




COMMUNICATION: REPORT

## The Tartini Moment

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For the general public, Giuseppe Tartini (1692–1770) has long risked being confined within the category of ‘one-piece composers’: the ‘Devil’s Trill’ Sonata (‘Trillo del diavolo’) is probably the piece for which he is best known. The composer’s concentration on works for the violin (concertos and chamber music), with the rare exception of concertos for flute and for cello, has not fostered a particularly extensive or varied approach to the oeuvre of this peculiar violinist–composer–didactician–theorist–philosopher. However, Tartini was one of the most esteemed musicians of his time and produced more than 450 compositions, including a group of sacred vocal works, among which is a *Miserere* performed in Rome on Ash Wednesday of 1768 by the Sistine Chapel Choir. Most available editions of Tartini’s music are due to the work of Edoardo Farina and Claudio Scimone, who planned and launched a complete edition in the 1970s. Their work was interrupted, however, after Carisch of Milan published a selection of concertos, sonatas and trio sonatas (a valuable enterprise on which I have commented in my chapter ‘Il contributo di Claudio Scimone alla conoscenza di Giuseppe Tartini’, in *Claudio Scimone 1934–2018: contributi per una storicizzazione*, ed. Sergio Durante and Claudio Griggio (Florence: Olschki, 2021), 27–35).

A new *Edizione nazionale delle opere musicali di Giuseppe Tartini* is now underway, produced in collaboration between the Università di Padova and the Univerza v Ljubljani. The first volume, edited by Matteo Cossu, has recently been issued by Bärenreiter. This volume is part of the section devoted to didactic works and represents perhaps the most useful of Tartini’s efforts towards the systematization of violin teaching, being the set of variations on the Gavotta from Corelli’s Sonata Op. 5 No. 10, known as *L’arte dell’arco* (the art of the bow). The comprehensive examination of all available sources has led the editor to include two previously unpublished variations by Tartini, as well as seventeen more that represent an early stage of the work. This single example demonstrates how the philological research supporting the edition may significantly alter our perspective on Tartini’s compositional output. The extent to which this will be the case for the subsequent volumes largely depends on the group of works chosen for each, and the often intricate source problems that are involved, but it is not too early to suggest that the edition could lead to a profound reconsideration of this composer’s overall production (the first review, by Christoph Riedo, appears in *Die Musikforschung* 76 (2023), 93–94). The general editorial plan includes twenty-six volumes in seven series, as follows:

- Series I (liturgical and devotional music)
- Series II/1 (published sonatas, with or without the authorization of Tartini)
- Series II/2 (sonatas in manuscript sources)
- Series III (trio sonatas)
- Series IV (*sinfonie* or sonatas *a quattro*)
- Series V/1 (concertos published in Tartini’s lifetime)
- Series V/2 (concertos in manuscript sources)

Series V/3 (concertos for flute and for cello)

Series VI (didactic works)

Series VII (transcriptions)

According to an opening statement by the editorial board (whose members are Margherita Canale, Sergio Durante, Federico Guglielmo, Milada Jonášová, Metoda Kokole, Agnese Pavanello, Pierpaolo Polzonetti and Neal Zaslaw), ‘One could say that this edition is overdue, considering Tartini’s reputation as one of the important composers of his time, or that it is premature, given that the biographical and philological research on this composer is still in progress’ (in Giuseppe Tartini, *L’arte dell’arco*, ed. Matteo Cossu (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2022), vii). Of course, such an observation might be made of any editorial project of this scope, but it is certainly crucial in the present case on account of the fast-developing interest in this artist in recent years. Until the 1990s, research on Tartini proceeded slowly, but of late, especially in the past four or so years, it has accelerated markedly: recent European Union funding for a joint Italian–Slovenian research project (which also envisioned the promotion of tourism; for more information see [www.discovertartini.eu](http://www.discovertartini.eu)) has led to the invention and implementation of tools that help us rethink the composer. Outputs so far include an online thematic catalogue that has been available since 2020 (see the introduction by Guido Viverit, one of the top Tartini scholars of his generation, at <http://catalog.discovertartini.eu/dcm/gt/preface.xq>), and an edition of Tartini’s letters and documents in two volumes that has been published with translations into both Slovenian and English (*Giuseppe Tartini, Lettere e documenti / Pisma in dokumenti / Letters and Documents*, ed. Giorgia Malagò, two volumes (Trieste: EUT, 2020; this is also available online at [www.discovertartini.eu/epistolario/I/](http://www.discovertartini.eu/epistolario/I/)).

