



Pablo SARASATE

Zigeunerweisen

Pablo de Sarasate (10 March 1844 – 20 September 1908) was a Spanish violin virtuoso and composer. The legend goes that after seeing his father – an artillery bandmaster – struggle with a difficult passage for a long time, a 5-year-old Sarasate picked up the violin and played it perfectly. He would go on to give his first public concert in A Coruña at the age of eight. A wealthy patron was so impressed by the performance that he provided funding for Sarasate to study in Madrid, where he gained the favor of Queen Isabella II. At 12, he was sent to study at the Paris Conservatoire, and at 17, Sarasate had won first prize at the Premier Prix, the Conservatoire's highest honour. His meteoric rise continued, as audiences were drawn to his direct, pure virtuosity – free of the sentimental touch of many other violinists. To display his technical prowess, Sarasate would perform his own, highly difficult show-pieces. Of his music, playwright and music critic Bernard Shaw once said “though there are many composers of music for the violin, [Sarasate] is one of the few composers of violin music.” Aside from being admired by audiences and critics, Sarasate was highly respected by other composers, and the Spanish flavour of his music influenced many (in fact, both Édouard Lalo's *Symphonie Espagnole* and Camille Saint-Saëns' *Introduction et Rondo Capriccioso* were written for Sarasate and dedicated to him). In addition to his own compositions, Sarasate also made arrangements of other composers' works for violin, and even composed sets of variations drawn from operas familiar to his audiences, such as Verdi's *La forza del destino*, and Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. Despite spending most of his life touring around the world, Sarasate returned to his hometown, Pamplona, each year for the San Fermín festival. He passed away in France in 1908, and his two Stradivari are now owned by the conservatories of Paris and Madrid.

Zigeunerweisen (Gypsy Airs), Op. 20 was written in 1878 and premiered the same year in Germany. While the piece is technically in one movement, it can be divided into four sections. Clearly influenced by gypsy music and Franz Liszt's foray into it, the final section of Sarasate's piece quotes Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 13 (1847)*, which itself traces the traditional Hungarian folk dance, csárdás. While originally composed for violin and orchestra, Sarasate also made an arrangement with piano accompaniment, which is the version heard on Sarasate's own recording of the piece in 1904 (accompanied by Juan Manén, a fellow Spanish violinist and composer). Since the recording was done in the early days of the technology, the record omits the 3rd section due to time constraints. Nonetheless, after hearing Sarasate's playing, the piece has become a favourite for violin virtuosos to record as a show-piece for their own abilities.

The first section (*Moderato*) acts as an introduction, with the violin imposing a virtuosic rendition on the brooding, majestic chords of the orchestra. This meter during this section is not well-established, giving the violinist lots of room to deliver blistering passages at their own pace.

The second section (*Lento*) introduces a more structured meter, with the accompaniment providing a more constant hushed homophonic pulse. However, despite a pair of 4-bar melodic phrases, the violin continues to display an improvisational quality, with difficult passages involving flying spiccato and ricochet bowings breaking up and ornamenting the more recognizable melodic fragments.

In the third section (*Un poco più lento*), the muted soloist plays a melancholic melody with the commonly heard “reverse-applied dotted note”, the romantic era's version of the “Mannheim sigh”. This section is very brief and provides a brief respite before the ensuing blistering dance.

The final section (*Allegro molto vivace*) jumps into a very rapid Hungarian folk dance called the csárdás. Directly quoting Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 13*, the gypsy rhythms are accentuated in a way not previously heard in the piece. Despite the ongoing virtuosity throughout the piece, this section seems to be much more measured and prepared than the previous, seemingly improvised passages, with the solo part involving a variety of difficult techniques, including long spiccato runs, double stops, artificial harmonics and left-hand pizzicato.