

Ruggiero Ricci's July 1950 Geneva recordings of the 24 Caprices, Op. 1, by Paganini were originally issued on two Decca LPs in the 1951 to great acclaim in *The Gramophone*. Although Ricci would return to them for a stereo re-recording a decade later, in this Ambient Stereo XR remastering we can appreciate anew his wonderful artistry in this original outing, dusting off the violin tone and bringing new sparkle, clarity and depth to playing which had brought such delight in some 72 years ago:

"The twenty-four caprices of Paganini are the only work which that legendary and historic figure allowed to be published in his lifetime. His concertos he kept for his own public use until after his death, lest his fame should be tarnished by another's playing of them. These caprices extend the virtuoso technique of the violin beyond anything known or dreamed of up to Paganini's day, and even now there is precious little a violinist can legitimately do with bow and fingers and strings that is not already in here. One suitably admires the fireworks. What is astonishing perhaps that listening to these twelve pieces in two hearings, one admires the music also. Paganini the player lived longer than mortal span, for the satanic and other legends whispered about him persisted after his death. But Paganini the composer is curiously alive 110 years after that death. Apart from its great technical interest, this music has quality, it has variety and imagination, and it has at times considerable emotional power. Its originality is beyond dispute. The caprices have gripped more than one composer: Schumann and Liszt both made piano transcriptions of them, and there are the famous variations by Brahms for piano (two books) and Rachmaninov for piano and orchestra.

Something of what was Paganini's living magic is conveyed to us through this music as performed here by Ruggiero Ricci. His attack and bite are exceptionally commanding without being unpleasantly self-asserting. The only exception I can find to take with his powerful technique is a slight tendency to a wavering of tone in slow double-stopped passages, noticeable in Nos. 3, 4 and 8, and giving a wailing quality (possibly partly intended) to No. 6. Sgr. Ricci brings out the best qualities of the music, and certainly No. 6 is exceptional in its moodiness. No. 7 is also remarkable; so is the hunting-call theme of No. 9, while No. 10 has tension and a splendid ending which the player properly builds up. There is as well a brilliant glitter to this performance (No. 7 is the best example), which can be shadowed down to tenderness in No. 11. The recording is excellent, and gives a good effect of the violinist's being in the room; there are few extraneous noises, and the whole disc is level and smooth in its flow of tone."

H.F., *The Gramophone*, April 1951

"The first twelve of Paganini's remarkable corpus of Twenty-four Caprices were issued on Decca LK4025 with Ricci playing, and were reviewed by the present writer in some detail in *The Gramophone* of April 1951 (page 249). There is little need for adding to the high commendation printed there of this quite outstanding achievement of performance and recording, except that I wish to set down my pleasure and my equal surprise that the second two sides are as good and even as the first: if anything, they are better. The lifelike effect of the player's being in the room compares favourably with any recording of solo unaccompanied violin I have heard. Being placed at the optimum distance from the microphone, the player is heard to make these extra sounds of a non-musical kind inseparable from virtuoso violin-playing only to a convincing and not a distressing degree. The discs are easy to reproduce and take plenty of amplification, though they could be no less effective in small rooms. And what control Ruggiero Ricci has! That dancing *spiccato* that iron-fingered in-tune-ness! The masterly technique is at the disposal of a quick understanding of the musical content, and I could not help feeling that Ricci enjoys the music, as music, as much as I do. A few special points may be noted—fire in No. 13, glitter in No. 14, the attack and the octaves in No. 15; No. 16 is highly exciting, and No. 18, with its trumpet call followed by chatter, shows wide range of tone. The antiphonal No. 19 has some lovely long notes among its quick ones, and No. 20, with its drone, is sweet to the ear. No. 21 is romantic with its perfectly hit sixths and tenths and No. 22 is whimsical and charming. The famous theme and its variations of No. 24 is perhaps the highlight of the whole issue."

H.F., *The Gramophone*, August 1951

Andrew Rose





ricci

plays paganini

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PAGANINI Caprices, Op. 1

1. Caprice No. 1 in E Major, 'L'Arpeggio': Andante (1:36)
2. Caprice No. 2 in B Minor: Moderato (2:55)
3. Caprice No. 3 in E Minor: Sostenuto - Presto - Sostenuto (2:55)
4. Caprice No. 4 in C Minor: Maestoso (6:00)
5. Caprice No. 5 in A Minor: Agitato (2:15)
6. Caprice No. 6 in G Minor, 'The Trill': Lento (4:55)
7. Caprice No. 7 in A Minor: Posato (3:09)
8. Caprice No. 8 in E-Flat Major: Maestoso (2:33)
9. Caprice No. 9 in E Major, 'La chasse': Allegretto (2:52)
10. Caprice No. 10 in G Minor: Vivace (2:01)
11. Caprice No. 11 in C Major: Andante - Presto - Andante (4:09)
12. Caprice No. 12 in A-Flat Major: Allegro (2:37)
13. Caprice No. 13 in B flat Major, 'Devil's Laughter': Allegro (2:36)
14. Caprice No. 14 in E-Flat Major: Moderato (1:31)
15. Caprice No. 15 in E Minor: Posato (2:39)
16. Caprice No. 16 in G Minor: Presto (1:08)
17. Caprice No. 17 in E flat Major: Sostenuto - Andante (3:02)
18. Caprice No. 18 in C Major: Corrente - Allegro (2:14)
19. Caprice No. 19 in E-Flat Major: Lento - Allegro Assai (2:44)
20. Caprice No. 20 in D Major: Allegretto (3:52)
21. Caprice No. 21 in A Major: Amoroso - Presto (3:13)
22. Caprice No. 22 in F Major: Marcato (2:51)
23. Caprice No. 23 in E-Flat Major: Posato (4:11)
24. Caprice No. 24 in A Minor: Tema con Variazioni (Quasi Presto) (6:04)

Ruggiero Ricci, violinXR Remastered by **Andrew Rose**Cover artwork based on a
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