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The Impact of Eugène Ysaÿe on Performance Practice and Solo Violin Repertoire: A Graduate Recital Inspired by the Master Himself

Petra Bubanja

Southern Illinois University Carbondale, klavdija60@gmail.com

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THE IMPACT OF EUGÈNE YSAÏE ON PERFORMANCE
PRACTICE AND SOLO VIOLIN REPERTOIRE: A GRADUATE
RECITAL INSPIRED BY THE MASTER HIMSELF

by

Petra Bujanja

B.A., Northwestern State University 2012

A Research Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Music.

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Approved by:

Michael Barta, Chair

Eric Lenz

Jacob Tews

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
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MAJOR PROFESSOR: Michael Barta

This paper will provide insight into the close connections of some of the early 20th century's true masters of violin and composition, specifically: Eugène Ysaÿe, César Franck, and Fritz Kreisler. Through anecdotes and analysis of four of their works I hope to show how collaboration and friendship between these masters lead to some of the last great examples of violinists composing for themselves (or others). The Franck *Sonata* will set the scene for how close these men all were, while a detailed look at the Ysaÿe *Sonata* and *Mazurka* will show the extensive skill present both musically and technically in the man responsible for these works' creation and popularity. The final piece, Kreisler's *Recitativo und Scherzo-Caprice*, will show how Ysaÿe's influence popularized certain techniques that are then used in other violinists' works and ultimately become considered standard.

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CHAPTER 1

SONATA IN A MAJOR FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO

Eugène Ysaÿe was born in Liège, Belgium on July 16, 1858 and died in Brussels on May 12, 1931.¹ His importance was vast not only for the world of violin performance, but also for the expansion of the violin virtuoso repertoire. However, in order to understand his compositional style, one must be familiar with his interpretative mannerisms and his musical background. It comes as no surprise that Ysaÿe was brought up in a musical environment. His father, Nicholas Ysaÿe, was a violinist and a conductor, and started teaching Ysaÿe at the age of 4. “His hand was heavy, but without his strict attitude I should never become what I am today,” wrote Eugène Ysaÿe in later years. “My father was indisputably my real teacher. True, Rodolphe Massart, Wieniawski, and Vieuxtemps opened up new horizons for me in the realm of technique and interpretation, but it was my father who taught me how to make the violin speak.”²

At the age of seven, Ysaÿe was accepted to the Liège Conservatory under the instruction of Desire Heynberg. At the time, he was also playing in the theater orchestra. As he became more professionally engaged (due to the financial necessity), and as if this was not ‘prodigious enough’ for a ten year old boy, Ysaÿe could not satisfy the Conservatory’s requirements and dropped out in 1869. He continued working on the violin repertoire by himself (most probably with the help of Nicholas) while touring West Europe with his father’s symphony orchestra and playing various orchestra programs.

¹ Michel Stockhem, "Ysaÿe, Eugène," *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*.
,<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/30732> (accessed May 10, 2014).

² Lev Ginsburg, *Prof. Lev Ginsburg's Ysaÿe*, ed. Herbert R. Axelrod (Paganiniana Publications, 1980), 24.

Henri Vieuxtemps, the famous Belgian virtuoso as well as composer (of mostly violin repertoire) heard the young Ysaÿe practicing while walking past their home and was impressed. This chance encounter led to the acquisition of government funding that would help resume Ysaÿe's studies at Liège, first with Rodolphe Massart and later, Vieuxtemps himself. Eugène's progress earned him a Premier Prix at the Liège Conservatory, and with the accompanying stipend he succeeded in getting twelve private lessons from his favorite violinist, Henryk Wieniawski. Wieniawski had just replaced Vieuxtemps at the Brussels Conservatoire whose paralytic stroke disabled him from playing and prompted a change in the faculty. Later on, Ysaÿe went to Paris to study with Vieuxtemps. At Vieuxtemps's house, he had amazing opportunities to meet some of the musical giants of the 19th century and make numerous connections.

On one of these musical occasions, he met Franz Liszt and Anton Rubinstein who had toured USA with Ysaÿe's previous teacher, Wieniawski, a couple of years earlier. Anton helped him greatly by transforming his career as a great orchestral player (he helped him get out of Bilse's symphonic contract) into one as a prestigious soloist. Even though Ysaÿe was already getting recognition by playing in Bilse, performing with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, and giving occasional public performances as a soloist, Rubinstein saw more to Ysaÿe (it is important to mention that the respect he already enjoyed is not to be overlooked; Joseph Joachim was bringing his students to Ysaÿe's performances out of admiration for the rising star). Rubinstein then arranged a couple of tours (Norway, Russia) which propelled Ysaÿe's fame. He also provided a considerable amount of fatherly advice for the young Ysaÿe:

Do not let the outward manifestations of success turn your head... Always keep before you the one goal, which must be to interpret the music according to your understanding, your temperament and feelings. Do not try merely to give pleasure to the public. You have acquired the art of giving pleasure. You should now sing your wings

against the flame of success and taste the pungent wine of triumph. When you have realized the vanity of success, when you have understood the true role of the interpretative artist is not to receive but to give, you will then have realized the sacred nature of your mission, and after having conquered the public you will have overcome yourself.³

In 1885, on Saint-Saëns's recommendation, Ysaÿe performed as a soloist with Edouard Colonne's orchestra as a part of the concert series named *Concerts Colonne*. This successful debut in the Châtelet Theatre (seating 3,600) only magnified his fame and helped establish his role of an important interpretative asset to French musical society.

