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BACH, BRAHMS, YSAŸE:

EXTENDED PROGRAM NOTE

by

Frank Lakatos

B.M., Rowan University, 2010

A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Music

Department of Music
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RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

BACH, BRAHMS, YSAŸE:

EXTENDED PROGRAM NOTE

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Graduate School
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CHAPTER 1

BACH: *SONATA NO. 2 IN A MINOR*

It is interesting how much significance a work can hold in the entirety of an instrument's repertoire and for its performer. Once a violinist, for example, becomes acquainted with Bach's Six Sonatas and Partitas for Violin, learns that the work is a paragon for study and performance, he eventually understands how much discussion is involved in its interpretation. The set of six sonatas and partitas must be approached from multiple angles before picking up the instrument. In order to narrow the scope to one part, specifically the Sonata no. 2 in A minor, BWV 1003, we must look at the origin of the work in its entirety.

Studying the work, it is noticeable the amount of knowledge the composer has of the mechanics of the violin. It is common for a composer who is virtuosic on an instrument to not fully represent another instrument for which he writes. But, J.S. Bach, though known for his vast masterfulness as both a performer and composer of the organ, had significant training in the violin, early in his life. His interest in the instrument was initiated by his father's violin playing.[1] This interest stayed with Bach for the remainder of his life, later not only holding reputable positions playing the violin, but writing for the medium at new heights. At the point of departure from his highest school system in Lüneburg, Bach became a member of the orchestra belonging to the brother of the reigning Duke of Weimar.[2] The position in Johann Ernst's orchestra was one that was achieved by Bach's status as an accomplished violinist. At the time, the violin was considered a melody instrument and not thought of as possessing polyphonic capabilities. This is important because it gives an idea of Bach's early understanding of the instrument. It was Bach's

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[1] Albert Schweitzer, *J.S. Bach* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1911), 384.
[2] Philipp Spitta, *Johann Sebastian Bach: His Work and Influence On The Music Of Germany, 1750* (London: Novello & Co., LTD., 1951, 70.

primary instrument, the organ, that influenced his writing for the violin, previously considered a monophonic instrument.

Bach's reason for composing the six sonatas is not as clearly displayed as, for example the advent of the well-tempered clavier, which inspired a collection of music named for that instrument. In the city of Cöthen, Bach wrote the autograph of the sonatas in 1720.[3] It is possible that the six sonatas and partitas, either individually or even movements were composed for or performed in church. Although, it is not certain that the sonatas were performed in Bach's lifetime, the style in which he wrote them, or at least the outline of the movements, may suggest the possibility of its performance in church. Within the six sonatas and partitas, the three sonatas, being the first, third, and fifth works in the set, use the same grouping of movement tempo-types. The four movements of each sonata follow the slow-fast-slow-fast pattern of the sonata da chiesa or "church sonata."[4] Is it hasty to suggest that Bach used this genre to imply the venue or function of the work? Whatever the case, it may be supported by the thought that it was usual practice to perform an instrumental solo, even concerto, during the communion office.[5]

As mentioned earlier, the entire set was finished in 1720. This is the date on Bach's autograph which derives from the Cöthen period of his life. The first publication of the set in 1802 by Nicolaus Simrock has both positive and negative attributes.[6] The negative is that the first publication was based on unknown copies rather than Bach's autograph, resulting in numerous discrepancies. These discrepancies persisted in subsequent editions.

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[3] Friedrich Smend, *Bach in Kothen* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Public House, 1985), 223.
[4] Karl Geiringer, *The Culmination of an Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 308
[5] Johann Nikolaus Forkel, *Johann Sebastian Bach: His Life, Art, and Work* (London: Constable and Company LTD, 1920), 137.
[6] Albert Schweitzer, *J.S. Bach* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1911), 384.

Sonata No. 2 is one of only two in the cycle of six that begins with an organ-like chordal entrance. The other, Sonata No. 1, begins with a quarter note *G-minor* chord from which a scalar passage of thirty-second notes descend. Similarly, the second sonata introduces itself with an *A-minor* chord, resonating with power as it encompasses all four strings of the instrument and also descends with thirty-second notes from its source, the seventh of the chord, using the natural-minor scale. This descent is displaced down an octave before it jumps back to an *F* to continue the descending line. This opening movement, given the name and tempo marking, *Grave*,[7] is in the style of a *fantasia,* or improvisation. This style gives us an imaginable glimpse of Bach's improvisational ability: the figured bass progresses steadily while each chord is colored with scalar runs, resting on melodically significant tones, all done with logically satisfying voice leading. The skeleton of the movement is outlined by chordal checkpoints: tonic minor on the down beat of measure one; major mediant in measure seven; minor form of the dominant in measure twelve; minor subdominant in measure sixteen; a fully diminished leading tone chord of the dominant (secondary dominant) in measure twenty; back to the tonic minor in measure twenty-one; and finally ending on the dominant in measure twenty-three, producing a half cadence: i — III — v — iv — vii dim^7/V — i — V. The two chords, iv and vii dim^7/V, as the more unstable ones in the row, were placed on the third beat of their respective measures, as opposed to the down beat. The movement ends on a half cadence (i — V), though it simultaneously serves as the dominant preparation for the following *fugue* in *A minor.*

