Class 5: Virtuosi

A. The Devil's Violinist

1. Class title 1 (Paganini)

As we did two weeks ago, we shall concentrate only on musical artists today, looking into the question of wht makes a superstar and where such stars can go next. Cued off this man, The violinist **Niccolò Paganini** (1782–1840), and the first musician to achieve fame comparable to that of a modern pop-star.

2. Section title A (*The Devil's Violinist,* opening)
3. Niccolò Paganini and David Garrett

That was the opening of the 2013 film *The Devil's Violinist,* written and directed by **Bernard Rose**. You might think the Paganini child was playing at an impossible speed, but when you get the to the actor, **David Garrett** (David Christian Bongartz, 1980–), you will see that he is playing half as fast again! I say "actor," but in fact Garrett is really playing; the Guinness Book of Records created a new category for him: "The world's fastest violinist." Garrett also fits because he also has a career as a pop star, which I'll show you more of at the end of the hour. Let's look at another scene from the movie. Paganini is in a London tavern, and gets into a quarrel with a pub fiddler over a girl. He gets challenged to a fight, but proposes a musical duel instead. So he borrows the fiddler's violin and proceeds to play, not stopping even when several of the strings break. The tune is "The Carnival of Venice."

4. *The Devil's Violinist,* tavern scene
5. *The Devil's Violinist,* poster

How much of this is true? Well, the playing certainly isn't faked; Paganini wrote it down, and Garrett is really doing it. The tavern setting, maybe; we may not know of such an incident, but Paganini was known as a reckless gambler and womanizer. The broken string, yes, though not necessarily here; later in his career Paganini sometimes broke some of his strings on purpose so that he could do his trick of demonstrating that he could carry on just as well with three strings, two, or even just one. And the title, *The Devil's Violinist*? Paganini was so good that the rumor soon arose that he had sold his soul to the Devil; it was a rumor that he himself encouraged, knowing that it would be good for the box office. You can learn more about this, other aspects of his personality, and the polarizing effect he had on his contemporaries from these clips from a much more sober documentary, *Paganini's Daemon,* a 2011 film by **Christopher Nupen**.

6. *Paganini's Daemon,* clips
7. Paganini portraits by Ingres (*left*) and Delacroix

These two portaits (both around 1831) back up the constrasting views of Paganini, but they also say a lot about the two artists. **Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres** (1780–1867) was a classicist, but **Eugène Delacroix** (1798–1863) was the leader of the new breed of Romantics. And superstardom of this kind was pretty much a Romantic invention, with its emphasis on the personal, the legendary, and the psychological extreme. This portrait of a musician playing as though wrestling with personal demons fits perfectly into the Romantic mode. Let's listen to a bit of his actual music in a concert setting. We are in London still. The conductor of an orchestra has advertised Paganini as the headliner of a concert at double the normal ticket prices, but so far the man has not shown up. When he does come, he plays his own 24th Caprice, a set of variations on a very simple little theme. I would be interested to hear what seems original to you in his technical devices (and of course David Garett's).

8. *The Devil's Violinist*, 24th *Caprice*
9. — still from the above

What did you see that was original? The traditional approach to violin playing had always been to emphasize the singing line achieved by smooth control of the bow. But Paganini took a number of special effects and made them, in effect, the whole point of his playing. And he had his greatest success with pieces such as this which consisted of variations on a simple tune, each variation showing a different technique. So we saw multiplication of the notes, leaping from one extreme of the instrument to the other, the use of double-stops or playing two strings at the same time, a variation taken entirely on the lowermost strings, and an extraordinary variation that combines bouncing the bow off the strings with the right hand while plucking other strings on the fingerboard with the left. The projection of the Devil's shadow is the director's invention, I think, except that Paganini was known to have encourged that rumor. As the scene goes on, it will combine some more fiction with a few more facts. **Fact**: when the King of England (**William IV**) arrived at one of his concerts, Paganini did interrupt the program to improvize a variation on "God Save the King." **Fact**, Paganini did fall in love with a teenage soprano, **Charlotte Watson**, and indeed tried to elope with her. But **fiction**: I don't think he wrote an aria for her, or performed it in front of the King. Yet **fact again**: whoever put the music together for the film used an actual Paganini tune, from the slow movement of one of his concertos; I am including it to show that Paganini was not just tricks and fireworks; he could write lyrically, and he did have a soul.

