

PRELUDE

SEPTEMBER 2024 • MASTERWORKS #1



HARTFORD
SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA

Prokofiev 5 & Peter – September 27 – 29, 2024

As we honor the opening of the 81st season of the Hartford Symphony Orchestra, we are proud to recognize two more important HSO anniversaries: the 20th anniversary of Leonid Sigal's tenure as Concertmaster, and the 30th anniversary of our Assistant Principal Second Violin, Jaroslav Lis. What better way to celebrate than with a violin duet, featuring two brilliant musicians, performing a piece created by another master of the violin, Pablo de Sarasate.



Sarasate

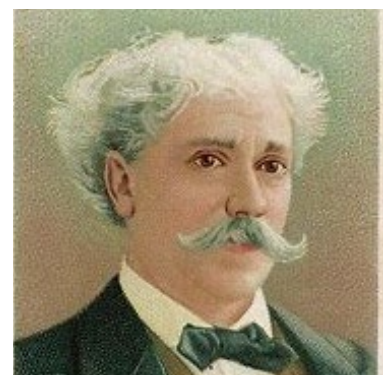
At the age of 33, Sarasate, a world-famous violinist, embarked on a U.S. tour that included Boston, Philadelphia, New York City, Baltimore, Washington, DC, Chicago, Cincinnati, St. Louis and San Francisco. On February 20, 1877, as part of that tour, Sarasate performed in Hartford's Allyn Hall.¹ At that time, all of the cities listed, including Hartford, were major cultural centers, and Sarasate performed to enthusiastic audiences, who appreciated his virtuosic skills. We know that Mark Twain made his home in Hartford from 1874 to 1891, so we can easily imagine that Mark Twain was in the audience for what was surely a thrilling performance of the world's most famous violin virtuoso of the time.

Originally named Martín Melitón Sarasate y Navascuéz, Pablo de Sarasate was born on March 10, 1844, in Pamplona, Spain, in the province of

¹ • Allyn Hall, a notable performance venue that opened in 1856, was a space for cultural performances as well as political gatherings. On January 10, 1883, Frederick Douglass appeared there as a featured speaker.

Navarre, a city made famous by the annual San Fermin festival and the “running of the bulls,” a celebration which dates back to the 17th century. Sarasate's father, Don Miguel Sarasate, was a military bandmaster and part-time violinist. At age five, Sarasate began violin lessons with his father. According to one story, a five-year-old Sarasate shocked his father when he picked up a violin and effortlessly played the very passage that his father had been struggling to master. While we cannot verify the accuracy of the story, we do know that Sarasate was an exceptional child prodigy. He gave his first public concert at the age of eight, and won the admiration of Countess Espoz y Mina, who gave the child an annual allowance to enable him to continue violin studies in Madrid, where he was introduced to the royal family and became a favorite of Queen Isabella II. After just a few years, the best teachers in Madrid told the family that their son had exceeded anything they could teach him. They urged the parents to send their child to Paris to study.

At the age of twelve, accompanied by his mother, Sarasate set off on a train journey to Paris. As they crossed



Sarasate

MASTERWORKS
SPONSORS

ROBERTS
FOUNDATION
FOR
THE ARTS

The Elizabeth M. and Harriette
M. Landon Foundation

the border into France, his mother tragically died of a heart attack and the doctor called to attend to her determined that Sarasate was suffering from cholera. Sarasate was nursed back to health by a Spanish nobleman (whose name appears to have been lost to history) and, upon his recovery, Sarasate finally arrived at the Paris Conservatory, where he began violin instruction with Jean-Delphin Alard. In 1857, at the age of 13, he won the Conservatory's first prize in violin, and in 1859, won another prize in harmony. In 1861, he won first prize in the prestigious Premier Prix in Paris. Although his teachers warned him against plunging into the whirl of concert life too soon, in 1861, at just 17 years of age, Sarasate embarked on his first international tour.



Sarasate

As he began his career as a performer, Sarasate played established violin works such as concerti by Mozart, Beethoven and Mendelssohn. But there was something unique in his style, that, according to famed Hungarian violinist and teacher, Carl Flesch, was:

“... distinguished by sweetness and purity of tone, produced with a frictionless bow stroke, and colored by a shallow, fast vibrato. His technique was assured, his intonation was precise especially in high positions... and his whole manner of playing was so effortless as to appear casual.”

