarov demonstrates some of the techniques laid out in Gregory Shir's new book, "Paganini Technique: 24 Caprices," at the book release at Metzler Violin Shop in Glendale Nov. 1.