



INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION NICCOLÒ PAGANINI



**WHEN PAGANINI
MEETS YSAÏE**

THE DEVILS' VIOLINS

16.10.26 > 7.03.27

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The destinies of Italy and Liège are culturally intertwined; this international exhibition, running over several weeks, will demonstrate this, particularly from a musicological perspective.

'The Devils' Violins', or the story of the devil's violinist, Niccolò Paganini, whose intense charisma fascinatingly transcends the instrument, only to find its conceptual extension in the talented Eugène Ysaÿe.

It was, therefore, only natural that Liège should channel its fervent creativity into this European Paganini trail.

Élisabeth Fraipont
Deputy Mayor for Culture,
Public Reading and
the Duty to Remember

Combining fascination, virtuosity and legend, the international exhibition **When Paganini Meets Ysaÿe: The Devils' Violins** invites visitors to rediscover Niccolò Paganini, not only as an exceptional musician, but also as a pioneering figure whose influence continues to resonate in Liège and throughout Europe.

On display at the Grand Curtius Museum in Liège from 16 October 2026 to 7 March 2027, this exhibition traces the extraordinary legacy of the Italian virtuoso and his influence at the heart of the Liège School of Violin.

Through autograph manuscripts, historical instruments, sheet music, previously unpublished archives and exceptional memorabilia, it reveals how Paganini's genius left its mark on several generations of European musicians. The exhibition offers an insight into the world of the Genoese artist who became a legend, whose talent, personality and virtuosity fuelled the myth of the 'Devil's Violinist'.

The exhibition brings together remarkable loans from public and private collections in Italy, Belgium and France. Among the most prestigious items are Paganini's personal, signed guitar, major autograph manuscripts and rare artefacts relating to his work as a composer, virtuoso and teacher.

From Paganini to his sole recognised pupil, Camillo Sivori, and then from François Prume and Henry Vieuxtemps to César Thomson and Eugène Ysaÿe, an artistic lineage emerges of which Liège is one of the most brilliant centres of influence. This legacy, built on admiration, teaching and innovation, bears witness to the city's essential role in the European history of the violin.

An exceptional collection of fourteen historic bows from the 18th and 19th centuries, made by the Tourte family, John Dodd, Louis-Simon Pajeot, François-Jude Gaulard and Nicolas-Joseph Harmand, amongst others, illustrates the innovations that paved the way for the emergence of modern virtuosity. Historical and contemporary instruments from the Liège International String Quartet Competition, the Cordaneum, the Grétry Museum and private collections also highlight the role of stringed instrument making in the evolution of European music.

The choice of the Curtius Palace is no coincidence. The Grand Curtius houses the Eugène Ysaÿe Studio, an authentic Art Nouveau-style salon designed by Gustave Serrurier-Bovy, as well as the César Franck Space. These venues, steeped in history, provide the perfect setting for the event and invite visitors to look, listen and experience the human story hidden behind every instrument, every manuscript and every memento.

Organised under the auspices of the City of Liège – recognised by UNESCO as a Creative City of Music – and as part of the European Paganini Route, a Cultural Itinerary of the Council of Europe, the exhibition reaffirms Liège's place amongst Europe's leading centres of musical culture.

Accessible to music lovers and curious visitors alike, the exhibition offers a vivid and evocative exploration of the history of the violin. Spanning virtuosity, tradition and innovation, it invites visitors on a journey to the heart of musical Europe, from Genoa to Liège, from Paganini to Ysaÿe.

Patrick Dheur,
Exhibition Curator

NICCOLÒ PAGANINI (1782–1840)

BIOGRAPHY

Born in Genoa on 27 October 1782, Niccolò Paganini showed himself to be an exceptional violinist from a very early age. Following his first public appearances, he performed in several Italian cities and continued his training under renowned masters.

From 1805 to 1809, he worked at the court of Lucca under Élisabeth Baciocchi, Napoleon Bonaparte's sister. There, he composed numerous chamber music works and developed a technique that helped to forge his reputation.

From 1810 onwards, Paganini pursued an independent career. In 1828, at the invitation of the Austrian Chancellor Metternich, he travelled to Vienna, the starting point of his grand European tour. Accompanied by his son Achille, he went on to tour nine countries and, by 1834, had given over four hundred concerts, many of which were in aid of charitable causes. This tour cemented his international fame and perpetuated the myth of the 'devil's violinist'.

His technical rests notably on harmonics, left-hand pizzicatos, double stops, considerable finger stretches and passages of extreme virtuosity. He exploited all the expressive resources of the violin and gave the impression of creating a dialogue between several voices. This mastery seemed so extraordinary to his contemporaries that it enveloped the musician in an aura of mystery.

In 1834, having returned to Italy and weakened by illness, Paganini helped to reorganise the court orchestra of Parma at the request of Archduchess Marie-Louise of Austria. He died in Nice on 27 May 1840, leaving behind a remarkable body of work and a considerable influence on the history of the violin.

PAGANINI THE COMPOSER

A composer as daring as he was a virtuoso, Paganini wrote mainly for the violin, which he exploited to the full extent of its technical and expressive possibilities. His works combine spectacular virtuosity, lyricism and freedom of composition.

His *24 Caprices for solo violin*, composed in the early 19th century and published in 1820, are his most famous work. Serving as both concert pieces and études, they explore double stops, harmonics, left-hand pizzicato, wide intervals and register changes.

Paganini also composed violin concertos, chamber music and numerous works featuring the guitar, an instrument he played with great passion. His music, closely linked to his personal technique, had a lasting influence on the composers and violinists who followed him.

PAGANINI: THE DEVIL'S VIOLINIST

From the 1820s onwards, Paganini acquired an extraordinary reputation. His slender build, gaunt face, flair for the dramatic and the performance of unprecedented feats fuelled numerous rumours. Some attributed to him a pact with the devil, which, in their eyes, was the only explanation for such exceptional talent.

Widely reported in the press and literature of the 19th century, this legend is not based on any historical fact. It nevertheless played a part in shaping his enduring public image, without detracting from the importance of his work as a composer and performer.



Paganini, violinist – guitarist – conductor (detail), Drawing, 1820, anonymous artist, On loan from: Associazione Amici di Paganini, Genoa, © Michele Trenti

PAGANINI'S LEGACY: CAMILLO SIVORI (1815–1894)

PAGANINI'S HEIR

Born in Genoa on 25 October 1815, Camillo Sivori was the only pupil to receive continuous, direct tuition from Paganini. He also studied under Giacomo Costa, but his encounter with Paganini had a profound impact on his career.

Paganini recognised the young violinist's talent very early on, dedicated several works to him and passed on to him the essential aspects of his art. Sivori did not merely imitate his master; he adapted this legacy to his own personality and introduced it to European audiences.

