

***Capriccio for Solo Viola in C minor “Hommage à Paganini,” Op. 55***  
**Henri Vieuxtemps**

(b. Verviers, 1820 / d. Mustapha Supérieur, Algeria, 1881)

Like other great violinists, the Belgian-born Henri Vieuxtemps composed the vast majority of his works for his chosen instrument. But, also like several of his fellows, he branched out later, and created works for other string instruments.

The great Italian virtuoso Niccolò Paganini (1782-1840) took up the viola during his career, and not only composed for it, but commissioned others to write works for him on that instrument. In the case of Vieuxtemps, he turned to both viola and cello as part of his creative output after a series of strokes left him unable to perform on the instrument for which he had become a famous exponent – the violin.

As a tribute to the Italian master of both violin and viola, Vieuxtemps composed this stand-alone work for viola late in his career. The *Capriccio for Solo Viola in C minor “Hommage à Paganini,” Op. 55* was published in 1881, the year he died, and is one of three chamber pieces he composed for viola in his final years. It is a brief work, some three and a half minutes, but bears the stamp of Vieuxtemps in several respects. Its pleasant, haunting melody and emphasis on the beauty of the musical line rather than bravura display are both hallmarks of most of his works that feature a prominent solo instrument. Nevertheless, with a dedicatee such as Paganini, who made much of his living dazzling audiences with his daunting virtuosity, the technical demands Vieuxtemps presents the violist are still considerable. As his student, Eugène Ysaÿe, says Vieuxtemps instructed him: “Not runs for the sake of runs - sing, sing!”