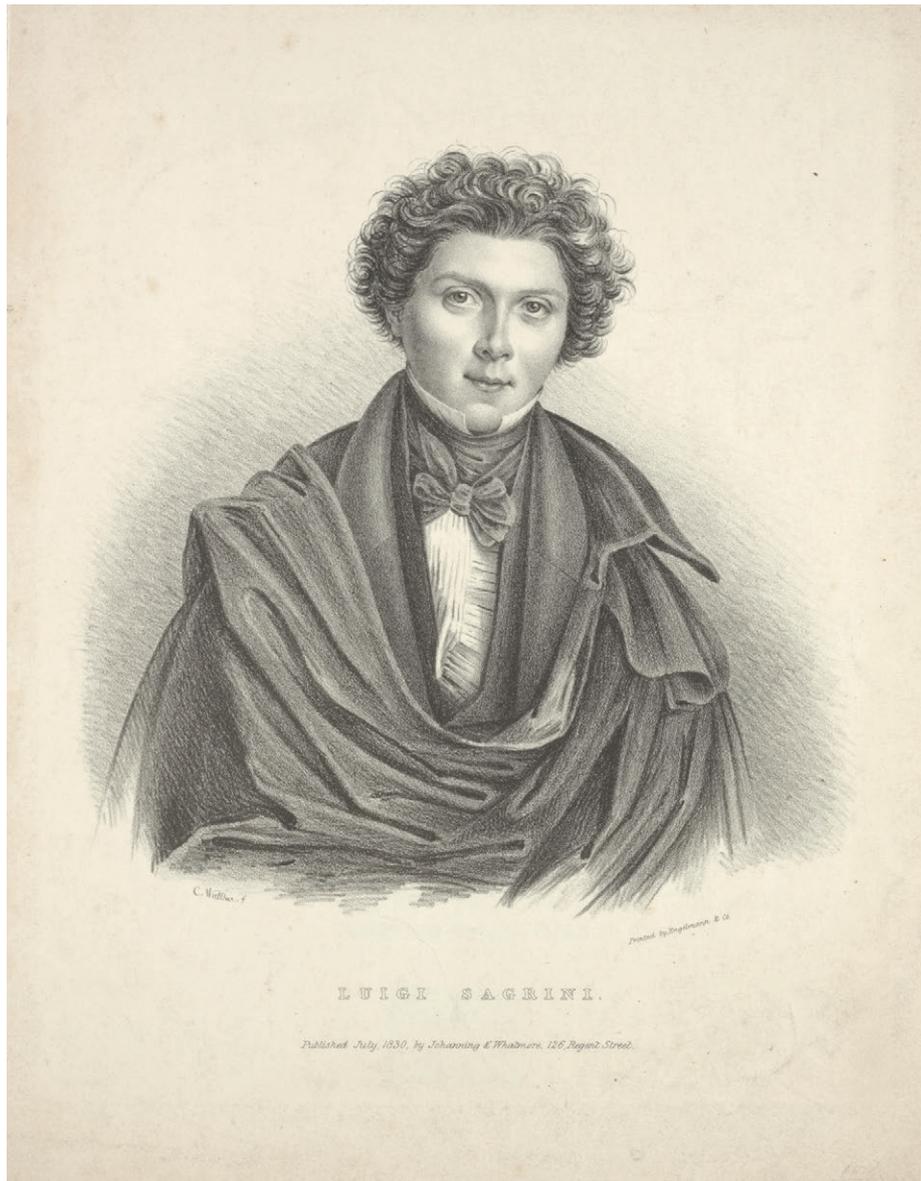


In Search of Segrini

Bernard Lewis and Robert Coldwell



Luigi P. Segrini

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INTRODUCTION



I first became aware of the name Sagrini in September 1962, when I was given an old, battered and neglected guitar by my father who had bought it at a local antique and house clearance auction in our home town of Shrewsbury. He paid the princely sum of one pound for it and gave it to me as part present for my twenty-first birthday. I wasn't too pleased about it at the time because of the condition it was in, so I stored it in a cupboard for several months. At the time I was mostly interested in Rock and Roll, in fact I was the singer in a local band called the Deltas. We were deemed to be the leading band in the county of Shropshire and as such frequently acted as a support band for visiting famous British bands. The most notable of these was the Beatles who came to Shrewsbury in December 1962 to promote their first hit single "Love Me Do," together with songs from their first album. Looking back, it was quite a memorable experience to have shared the stage with the Beatles who went on to become the most successful and famous band in the world.

Eventually my taste in music began to change. A friend who knew I liked guitar music gave me an album by the great classical guitarist Andrés Segovia entitled *An Evening With Segovia*. I was so impressed by the beauty of the music and the wonderful sound that Segovia produced from the guitar I decided to try and learn the classical guitar. The only guitar I had at the time was the old guitar stored in my cupboard. When I retrieved it from the cupboard I soon realised the sorry state it was in and that it was going to need a lot of careful restoration. The face of the guitar was absolutely black with the grime that had accumulated over many years of neglect. It had the original gut strings which were beyond use. One of the ebony tuning pegs was missing and the ebony bridge was warped which would have to be removed and straightened. Several mother-of-pearl dots around the sound hole were also missing together with several frets. I noticed on the inside of the sound hole a small stained label with the words "Guitare à la Sagrini en 1825."