A pickup measure of an eighth rest, two sixteenths, and two eighth notes on the dominant of *A minor* lead to the tonic on the downbeat of the first full measure of the *Fugue.* The content

[7] Though the word was used, before Bach, to describe the mood of a movement. *Grave,* meaning *heavy* or *serious* was used by Purcell to mean a slow movement or section. Mary Cyr, "Tempo gradations in Purcell's Sonatas," *Performance Practice Review* Vol.7, No. 2, Article 9 (1994): 193, doi: 10.5642/perfpr.199407.02.09.

in the pickup measure is the motive used as the driving force of the entire movement. The head of the subject consists of, on the second half of the first beat, the sixteenth notes *E5 – D-sharp5 and eighth notes, E5 – E4 – A4* (down beat of the next measure).

Fig. 1

The subject's tail: from the second eighth note of the measure, is *C5 – B4 - D5 – C5.*

Fig. 2

The counterpoint against the tonal (the skip of perfect fifth occurs after the octave leap, as opposed to the perfect fourth in the subject) answer is in free counterpoint as it differs from the counterpoint under the third voice's tail of the subject. The transitional material after the statement of the second voice is entirely made up of the head of the subject. The development begins at the second half of the first beat of the eighth measure. The development section progresses through an expectedly adventurous array of keys, though it is viable to divide it into larger harmonic subsections. Measure forty-five begins a sixteenth note bariolage figured section (Fig. 3) which modulates to *E minor* at measure sixty-one.

Fig. 3

Measure eighty-one begins a *C major* section to one in *D minor* from measure 232. This leads to an *A minor Coda.* Two measures before the last chord, a cadence of thirty-second notes in *D minor* (Fig. 4)*,* which quickly descends by an *A melodic minor* scale to a four-chord ending, i – V – I (*A major* due to the traditional raised Picardy third).

Fig. 4

The third movement of this sonata is a highlight in the lofty sculpture of the cumulative six sonatas. It possesses that quality that gives it the ability to function out of the cycle's context, like the Chaconne of the second Partita, which has long carved a place on concerts as a work that can stand on its own. The *Andante,* too functions on its own as a pensive and lyrical *moment musicaux.* It is periodically used as an *encore* piece by violinists, which is one of only three slow movements of the cycle (the others being the *Sarabande* of Partita No. 2 and the *Largo* of Sonata No. 3), in the company of their fast counterparts (the *Presto* of the first sonata and the *Allegro assai* or final movement of Sonata No. 3) to be so used. Its tempo marking could not be more descriptive: *Andante* or a *walking tempo* due to the consistent eighth note accompaniment, above which the violinist must add a lyrical line made up of four bar phrases (Fig. 5). It is in *C major* and follows the harmonic outline, I – V – I.

Fig. 5

A four-voice *moto perpetuo,* the *Allegro* or last movement of the sonata, exemplifies Bach's ability to use rhythm for dramatic sense. The first two beats of the measure consist of an arpeggiated *A minor* triad which then descends by step from the fifth. The latter beats of the measure immediately imitate the former which suggests the performance practice of juxtaposing the dynamic to a lesser one, though keeping the marked character. The following measure provides the featured rhythmic drive, a sixteenth note on the down beat followed by two thirty-second notes (Fig. 6).

Fig. 6

The first two measures of this movement show how quickly and intensely Bach can grab the listener's attention. This was a technique he learned from copying by hand the many works of Antonio Vivaldi, who was not always able to sustain such attention throughout his works, something at which Bach excelled. The binary movement's two parts, each repeated, follow the standard I – V – I progression in *A minor.* Its large leaps from bass to soprano voices bring out its inherent polyphony, which obliges the performer to emphasize the step progressions. This movement reflects not only Bach's vast knowledge and experience in polyphony but also his instrumental virtuosity.

CHAPTER 2

BRAHMS: *VIOLIN SONATA NO. 3 IN D MINOR*

Romanticism was characterized by a longing for the unattainable, that for which the soul yearns. And although that spirit certainly manifests itself in the musical compositions, the era also brought with it an unprecedented level of performance and saw performers possessing unimaginable instrumental abilities. One example of the virtuoso composer-performer was Niccolo Paganini. He displayed a level of technical ability that seemed unattainable even to his contemporaries. His accomplishments inspired in violinists the desire to attain such ability and in composers the desire to write works for such transcendent virtuosity. Johannes Brahms was one of those composers, though he never heard the legendary violinist first-hand as he was only seven years old when Paganini died. Brahms himself became known as a virtuoso pianist and, of course, one of the "three Bs," as his close friend, the German conductor, pianist, and composer Hans von Bülow described of him (the other two being Bach and Beethoven).[8] The exponential increase of the violin repertoire of the time is no surprise, although the amount of pre-Romantic era violin repertoire was not lacking by any means. Once the voice-like quality of the instrument was recognized, composers took to it as a standard instrument with which to display their compositional faculties.