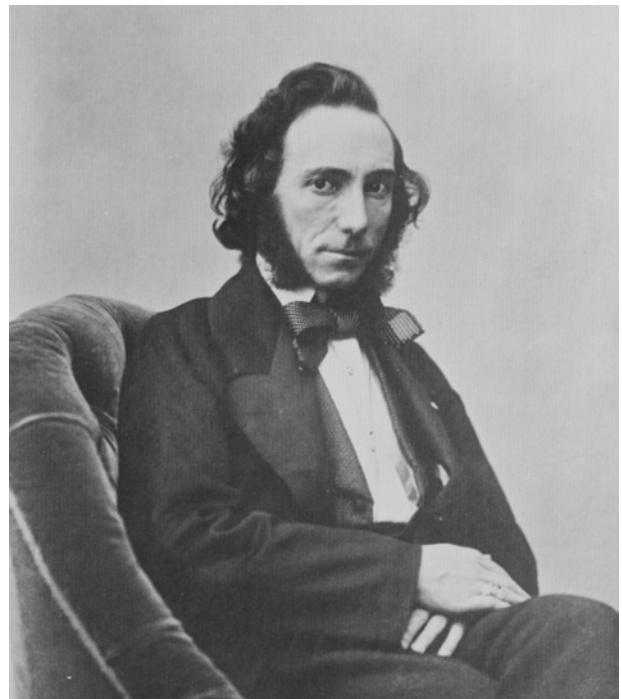
From his teenage years onwards, he performed in Italy before embarking on an international career. In 1843, in the wake of Paganini's triumphs, Belgium welcomed numerous Italian artists. The Brussels press gave extensive coverage to Sivori's concerts in Paris, whilst the memory of the master remained very much alive.

His playing combined virtuosity, elegance and expressiveness. Also a composer, he wrote mainly for the violin in a style based on variation, melody and technical exploration.

Sivori thus formed a living link between Paganini and subsequent generations. Through his concerts and his influence, he passed on the legacy of the Genoese master to the great virtuosos of the 19th century and contributed to the spread of styles that would also inspire the Liège School of Violin. He died in Genoa on 19 February 1894.

THE ROMANTIC VIOLIN IN THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES

Throughout the 19th century, the violin occupied a prominent place in European musical life. Improvements in instrument-making, particularly the development of the modern bow, accompanied the evolution of playing techniques and enabled performers to explore new sonic and expressive possibilities. Composers enriched the instrument's repertoire, whilst conservatoires and leading national music schools helped to train new generations of violinists. At the same time, the growth of public concerts and international tours fostered the emergence of the image of the virtuoso musician. Admired as much for their technical mastery as for their artistic personality, these musicians attract ever-growing audiences and contribute to the flourishing of a genuine concert culture.



Félix Tournanchon, portrait of Ernesto Camillo Sivori (1815–1894), photograph, circa 1860 © Musée Carnavalet – History of Paris (D.R.)

EUGÈNE YSAÏE (1858–1931)

HEIR AND INNOVATOR OF VIRTUOSITY

BIOGRAPHY

Born in Liège in 1858 into a modest family originally from Soumagne, Eugène Ysaÿe grew up in a musical environment. His father, Nicolas Ysaÿe, a conductor at the Pavillon de Flore, gave him his first violin lessons at the age of five.

Admitted to the Liège Conservatoire in 1865, Eugène stood out there as much for his talent as for his unruliness. Having graduated at the age of fifteen, he went on to study with Henryk Wieniawski in Brussels and then with Vieuxtemps in Paris.

His international career began in the late 1870s. In Cologne, he played with Clara Schumann; in Berlin, he became first violin in Benjamin Bilse's orchestra, which would later become the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. Noticed by Franz Liszt and Anton Rubinstein, he undertook several tours of Russia and Scandinavia with the latter.

Ysaÿe was a direct source of inspiration for musical composition. César Franck presented him with his *Sonata for Violin and Piano* on the occasion of his wedding in 1886. Debussy, Saint-Saëns, Fauré, Lekeu and numerous Belgian composers also dedicated works to him. He became a key link between composers, performers and the public.

His violin was a Guarnerius del Gesù from 1740, which later came into the possession of Isaac Stern.

A professor at the Royal Conservatoire of Brussels, founder of the Ysaÿe Quartet and the Ysaÿe Concerts, and later director of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, he contributed to the international renown of the Belgian School. On his return to Belgium, he became Kapellmeister to the Court and musical adviser to Queen Elisabeth, and died in 1931. The competition established in his memory in 1937 became, in 1951, the Queen Elisabeth International Music Competition.

THE ENCOUNTER : A SYMBOLIC MOMENT

In the preface to his *Ten Preludes for Solo Violin*, Op. 35, Ysaÿe writes: 'There is no doubt that, throughout history, harmonic innovations have formed the basis of progress in instrumental technique. [...] Paganini, a pioneer and inventor of a specialised technique, followed the evolution of the Italian operatic music of his time and, building upon a generally consonant harmony, devised an entirely new system by employing—with a skill bordering on the prodigious—rapid sequences of thirds, fingered octaves, and so on. By analysing his work, one discovers, long before the virtuoso violinist, the genius of the violin. The concept has but a single aim: the instrument. The credo is the Guarnerius, and it must produce astonishing results.'

Ysaÿe thus invites us to move beyond the image of the showy virtuoso. The Guarneri becomes Paganini's voice, his laboratory and the wellspring of his imagination. His innovations arise from the convergence of developments in harmony, the composer's inventiveness and the physical exploration of the instrument.

Ysaÿe extends this concept into the language of his own time. His *Six Sonatas for Solo Violin*, Op. 27, and his *Ten Preludes*, Op. 35, demonstrate that virtuosity is never separate from musical thought.

meets symbolique between Paganini and Ysaÿe is that of two composer-violinists and two major stages in the history of the instrument.



La Monaca, Ricardo, Ysaÿe playing the violin, bronze, firsthalf of the20thcentury, Italy. © Grand Curtius – City of Liège

WHEN PAGANINI MEETS YSAÏE. THE DEVILS' VIOLINS

THE EXHIBITION AT THE GRAND CURTIUS

Through autograph manuscripts, historical instruments, sheet music, previously unpublished archives and exceptional memorabilia, the exhibition *When Paganini Meets Ysaÿe: The Devils' Violins* reveals how Paganini's genius left its mark on several generations of European musicians. The exhibition offers an insight into the world of the Genoese artist who became a legend, whose talent, personality and virtuosity fuelled the myth of the 'devil's violinist'.