During this time I had developed a growing interest in chess, having been taught by my father. I determined that if I was going to beat him I would have to read books on chess, so I paid a visit to the local library where I found many books on the subject. After scanning the titles for a few minutes I noticed a very slim volume squeezed in between two larger books with the unlikely title *The Story*

of The Spanish Guitar by A. P. Sharpe. I pulled the book out and began to look through the pages. It had a short history about the classical guitar and various photos of famous guitarists as well as short biographies. I was surprised to find a page devoted to "Luigi Sagrini" the name inside my guitar. It was as a result of finding this small volume that I began to take an interest in his life without realizing how many years of research it would take. For many years it was extremely slow progress until the advent of the computer and the World Wide Web which revolutionized my research. Having realized that Sagrini was a famous guitar virtuoso and composer I set out to discover as much as I could about his life and how the guitar came to be in Shrewsbury. It was at least a year (1963) before I visited the auctioneers to see if I could trace the origin of the guitar. On arriving at their offices I was informed that the company had recently moved to new premises within the town and had destroyed many of their old records. However, when I showed the receipt for the guitar to the manager he recognized it as part of a sale of items belonging to Cronkhill House, which is part of the Attingham estate belonging to the Hill family, a very important aristocratic Shropshire family. I decided to visit Cronkhill with my father only to find that the house was empty. There was a caretaker in the grounds who informed us that the house had remained unoccupied for sometime and that he was unable to help with our inquiries about the guitar.

As recently as May 2017 I decided to try again to establish the origin of the guitar by visiting Attingham Hall, the seat of the landowners who owned Cronkhill.

Today it is owned by the National Trust and I was fortunate to arrange a meeting with the Research and Interpretation Officer, Saraid Jones, who was kind enough to give me a fairly detailed history of the Hill family who had occupied both Attingham Hall and Cronkhill between the eighteenth, and twentieth centuries. The part of their history that is most relevant to my research begins with Richard Noel Hill the 5th Lord Berwick (1800–1861).

Richard Noel Hill was the nephew of William the 3rd Lord Berwick, who took on the post of George IV's Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to the King of Sardinia, which he held until 1824. The city of Turin in Piedmont was the de facto capital of the House of Savoy. Noel's uncle, William Hill, seems to have been an influential figure in Noel's early adulthood. William was a



Chapter 1



THE SAGRINI FAMILY

Luigi Perret Sagrini was born in Chambéry, Piedmont in 1809, which at the time was controlled by France before being returned to the House of Savoy in 1815. Early newspaper accounts of Sagrini refer to him as the “little Savoyarde” and later generally refer to him as “Italian.” In the 1851 and 1861 London census reports he is marked as being from “Italy” and then in the 1871 report is marked as being from “Milan.” This information made it difficult to determine his true birth location. Fortunately, the discovery of his British naturalization application from 1845 included a correct birth location and led to further discoveries of his extended family [see the Family Records appendix for the complete naturalization document]. This application was signed by Luigi, and therefore is assumed to be the most correct information on his birth date and location.

The naturalization document states that he is the “subject of his Majesty the King of Sardinia.” Due to the year of his birth he would have been a French citizen, but at the time of his naturalization the area was controlled by the House of Savoy in Turin. Chambéry was ceded to France in 1860.

Although his birth record has not been located in Chambéry, he was likely born as Louis and not Luigi. He

did not start using the name Luigi in concerts and publications until the late 1820s. Note that in the naturalization application his name is written as Louis Perret Sagrini and he signs as Luigi P. Sagrini.

Little is known of the musical background of Luigi’s father other than frequent references to him in newspaper reviews of Luigi’s early concerts. It is clear that his father, also a guitarist, often performed with him from the earliest concert in 1817 until their arrival in England. Newspapers usually referred to him as “Signor Sagrini” or just “the father.” Four documents have been discovered which reveal his full name as Jean Baptiste Jules “Giulio” Gabriel Sagrini. The documents are: the 11 December 1822 birth record of his son Italo Augusto Sagrini, the 22 January 1842 marriage record of his son Luigi Perret Sagrini to Margaret Mair Paterson in London, the 8 October 1850 marriage record of his son Publio Scipion Sagrini to Marie Eugénie Zoé Duclos in Bayonne, France, and his 17 September 1863 death record in Clairac, France [see the Family Records appendix for the complete documents]. These documents have allowed the tracing of the activities of Sagrini’s father in his later years and the rest of the extended family.

*That your Memorialist was
born in the Year 1809 at Chambéry in
Piedmont and is a Subject of his Majesty
the King of Sardinia.*

*That your Memorialist came to
England in the Year 1829 and has ever
since resided in this Country and is a
Professor of Music. —*

*And your Memorialist
will ever pray &c
Luigi P. Sagrini*

Naturalisation Papers: Sagrini, Louis Perret, from Piedmont. Certificate 198 issued 30 July 1845. The National Archives, reference HO 1/19/198.