“The young violinist resumed old acquaintances in Paris and struck up a close friendship with the prominent French composers Saint-Saëns, Fauré, Debussy, d'Indy, Chausson, Chabrier and, naturally, the outstanding Belgian composer and organist César Franck, who was intimately associated with the French school of composition.” Ysaÿe enjoyed numerous fruits of these friendships; he was the dedicatee of more than fifty pieces, the most famous of which are (as listed in Prof. Lev Ginsburg's *Ysaÿe*): Sonata for Violin and Piano by Franck, a string quartet by Saint-Saëns, the Sonata for Violin and Piano by Lekeu, the Piano Quintet by Fauré, a Quartet by d'Indy, a Quartet and the original—violin—version of *Nocturnes* by Debussy, the *Poème* by Chausson, the Sonata for Violin and Piano by Dukas, and the sonatas by Jongen.⁴

Ysaÿe married Louise Bourdeau de Courtrai on September 28, 1886. The Sonata was brought to the wedding by Marie Leontine Bores-Pene as a present from César Franck. From Franck's letter to the pianist and a mutual friend, Charles Bordes, it is implied that the Sonata for violin and piano was not conceived with a dedicatee (concretely, E.Y) in mind: “You are asking me, dear Madam, to dedicate the sonata to Ysaÿe. I will do so with great pleasure, not having

³ Lev Ginsburg, *Prof. Lev Ginsburg's Ysaÿe*, ed. Herbert R. Axelrod (Paganiniana Publications, 1980), 45.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

promised it yet to anybody else, and will be very happy to give it under the advocacy of such an artist.”⁵

Having opened the present and skimmed through the music, Ysaÿe responded:

Nothing in the world could have done me greater honor or given me more pleasure than this gift. But it is not for me alone. It is for the whole world. My part will be to interpret it with all the art, at my command, and I shall be helped by the profound admiration I have for the work of César Franck, so far insufficiently recognized. Whenever I play this work I shall be thinking of this happy day, and the art and the affection which Franck has put into this music will spread our glow over its family life.⁶

He sight-read the piece with Mme. Borde who had previously devoted some time to familiarize herself with such a challenging work of music, predicting Ysaÿe’s enthusiasm.

The official premiere of the work was on December 16, 1886 as part of an all-Franck concert including his Piano Quintet, *Prélude*, *Chorale et Fugue*, and *L’Ange et L’Enfant*. The venue was Musée Moderne de Peinture. “By the time violinist and pianist had finished playing the first movement, dusk had fallen. The museum administration banned artificial lighting. Therefore the players, no longer able to read from the scores in front of them, had to render the final three movements from memory.”⁷ This is remarkable for a violinist, considering that sonatas with pianos were considered (and still are) chamber music and were/are played from parts. The fact that Mme. Borde could play her part from memory testifies to her extraordinary skills as pianist and collaborator.

Alfred Marchot, who was involved in the Quintet performance, as the second violinist next to Ysaÿe playing the first, noted: “Never have I seen this simple, gentle and modest man in such joy. He was literally drinking his music and did not know how to express his satisfaction to

⁵ Lorenz Amadeus Gamma, *The Sonata by César Franck: A Critical Edition for Violinists* (Los Angeles:University of California, 2005), 4.

⁶ R. J. Stove, *César Franck: His Life and Times* (United Kingdom: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2012), 257.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 258.

the performers, especially to Ysaÿe.”⁸ At the remark of Armand Parent, another famous violinist present at the premiere, that Ysaÿe did not obey composer’s instructions, César responded:

“This may be so, but from now on it will be impossible to play it any other way. Don’t worry, it is Ysaÿe who is right.”⁹ The Franck sonata and its unique interpretation brought by Ysaÿe inspired many; “even contemporary painting, sculpture and literature,” according to Ginsberg. “Eugène Ysaÿe and Ernest Chausson are known to have played the Sonata in Rodin’s studio.”¹⁰

If it was not for Ysaÿe’s passion, his innumerable performances of it in order to make it known, his promotion of it and the exceptional musical understanding behind his playing, it is speculative whether the piece would enjoy such a prestigious place in the standard violin repertory. D’Indy stated that Ysaÿe “carried it around the world like a torch and gave Franck one of the earthly joys he knew.”¹¹

The Sonata was originally titled *Sonate pour piano et violon*. This order was not due to the comparative difficulty (even though that argument might be justified) but was simply done in Beethoven’s traditions. The role of the piano part and its rich texture are also somewhat reminiscent of Beethoven’s sonatas for “piano and violin.” The cyclic nature of the sonata is found in Beethoven as well, as it was in many other Romantics who were obsessing over the concept of “*idée fixe*.”

I. Allegretto ben moderato

This movement could be considered a sonata form. The basic requirements for this form are fulfilled: there are two themes presented and they are contrasting to each other. However,

⁸ Lorenz Amadeus Gamma, *The Sonata by César Franck: A Critical Edition for Violinists* (Los Angeles:University of California, 2005), 4.

⁹ Lev Ginsburg, *Prof. Lev Ginsburg’s Ysaÿe*, ed. Herbert R. Axelrod (Paganiniana Publications, 1980), 105.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

there is no development section. Consequently, a better description for the movement could be an ‘underdeveloped’ sonata form or perhaps, a *sonatina*. Franck’s use of motive is integral to understanding the piece. The path from a motive to a phrase, and phrase into a larger structural unit is very lucid and straight-forward. Franck’s most common compositional tools are sequences, fragmentation, and intervallic inversion. With these unifying devices, Franck manipulates the musical cell in ways that diversify the material.

The movement starts with the 4-measure long introduction in the piano outlining the dominant 9th.

Figure 1-1

The image shows the first four measures of a musical score. The title is "Allegretto ben moderato". The score is for Violin (Скрипка) and Piano (Ф.п.). The piano part features a dominant 9th chord in the right hand and a pedal E in the left hand. The violin part is silent in the first four measures.

It features rhythmic augmentation of the principal theme brought by violin solo in bar 5. The half notes are D-B-F#-D, and soon after this Theme I in the violin outlines the same arpeggiated chord with a pedal E in the left hand (piano).

The image shows a musical score for a violin solo. The score is for Violin (Скрипка) and Piano (Ф.п.). The violin part features a melodic line with a "molto dolce" marking and a "v" marking. The piano part features a simple accompaniment.

A glimpse of the tonal foundation (A major) is felt in measure 8, but it isn’t until measure 31 that the tonal stability is confirmed by an authentic cadence (E major). The second theme is presented by the piano and treated sequentially.

Figure 1-3

The musical score for Figure 1-3 consists of three systems of piano accompaniment. The first system is marked *sempre forte e largamente*. The second system is marked *dim.* and *più dim.*. The third system is marked *p* and *molto*. The score is in G major and 4/4 time, featuring a mix of chords and melodic lines in both hands.

The closing section of B (47-63) is initiated by the canonic appearance of the beginning motive transposed up a M2.

Figure 1-4

The musical score for Figure 1-4 shows a single system of piano accompaniment in G major and 4/4 time. The right hand has a melodic line starting with a sequence of notes: G4, A4, B4, C#5, E5, D5, C5, B4, A4, G4. A box labeled '2' is placed above the C#5 note. The left hand has a bass line with notes: G3, F3, E3, D3, C3, B2, A2, G2.

