THE COMMISSION

by

Woody Vasulka

Text and character of Paganini
Text and character of Berlioz
Text and character of The Mortician

Paganini's son
Narrator
Voice
Set design
Camera
Video tape editor
Audio mix

Special electronic tools:

Vocoder
Scan Processor
Digital Articulator

Ernest Besella
Robert Ashley
Cosimo Corso

Ben Harris
David Osman
Andrea Harris
Bradford Smith
Steina
Peter Kirby
Baird Benner

Harald Bode
Rutt/Etra
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 terrifying 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 wagon to his family house, were 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 ecstatic 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 truth 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 through the darkening organs of sense behold in thee the nature of that which they imitate". I don't understand that.

Any way later from Scepsis says Strabo came Metrodorus
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 mould 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.

INTERMEZZO

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 hart 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".
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 unhearsed 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.
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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Berlioz:

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How nice...
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Harald Bode
Rutt/Etra
Jeffy Schier
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
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 più.
Il naso? Due e il naso. Che bellino.
La bocca? Due due!
Facciamo un piccolo duetto.
Ma che noia.
Affanculo.
Sto povero cretino morto. Misuriamo sto petto.
La coscia e così lunga, figlio mio, la coscia che
non ti serve; mettiamo un quindici. Eppure l'altra
cosa può essere differente. E chi lo sa?
Eh si. La coscia destra e molto più lunga!
Quindici e mezzo.
Le povere ginocchia. Oh, ginocchia.
Son due; son altre due. Due, Due.
E sti piedi, sti piedi di sti povero cristo,
Son lunghi, però quanto ha camminato! Uffa! Undici.
E sarà lo stesso, no? Undici.
Misuriamo l'uomo. Ah, sto povero uomo che è
crepato.
Facciamo un tre.
Cerebrum: Unum duum treum. Eh!
Nasum: quantum? Dum! Tambien!
Osi: dos.
Tettine: octo.
Pectum: unum duum treum quattuor cincum, etcetera.
Quattro l'ombellico. Sto povero cristiano.
Aspetto, 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'è due te li vendo per un poco.
Ecce homo. Morto. E ubbe.?
Chi se ne frega?
Mater dolorosa. Requiscat in pace. Povero bambino.
Paganini, bello mio.
Dormi. In pace
Stronzo. Dormi
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 Cassole, who had been appointed trustee for Achillino, the sum of 38,000 francs in order to exhibit the corpse in England.

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Soon stories began to circulate: the vails of a violin... other terrifying 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, were as a boy he helped to plant the vegetables.

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