Giuseppe Tartini – Devil’s Trill Sonata (Mutter) [1999]

1. Sonata for Violin and Continuo in G minor, B. g5 - "Il trillo del diavolo" - 1. Larghetto affettuoso 2. Sonata for Violin and Continuo in G minor, B. g5 - "Il trillo del diavolo" - 2. Allegro 3. Sonata for Violin and Continuo in G minor, B. g5 - "Il trillo del diavolo" - 3. Andante - Allegro 4. Sonata for Violin and Continuo in G minor, B. g5 - "Il trillo del diavolo" - 4. Allegro assai
Trondheim Soloists Anne-Sophie Mutter - violin & conductor

Tartini's Le trille du diable (The Devil's Trill) first appeared in print in 1798, 28 years after the composer's death. A legend surrounding the piece either is derived from its nickname or gave rise to it. Supposedly, Tartini took refuge in a monastery after a secret marriage to one of his students. While sleeping at the monastery, Tartini had a dream in which he asked the devil to play the violin. The devil responded by performing a sonata. When Tartini awoke, he composed a sonata for violin in imitation of that played by the devil in his dream. In one version of the legend Tartini even negotiates a contract with the devil.

Tartini was a prolific composer who wrote hundreds of trio sonatas, violin sonatas, and concertos for the violin and other instruments. In his concertos he followed the formal principles of Vivaldi but wrote music that showcased his formidable technique. In his sonatas, all movements are in the same key, and binary form is clear and predominant.

The music connected with the sonata's nickname occurs at the very end, but the full sonata is a four-movement work with fairly conventional features for the most part. As Charles Burney (1726-1814) noted, Tartini's style changed around 1744 from "extremely difficult to graceful and expressive." This is evident in the very opening of The Devil's Trill. Tartini stresses a falling half step in the first melody, a slow, contemplative theme in 12/8 time. The melody is periodic, moving to the dominant in the middle then back to the tonic. Variations of the theme ensue, stressing the dotted figure from the first beat of the theme. Several deceptive cadences extend

the central part of the movement before a varied return to the theme. The next movement, an Allegro, begins with a jagged idea that outlines a G minor triad. In a bouncy 2/4 time, the main theme is fast and highly decorated with grace notes and trills. The entire movement is repeated. A brief slow movement provides contrast with its cantabile melody and acts more as an introduction to the Allegro finale than as a self-contained movement. Repeated notes again outline the tonic triad at the beginning of the last movement. This dissolves into a transition with a repeated, modulatory figure in the solo violin over increasingly intense accompaniment from the continuo. This leads to a new, slow theme, in which chromatic alterations touch on G major and the dominant. The rest of the movement consists of alternations between these two themes until a bravura cadenza begins with trills that outline the main theme; this cadenza is the source of the sonata's nickname. The trills are very difficult, for the performer is required to trill on one string while performing rapidly moving notes on another. After the lengthy cadenza, the continuo joins for the last few, highly dramatic measures. ---John Palmer, Rovi

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