10. *The Devil's Violinist*, remainder of concert
11. Paganini's tomb in Parma

This course is called "Popularity—***and then?***" So what happened to Paganini? As the introduction to the Nupen documentary suggested, he became consumed by the need to make money as a performer over all else. And he lost much of that when he invested in building a Paris casino that went bust. He no longer composed much. And he had been ill for a long time, whether with syphilis or poisoning from the mercury he took to cure it. And he got bitten by his own Devil legend in the end. When he was dying, the Bishop of Genoa sent a confessor to his bedside to perform the last rites But Paganini waved him away, thinking it was far too soon. But the Bishop took it as evidence that the legend was true, and this really was the Devil's Man. So when Paganini died a few days later, the Bishop refused him burial in hallowed ground. It took four years and a petition to the Pope before Paganini could be given a proper

tomb—but not in Genoa; the body had to be transported 150 miles to Parma. Before we end, I want to show David Garrett performing in his own right, the delicate opening of the finale of Paganini's Second Concerto, known as ***La campanella,*** or "the little bell." You will hear the tune again in a moment.

12. Paganini: *Violin Concero #2*, finale, *La campanella* (David Garrett)

B. Lisztomania

13. Section title B (*La campanella*, Liszt/Wang)
14. Henri Lehmann: *Franz Liszt* (1838, Paris Musée Carnavalet)

One of the voices you heard praising Paganini in the Nupen video was that of **Franz Liszt** (1811–86). Though born in Hungary, Liszt moved with his mother to Paris in his early teens, where his prodigious skills and handsome appearance soon made him a fixture at high-society *salons*. The term "Lisztomania" was coined by **Heinrich Heine**, whose praise of Paganini you also heard. Soon after coming to Paris, Liszt had attended a concert by Paganini. This made him determined to make himself as much a wizard of the piano as Paganini was of the violin. And one of the works in which he demonstrated the new techniques was his 1838 set of *Grand Études* based on themes by the violin master. That was the end of hs version of *La campanella* played by today's superstar pianist **Yuja Wang**.

15. Jozef Dannhauser: *Franz Liszt Fantasizing at the Piano* (1840)

Liszt's abilities and rock-star appearance soon took him around Europe, where he played in concert halls and royal courts alike. And, like Paganini, he could also improvise at the drop of a hat, as you see in this painting of him improvising before a virtual who's-who of the Romantic movement. The painter's imagination, probably. But here he is in Moscow, doing his audience-pleasing trick of improvising on a theme picked at random out of submissions from the audience. The theme in this case comes from the opera *Russlan and Lyudmila* (1842) by Mikhail Glinka (1804–57). I did not add the comments at the bottom of the screen, but they may be helpful. The pianist is the great **Svyatoslav Richter**.

16. Liszt improvises on Glinka
17. Liszt's three levels

Liszt wrote a lot of music for himself to play—like Paganini, but a lot, lot more. Among these were numerous transcriptions of works by other composers. Many, perhaps most, are quite difficult. But Liszt was quite conscious of the different levels of his transcriptions. He was capable of writing music that had nothing of the barnstorming element to it at all. But most of what he wrote for himself was simply to display his performing chops—as a charltan, in his own words—as in the fast section of his celebrated *Hungarian Rhapsody #2,* played here by **Lang Lang**, who is as much a crowd-pleaser as Liszt ever was.

