



58th International Violin Competition "Premio Paganini"

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All about



[Home](#) > [News](#) > WFIMC interview with President Panebianco

WFIMC interview with President Panebianco



WFIMC: In a nutshell, could you tell us what is new at the Premio Paganini?

The revitalized Paganini Prize constitutes a strategic asset for the cultural politics of the City of Genoa. Mayor Marco Bucci entrusted me with the goal of “renewing by conserving”: making the Paganini Prize, and by association Genoa, better known in Italy and abroad. This includes engaging new audiences beyond a narrow community of music professionals, while maintaining the prestige and the artistic excellence that the Prize has represented for almost seventy years. The role of the Opera Carlo Felice Theatre is more strengthened than in the past and I like to thank once again the Superintendent Claudio Orazi. Based on a solid, modern project, we have assembled a renowned team, beginning with Artistic Director Nazzareno Carusi. Salvatore Accardo, an icon of international violin performance, leads the jury composed of extraordinary artists and experts. Thanks to a new organizational model and an operational headquarters, we have updated our channels of communication, including a network of “Paganini Ambassadors,” illustrious figures not necessarily linked to the musical community, to cultivate opportunities for valorizing the competition, which has returned to a biennial calendar. In the period between editions of the Prize, we will continue to promote the competition and celebrate Paganini in Italy and abroad through prestigious events. We are already at work on two exceptional concerts: one at the Musée du Louvre in Paris, and the other at Guildhall in London with the London Symphony Orchestra directed by Sir Antonio Pappano. We believe strongly in international cooperation and hence in our membership in the WFIMC, in which the Paganini Prize counts among the founding members since 1957. It is an excellent collaboration, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank, in particular, President Paul Kainrath and Secretary General Florian Riem.

WFIMC: How do you see the importance of the Paganini for Italian artists? The last edition was won by an Italian, which was quite extraordinary for the competition, which had not seen an Italian winner in more than 20 years. Do you offer activities especially focussed on Italian students to support the “Italian school”?

With his victory in 2021, Giuseppe Gibboni marked an important new chapter in the history of the Premio Paganini, “returning” the Prize to Italy after twenty-four years. I recall one of his interviews, in particular, in which, in addition to expressing his happiness, he voiced some regret that the Italian press had not covered the event. He received plenty of attention, however, from other quarters: the President of the Italian Republic Sergio Mattarella received Gibboni at the Quirinal Palace. We are particularly proud of the fact that the international presentation of the 57th edition of the Prize at the Italian Embassy in Paris on November 3rd, 2022, took place with the high patronage of the head of state. This renewed attention on the part of Institutions, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the international cooperation activating the network of Italian Cultural Institutes abroad, encourages us to proceed in this direction, intensifying collaborations with schools and academies, beginning with the Conservatorio “Niccolò Paganini” in Genoa. The preselection rounds for the current competition were conducted there for the first time in the history of the competition. The conservatory is also the principal partner of the Paganini Prize for the promotion of Master Classes and fellowship grants. On October 25th and 26th, thanks to the efforts of Director Roberto Tagliamacco, Professor Natalia Lomeiko – winner of the Paganini Prize in 2000 – will be in Genoa to conduct a Master Class for the students.

WFIMC: You have a mostly male jury, while a majority of participants are women. This is actually quite common for most violin competitions. What is your stance on gender equality/balance?

We are firmly committed to addressing the issue of gender equality. The fact that the number of female applicants to compete in the 57th edition of the prize outnumbered the men gives us a great deal of satisfaction. As far as the composition of the jury is concerned, the current members represent an extraordinarily high level. The Artistic Director has done an excellent job, considering the short time at his disposal, too. The difficulties involved in recruiting those who serve on juries of an international competition of this sort, given their packed agendas, is well known in the field. I trust that in 2025 there will be a fuller complement of women on the jury.

WFIMC: What is your position regarding Russian artists and competitors at the competition?

This is another delicate concern to which we have dedicated a great deal of thought. All of us hoped to arrive at the final of the competition this year with the war behind us. This year, among the 117 applicants, a record in the history of the Prize, there were only two Russians and two Ukrainians, whereas in previous editions representatives from each country were always more numerous. On the other hand, last winter, it was impossible to organize preselection rounds in Russia, as had been done in 2018. The uncertainty of the geopolitical situation did not allow it, and we certainly could not risk putting competitors or members of the jury in harm's way. Music is a universal language that unites people, saves them, and provides relief. It has been thus even in the darkest moments of the past. I believe that talent and a love of music transcend flags and national identity.

WFIMC: What is the legacy of Niccolò Paganini today, and what does it mean for young artists?

Paganini was an extraordinary violinist who inspired many great artists of the nineteenth century, contributing to the construction of European cultural identity. Romantic hero, innovator and pioneer of fashion and customs, he lived his life and that of his epoch with rare intensity. We are committed to rediscovering and valorizing his fascinating legacy as an individual and as an artist. I like to remind people that the program of the first edition of the competition, in 1954, included the following passage: “The Prize aims to be an homage paid by his birthplace to the supreme violinist whose personality, interpretative force and unparalleled expressive potential made the violin into a living thing, almost a vibration of the soul.” Paganini's legacy emanates from the “vibration of the soul,” as capable today as it was in the past of seducing legions of young violinists and many others. I am confident that on October 27, at the Opera Carlo Felice Theater in Genoa, we will experience a truly memorable moment together with many young people, as well as those of every age from all over the world, who love the timeless music of Paganini.

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