His performing style was in stark contrast to that of Joseph Joachim, the famed German violinist of the same era. In 1867, Sarasate embarked on his first of many tours of the Western hemisphere. That concert tour, from New York to Argentina, lasted until 1871. Although he was impressed by Steinway Hall in New York City, he did not like being in New York, writing:

“New York is a miserable city, as are its people. Everyone lives only for business; anything else is just a hobby. The average American is the most sullen and unpleasant person that one can meet – not the kind of person one would wish to associate with.”

Sarasate launched into what became a lifetime of concert touring that brought him great acclaim and recognition as one of the world's premier violin virtuosos. He was a frequent performer throughout Europe, toured Asia and South Africa, and toured North and South America twice. By the 1880s, Sarasate was one of the most famous musicians in the world. As his reputation grew, great composers dedicated their works in his honor, including Max Bruch (*Concerto No. 2* and *Scottish Fantasy*, although the premiere of *Scottish Fantasy* was performed by Joseph Joachim), Camille Saint-Saëns (*Introduction and Whimsical Rondo*, plus his First and Third violin concerti), Henryk Wieniawski (his Second violin concerto) and Antonin Dvôrák (*Mazurek*).

Sarasate never married. It is believed that early in his life, he was cast aside by a young woman who had initially agreed to take part in an arranged marriage, and that Sarasate never recovered from the rejection. There was no shortage of female admirers, however, and one married woman kept a diary of love letters to Sarasate that stretched over a period of 18 years.

Although Sarasate returned to Pamplona for the annual festival, he identified primarily as French, and when he was not touring, he lived in an apartment in Paris decorated by American-born James McNeill Whistler, one of the most famous artists of the day. Whistler's portrait of Sarasate, *Arrangement in Black*, became one of the most iconic images of the violinist. In addition, Sarasate purchased a vacation home in the French seaside town of Biarritz, which he named Villa Navarra, no doubt a tribute to his origins in the Spanish province of Navarre. Perhaps because of his early bout with cholera, Sarasate suffered



Portrait of Sarasate by James McNeill Whistler

from chronic breathing problems. On September 20, 1908, at his beautiful Villa Navarre, Sarasate died of bronchitis. He was just 64 years of age.

Today, Sarasate is remembered not only as a performer but a composer of virtuoso violin repertoire. His *Zigeunerweisen*, written in 1878, was his first major work to draw successfully on his Spanish heritage. That was followed by his four *Spanish Dances*, composed between 1878 and 1882. Sarasate was just one of the few 19th century virtuosos who lived into the era of the gramophone, and he was one of the only artists to be recorded. For proof of his brilliance, just listen to this recording of his performance of *Zigeunerweisen*:

[Sarasate Plays Sarasate Zigeunerweisen \(youtube.com\)](#)

While Sarasate's compositions fell out of favor in the mid-20th century, that changed in the 1990s, when young classical musicians rediscovered his music. Both Joshua Bell and Leila Josefowicz recorded Sarasate's *Zigeunerweisen*, and Rachel Barton Pine recorded an entire *Homage to Sarasate* album.

One of Sarasate's best known works is *Carmen Fantasy*, composed in 1883. Film composer Franz Waxman, inspired by Sarasate's composition, wrote a similar piece in 1946, *Carmen Fantasie*. Below are links to performances of each of these works. See if you can find the differences between these two exceedingly difficult compositions:

Augustin Hadelich, performs Sarasate's *Carmen Fantasy* for violin and piano:

[Augustin Hadelich plays Sarasate Carmen Fantasy \(Live, 2022\) \(youtube.com\)](#)

Maxim Vengerov, performs Waxman's *Carmen Fantasy*: Maxim Vengerov – the Carmen Fantasy:

[Bizet / Waxman - Carmen Fantasy \(Maxim Vengerov\) \(youtube.com\)](#)

At the time of his death, Sarasate was in possession of TWO Stradivarius violins. Sarasate performed on a 1724 Golden Period Stradivarius, that, upon his death, was given to the Musee de la Musique at the Paris Conservatoire and is now appropriately named for their star student: the Sarasate Stradivarius. The second violin, known as the 1713 Boissier, is now owned by the Real Conservatorio Superior de Música in Madrid, where Sarasate studied as a young boy.



Sarasate

JOIN US!

Please join the HSO on September 27 - 29, 2024, to hear Sarasate's thrilling *Navarra*, performed by the violin duo of HSO Concertmaster Leonid Sigal and HSO Assistant Principal Second Violin, Jaroslav Lis, along with two wonderful works by Prokofiev: Symphony No. 5 and his all-time favorite, *Peter and the Wolf*, narrated by June Archer, HSO board member, executive, artist and community leader.