This is interesting due to the last two notes being replaced and inverted in their intervallic motion. If it was a direct sequence of the beginning motive, the C# should have come before E and both notes would have risen instead of descending. This is repeated twice before it goes on with a sequential descent (B-A-G).

Measures 63-117 are quite similar to the exposition. In measure 79 (as opposed to 21) Franck quite cleverly inserts a dotted quarter note encompassing a m3 leap which, in addition to the already used upward (M2) sequence leads to the tonic key.

Analyzing this piece of music, one can find a lot of “extra” material. There are many motives that start and stop, then start again and finish. This method of motive transformation might seem unnecessary but it is vital to the movement’s development. Sequencing is frequent and is usually characterized by an upward M2 or m3 motion. It is interesting how Franck uses intervallic inversion to hide the immediate repetition of the phrase (compare 9-12 to 13-16).

Figure 1-5



These phrases are clearly parallel in that they are a minor third apart, but the fact that Franck commences the first phrase with the downward m3, d. m2, d. m3 intervallic relation and follows it with the brighter upward M6, d. m2, d. m3 (the beginning of the next phrase) makes these two sound almost unrelated. This is something that he will use in the latter movements as well.

II. *Allegro*

The second movement is clearly in sonata form and is in d minor. As opposed to the calm and pensive character of the first movement, which captures the nature of what one would call the “French/Belgian sound,” (what with its metric and harmonic indecisiveness), the second movement gives off the feelings of passion, frustration, perpetuity, and despair culminating in a short array of sunlight at the very end. Theme I is presented by the piano (the middle voice) after a short three bar introduction.

Figure 1-6

Figure 1-6 shows a musical score with four staves. The first staff is marked *passionato* and *mf*. The second staff has *cresc.* and *3 2* markings. The third staff has *f* marking. The fourth staff has *più* marking.

In measure 14, the violin takes over.

Figure 1-7

Figure 1-7 shows a musical score with two staves. The first staff has *1* and *IV* markings. The second staff has *3*, *4*, and *4* markings.

Theme I is repeated in m.34 an octave higher, but this time the beginning interval of M2 is substituted with a m2. The interesting thing about the first themes in both movements I and II is that they do not start on the downbeat, therefore providing rhythmic instability (which couples well with the tonal flux) and syncopation (especially pertinent to the second movement). Theme II, starting at *a tempo* (exposition), reflects a calm and carefree mood.

Figure 1-8



The formal scheme of the movement is: Exposition bars 1-80, Development 80-138, Recapitulation 138-217 and Coda 217-the end. Bar 216 seems to pull towards resolution, however it is just a *quasi* ending, delayed by something previously heard as the transition material between Themes I and II (or one could even call it an intro to the second theme; material resembling the beginning theme of mvt. I, 44-45 and 168-169). The development section is characterized by keys distant to the tonic (a minor, c# minor, E-flat major and g# minor). In this section, the violin (even though rich in texture) serves the role of an accompanist. The piano brings back both themes followed by one another. After busy accompaniment, the violin provides fragments of the second theme while the piano has the beginning motive of the first theme.

Figure 1-9

The image shows a musical score for three staves. The top staff is in treble clef and contains a melodic line with various rhythmic values and accidentals. It is marked with 'dolciss. espress.' and 'sempre PP'. The bottom two staves are in bass clef and contain a complex accompaniment with many sixteenth notes and rests. They are marked with '7' at the beginning.

This complex juxtaposition resolves into the recap, with an appearance of Theme I in whole statement. This playful counterpoint proves Franck's vast knowledge of compositional devices and form itself. He does not make big changes within the overall structural frame. Most of the time he keeps the transitional material the way it is (as if it were a theme) but the rich

texture and harmonic progression are pushed towards their limits. The movement ends in the key of D major, the parallel key to d minor which could be seen as a transgression from Franck's unrelenting structural (phrase level) parallelism to the harmonic one. The D major is boldly established in the last 4 bars of the piano part with the arpeggiated D major chord (in three different octaves) under the A-drone in the violin, resolving to the full chord followed by a third and a fifth.

III. *Ben moderato: Recitative-Fantasia*

The third movement is of a loose structural form. There are three clearly distinguished sections making this a 3-part song. The first section (1-32) is improvisatory sounding. Following a piano introduction, there is a violin solo.

Figure 1-10
Ben moderato

The articulation of the triplets creates a rhythmic “confusion.” The second note within the triplet is reached by a big downward leap therefore accentuated, and it slurs onto the following two notes (including the first note of the next triplet). This is mirrored in the piano part in the third section with a delicate and ethereal “accompaniment” in the violin. A performer could find it difficult to follow and not be late by an eighth note triplet, because the accent on the second note of the triplet feels like a downbeat. The transitional material between the two solo

violin appearances consist of a recycled and expanded transitory material found in the second movement and the repeated intro (P5 higher). The second section (busy for violin but *molto dolce*) is accompanied with chromatic descending quarter notes. This material could also be considered to stem from the transitional material, particularly the descending motive in bar 17 (*Molto lento*). Analyzing this sonata, one can conclude that Franck exhausts every motive; constantly intertwining different musical ideas which further strengthens the structural foundation and unifies this grandiose edifice. The third section offers two new themes, different in character, which will be exploited in the fourth movement. The first one is of stationary and delicate character (and ends with what one could identify as the *Molto lento* descending motive) while the other one is dramatic and powerful.

Figure 1-11

The musical score for Figure 1-11 consists of three staves of music in a treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The first staff begins with a *trillo* and is marked *dolcissimo espress.* and *tranquillo*. It features first and second endings, with a *1* and *2* marking. The second staff continues with a *poco accel.* and *a tempo* marking, followed by *mf* *dramatico*, *molto cresc.*, and *f*. The third staff is marked *rall.* and *a tempo*, with *dim.* and *p* dynamics.

He also throws in a theme rhythmically different but harmonically highly evocative of Theme I in mvt. I (93-95 and 97-99 or at number 4).

Figure 1-12

The musical score for Figure 1-12 consists of two staves of music in a treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The first staff is marked *poco accel.* and features first, second, and fourth endings, with a *1*, *2*, *3*, and *4* marking. The second staff is marked *cresc.* and features a *V* marking.