The exhibition is spread across several areas of the museum:

- the temporary exhibition, held within the Palais Curtius and the Résidence Curtius, brings together the galleries dedicated to Paganini, Sivori, Ysaÿe, the Liège School of Violin, the Liège International String Quartet Competition, contemporary violin-making, and the educational and outreach area;
- the César Franck Space is housed within the permanent exhibition of the Grand Curtius;
- the Eugène Ysaÿe Studio is situated within the permanent exhibition at the Grand Curtius.

THE TEMPORARY EXHIBITION ''

The exhibition brings together remarkable items on loan from public and private collections in Italy, Belgium and France. Among the most prestigious pieces are Paganini's own signed guitar, major autograph manuscripts and rare artefacts relating to his work as a composer, virtuoso and teacher.

Historical and contemporary instruments from the Liège International String Quartet Competition, the Cordaneum, the Grétry Museum and private collections also highlight the role of instrument-making in the evolution of European music.

Paganini's guitar – Gennaro Fabricatore, Naples

This six-string guitar was made in Naples in 1826 by Gennaro Fabricatore, whose workshop was located on Strada Toledo. It is one of the few known Italian instruments to have belonged to Niccolò Paganini.

Although Paganini never performed in concert with a guitar, he nevertheless regarded it as an essential instrument. He used it to compose, to accompany his pupils and friends, and to write numerous chamber music works.



Gennaro Fabricatore, Niccolò Paganini's guitar, Naples, c. 1826, Giovanni Accornero Foundation (Italy)

The instrument is distinguished by Paganini's autograph signature on the soundboard, which was authenticated in 1994 by the musicologist and critic Edward Neill. Its shape reflects a period of transition: whilst still narrow and elongated in keeping with 18th-century tradition, it foreshadows a more modern form with broader curves. The top is adorned with ebony foliage and floral scrolls, as well as a small lyre in the centre of the bridge; the back and sides are made of Neapolitan maple finished in a yellow-brown varnish.

More than just an instrument, this guitar bears witness to Paganini's private musical practice and serves as a reminder that his genius

was not confined to the violin: it served as an instrument for composition, exploration and the passing on of his art.



Gennaro Fabricatore, Niccolò Paganini's guitar (detail), Naples, c. 1820, Giovanni Accornero Foundation (Italy)

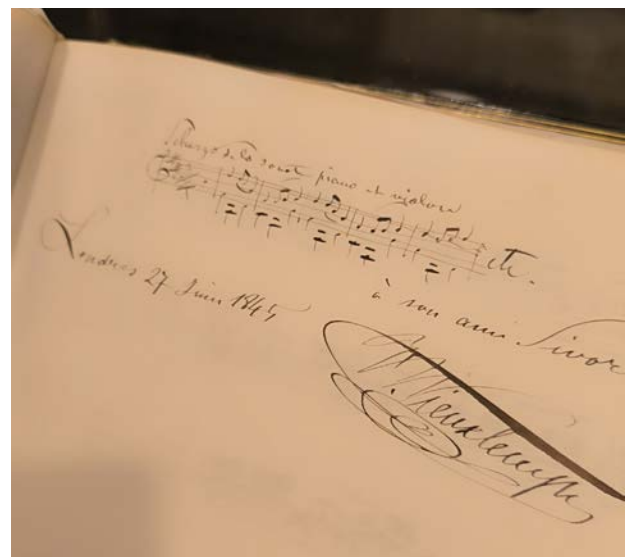
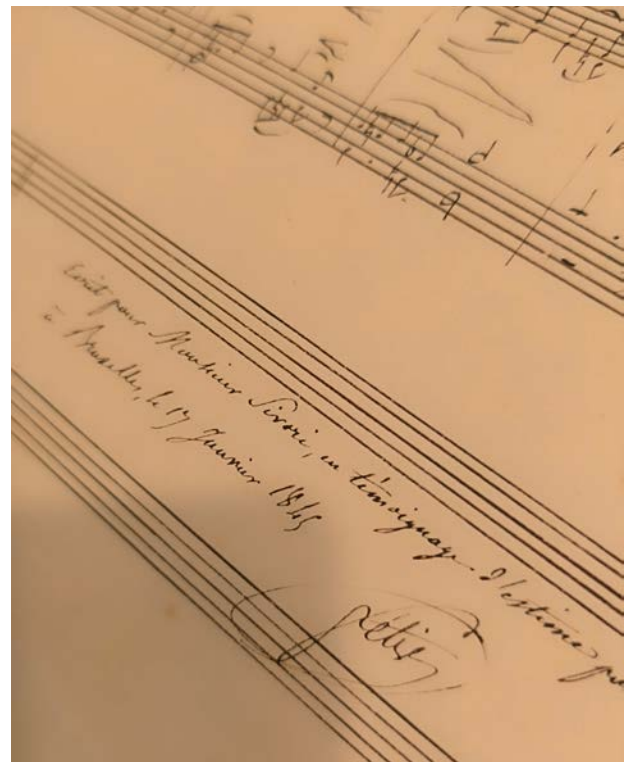
Gennaro Fabricatore (c. 1750 – c. 1832)

A leading figure in the Neapolitan school of violin-making, Gennaro Fabricatore contributed to the development of the modern six-string guitar. His instruments are distinguished by the quality of their craftsmanship and the refinement of their decoration. Bearing an inscription in Paganini's own hand, this guitar is a valuable insight into his creative process and reveals a more intimate side to the musician, for whom the dialogue between the violin and the guitar lay at the heart of his musical language.

Camillo Sivori's autograph album

Camillo Sivori received this album during his tour of Moscow in 1842, the date mentioned on the flyleaf. Throughout his life, he collected dedications, drawings, musical scores, visiting cards, letters and other mementoes in it.

The album is a hybrid object, serving as a repository, a collection and an archive. It bears witness to the breadth of Sivori's connections amongst musicians, artists, writers, painters and politicians. Its composition does not follow a strictly chronological or thematic order: its apparent heterogeneity reflects the violinist's encounters and choices.



Excerpts from Sivori's souvenir album: top page with Fétis's signature and dedication; bottom page with Vieuxtemps's signature. Private collection: Stefano Termanini

The portrait of Paganini by Giuseppe Isola

This oil on canvas, held at the Galleria d'Arte Moderna of the Musei di Nervi (Gallery of Modern Art of the Nervi Museums) in Genoa, depicts Paganini at the height of his fame. Painted during his lifetime, the portrait helped to shape the image of the Romantic virtuoso.

Giuseppe Isola (1808–1893), a Genoese painter specialising in portraiture and history painting, did more than simply capture the features of a famous musician: he helped to turn Paganini into a European icon. Here, he captures the artist's unique aura, whose exceptional talent was already fuelling a reputation that blended admiration and fascination. This work is one of the most famous depictions of Paganini.