Did you borrow this *Prelude*? Get your own free copy! Whether you're a ticket buyer, donor, curious about the music, or know someone who is, just send an email to dshulansky@hartfordsymphony.org. We'll make sure you receive *Prelude* by email, in advance of each HSO Masterworks concert!

Are you interested in learning more about Pablo de Sarasate? Sarasate's music is thrilling. Please click on the links below for some memorable performances that will leave you wanting even more.

Zigeunerweisen remains a hugely popular piece and there are numerous arrangements of the work for other instruments. Enjoy this arrangement by Edgar Meyer for double bass, performed by the brilliant bassist, Edgar Meyer, and banjo virtuoso Bela Fleck:

[**Zigeunerweisen - Edgar Meyer \(youtube.com\)**](#)

An unusual and thrilling arrangement of the same piece for classical guitar and electric guitar may be heard here:

[**Zigeunerweisen Op.20 guitar duel The Commander-In-Chief feat. Thomas Valeur \(2013\) \(youtube.com\)**](#)

Enjoy these two performances of *Zapateado* by top violinists Midori and Gil Shaham:

[**Midori Goto Sarasate Zapateado - YouTube**](#)

[**Gil Shaham - Sarasate, Zapateado \(HQ\) \(youtube.com\)**](#)

Enjoy Nathan Milstein performing *Introduction and Tarantella*:

[**Nathan Milstein Introduction and Tarantella Sarasate \(youtube.com\)**](#)

And if you still want more, just hit play on this collection of Sarasate works - *Danza Española para violon y piano* – and enjoy!

[**Danza Española para violon y piano, Op. 21: No. 1, Malagueña \(youtube.com\)**](#)



WONDERING HOW THE MUSIC OF OUR FEATURED CONCERT WILL SOUND? Try HSO'S LISTENING GUIDE, with links to the pieces you'll hear on our concert stage – and more!

A performance of *Navarra* for two violins and piano may be enjoyed here:

[**Sarasate Navarra Op.33 \(Paul Huang, Danbi Um, Orion Weiss\) \(youtube.com\)**](#)

Here is an orchestral version of the same piece, by the Third Polish Nationwide Music Schools' Symphonic Orchestras Competition:

[**Pablo de Sarasate - Navarra Op. 33 \(youtube.com\)**](#)

Enjoy this performance of Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* by the Kaleidoscope Chamber Orchestra, narrated by Thomas Hadnut:

[**Sergei Prokofiev: Peter and the Wolf - Kaleidoscope Chamber Orchestra - Thomas Hadnut, narrator \(youtube.com\)**](#)

And last but not least, enjoy this performance of Prokofiev's Symphony No. 5 conducted by Yannick Nézet-Séguin at the BBC Proms:

[**Prokofiev - Symphony No 5 in B flat major, Op 100 - Nézet-Séguin \(youtube.com\)**](#)

CASEY'S CLASSICS

Want the best recordings of the pieces you'll experience on the concert program? Coleman Casey, HSO's dear friend, Director Emeritus and beloved in-house audiophile, offers his recording recommendations of selections featured in our upcoming Masterworks Concert.

Sarasate's **Navarra** is incomparably performed by David and Igor Oistrakh accompanied by Franz Konwitschny and the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra (DG).

Prokofiev's **Peter and the Wolf** is charmingly performed by Sir Malcolm Sargent conducting the London Symphony Orchestra with Sir Ralph Richardson as the memorably avuncular narrator (DECCA).

The magnificent **Symphony No. 5** of Prokofiev receives a classic performance from Herbert von Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic in superb sound (DG).



Sarasate

REFERENCES

[Pablo De Sarasate | Encyclopedia.com](#)

[Biography of Pablo de Sarasate \(biografiasyvidas.com\)](#)

[Pablo de Sarasate. All the information about Pablo de Sarasate updated 2024. \(lahistoria.net\)](#)

[Pablo de Sarasate - Classical Music Composers \(pcmsconcerts.org\)](#)

[The Great Virtuoso Violinists/Composers of the 19th Century: Sarasate | rhap.so.dy in words \(rhapsodyinwords.com\)](#)

[Pablo de Sarasate: What Made This Violinist So Popular? \(interlude.hk\)](#)