The last seven measures reflect back on the *molto lento* (m.17-21; P5 down) but this time the marking is *Molto lento e mesto*; meaning joyless, sad, melancholic but with a *non troppo dolce* beneath transforming the character into a hopeless and defeated closing thought.

IV. *Allegretto poco mosso*

The fourth movement is in a rondo form. It is in a completely different, unexpected mood compared to the previous two movements. After the despair comes joy and light. The scheme of the movement could be AB A¹C A²D A³E A followed by a Coda (222-). The opening theme starts with piano which violin follows canonically.

Figure 1-13

The image shows a musical score for Figure 1-13. It consists of two staves: a violin staff on top and a piano staff on the bottom. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#). The violin part begins with a whole rest followed by a series of eighth notes, with the marking 'dolce cantabile' written below it. The piano part begins with a series of eighth notes, also marked 'dolce cantabile'. In the latter part of the score, the piano part is marked 'sempre legato'.

Again, the principal theme begins with an upbeat. In section B, the violin's delicate eighth notes providing the texture are juxtaposed with the first theme of the closing section from mvt. III (comprised of three similar phrases).

In section C, roles are reversed: violin presents the theme while piano accompanies with the chromatic eighth notes previously heard in the violin.

Figure 1-14

The image shows a musical score for Figure 1-14. It consists of two staves: a violin staff on top and a piano staff on the bottom. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#). The violin part begins with a series of eighth notes, marked 'sempre cantabile e molto dolce'. The piano part begins with a series of eighth notes, marked 'cresc.' and 'dim.'.

The fourth appearance of the ritornello is rather interesting: the violin is bringing the theme back alone but there it is accompanied by the beginning fragment of the theme (in retrograde form) in the bass.

Figure 1-15

The musical score for Figure 1-15 consists of two staves. The top staff is for the violin, starting with a circled number 5 above the first measure. The bottom staff is for the piano, marked with the dynamic *sempre pp*. The key signature has two flats, and the time signature is 3/4. The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the right hand and a more static bass line in the left hand.

In the D section, the violin exposes the second theme from mvt. III's third section and this is followed by the first theme of the same section, now in a different character and at a *ff* dynamic (no. 8).

Figure 1-16

The musical score for Figure 1-16 consists of two staves. The top staff is for the violin, starting with a circled number 8 above the first measure. The bottom staff is for the piano, marked with the dynamic *f* and *ff*. The key signature has two sharps, and the time signature is 3/4. The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the right hand and a more static bass line in the left hand. A dashed line above the piano staff indicates a measure rest of 8 measures. The number 10679 is written below the piano staff.

The canon in the Coda is tighter than one concerning the principal theme: violin starts two beats after piano as opposed to the four beats. Herbert Schneider called this: “an ingenious combination of canon, rondo and sonata form.”¹² One could not find the better words to describe the mastery of counterpoint evident in this movement. The cyclical nature of this piece and this movement especially could imply Franck’s inspiration by Beethoven and Mozart. Due to its complexity and the endless contrapuntal interplay between violin and piano in this sonata, one

¹² Herbert Schneider, “Analyse der Violinsonate A-Dur von C. Franck,” trans. Lorenz Gamma, *Revue Belge de Musicologie* 45 (1991), 139.

could spend years playing it while continually discovering intricate details that could potentially have a rather significant impact on its interpretation.

CHAPTER 2

LOINTAIN PASSÉ

During the last decades of the past century, a very prominent part in Belgium's artistic life was played by *Le Cercle des XX*, in 1893 renamed *La Libre Esthétique*. Its members were outstanding Belgian artists and art patrons. In spite of its initial appellation suggesting a limited sphere of action, the Twenty Club, as it was familiarly called, stimulated the work of many national artists (mainly Impressionists) and musicians and was instrumental in popularizing their achievements. At this inception (*Le Cercle des XX* was founded in 1884) it consisted chiefly of painters and sculptors. Work in this field formed the focus of attention, with the holding of exhibitions by such prominent artists, predominantly French and Belgian, as Constantin Meunier, Claude Monet, Auguste Rodin, Camille Pissarro and Paul Cézanne, but when Eugène Ysaÿe joined it, the Twenty Club became a major musical center and the fame of the concerts sponsored by it spread beyond borders of Belgium.¹³

A huge part of the entertainment at these events was provided by Ysaÿe's quartet whose other three members were: Ysaÿe's student-Mathieu Crickboom (later replaced by Alfred Marchot), Leon van Hout, and Joseph Jacob. Another cultural establishment of great importance was the concert series the *Ysaÿe Concert*, which he founded in 1895. This orchestra, mostly under his baton (and those of Camille Saint-Saëns, Artur Nikisch, Felix Mottl, Felix Weingartner, Willem Mengelberg,...) gave successful concerts of diverse repertoire for 19 consecutive years featuring many of Ysaÿe's friends and "chamber music buddies" as soloists (Fritz Kreisler, Pablo Casals, Alfred Cortot, Jacques Thibaud, Karel Halir, Lucien Capet, Raoul Pugno, Ferruccio Busoni...)¹⁴ According to Ginsburg, "recitals were resumed after World War I and attracted soloists such as Sergei Rachmaninov, Nikolai Orlov, Jascha Heifetz, Bronislaw Hubermann, and Andres Segovia. Alfred Megerlin, a Belgian violinist and a pedagogue, when

¹³ Lev Ginsburg, *Prof. Lev Ginsburg's Ysaÿe*, ed. Herbert R. Axelrod (Paganiniana Publications, 1980), 57.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

asked by his pupil to compare Heifetz's playing abilities to those of Ysaÿe responded: "Eh bien, Heifetz is like the Empire State Building [then the world's tallest skyscraper]. But, he added with a gleam of utter conviction in his eye, Ysaÿe was like a mountain."¹⁵