Giuseppe Isola, Portrait of Niccolò Paganini, oil on canvas, 1835, Genoa, Museo di Arte Moderna di Nervi.

The statuette of Niccolò Paganini by Jean-Pierre Dantan, known as Dantan the Younger

Created in 1832 by Jean-Pierre Dantan, known as Dantan the Younger, this statuette, housed at the Grand Curtius, is one of the most famous depictions of Paganini. A true caricature, it combines likeness with exaggeration to capture the musician's extraordinary image.

Created at the height of his immense European success, it bears witness to the Romantic fascination with his virtuosity, his appearance and the stories surrounding his career. The presence of the violin serves as a reminder of the inseparable bond between the artist and his instrument.

After his death, portraits, manuscripts and personal mementoes became the bearers of a collective memory that transformed the musician into a true legend.



Jean-Pierre Dantan, known as Dantan the Younger, Statuette of Niccolò Paganini, terracotta, 1832, Grand Curtius, Department of Decorative Arts (Eugène Ysaÿe studio), Liège.

The bows

The Sartory bow presented to Ysaÿe by Queen Elisabeth

Crafted by Eugène Sartory, one of the great French bow-makers of the 20th century, this ebony bow with gold fittings was presented by Queen Elisabeth of Belgium to Eugène Ysaÿe as a Christmas gift in 1929. The engraving commemorates this royal gift and the special bond between the sovereign and her music teacher.

Following Ysaÿe's death in 1931, the bow remained in his family's possession before finding its way into various collections. Rarely displayed to the public, it is of exceptional heritage and symbolic importance.



Violin bow by Eugène Sartory, signed and inscribed by Queen Elisabeth of Belgium to her dear teacher Eugène Ysaÿe, dated 24 December 1929, with tortoiseshell and gold fittings, from the private collection of Pierre Guillaume.

The fourteen historic bows from the 18th and 19th centuries

The exhibition owes a great deal to the exceptional loan from the violinist and collector Jérôme Akoka. Assembled over several decades, his collection brings together historic bows, instruments and rare objects that illustrate the evolution of European instrument-making between the 18th and 19th centuries.

The transition from one model to another reflects a quest for balance, power, precision and flexibility. The bow is not merely an accessory; it is an extension of the performer's arm.

A collection of fourteen historic bows from the 18th and 19th centuries, made notably by the Tourte family, John Dodd, Louis-Simon Pajot, François-Jude Gaulard and Nicolas-Joseph Harmand, bears witness to the innovations that made the emergence of modern virtuosity possible.

Gauthier Louppe – The legacy of , reimagined

Gauthier Louppe, born in Luxembourg on 12 May 1959, comes from a family with a long tradition of woodcarving. From a young age, he learnt how to handle the tools.

After graduating from the International School of Violin Making in Cremona (Italy) in 1983, he trained in the great tradition of Italian violin making. He worked for the masters Giorgio Scolari and Mario Gadda. For many years, he has devoted himself to the restoration and making of string quartet instruments. He is a member of the Groupe des Luthiers et Archetiers d'Art de France.

In 2010, this master violin maker, in partnership with the Town of Marche-en-Famenne, founded the Cordaneum, a living tribute to the craft of string quartet instrument-making (violin, viola, cello). A veritable violin museum in Belgium, it tells the story of the history, materials and passion behind each creation. The Cordaneum is also committed to training young talent, in collaboration with the IMEP, to guide them towards a professional career in the world of the string quartet.



Gaudiade viola, designed by Gauthier Louppe © Marc-Henri Cykiert

Presented at the end of the scenographic tour, Gauthier Louppe's instruments place contemporary violin-making within the continuity of a history stretching back several centuries.

Among these creations are the *Gaudiade* viola and the *Phénix* cello, both of which were awarded a gold medal at the Malta Competition.

An iconic figure in contemporary violin-making, Gauthier Louppe champions an evolving tradition, open to the arts, the sciences and the thinking of his time. Whilst not disregarding the knowledge passed down by the great masters, he refuses to regard the form of the violin as set in stone.

His instruments combine acoustic research, masterful craftsmanship, formal innovation, ergonomics and philosophical reflection. Their original forms are not driven by purely aesthetic considerations: they explore the relationship between the material, the sound, the musician's body and the instrument's visual identity. Intended to be played, these creations can also be contemplated as true 'sounding sculptures'.

This approach is developed through an ongoing dialogue with visual artists, performers and composers. Claude Ledoux, Jan Van Landeghem, Gian-Paolo Luppi, Marc-Henri Cykiert, David Preisler and Robert Janssens, amongst others, have written works for these instruments. They are therefore no longer merely a means of performing a piece: they play a direct part in the creative process and give rise to new musical languages.

Their inclusion in the exhibition **When Paganini Meets Ysaÿe: The Devil's Violins** extends the dialogue between heritage and innovation that runs throughout the exhibition. Paganini pushed the technical and expressive boundaries of the violin; Ysaÿe renewed its musical language and thinking. Gauthier Louppe continues this exploration by intervening in the very form and material of the instrument.

His creations thus serve as a reminder that the legacy of violin-making is not merely preserved: it is passed on, questioned and reinvented.

<https://www.cordaneum.be>

THE PERMANENT EXHIBITION: CÉSAR FRANCK SPACE AND EUGÈNE YSAÏE STUDIO

Grétry, Franck, Ysaÿe: an exceptional musical and museum heritage in Liège!

Liège is one of those rare cities that have preserved the birthplaces of its illustrious composers. With André Modeste Grétry (1741–1813), César Franck (1822–1890) and Eugène Ysaÿe (1858–1931), an exceptional musical heritage lives on within the museums of the ‘Cité ardente’.

The lives and works of these three composers and performers span three centuries of intense musical activity and encompass musical genres as diverse as comic opera, symphonic music, chamber music and, in particular, the school of the great violin virtuosos.

The exhibition **When Paganini Meets Ysaÿe: The Devils’ Violins** continues its run within the permanent collection of the Grand Curtius.

The ‘César Franck’ Gallery

The ‘César Franck’ Gallery was established in 2022 at the Grand Curtius Museum, 500 metres from the composer’s birthplace, to mark the bicentenary of his birth. It brings together, for the first time anywhere in the world: the console of his Cavaillé-Coll organ (1858) from the Basilica of Sainte-Clotilde in Paris, his Erard half-grand piano (1844), and the table piano (1790) that belonged to his paternal grandmother, as well as numerous documents (diaries, accounts, photographs) and extremely rare original manuscripts.

This César Franck Centre thus complements the presence of Liège’s great composers at the heart of the city: the **Grétry Museum in Outremeuse**, and the **Ysaÿe Studio at the Curtius**, which is deliberately situated next to the César Franck Centre, thereby creating a counterpoint between the intertwined and exceptional lives of these two great 19th-century musicians.

