
Analysis Of The Movies: Soloist Vs the Devil's Violinist

Both films, *The Soloist* and *The Devil's Violinist* are about actual musicians although living in different centuries. While both movies focus on the emotional lives of these two musicians, they approach the subject from very different perspectives. *The Soloist* is a realistic portrayal of events surrounding Nathaniel Ayers, while *The Devil's Violinist* uses the clichéd story of selling your soul to the devil to achieve fame and prominence.

Nathaniel Ayers was a talented musician (bass, cello and violin) who had a promising career ahead of him. While studying at Julliard he collapsed under the stress and had a psychological breakdown and ended homeless on the streets of Los Angeles. Ultimately his condition was diagnosed and he responded to medication and was able to have a reasonably normal life after many years of hardship. He achieved stability due to the support and understanding of friends, in particular journalist Steve Lopez who took up his cause and eventually told his story. Under care, Ayer's was eventually able to live a life as a functioning musician and member of society.

Paganini was an Italian violinist and composer in the early 1800's. He wrote music that was revolutionary for the time and would take the world years to catch up to his harmonic and melodic complexities. While not portrayed in the movie, Paganini suffered from many emotional disorders and contracted syphilis, which eventually led to his death. Given the time of his life, one cannot accurately diagnose his mental disorders, but clearly the movie attempts to portray his many obsessions, abuses and addictions. The film could not realistically address and or diagnose his condition as we could today. In this case, the director/writer chose to focus on ideas of the time that supernatural (satanic) forces were in effect to explain his abnormal psychological behaviors.

It's not a stretch to draw the conclusion that with great talent frequently come mental health issues. Statistically musicians have a very high rate of depression. Musicians think in a different language; one that is much more connected to emotions than to logical or rational thought. Perhaps because of this, musicians have a propensity for emotional disorders. Great musicians are consumed by their work and the drive can be harmful and lead to psychological issues. Fortunately, people understand this now and there is much greater acceptance and help available than in Paganini's day and even during Ayer's college years, which weren't that long ago. Had Paganini lived today, perhaps he would have received medical care so that he too could have lived a longer, happier and more prolific life.

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