In the year 1895, Ysaÿe composed his third Mazurka, op.11 in B minor named "*Lointain Passé*" or The Remote Past. Its initial title was "*Souvenir de Norvège*."¹⁶ This piece was published later, in 1910. Two years after that, Ysaÿe played two Wieniawski Mazurkas, the "Obertass" and the "Menetrier" (and thirteen other pieces) for Columbia Records with Camille Decreus as the pianist.¹⁷ By this time, he was already fifty-four and feeling that his hands were deteriorating (especially his bow hand). Some attribute this to his unconventional bow grip with three fingers and a thumb, leaving the pinky off of the stick, and some attribute his pain issues to diabetes (due to his obesity) as a result of which he had to have his right foot amputated (1929). He was supposed to go on a diet, stop travelling and perform only on seldom occasions. "This proposed remedy constitutes a living death. No, I shall not give up my life as an artist until I have no strength left, until I feel the weakening of the will within me, of the power of my fingers, of my bowing, of my brain."¹⁸

This will was evident in the way he lived his later life. He toured Russia, Austria, Germany and France in 1912 and successfully performed the two year old Elgar violin concerto for the Berlin public. Members of the audience were impressed, especially the already world-renowned violinists Fritz Kreisler, Carl Flesch and Mischa Elman. In this year Ysaÿe also

¹⁵ Henry Roth, *Master Violinists in Performance* (New Jersey: Paganiniana Publications, Inc.,1982), 47.

¹⁶ Lev Ginsburg, *Prof. Lev Ginsburg's Ysaÿe*, ed. Herbert R. Axelrod (Paganiniana Publications, 1980), 343.

¹⁷ Henry Roth, *Master Violinists in Performance*, 58.

¹⁸ Lev Ginsburg, *Prof. Lev Ginsburg's Ysaÿe*, 163.

recorded fifteen pieces for Columbia Records (featuring: Vieuxtemps, Wieniawski, Dvořák, Brahms, Wagner-Wilhelm, Schuman-Wilhelm, Schubert, Chabrier, Kreisler and himself).¹⁹

Listening to these recordings, most of which can be found on YouTube, one does not get the feeling that he was having any health-related issues. These samples of his artistry bear witness to his impeccable skill and the uniqueness of his playing. His interpretative traits are somewhat emphasized when playing his own piece, “*Lointain Passé.*” This might indicate that out of respect towards the composers whose pieces he performed he would actually restrict his free style of playing, whereas performing his own Mazurka he could play it just the way he wanted to.

Chopin wrote a total of 58 Mazurkas, starting its trend as a short and virtuosic but sophisticated piece. Ysaÿe’s inspiration was probably Wieniawski, the Polish violinist and Ysaÿe’s teacher, who himself composed several sets of Mazurkas. The Mazurka is a Polish dance in $\frac{3}{4}$ with an accentuated second or third beat. In this case, the first beat is omitted (quarter pause) so the emphasized beat is the second one. The form is ABA’ followed by a *quasi* ending and a short but entirely new material (ABA’C). The B section alone is in ternary form.

Figure 2-1:

A (beginning)



Section B (m.48)

a



b



¹⁹ Henry Roth, *Master Violinists in Performance* (New Jersey: Paganiniana Publications, Inc., 1982), 58-61.

a'



A'



The beginning motive is embellished by a sextuplet with the first sixteenth note omitted.

Figure 2-2 C

The C section starts off very calm with a wave-like melodic contour; it ascends, descends then goes back up and culminates on a 4-bar, trilled F# which is followed by an elaborate, improvisatory sounding cadence. When the cadence is over, after the elongated E# resolves to F# and F# to B, the tonic, the Coda begins. The wave-like shape is applied again, outlining the arpeggiated tonic chord. The culmination of the wave is reached and abandoned quickly on third

note below the **E7** (B6) which just implies how well Ysaÿe controlled the whole violin range. This Mazurka is brilliant in character and fairly demanding technically. As opposed to his later works (especially the six sonatas) it is pretty strict in form and does not possess much use of extended technique (except for the left hand *pizzicatos*). Ysaÿe's recording is probably the best way for a player to understand what he wanted the Mazurka to sound like.²⁰ However, the amount of tempo fluctuation is so immense that the character of some rhythmic figures gets distorted and lost. It would have probably been too much trouble to notate the piece the way he played it and mark all the *rubati*. A conscientious performer would try to convey the feel of Ysaÿe's interpretation, but remain within the frame of his composition.

Here are some of the interpretative features thoughtfully noted by Henry Roth:

- 1) Ysaÿe tried to play as many notes as possible on the E string for added brilliance-sweep
- 2) his powerful up-bow slap at the tip
- 3) open strings for timbre
- 4) bow replenishment (“Ysaÿe would use a full toned down-bow on a sustained note, then near the tip, suddenly relax the pressure, deftly and silently pull the bow back to mid-bow or a bit lower, and continue the down bow with only a quick breathing space between the two strokes.”)
- 5) *flautato* bowing
- 6) slides and *portamentos* (especially 2nd finger in third position to the 3rd finger in the first position, but also one finger downward and upward)
- 7) controlled vibrato, varied in speed and color; “white tone” or *senza* for timbre
- 8) rhythmic and tempo freedoms²¹

²⁰ Eugène Ysaÿe and Josef Hofmann, *Lointain Passé* (Columbia Records: 36516, 7113, rec.1912).

²¹ Henry Roth, *Master Violinists in Performance* (New Jersey: Paganiniana Publications, Inc.,1982), 50-51.

CHAPTER 3

SONATA NO. 5 IN G MAJOR

Ysaÿe taught at the Brussels Conservatoire from 1886 to 1898.²² Even after that, while on tours, he was happy to give master classes to any dedicated student. Among his most famous students, as listed by Ginsberg, were: “Josef Gingold, Mathieu Crickboom, Carlo Van Neste, Rene Benedetti, William Primrose, Alfred Marchot, Dany Brunschwig, Alberto Bachmann, Louis Persinger, André de Ribaupierre...”²³ Mathieu Crickboom, a member of the Ysaÿe quartet, his pupil and successor at the Brussels Conservatoire (he also taught in Liège) was the honored dedicatee of one of Ysaÿe’s Six Solo Sonatas. The violinists who inspired the other five sonatas were: Joseph Szigeti, Jacques Thibaud, Georges Enesco, Fritz Kreisler and Manuel Quiroga.²⁴

Besides being motivated by these violinists’ abilities to write the sonatas, Ysaÿe had other reasons for dedication:

“The dedication of a composition could assume historical importance. We would like that, henceforth, the violinists performing the master’s sonatas in public, mention them by name of the artists to whom they are dedicated, in the same way as one says the *Kreutzer Sonata*. It would be a token of homage to their predecessors and those who give life to music: THE INTERPRETERS, too often forgotten by the musicologists.”²⁵

²²Lev Ginsburg, *Prof. Lev Ginsburg’s Ysaÿe*, ed. Herbert R. Axelrod (Paganiniana Publications, 1980), 63.