18. Liszt: *Hungarian Rhapsody #2*, fast section (Lang Lang)
19. Joseph Edgar Boehm: *Abbé Franz Liszt* (1886)

Liszt may have been very much in the Paganini mode as a performer, but he was far superior as a composer. His one *Piano Sonata,* for example, although fiendishly difficult to play, is every bit as tightly argued as one of Beethoven's late masterpieces, and is a key work in 19th-century music. And when he was not writing for himself, he could throw off the charlatan cloak, for example in his dozen orchestral tone-poems, a form which he himself invented. He was also notably generous and supportive of other musicians, notably **Chopin**, **Berlioz**, and his future son-in-law **Richard Wagner**. In 1865, he took minor holy orders (not quite the priesthood), and became known as **Abbé Liszt**. And in his late works, he dropped all the trappings of virtuosity, to write disarmingly simple works solely for their beauty and sense of almost religious contemplation. Here is the most famous of them, the *Consolation #3,* played by **Daniel Barenboim**. I would love to hear wht you thought after you have heard and watched it.

20. Liszt: *Consolation #3,* Barenboim

What did you think? One look at Barenboim's face tells you he is in an altogether deeper world.

C. Beckham of the Violin

21. Section title C (Vivaldi: *Winter*)

Short though it was, what did you make of that? It was David Garratt again, in his own persona, playing part of **Vivaldi's** *Seasons.* Playing it straight, too, with all the technical brilliance you would expect. But what about the presentation? The mic on the violin; the color on the orchestra; the projections in the background; and the jumbotron screens behind the orchestra? Thise are what you would expect of a rock concert, not a classical one. We have had two "and thens" so far: the incandescent burnout of Paganini, the religious retreat of Liszt. Now a third one, **David Garratt** cashing in on his charisma to develop a career on the lines of a pop artist, though still with first-rate violin playing at the heart of it.

22. David Garratt and Franck van der Heijden: *Despacito*

I'm not sure what the selling point here is, the music as such or the fact that Garratt and the guitarist Franck van der Heijden are so obviously having fun with it. For me, it is the latter. This is not the kind of music I normally listen to, but that verve and the sitting-on-the-edge-of-the-stage presentation certainly draw me in. Garratt, whose real name is **David Christian Bongartz**, is the son of a German lawyer and American mother, the ballerina **Dove Garrett**. He was a child prodigy, winning support to send him to Juilliard as a classical violinist. But he has made a huge career as a crossover artist, presenting concerts worldwide that have the professional presentation of a good rock group, but whose material is a mixture of popular and classical. Personally, I am not sure how far a presentation like the video I am going to show you, called simply *The Fifth*, would go in drawing young audiences to a symphony concert, but it is certainly well made and inventive.

23. Garrett: *The Fifth*
24. Class title 2 (…and then?)

D. The Spanish Connection

25. Section title D (singers connected to Manuel Garcia)

The earlier 19th century, as I said, saw the first appearances of virtuoso performers as pop stars. To achieve this status, both Paganini and Lizst had to perform music of such obvious difficulty that it was clear that no mere mortal could play it. For the most part, they wrote it themselves. Similar technical challenges could be seen around this time in *bel canto* opera, and a little later in ballet. Most of the music in these media was written by other composers, but *they wrote for these specific performers*, and the fact that the music exists is tribute to how good they really were.

26. — later careers of the singers above

However, I could not find one single singer for whom I could demonstrate both the virtuosity that made them stars in the first place and also some interesting career path in later life. So instead, I am doing a composite of four of them, all connected to the Spanish tenor, singing teacher, impresario, and sometime composer **Manuel Garcia** (1775–1832). As another Spanish artist working in Italy, **Isabella Colbran** (1785–1845), sung several major roles opposite Garcia, including the premiere of at least one of his own operas. She later married **Gioacchino Rossini** (1792–1868), who wrote many roles for her; the music you just heard is an aria written for her in his opera *Armida* (1817). After she retired in 1824, she started composing and published four books of songs. Garcia's daughter, **Maria Malibran** (1808–36), was all set to become the leading *bel canto* soprano of her day, but she died at only 28, following a fall from a horse. Her sister **Pauline Viardot** (1821–1910) was sufficiently younger that the *bel canto* era had passed before she began her professional career in Paris, so her roles were generally heavier. Her later career as a composer, though, was a significant one; I'll have a couple of mouth-watering samples later. Swedish soprano **Jenny Lind** (1820–87) also began her career singing heavier roles, which damaged her voice, but she was saved by Garcia's son, a voice teacher and pioneer of vocal therapy. Billed as "The Swedish Nightingale," she was probably the closest to a superstar of all the four, triumphing at the peak of career in US tours organized first by **PT Barnum**, and then under her own management.