César Franck was born in Liège on 10 December 1822. He was one of the first pupils at the Royal Conservatoire of Music in Liège. A child prodigy, the press reported, from the age of 11, on his incredible talent as a pianist and composer. In 1837, he entered the Paris Conservatoire. His numerous accolades and exceptional



View of the César Franck Hall © City of Liège – Grand Curtius

aptitude for composition, the piano and the organ attracted the attention of the musical world. He triumphed in musical salons and became a protégé of Franz Liszt, who saw in him a new Johann Sebastian Bach. His discreet and unassuming nature, combined with family frustrations, would eventually dampen his ambitions. His appointment as organist at the Cavaillé-Coll grand organ at Sainte-Clotilde (1858) allowed his talents as an improviser and performer to establish him as an exceptional master. César Franck died accidentally on 8 December 1890.



Views of the Espace César Franck © City of Liège – Grand Curtius

The Eugène Ysaÿe Studio

Eugène Ysaÿe's Art Nouveau studio, created in Brussels by Serrurier-Bovy (1858–1910), is on display at the Grand Curtius.

This unique testament to an exceptional man and an era became part of the City of Liège's collections through a bequest from Eugène Ysaÿe's heirs. Faithfully reconstructed, it is housed within the Grand Curtius's permanent exhibition.

Visitors enter the music room of the musician whose violin artistry forms the basis of the Queen Elisabeth International Music Competition. The objects adorning the studio, the books and sheet music in his library, and the style of the furniture all served as a source of inspiration for the composer. It was the place where the performer's virtuoso music resonated most vividly during his rehearsals.

His legendary generosity, his friendship and his admiration for César Franck led the latter to dedicate his *Sonata for Piano and Violin* to him and present it as a wedding gift; this piece is one of the most frequently performed works in this particular repertoire.

Eugène Ysaÿe (Liège 1858–Bruxelles 1931), a brilliant violinist adored throughout the world, was the founder of the Liège school of violin. In 1912, following years of triumphant tours, he was appointed musical adviser to Queen Elisabeth of Belgium. The competition established by the Queen, which was initially known as the 'Ysaÿe Competition', was renamed the 'Queen Elisabeth of Belgium International Music Competition' in 1951. Ysaÿe died in 1931.



Eugène Ysaÿe's Studio © City of Liège – Grand Curtius

THE PAGANINI EUROPEAN ROUTE

"The European Paganini Route takes travellers on a journey to the places that were the setting for important events in the life of Niccolò Paganini. Palaces and squares, guesthouses, hotels, concert halls and theatres, towns and churches: there is no better way to get to know Niccolò Paganini, his life and his music, than by following in his footsteps across Europe, discovering places of significance to Europe's cultural heritage in the fields of music, art and architecture. Numerous festivals in several countries are dedicated to him." ()*

Established in Genoa in 2018, the European Paganini Route was created with the aim of promoting the legacy of the famous violinist and composer Niccolò Paganini across the towns and countries he visited on his tours. It brings together European cultural institutions around the themes of music, heritage, research and intercultural dialogue. Following the official submission of its application in 2023, the project was certified in May 2026 as a 'Council of Europe Cultural Route', thereby recognising the profoundly European dimension of Paganini's life and work.

As a partner city on this route, Liège helps to bring it to life through the richness of its musical and cultural heritage. By linking places marked by Paganini's visits or influence, the Route enables each partner city to showcase its history, institutions, collections and artists. Paganini thus becomes the common thread running through a shared European heritage, whilst revealing the unique identity of each region.



LIÈGE, A UNESCO CREATIVE CITY OF MUSIC

On 31 October 2025, the City of Liège officially joined the UNESCO Creative Cities Network in the Music category, becoming the second Belgian city after Ghent to be awarded this international designation. This distinction, achieved jointly by the City of Liège and GRE-Liège in consultation with over a hundred local cultural organisations, recognises the city's exceptional historical musical heritage. The Liège metropolitan area stands out for the diversity of its soundscape, which ranges from a centuries-old classical heritage and a prestigious violin school to a dynamic contemporary creative scene. As a Creative City, Liège is committed to an ambitious action plan focused on inclusive music promotion, raising the profile of the local scene, organising a biennial songwriting competition and fostering international cooperation with other cities in the network. This title aims to make music a genuine driver of sustainable urban development, economic attractiveness and social cohesion, affirming culture as the beating heart of the Liège region.

The exhibition **When Paganini Meets Ysaÿe: The Devils' Violins**, on display at the Grand Curtius, fully embodies this dynamic by celebrating this famous school of violin playing. By creating a dialogue between the figures of Niccolò Paganini and Eugène Ysaÿe through rare instruments and exceptional manuscripts, it illustrates Liège's ability to showcase its prestigious musical heritage on the international stage.

<https://www.unesco.org/fr/creative-cities>
<https://gre-liege.be/>



(*) source : www.coe.int/fr/web/cultural-routes/european-paganini-route

THE ROYAL CONSERVATORY OF LIÈGE

Founded in 1826, the Royal Conservatoire of Liège ranks among Europe's oldest institutions of musical education. The successor to a project conceived as early as the late 18th century with the support of André-Modeste Grétry, it has embodied the excellence of musical education in Liège for two centuries.

César Franck received his early training there and became one of its first brilliant First Prize winners in piano. A few decades later, Eugène Ysaÿe laid the foundations of his art there before establishing the Franco-Belgian school of violin on the major international stages.

In 1887, the Conservatoire moved to Boulevard Piercot under the direction of Jean-Théodore Radoux. A composer, teacher and administrator, Radoux modernised the institution, founded its orchestra and contributed to the flourishing of musical life in Liège. A great admirer of Grétry, he also played a part in preserving his legacy.

Through Grétry, Franck, Ysaÿe and Radoux, the Conservatoire embodies a shared ambition: to pass on knowledge, encourage creativity and promote music beyond national borders.