²³ *Ibid*, 73.

²⁴ *Ibid*. 331.

²⁵ Antoine Ysaÿe, *Historical Accounts of the Six Sonatas for Unaccompanied Violin, op. 27 of Eugene Ysaÿe* (Brussels: Les Editions Ysaÿe, 1968), 18.

C's sonatas for solo violin are of exceptional artistic value in the violin repertoire. All the sonatas are distinguished by the truest inspiration and originality. At the same time, they open up new horizons in the history of violin virtuosity: in them Ysaÿe stands out as the greatest innovator after Paganini, as one who has considerably enriched the technical and expressive potentialities of the instrument, particularly regarding the polyphonic writing. It should be emphasized that this daring enrichment and development of the violin technique in the sonatas has been achieved, not in the divorcement from the music, but in complete harmony with artistic tasks. Actually, it was in the process of searching for the means to express the musical ideas born of Ysaÿe's creative imagination that the technical devices arose.²⁶


These remarks from David Oistrakh, one of the greatest violinists of the twentieth century, concisely sum up his respect for Ysaÿe.

Even preceding the *Lointain Passé*, though, substantially smaller due to the length of the piece and the level of difficulty, Ysaÿe provides a table with abbreviations for different technical and musical (fingering, articulation or change of timbre, etc.) suggestions. In his *Nota Bene*, Ysaÿe indicated: "Sans contester que les procédés techniques soient du domaine individuel, on peut dire, avec certitude, que l'artiste qui regardera de près les doigtés, coups-d'archet, nuances et indications de l'auteur, se rapprochera toujours plus rapidement du but."²⁷ This basically means that although considering the technical process to be individual to some extent, a violinist who takes a note of these indications has better chances of approaching his goals faster. This performer's guide testifies to Ysaÿe's pedagogical selflessness and the willingness to share his knowledge with the rest of the interpretative world. Also, some of the markings reflect his expectations as the composer.

²⁶ Lev Ginsburg, *Prof. Lev Ginsburg's Ysaÿe*, ed. Herbert R. Axelrod (Paganiniana Publications, 1980), 331.

²⁷ Eugene Ysaÿe, *Six Sonates pour Violon Seul*, op.27, ed. Antoine Ysaÿe (U.S.A.:G. Schirmer, Inc., 1924),3.

Figure 3-1

Les accords ainsi notés: - - 

S'exécutent par un rapide arpège. *Ex.*

Les 4 cordes; $\bar{m}\bar{i}$ - $\bar{l}\bar{a}$ - $\bar{r}\bar{e}$ - $\bar{s}o\bar{l}$. ^④

En se maintenant sur une corde ① ② ③ ④

Doigt immobile: - - - - ①

Poser le doigt sur la quinte juste: ⑤

Restez à la position: - - - ②

A la pointe: - - - - - ③


Au talon: - - - - - ④


Au milieu: - - - - - ⑤

Note jouée isolément - ϕ

Le quart de ton au dessus \boxtimes

Le quart de ton au dessous \boxtimes

Le sautillé: - - 

Le détaché à la corde: 

Employez tout l'archet: \dashv

Archet court: \overline{AC} - Archet long: \overline{AL}

Vibrant: - \overline{VB} - Sans vibrer: \overline{SV}

Sans presser: \overline{SP} - Sans hâte: - \overline{SH}

Bien mesuré: \overline{BM} - Bien rythmé: \overline{BR}

Marqué-accentué: \ggg

The Six Solo Sonatas, Op.27 were composed in 1923-1924. They were inspired by Szigeti's performance of Bach's g minor sonata. As chosen by Ginsburg, from Antoine Ysaÿe's writings, Eugène Y. had the following to say about the Hungarian violinist to whom he dedicated the first out of the six sonatas:

I have found in Szigeti the ability to be at one and the same time a virtuoso and a musician—a combination that is rare nowadays. Szigeti is an artist who is conscious of his high mission which he fulfills like a prophet and you value him as a violinist who has overcome all difficulties and has placed technique at the service of musical expression.²⁸

²⁸ Lev Ginsburg, *Prof. Lev Ginsburg's Ysaÿe*, ed. Herbert R. Axelrod (Paganiniana Publications, 1980), 340.

After Szigeti's recital, according to his son, Ysaÿe rushed home, closed himself off in his room and did not come out until the following morning, when, disheveled and tired from spending the whole night up playing on his muted violin and composing, he announced to his family that he had made sketches for the whole set of solo sonatas.

In his memoirs, Szigeti will later write of this dedication:

In the middle twenties, after I had spent a day or two playing quartets with Ysaÿe at his seaside home, Le Zoute on the Belgian coast, he called me to his bedroom and showed me the green leather-bound music manuscript book that was always at his bedside, a pencil stuck between its pages. When, on opening it I found my name inscribed above the first penciled sketches of the G minor Sonata. Here was perhaps the last representative of the truly grand manner of violin... showing the music he was composing *a mon intention*—composing with my playing in mind! I am unashamed to admit that any level-headed evaluation of musical content, of architectonics, was out of the question for me at that moment. He began talking of 'my' sonata and of the others he was planning, telling me what they would mean to him when completed... A glance at some of the pages showed me that here indeed was a work in the making that would permit later generations to reconstruct a style of playing of which the inadequate Ysaÿe recordings gave us barely a hint.²⁹

It is important to mention that this set of six sonatas for solo violin was based on Bach's collection and its polyphonic principles. Ysaÿe's first and last sonatas are in the same key areas as Bach's (g minor, E major). Ysaÿe also modeled the sonatas' structures according to Bach's, and even quoted the material from Bach's E major prelude in the first movement ("Obsession") of his Sonata No. 2. The character of these sonatas is rather improvisatory. Preceding the sonatas, Ysaÿe composed eight Poems. He was fascinated by symphonic poems (such as Franz Liszt's) but he also liked the idea of applying the poem as a literary genre (most probably written in free verse form) to the music. "I allowed free improvisation to reign. Each sonata constitutes a kind of little *poème* where I abandoned the violin to its fantasies. I wanted to associate musical interest with grand qualities of true virtuosity, a much neglected association since

²⁹ Joseph Szigeti, *With Strings Attached: Reminiscences and Reflections* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), 117-118.

instrumentalists no longer venture into composition and are abandoning this task to those who do not know the resources and secrets of the medium.”³⁰ Just as Ysaÿe indicated, even though very difficult, the sonatas are idiomatically written. When beginning to learn a sonata by Ysaÿe, even a skilled violinist is initially intimidated and overwhelmed with the amount of diverse technical demands, however, once the content is understood and notes learned, even the trickiest parts become attainable.