27. Isabella Colbran

Isabella Colbran's father was court composer to the King of Spain, so she started with built-in advantages. But she was also talented. She had a powerful voice of three octaves in range, and a noble bearing, which enabled to to triumph in Bologna, Milan, and especially Naples—often opposite her compatriot, Manuel Garcia. Rossini heard her, married her, and wrote 18 roles for her—roles whose vocal and dramatic demands show clearly the kind of singer she was. We have already heard a scrap from one of them; here is a clip from her last Rossini role, Semiramide (1823), part of the aria "Bel raggio lusinghier." The singer is the Australian soprano **Jessica Pratt**.

28. Rossini: *Semiramide,* "Bel raggio lusinghier," part
29. Colbran as a composer

Semiramide was Rossini's last Italian opera. Colbran was already ill by this time (probably from an STD contracted from him) and retired from the stage to devote herself to composing. In all, she published four volumes of songs. But not for virtuosi like her; they have a touching simplicity, and can all be sung by amateurs and students. Which is what we get on YouTube. Here is the best rendition I could find: I find the practice-room setting rather suits the music. The words are "La speranza al cor mi dice" or "Hope speaks to my heart."

30. Colbran: "La speranza al cor mi dice"
31. Maria Malibran

Manuel Garcia brought his entire family to New York City in 1825, the first Italians to present opera in America. They gave **Rossini's** new opera *The Barber of Seville* and also **Mozart's** *Don Giovanni*, because their New York sponsor was no less than Mozart's librettist, **Lorenzo da Ponte**, who was now teaching at Columbia. The Zerlina was Garcia's eldest daughter, who later became a major *bel canto* star under her married name, **Maria Malibran**. Such was her fame that by donating the fees from a single performance at a dilapidated theater in Venice enabled it to be entirely rebuilt as the Teatro Malibran. Mostly she sang roles in operas premiered by others, but **Donizetti** wrote *Maria Stuarda* for her in 1835, presenting it at La Scala. By this time, she had moved to London, and rather than illustrating her voice with the Donizetti, I want to turn to the Irish composer **Michael Balfe** (1808–70) who wrote *The Maid of Artois* for her in 1836. No recording of this exists, but there is an interesting clip from a documentary on Malibran by the Italian *bel canto* specialist **Cecila Bartoli**, not least because it shows a professional singer at work. Note that the aria, "Yon Moon o'er the Mountains," was cut from performance because it was not showy enough!

32. Bartoli documentary on Malibran, restoring Balfe aria
33. Jenny Lind

I am skipping the younger Garcia sister for now to stay with the *bel canto* tradition. The connection between Spanish soprano **Jenny Lind** and the Garcia family is an oblique one. Lind was a child prodigy, but sang big roles too young and risked ruining her voice. She was saved by Garcia's son, **Manuel Garcia Jr.**, who had sung with the family in New York as a passable baritone, but taken up a new career as a teacher, or what we would now call a **voice therapist**. The younger Garcia developed a manner of training that is still the Bible of teachers today; he also invented the **laryngoscope**. Anyway, Lind became known as "The Swedish Nightingale." I know no better way of illustrating the justice of this than to play an excerpt from a role written for her by **Giacomo Meyerbeer** (1791–1864), in his comic opera *A Camp in Silesia* (1840). This story about **Frederick the Great of Prussia** was written for a state and is seldom if ever revived. Jenny Lind's schedule did not permit her attending sufficient rehearsals and she eventually ceded the role to her understudy. But one aria in particular remained part of her touring repertoire. By combining Frederick the Great's passion for the flute with the clarity of Lind's coloratura, Meyerbeer had produced the ideal calling-card for the "Swedish Nightingale."