<https://www.crlg.be/>



Louis Boonen and Laurent Demany, Royal Conservatoire of Liège (main façade on Boulevard Piercot), 1881–1887 © City of Liège



ORGANISATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When Paganini Meets Ysaÿe. The Devils' Violins

Exhibition From 16 October 2026 to 7 March 2027 Grand Curtius

Under the auspices of the City of Liège
A UNESCO-recognised Creative City of Music
As part of the Council of Europe's 'European Paganini Route' (EPR)

Authorities

- Willy Demeyer, Mayor of the City of Liège
- Elisabeth Fraipont, Deputy Mayor for Culture, Public Reading and the Duty to Remember, City of Liège
- Pauline Bovy, Director of the City of Liège's Museums

Exhibition Curator

- Patrick Dheur, concert pianist, composer and curator of the Grétry Museum

Honorary Committee

- In memoriam: José Van Dam, baritone, patron of the Grétry Museum and the Classical Music Centre
- Giovanni Accornero, private collector
- Jérôme Akoka, violinist, private collector
- Walter Burian, President of the Franz Liszt Society (Raiding)
- Nicola Costa, President of the 'European Paganini Route' (Genoa)
- Jean-Luc Franck, collector, descendant of the composer Niccolò Paganini
- Dominique Petta, Honorary Consul of Italy, President of the Euritalia Foundation
- Elisabeth Thausing, Chair of the Vienna Paganini Association
- Stefano Termanini, publisher, writer and private collector

Artistic and Scientific Committee

- Marie Cornaz, PhD in Musicology, Music Section, Royal Library of Belgium. Royal Academy: Full Member of the Class of Arts
- Stéphanie Fruzzetti, musicologist, Head of the Library at the Royal Conservatoire of Liège
- Pierre Guillaume, master bow-maker and expert in bows
- Mario Hossen, violinist, ambassador for the European Paganini Route

- Martine Koch, granddaughter of Henri Koch, music historian and author
- Gauthier Louppe, master luthier specialising in the making, restoration and maintenance of stringed instruments
- Mirte Maes, curator, Vleeshuis Museum (City of Antwerp)
- Pio Montanari, curator of the 'Il Canone' violin, Paganini Museum
- Luc Ponet, PhD in musicology, organist, member of 'European Cities of Historical Organs'
- Danilo Prefumo, musicologist, publisher, specialist in Paganini
- Francesca Serrati, Director of the Gallery of Modern Art (Genoa Nervi)
- Michele Trenti, Chair of the Paganini Committee of the City of Genoa
- Guy Van Waas, conductor, organist, clarinetist and teacher

Acknowledgements

The organisers would like to express their deep gratitude to the non-profit organisation Les Rendez-vous musicaux liégeois, to O.B.C. – Belgian Concert Office, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra of Liège, the Euritalia Foundation, the G.R.E. (Groupement de Redéploiement Économique du Pays de Liège), RESA, the Italian Cultural Institute, the Consulate General of Italy in Charleroi, the Consulate of Italy in Liège, the Cordaneum – the Museum of Stringed Instruments and the Violin, KBR – the Royal Library of Belgium, the Royal Museums of Art and History, the Library of the Royal Conservatoire of Liège, the Museo di Arte Moderna di Nervi (Genoa), the European Paganini Route – a Council of Europe cultural route, the Royal Chamber Orchestra of Wallonia, and the Union of Belgian Composers (UCB), for their invaluable support and contribution to the organisation of this event.

THE GRAND CURTIUS

The Museums of the City of Liège – The Grand Curtius

The Museums of the City of Liège comprise the Grand Curtius, La Boverie, the Lighting Museum (Mulum), the Grétry Museum, the Ansembourg Museum – currently undergoing renovation – and the Heritage Collections.

The Grand Curtius is an art and history museum housing collections spread across five departments over an area of more than 5,000 m²: Archaeology, Religious Art and Meuse Art, Weapons, Glass and Decorative Arts. The Glass Department is currently in storage.

Its collections comprise over 5,000 exhibited objects, drawn from a total collection of more than 200,000 items.

Thanks to the richness of its collections and the rigour of its heritage management, the Grand Curtius has established itself as a leading institution in the museum and heritage sector in Belgium.

Within its walls, visitors can explore over 7,000 years of Liège's history, set within a remarkable architectural complex. The Curtius Palace (early 17th century), the museum's iconic building, houses the collection of arms, which is world-renowned both for the quantity of items on display and for their quality.

www.grandcurtius.be

With the support of the City of Liège and the Wallonia-Brussels Federation.



PUBLICATIONS

The exhibition is accompanied by publications produced especially for the occasion, available at the Grand Curtius.

VISITOR'S GUIDE

Exhibition Highlights

The Exhibition *Highlights* focuses on the must-see works on display and provides key concepts and both historical and scientific information about them.

This visitor's guide is published in French, English, Dutch and German.

Price: €2



ACTIVITY BOOK

For children aged 6 and over, discover Paganini's musical world. Published in French, English, Dutch and German.

EDUCATIONAL PACK

'Teachers' Day' at the Museums of the City of Liège: 18 November 2026 at 2.00 pm

As part of the exhibition, the Grand Curtius is organising a 'Teachers' Day' dedicated to the 'Maestro of the Violin'. During this afternoon, you will meet the Museums' Events Department (Le Grand Curtius, La Boverie, the Heritage Collections, the Grétry Museum and the MULUM), which is responsible, amongst other things, for welcoming school groups. You will learn about the various educational programmes and be informed about the exhibitions for the 2026–2027 academic year. Of course, you will also be able to book your upcoming educational visits.

Educational pack (on request) and Teachers' Days (by registration):
animationsdesmusees@liege.be

AROUND THE EXHIBITION

A programme of concerts, talks and activities for all ages, from young children to adults, is on offer throughout the exhibition.

1. THE LIVING EXHIBITION – THE EXHIBITION'S MUSICAL JOURNEY

This international exhibition is not confined to the museum's galleries. It is complemented by a programme of musical and scientific events designed as an integral part of the visitor experience. Each concert, each lecture and each talk sheds new light on the works, instruments and manuscripts on display, creating a dialogue between heritage and live music.

Spanning the Palais Curtius and the Espace César Franck at the Grand Curtius, the Grétry Museum, La Boverie, the Grand Auditoire Montefiore and, exceptionally, the Palazzo Tursi in Genoa, this programme invites the public to follow a genuine musical itinerary linking Liège to Europe, in the spirit of the European Paganini Route, a Cultural Route of the Council of Europe.

Leading international experts are involved in this exhibition. Violinist **Mario Hossen**, Ambassador of the European Paganini Route, opens and punctuates the exhibition with several exceptional concerts, including a unique event held at the Palazzo Tursi, featuring the famous Il Sivori violin. **The Paganini Ensemble Vienna** brings the virtuoso's Viennese years to life, whilst **Giulio Ginobi** evokes, on the piano, the legacy of Romantic virtuosity.

The lectures bring together leading figures who are among the most eminent specialists in their fields. The Italian musicologist **Danilo Prefumo**, author of the definitive work on Paganini, sheds light on the virtuoso's influence on European violin schools. **Jérôme Akoka**, a collector and historian of the bow, reveals the decisive role played by the great bow-makers in the emergence of Romantic virtuosity. Finally, **Marie Cornaz**, curator of the musical collections at the Royal Library of Belgium and a member of the Royal Academy of Belgium, brings this series to a close by situating Paganini's legacy within the Belgian and European violin tradition.