Sonata No.5 has two movements and is in the key of G major. It is probably the most programmatic of the six. The first movement, “L’Aurore,” depicts a sunrise. It starts off with a G-D double stop (open strings); it then steps to an E and leaps to a B followed with an eventual descent to F, after being repeated.



This up a M2, P5 and down a P4 (in some cases A4 or m7) motive comes back throughout the movement (in various forms). This movement can be divided in three sections. The first one (m. 1-29) is the delicate, dreamy-like dawn. The prevailing dynamics are *pp* and *p*. The advanced technique used (besides the common-practice double stops and artificial harmonics) is left hand *pizzicato* (on two strings) while sustaining the note on a third string. The coordination this requires, in order to achieve the percussive and clean pizzes while ensuring that

³⁰ Laurie Niles, “Ray Iwazumi On Ysaÿe’s Sonatas No. 2 And No. 5,” <http://www.violinist.com/blog/laurie/20116/12408/>, (June 16, 2011).

the *arco* note is uninterrupted and ended with a natural decay is not to be underestimated. The second section (29-45) is busier (shorter note values, features 6, 9, 11 and 12-tuplets, *tremolo* double-stops). Most of this segment is a picturesque representation of, perhaps, the sun half-rising behind a mountain: the auditory shimmering achieved with fast arpeggiated passages might describe the perspective of a spectator who is reached by rays of the awakening sun but cannot yet see it fully.

Figure 3-3

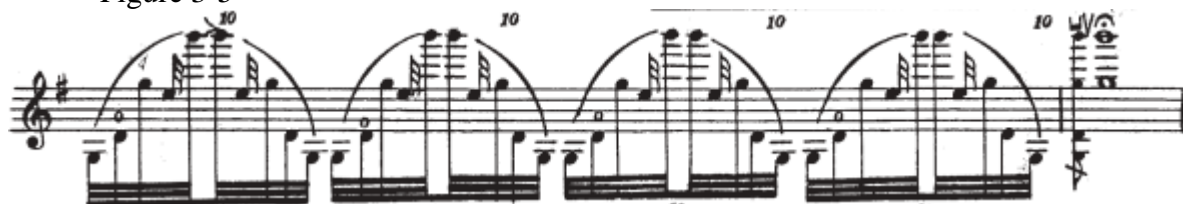
By the end of this section (in the last two bars), the sun is out and a *forte* dynamic is reached.

The third section (second beat of 45-the end) represents the splendor and brightness of the sunlight. The highest notes of the arpeggiated figures quote the “rising motive” from the beginning but now, in a completely different character.

Figure 3-4

As the dynamic rises, the register is higher, therefore adding to the intensity and gloriously ending with a G-B tenth under the dynamic of *fff*.

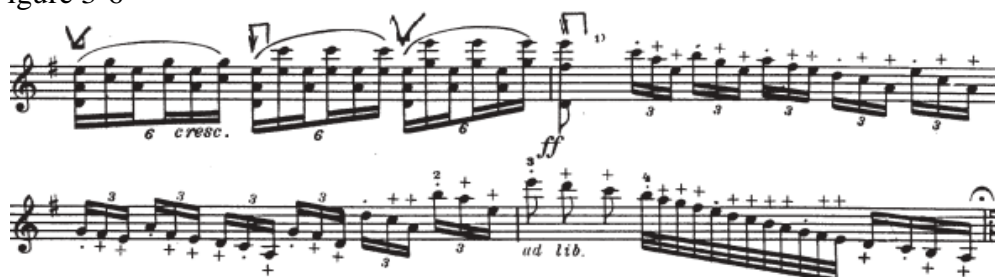
Figure 3-5



The metric indication at the beginning of the movement discussed is 4/4-3/4, meaning that the meter will often vary between the two. This implies a certain dose of metric instability, which simply adds to the poetic and improvisatory feel of the movement. Besides the left-finger *pizzicato*, there are also double stop microtones, 5-tone chords, and fast changes between the 6,7,8,9 and 15-note figures that might require some additional attention. After all, Ysaÿe dedicated the piece to his pupil, so it would make sense if it (besides promoting Crickboom's attributes) had some didactic qualities. The excessive use of fourths in the double stops could be due to the fact that this interval is one of the more neglected of most students and violinists' daily routine.

The second movement, "Danse Rustique," could be analyzed as being in ABA' form but the structural constraints are so loose that it would take a very passionate theoretician to claim one or the other. The fact that Ysaÿe himself considered form to be an obstacle to artistic expression makes it rather irrelevant to invest the time in. This movement is like a concert-etude. It definitely testifies to Crickboom's impressive playing abilities. The sweeping left-hand *pizzicato* passage in bars 62-65 is (even nowadays) played brilliantly by only a few due to its difficulty.

Figure 3-6



The first section of the Rustic Dance (1-22) is very pentatonic in sound and again, metrically unstable. In these twenty-two bars, the meter changes eight times between 5/4, 7/4, 3/4, 4/4 and 6/4. The application of accents and natural emphases (using paired down bows) removes any possibility of finding the metric pattern. Once hope of recognizing the downbeats is abandoned, the listener can truly appreciate the peasant-like harshness of the unending chords and the playfulness of this metrically wicked dance.

Figure 3-7



The middle section or *Moderato amabile* could also be divided into two smaller fragments (m.22-45 and 45-65). The beginning material in the middle section is based on the two-bar phrase in the previous section (9-10).

Figure 3-8



Section B



The material in bars 35-36 seems fresh, with a slight reminiscence of the beginning phrase (beg. of the middle section), but under a magnifying glass it becomes more comparable to measures 9-10 than 22-25.