FIRST CONCERTS

The earliest information regarding Sagrini's concert career is when only 9 years old he gave a concert on 31 August 1817 in Chambéry, the city of his birth, as reported in the *Journal de Savoie*. As Sagrini was born in 1809, it is possible that he was actually only 8 years old at the time.

We attended the Guitar Concert given on Sunday by the young Louis Sagrino, aged nine. We were struck by the advantage that this child draws from a naturally ungrateful instrument, in which one can hardly admire any merit other than that of the difficulty overcome. The guitar is not very suitable for concerts; the treble sounds are meager, and the bass strings are not in proportion to the others. However, it goes well enough with two instruments, or three at most, such as the violin, the flute and the viola; but its real merit lies in the harmony and accompaniment of the voice; its melancholic chords are suitable above all for romance. To draw from it sounds which have any expression, it takes a great deal of nerve; so we were surprised by what the young virtuoso's little fingers are already doing, playing with remarkable ease and rapidity on the difficult neck of his instrument: he succeeds very well in harmonic sounds. This young artist deserves encouragement; and we confidently predict that with hard work he will one day be of great strength.¹

— Nous avons assisté au Concert de Guitare donné dimanche par le jeune Louis Sagrino, âgé de neuf ans. Nous avons été frappés du parti que cet enfant tire d'un instrument naturellement ingrat, où l'on ne peut guères admirer d'autre mérite que celui de la difficulté vaincue. La guitare est peu propre au concert; les sons aigus en sont maigres, et les cordes basses ne sont pas en proportion des autres. Toutefois elle se marie assez bien avec deux instrumens, ou trois tout au plus, tels que le violon, la flûte et l'alto; mais son vrai mérite est dans l'harmonie et l'accompagnement de la voix; ses accords mélancoliques conviennent surtout à la romance. Pour en tirer des sons qui aient quelque expression, il faut beaucoup de nerf; aussi avons-nous été surpris de ce que font déjà les petits doigts du jeune virtuose, qui se jouent avec une aisance et une rapidité remarquables sur le manche difficile de son instrument: il réussit très-bien dans les sons harmoniques. Ce jeune artiste mérite des encouragemens; et nous prédisons avec assurance qu'au moyen du travail, il sera un jour d'une grande force.

LENT 1820 – TURIN

He appeared in concert at Teatro Carignano in Turin during Lent in 1820, with the acclaimed clarinetist Jose Avelino Canongia.² Sagrini performed a series of variations by Mauro Giuliani, the opus is unknown. Sagrini would have actually been only 11 years old at the time.

The little Savoyarde, Signor Sagrino, around 14 years old, was heard with applause in the last concert by Mr. C. [Canongia] with variations for the guitar by Giuliani.³

Concerte während dieser Fasten, im Teatro Carignano. Signor Canongia, Portugiese, Klarinetist, gab deren zwey. Er ist Herr über sein Instrument, vorzüglich was den Ansatz anbetrifft (piano; forte, guten Ton und ausserordentliche Sicherheit in den höchsten Tönen), hat grosse Fertigkeit, aber nicht genug Rundung in den Passagen, woran mir sein vierter Finger (beyder Hände) Schuld zu seyn scheint. Trüge er nicht blos seine eigenen Compositionen vor, so würden wahrscheinlich sein Geschmack und Ausdruck noch mehr wirken. Wie viele vortreffliche Virtuosen arbeiten wider sich selbst als Componisten! — Doch spielte er ausser den erwähnten eigenen Compositionen — Violinvariationen von Rode auf der Klarinette. Der kleine Savoyarde, Sign. Sagrino, etwa 14 Jahr alt, liess sich in dem letzten Concerte des Hrn. C. mit Variationen für die Guitarre von Giuliano mit Beyfall hören.

The *Harmonicon* of May 1824 repeats information from the 24 March 1824 *Le Moniteur universel*, stating that the young Sagrini “at the court of Turin astonished and charmed the most distinguished connoisseurs, and the same effect was reproduced at Paris.” His appearance at the Court was most likely in 1820 as this is the only year Sagrini is known to have performed in Turin. His first mention in England in the *Harmonicon* being for such a distant concert shows just how much impact he was having within the international musical world, even at such a young age.

It is more than reasonable to assume that Richard (Noel) and his uncle William would have attended this concert, as the Court of Turin was their place of residence at this time. Richard (Noel) would have been twenty and serving under his uncle William as his personal secretary. Both being musical it is possible that based at the Royal Court of Turin in 1820 they would have been interested to see Canongia, a virtuoso on the clarinet at the Teatro Carignano in Turin and also Sagrini who performed in the same concert. It may well have been at this concert Richard (Noel) developed his interest in the clarinet.

MARCH 1821 – SWITZERLAND

In 1821 Sagrini was in Lausanne, arriving at some point prior to March, according to an article on 9 March in *Gazette de Lausanne*. No concert announcements have been found, but from this article it seems certain he performed at least once.