The programme also features rarely performed works. **Giuseppe Nova** and **Michele Trenti** breathe new life into Paganini's manuscripts; **Amélie Debecq**, **Magali Rischette** and the composer **Andrea Talmelli** demonstrate just how much his world continues to inspire

contemporary composition; finally, **the Royal Chamber Orchestra of Wallonia** celebrates Liège's musical spirit through Grétry, Franck, Vieuxtemps, Ysaÿe, Lekeu and Rogister, whilst premiering a Belgian work by the pianist and composer **Patrick Dheur**.

The programme is not merely a complement to the exhibition: it is its living extension. The exhibits find their voice again, the manuscripts become music, the instruments come to life once more, and the historians' research enters into dialogue with the performers.

An exhibition devoted to music cannot be conceived in silence...

PROGRAMME OF CONCERTS AND MUSICAL EVENTS

WED 28 AND THU 29 OCTOBER 2026

SPECIAL CONCERT AT THE PALAZZO TURSI

Paganini Festival in Genoa • Palazzo Tursi – Genoa, Italy

As part of the Genoa Paganini Festival, a special concert is being held at the Palazzo Tursi. For the occasion, the historic Il Sivori violin, crafted by Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume and housed at the Palazzo, returns to the stage. Violinist Mario Hossen and pianist Patrick Dheur will perform, amongst other pieces, Eugène Ysaÿe's **Rêve d'enfant** on this instrument that once belonged to Paganini, as well as César Franck's Sonata for Violin and Piano on a violin by Giovanni Battista Guadagnini (Turin, c. 1749–1750), played by Mario Hossen.

SAT 21 NOVEMBER 2026 AT 8.00 PM

PIANO RECITAL

In Memory of Paganini: Chopin, Scarlatti and the Legacy of Virtuosity

Giulio Ginobi (Italy), piano

Auditorium of the Musée de La Boverie, Parc de la Boverie 3 – 4020 Liège

Born in Rome in 2013, Giulio Ginobi is one of the most outstanding young talents on the Italian piano scene. He has won numerous national and international competitions, including the Steinway & Sons Competition in Rome and the Humberto Quagliata International Competition. In 2025, he was awarded First

Prize in the Young Pianists category at the Roma International Piano Competition, one of Italy's most prestigious piano competitions.

SAT 5 DECEMBER 2026 AT 8.00 PM

CONCERT FEATURING PAGANINI'S MANUSCRIPTS

Giuseppe Nova, flute – Michele Trenti, guitar
Paganini Salon – Palais Curtius, Féronstrée 136 – 4000 Liège

Guitarist Michele Trenti and flautist Giuseppe Nova present a rarely performed repertoire, revealing a more intimate and experimental side to the Italian composer.

SAT 12 DECEMBER 2026 AT 8.00 PM

LECTURE BY DANILO PREFUMO

The influence of the French school on Paganini and of Paganini on the European schools of the 19th century

Salon Paganini – Grand Curtius, Liège
Féronstrée 136 – 4000 Liège

The Italian musicologist Danilo Prefumo, a specialist in instrumental music of the 18th and 19th centuries, offers an in-depth analysis of the influence of Paganini's technique on European violin schools in the 19th century.

FRI 15 JANUARY 2027 AT 8.00 PM

CONCERT BY THE PAGANINI ENSEMBLE VIENNA

Vienna 1828: Paganini's European breakthrough

Grand Auditoire Montefiore, 33 Rue Saint-Gilles – 4000 Liège

Entitled '*Vienna 1828: Paganini's European Revelation*', this concert pays tribute to the virtuoso's famous performances in Vienna from 29 March 1828 onwards, events that proved decisive in establishing his international reputation.

The Paganini Ensemble Vienna, appointed Ambassador of the European Paganini Route, is dedicated to preserving and promoting this exceptional musical heritage.

Joining violinist Mario Hossen are Gérard Caussé (viola), Liliana Kehayova (cello) and Alexander Swete (guitar).

SAT 30 JANUARY 2027 AT 8.00 PM

PAGANINI INSPIRATION CONCERT

Amélie Debecq, flute – Magali Rischette, guitar

Grand Curtius Auditorium, Féronstrée 136 – 4000 Liège

Organised in collaboration with the Belgian Composers' Union, this concert brings together contemporary composition and historical heritage. New works, dedicated to Paganini or inspired by his world, are presented for flute and guitar, featuring guest Italian composer Andrea Talmelli.

SAT 13 FEBRUARY 2027 AT 8.00 PM

LECTURE BY JÉRÔME AKOKA

From Tourte to Paganini: the golden age of the bow

The technical evolution of the bow and the musical revolution (1780–1830)

Paganini Salon – Palais Curtius, 136 Féronstrée – 4000 Liège

Violinist, collector and specialist in the history of the bow, Jérôme Akoka, presents a lecture devoted to the bows that profoundly transformed the art of violin playing between the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

A recognised expert in chamber music and the history of the bow, he sheds light on the evolution of instrument-making during the era of François Tourte and its impact on performance practices, paving the way for the Romantic virtuosity epitomised by Paganini.

SAT 20 FEBRUARY 2027 AT 8.00 PM

CONCERT BY THE ROYAL CHAMBER ORCHESTRA OF WALLONIA

The musical soul of Liège: from bow to keyboard, heritage and new works

Grand Auditoire Montefiore, 33 Rue Saint-Gilles – 4000 Liège

Conducted by Jean-Frédéric Molard, this evening celebrates the leading figures of the musical traditions of Liège and Belgium. Works by Eugène Ysaÿe, César Franck, André Grétry and Guillaume Lekeu offer a rich and representative overview of the region's musical heritage. The concert also features the new *Piano Concerto for the left hand alone, the right hand alone and both hands together, Op. 47*, performed by its composer, Patrick Dheur.

SAT 6 MARCH 2027 AT 8.00 PM

LECTURE BY MARIE CORNAZ

CLOSING SESSION: *Eugène Ysaÿe inspired by Paganini*

Salon Paganini – Palais Curtius, 136
Féronstrée – 4000 Liège

The exhibition's closing event features musicologist Marie Cornaz, curator of the music collections at the Royal Library of Belgium and a member of the Royal Academy of Belgium. Her lecture offers an overview of the historical, aesthetic and heritage issues explored throughout the exhibition, placing Paganini's legacy within the context of the Belgian and European violin-playing tradition.