Figure 3-9



The second part of section B, starts off with a G-D chord (on the D and E strings, fingers 1 and 2 in the third position) and a left-hand pizz on the G string; the chord keeps on going, while the next pizz is supposed to be the C on the G string (having to reposition a finger that is being used far away from the string to being on the string is virtually impossible).

Figure 3-10



In order to make this happen without a distortion in the *arco* chord, one must have incredibly agile and coordinated fingers. In bar 54, the motive from first movement is brought back.

Figure 3-11



A' contains three variations on the A section (65-75, 75-109 and 109-end). Each variation gets progressively more rhythmically diminished and therefore condensed.

Figure 3-12

Tempo I (non più presto) *mf*

Poco più mosso *p*

(sempre più presto sino al fine) *f*

(transitory variation)

The beginning of each variation is also marked with a tempo faster than the previous (*Tempo I*, *Poco piu mosso* and *sempre piu presto sino al fine*), so with the rhythmic diminution the tempo changes sound even more drastic. The work finishes with a repeated perpetual motion motive and an Ysaÿe sweep, much resembling the end of Debussy's G minor String Quartet. According to Jeun Hae Michelle Lie, this was a tribute to their experience playing together for the Debussy quartet.³¹

Figure 3-13

³¹ Jeun Hae Michelle Lie, "Musical Quotation and Influence: A Study of Works by Eugène Ysaÿe and Max Reger Drawing on the Music of J.S. Bach and Violinists of the Early Twentieth Century" (DMA diss., Jacobs School of Music, 2013), 48.

CHAPTER 4

RECITATIVO UND SCHERZO-CAPRICE

Ysaÿe was respected and cherished by many. One of these ardent admirers was Fritz Kreisler, the dedicatee of one of his unaccompanied sonatas. Kreisler was a true wunderkind; he studied with his father who was an amateur violinist and then had lessons with Jacques Auber. At the age of seven, Kreisler got accepted to the Musikverein Konservatorium—the youngest applicant to be accepted. There he had lessons with Joseph Hellmesberger Jr. and took theory with Bruckner. He won the gold medal for his performance excellence when he was ten. Then, he studied with J.L. Massart at the Paris Conservatory where he won the first prize once again. He left the Paris Conservatory at the age of twelve, and this was the end of his formal violin education.³² He was an amazing violinist and had a very special connection with Ysaÿe. At one occasion, he stated: “...It was Eugène Ysaÿe, however, and not Joseph Joachim, who was my idol among violinists.”³³ Ysaÿe also wrote of him to his wife (after the rehearsal in preparation for the Berlin concert in 1912):

After the rehearsal, Kreisler was delightful. He was full of admiration, both for me and for the work. He has a rare nature, perfect tact and also great sincerity. All he said to me went straight to my heart. Coming from him, who first performed the Elgar Concerto—which he played so well, with so much poetry and in so masterly a manner—his words had double their value.³⁴

Recitativo und Scherzo-Caprice was one of the two pieces for solo violin Kreisler composed in the sea of accompanied works. It was dedicated to Ysaÿe- “a E.Y. , le maitre at l’ami.” It was published in 1911, therefore, it was composed well before the existence of the six

³² Boris Schwarz, “Kreisler, Fritz”, *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online* <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/15504> (accessed May 10, 2014).

³³ Louis P. Lochner, *Fritz Kreisler*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1950), 53.

³⁴ Lev Ginsburg, *Prof. Lev Ginsburg’s Ysaÿe*, ed. Herbert R. Axelrod (Paganiniana Publications, 1980), 179.

solo sonatas. It is important to remember that the “*Lointain Passé*” was published in 1910. The ending of the Scherzo is slightly similar to that of the Ysaÿe’s No.3 Mazurka, which implies that Kreisler might have done this deliberately. The rising melodic line, outlines the arpeggiated tonic chord and ends with the *pizzicatos*, the first of which (the first two in *L.P.*) is loud and the latter one playfully quiet.

Recitative and Scherzo is in the key of D minor/F major with the Recitative being in 4/4 and Scherzo in 3/4. The definition of recitative is “musically-stylized speech,” and Kreisler’s “speech” in the work is quite dramatic and seems to bear the character of majestic importance (Axel Strauss offers an interesting insight into the speech-like qualities of the Recitative).³⁵



Even though the Recitative (as well as the Scherzo) is idiomatically written, the use of awkward double stops such as fourths and sixths, left hand pizzicatos while playing double stops and the rapid transitions between ordinary notes and artificial harmonics (therefore, the quick changes in the applied pressure on the strings) can be quite challenging to make sound effortless.



The joyous nature in the Scherzo (*Presto e brillante*) comes unexpectedly, then playfully slips into the darker moods but ultimately comes back quickly with its initial, innocent and brilliant theme.

³⁵ Axel Strauss, “Violin Music: Fritz Kreisler’s Recitativo and Scherzo, Op.6,” (2005).
<http://www.allthingsstrings.com/layout/set/print/Repertoire/SOLO-SONATA/Violin-Music-Fritz-Kreisler-s-Recitativo-and-Scherzo-Op.-6> (accessed May 10, 2014).

Figure 4-3



This movement is played mostly with the *spiccato* stroke but calls for occasional *ricochet* and heavy but quick and sharp *détaché*. The technical difficulties (*détaché* double stops with left hand *pizzicatos* right after the *ricochet* strokes; the M2 double stops, the descending octave-d.s. chromatic scale) imply just a small bit of the tremendous amount of admiration Kreisler had for Eugène Ysaÿe.

Figure 4-4

The selfless and generous nature of Eugène Ysaÿe and his contemporaries resulted in a noteworthy generation of players, but most importantly, it inspired creations that are integral to the standard repertoire. The genuine collegial support and admiration these masters had for each other, as well as their friendships, yielded some of the most idiomatically composed works for the violin of the twentieth century. Ysaÿe was one of the central figures to explore the limits of violin technique, without hindering the musical capability of the instrument. As someone who

breathed music, Ysaÿe made a significant impact in the world of performance, composition, pedagogy, and promotion of musical pieces as well as his fellow interpreters.

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VITA
Graduate School
Southern Illinois University

Petra Bubanja

Klavdija60@gmail.com

Northwestern State University
Bachelor of Music, Music Performance, 2012

Research Paper Title:

The Impact of Eugène Ysaÿe on Performance Practice and Solo Violin Repertoire: a Graduate
Recital Inspired by the Master Himself

Major Professor: Michael Barta