It is necessary to stress the importance of this ‘linguistic turn’ since Tartini research had been limited, until roughly the end of the last century, to scholars having a good command of the Italian language and/or having a special link to Tartini’s birthplace, Piran (then part of the Venetian Republic, now in Slovenia), or his main site of activity, Padua (where he was concertmaster and soloist for approximately forty-five years in the orchestra of the Basilica di Sant’Antonio di Padova). It is not by chance that the most influential Tartini scholar, Pierluigi Petrobelli, came from Padua and started his brilliant career in close contact with the local biographical and musical resources (his ground-breaking contribution to this field was the volume *Giuseppe Tartini: le fonti biografiche* (Vienna: Universal, 1968)). The very fact that over the last two decades much of the pertinent research has been published in English, now the lingua franca of musicology, reflects nothing less than the transition of Tartini from violinist of local interest to composer of broader historical significance. This change was marked by the publication, in 2013, of an issue of *Ad Parnassum* (11/22) devoted to Tartini – including my summary of the field up to 2012, ‘Tartini Studies: The State of the Art’ (1–10) – and blossomed recently into three volumes of conference proceedings under the series title ‘Giuseppe Tartini and the Musical Culture of the Enlightenment’: Gabriele Taschetti, ed., *Giuseppe Tartini: Fundamental Questions* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2022); Nejc Sukljan, ed., *In Search of Perfect Harmony: Tartini’s Music and Music Theory in Local and European Contexts* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2022); and Margherita Canale Degrossi and Paolo Da Col, eds, *The Sound of Tartini: Instruments and Performing Practice in Tartini’s Time* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2023).

The new wave of Tartini studies has, among other things, the merit of pulling the composer away from the ‘baroque’ label that has characterized a large part (though, fortunately, not all) of the recent discography. The inclusion and understanding of Tartini’s production (both musical and literary) within the realm of ‘Enlightened’ culture presents two fields of interest for the musicologist and the cultural historian: on the one hand, it sheds light on Tartini’s personality and aesthetics, and, on the other, it paves the way for a deeper understanding (more complex and contradictory, that is) of the consequences of the ‘Enlightenment’ for the realm of music. While we traditionally associate the *siècle des lumières* with its social and political consequences in the second half of the

eighteenth century, it has become increasingly clear that processes of rationalization were well and truly alive from the late seventeenth and, perhaps more significantly, affected both the ‘progressive’ Enlightenment and the ‘conservative’ one. To simplify somewhat, one might say that Tartini belonged to the latter: he envisioned forward-looking didactic practices while denying any merits to equal temperament, which he would have considered unnatural (as well as its later developments, which we can speculate would have been unimaginable to him). He established ‘order’ within the intrinsically ‘bizarre’ field of music improvisation and investigated the physics of sound, while reconnecting it tentatively with the arcane metaphysics of hermetism. Finally, he was a charismatic and cosmopolitan teacher who welcomed dozens of students from different countries and religious confessions, while maintaining a staunch faith in the Catholicism in which he was raised.

Tartini’s case invites us to look at the ‘musics’ of the mid-eighteenth century through the lenses of local differences and idiosyncratic compositional attitudes rather than that of teleological stylistic progress. In this sense the violinist-philosopher from Piran has something to teach not only violinists, but also cultural historians. The individuality of Tartini was the focus of an exhibition held at the European Parliament in Brussels (in the Yehudi Menuhin Space) in November–December 2022 under the title ‘The Shared European Heritage of Giuseppe Tartini’. This event was intended to celebrate the merits of an artist and also the cooperative climate between different countries in today’s EU, which has supported so many new initiatives.

**Sergio Durante** studied at the Università di Bologna and Conservatorio di Musica Giovan Battista Martini Bologna, and received his PhD from Harvard University in 1993. Since 2000 he has been Full Professor of Musicology at the Università di Padova. He has published around eighty essays in various languages, on topics including the history of the singing profession, musical theatre of the eighteenth century, instrumental music of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the theory of opera, ethnomusicology and electroacoustic music. Recent publications include *Music and Nation: Essays on the Time of German and Italian Unifications* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Department of Music, 2019). He has held posts including De Bosis Lecturer in Italian Civilization at Harvard University (2011) and Visiting Lecturer at both the University of Sydney (2014) and Shanghai Tech University (2017). He is presently directing the *opera omnia* of Giuseppe Tartini.