A programme organised by the non-profit organisation Rendez-vous Musicaux liégeois in partnership with the Museums of the City of Liège

PRICE: €15 PER CONCERT
€10 PER LECTURE
BY BOOKING ONLY:
WWW.RENDEZVOUSMUSICAUXLIEGEOIS.COM

2. EVENTS CALENDAR FOR THE EVENTS DEPARTMENT OF THE MUSEUMS OF THE CITY OF LIÈGE

19 OCTOBER 2026 – 23 OCTOBER 2026

'In the Footsteps of Paganini' workshop

A week full of discoveries to spark curiosity, foster creativity and explore Liège's musical heritage in a fun and interactive way.

On the programme: creative workshops inspired by the works in the exhibition, games and challenges in the museum's galleries, meetings with musicians, exploring iconic venues in Liège's musical life, and discussions with craftspeople involved in the making and performance of music.

Course for children aged 6 to 12

From 9.00 am to 4.30 pm (childcare available from 8.30 am until 5.00 pm) Price: €80 per child (insurance and materials included)

31 OCTOBER 2026

The Devils' Parade

To mark Halloween, the little devils take over the museum for a festive and creative afternoon, echoing the exhibition dedicated to Paganini, **When Paganini Meets Ysaÿe: The Devils' Violins**. Families are invited to make their own little devil masks before being swept away by a reading from a children's picture book where the devil pops up in the stories. Then it's time for a joyful musical parade through the exhibition! A fun event to celebrate Halloween in a different way, combining creativity, music and the discovery of the artworks.

From 2.00 pm to 5.30 pm

An afternoon of activities for children aged 5 to 12, accompanied by an adult

€10 for all the activities / per child accompanied by a parent

31 OCTOBER 2026

'Paganini' Night

Le Grand Curtius is hosting a Halloween evening that's as festive as it is spine-tingling, centred around Niccolò Paganini's cult film. A screening hosted by the Pirate Movie Club.

Since 2012, Caroline Poisson has been presenting one of her pop culture classics every month – or more often if there's enough interest – and in French, because it's often through these dubbed versions that the lines have become unforgettable. Once the screening has started, silence is no longer the order of the day: we react, we comment, we

cheer on the heroes and heroines, we boo the villains and we experience the film together. Here, talking is not only allowed... but strongly encouraged.

To make the evening even more festive, audience members are invited to come in fancy dress. Devils, witches, damned musicians, creatures of the night or pop culture heroes: all ideas are welcome to celebrate Halloween in a friendly atmosphere, combining genre cinema, music and the world of fantasy.

This film night also celebrates the birthday of Niccolò Paganini, born on 27 October, a legendary figure whose mysterious aura continues to inspire the darkest tales.

From 8.00 pm Admission: €5

8 NOVEMBER 2026

Children's tour: 'Paganini and Ysaÿe'

A family-friendly immersion into the fascinating world of Paganini and Ysaÿe, through violins, manuscripts and original paintings. This musical journey offers the chance to discover the lives and extraordinary tours of these virtuosos and to learn about the history of the violin. A tour organised by the Events Department of the Museums of the City of Liège and led by Art&Fact, accompanied by musicologist Stéphanie Fruzzetti.

For children aged 6 to 12, accompanied by an adult. At 2.00 pm

€10 per adult and €6 per child under 12

13 NOVEMBER 2026 – 13 DECEMBER 2026

HELMO exhibition on Paganini

Following a project carried out in partnership with students from HELMo Mode and the Liège-based second-hand shop Beau Bizarre, the Grand Curtius is presenting an exhibition of original designs inspired by the world of **When Paganini Meets Ysaÿe: The Devils' Violins**. Using upcycled clothing and textiles, the students have devised contemporary designs that echo the figures, myths and musical imagery

surrounding Paganini. Combining creative reuse, aesthetic exploration and a dialogue with heritage, these creations exemplify the convergence of fashion, craftsmanship and the history of music. This exhibition showcases the talent of emerging designers whilst offering a fresh perspective on the fascinating world of the most famous of all violinists.

Grand Curtius Glass Gallery

13 November to 13 December 2026 Free

15 NOVEMBER 2026

Themed tour: 'Paganini and Ysaÿe'

Discover the musical history of Paganini and Ysaÿe through their instruments, manuscripts and original works. Explore the lives of these virtuosos, their European tours and their influence on violin technique. A rich journey to understand their artistic and musical legacy. A tour organised by the Events Department of the Museums of the City of Liège and led by Art&Fact, accompanied by musicologist Stéphanie Fruzzetti.

At 11.00 am

€10

BOOKING FOR ACTIVITIES AT WWW.GRANDCURTIUS.BE/FR/VOTRE-VISITE/BILLETTERIE

INFO: ANIMATIONSDESMUSEES@LIEGE.BE
+ 32 (0)4 221 68 32 – 68 37

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Exhibition: *When Paganini Meets Ysaÿe. The Devils' Violins*

From 16 October 2026 to 7 March 2027, Grand Curtius

Féronstrée, 136 – 4000 Liège
+32 (0)4 221 68 17

www.grandcurtius.be

Facebook: Legrandcurtius

Monday to Sunday: 10.00 am – 6.00 pm, closed on Tuesdays

Closed on 1 January, 1 May, 1 November, 2 November, 11 November and 25 December.

The Grand Curtius is accessible to people with reduced mobility.

Shop

Cafeteria with terraces (closed on Mondays and Tuesdays)

PRICES

Single admission price granting access to the exhibition 'When Paganini Meets Ysaÿe: The Devils' Violins' and to the Grand Curtius's permanent collection.

Adult: €10 Adult group: €8

Senior citizens (over 65), senior groups: €6

Article 27: €1.25

Free admission:

- For those under 26.
- For holders of the MuseumPassMusée.
- The first Sunday of the month for everyone.
- For teachers and accompanied school groups based in the City of Liège, and for students at the Saint-Luc schools and the Académie de Liège.

CONTACTS

**Exhibition curator
Patrick Dheur**

Concert pianist. Composer. Head of the 'César Franck-Eugène Ysaÿe-André M. Grétry' Music Centre

patrick.dheur@liege.be
dheur.obc@gmail.com

Press | Grand Curtius: permanent collections and exhibitions

Sandrine LORIAUX

Communications Officer | Grand Curtius & Museums of the City of Liège

+32 (04) 221 91 80
sandrine.loriaux@liege.be

Sara SCHEFFERS

Communications Officer | Grand Curtius & Liège City Museums

+32 (04) 221 68 43
sara.scheffers@liege.be

Elisabeth FRAIPONT

Deputy Mayor for Culture, Public Reading and the Duty to Remember, City of Liège

Féronstrée 92 – 4000 Liège
echevin.fraipont@liege.be



GRAND CURTIUS
Féronstrée 136 - 4000 Liège
www.grandcurtius.be
Facebook : LeGrandCurtius