34. Meyerbeer: *Ein Feldlager in Schlesien*, excerpt
35. Jenny Lind in America
36. Jenny Lind memorabilia

Jenny Lind was the first musical artist to achieve a popularity in America that came anything close to that of Paganini or Liszt in Europe. And she did this as the result of Barnum's merchandizing genius in the tour he organised for her beginning in 1850, which she accepted to raise money for a girls' school she founded back in Sweden. And I do mean "merch"; this was the first time, I think, when a concert tour was supported by brand-name accessories in everything from silk stockings to cigars. This is even an episode in the 2017 **Hugh Jackman** movie *The Greatest Showman.* Unfortunately, the movie is a musical, so the music that Lind sings has nothing whatever to do with her real repertoire. It also imagines a romantic attachement without any basis in fact.

37. Movie: *The Greatest Showman,* Barnum intoduces Lind
38. Pauline Viardot

I skipped over Manuel Garcia's youngest daughter, the future **Pauline Viardot**, in terms of order of birth, partly because the part I really want to show—her post-retirement work as a composer—came mostly at the turn of the century, and partly because her more dramatic alto voice flourished in later Romantic opera rather than *bel canto* coloratura. **Hector Berlioz**, for example, made his famous adaptation of **Gluck's** *Orfeo ed Euridice* for her. We have no recordings of her singing this, or indeed anything else, but I made this little video using a 1950s recording (**Herta Töpper**) to accompany a couple of still pictures.

39. Pauline Viardot as Orphée
40. Pauline Viardot in old age

In later years, she became known as a Parisian *salon* hostess. These were primarily music *soirées* for which she wrote a lot of the music herself, including three or four chamber operas. Though small in scale, there was nothing amateur about these pieces. Unlike Colbran's songs, they could not be performed by amateur. I will put several pieces on the website, but for now will leave you with only one, a song called *La nuit* (The Night) for soprano and piano trio. I hope you find is as delectable as I do

41. Viardot: *La nuit*

E. From Russia with Love

42. Section title E (Nureyev in *Le Corsaire*)

The other great art form to emerge in the age of the virtuoso was **ballet**. Unlike music, ballet steps were passed on from teacher to pupil rather than being written down, but the result is the same: anyone able to execute them is essentially recreating the virtuosity of the original performer, as well as displaying her or his own.

43. Rudolf Nureyev

I say "her or his" because the superstar dancers of the Romantic era were all women, with men as their necessary partners. But the Russian school especially developed interest in the male dancer as the

ballerinas' equal. And one of the most electric of the young Russian men was **Rudolf Nureyev** (1938–93) who defected to the west in 1961, where he quickly became a superstar. You have just seen him in a solo from *Le Corsaire*; how would you describe his qualities?

44. Margot Fonteyn biography

Nureyev could have joined any Western company and triumphed as its star and biggest box-office draw. But when he joined the Royal Ballet in 1962, he had an even more remarkable effect. By partnering the reigning prima ballerina **Dame Margot Fonteyn** (1919–91), a woman almost twice his age, whose career had peaked some years before, he revitalized her and by extension the whole of British ballet. I'll let her tell it in her own words.

45. Fonteyn interview
46. Nureyev and Fonteyn in *Swan Lake*

It's a shame to have you watch them only in black and white. So here, in color, is the last part of their pas-de-deux in the third act of *Swan Lake*.

47. Nureyev and Fonteyn in *Swan Lake*
48. Poster collage

Nureyev and Fonteyn toured the world together, receiving the same accolades in New York, Sydney, or Vienna that had greeted them in London. In 1983, Nureyev became Artistic Director of the **Paris Opera Balle**t, lifting the venerable company out of a dark period. He revived or recreated many works that had been lost to the Western repertoire. Mostly, he put his stamp on older ballets, but there were a few original works also. I'll give you a clip from one of them, *Manfred*, his 1986 ballet about Lord Byron, which shows his transformation of the male dancer—**Mathias Heymann** in this modern revival.

49. Nureyev: *Manfred*, clip
50. Class title 3 (Nureyev's tomb)

By this time, unfortunately, he was suffering from AIDS, which was not made public until his death on January 6, 1993. Appropriately, his tomb in the Russian Cemetery in Paris was designed by a set designer, **Ezio Frigerio**, and includes a Turkish rug, made entirely from mosaic.