Though a pianist, Brahms' significant contributions to the violin repertoire (a violin concerto, three sonatas, and the double concerto with cello) may have been in part due to his close friendships with some of the most well-known violinists of that time. Friendships between composers and violinists were quite common (if not a necessity) for a successful composer in the genre. Famous couplings were known as early as Bach and Telemann who were both friends with violinist Johann Georg Pisendel. Later instances include Mendelssohn

and German violinist Ferdinand David, as well as Ravel and the Hungarian violinist Jelly d'Arányi, and another remarkable composer-violinist friendship in the twentieth century, Bartók and American violinist Yehudi Menuhin. For Brahms, it was the Hungarian violinist, conductor, composer, and teacher Joseph Joachim who was so influential in the writing of Brahms' works for violin, especially his concerto for the instrument, which he dedicated to Joachim.

Sonata No. 3 in D minor is the largest in scale and breadth of the three sonatas Brahms composed for the violin. The sonata was finished approximately ten years after his violin concerto and the first sonata in G major. The intensity and mass of the D-minor sonata mirrors the impressive compositional output and experience he had attained up to that point in his life. Brahms, as well as many composers of the latter half of the nineteenth century, understood their collective position under the colossal shadow of Beethoven (Brahms was in his early twenties when he started his first symphony, which took him - from beginning sketches to finish - twenty-one years to complete). By 1884, he had completed his four symphonies and a body of works of such quality that the pieces firmly secured him as the successor to Beethoven. The third sonata is also notable in that it is an equally weighty undertaking for both pianist and violinist. This is hardly surprising knowing that virtuoso pianist (and early student of Franz Liszt) Hans von Bülow was the dedicatee of that work. Contrary to the first two sonatas in which the movements' tempos are arranged fast-slow-fast, the third sonata consists of four movements, as a scherzo movement is placed before the last.

The first movement, Allegro, begins with a reiterated instruction from the composer as both the piano dynamic and *sotto voce ma espressivo* markings appear again. However, two characteristics of the music immediately project a quasi-agitato feeling. The first is the quarter-

note syncopations in the piano (Fig. 7) and the second (starting in the third measure of the violin part after long, tied whole and half notes) is an abrupt crescendo-decresendo on the last eighth note of the measure (Fig. 8). Considering the tempo marking with the *alla breve* time signature, this eighth note aggressively protrudes from the quiet musical line and continues to do so throughout the movement. The figure is reminiscent of one of Beethoven's "surprise" figures.

Fig.7

Fig. 8

In the twenty-third measure, after hints of its arrival, the piano explodes in forte dynamic with the dominant chord of the key. It restates the first theme, followed by imitation of that theme in the violin. After repeated outbursts of the first theme in both instruments, the voices gradually recede in intensity while sporadic glimpses of the first theme's characteristically quick swells begin to appear. Finally, the second theme arises from a soft, solo piano interlude. But the new theme's content is familiar. One recalls Arnold Schoenberg praising Brahms for his genius in evolving this technique called *motivic development,* and in this fashion the familiarity of the theme is apparent. If the third measure of the violin part's content can be called the *fourth cell* (Fig. 8), then we can observe that it has been modified by diminution and inversion to create

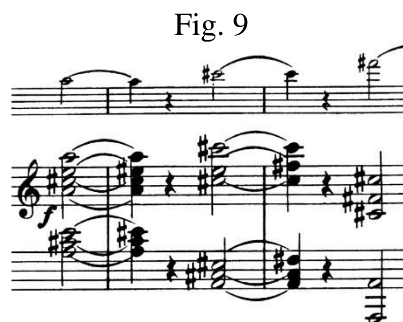
the second theme in the relative key, F-major. It is a lyrical melody, yet because of its derivation, the eighth note that precedes the second beat of this theme is colored by both a crescendo directly to that eight-note (with an instant decrescendo), then followed by a sforzando under the already staccato marked eighth note.

The development section, with the direction *molto legato e sotto voce sempre,* is accompanied by a murky *A* pedal tone throughout the entirety of the section. That pedal *A* is doubled in octaves by both A1 as a whole note in each measure and A2 as quarter notes which subtly foreshadow the coming rhythm of the recapitulation. On the surface, this development section begins with the original syncopated material of the piano that accompanied the violin at the start of the movement, but this time it is the violin which initiates it. The two instruments pass fragments of the first theme back and forth. The slurred passage of the syncopation figure is the first to be imitated. In this case the piano imitates the violin after two measures. The other fragment that is developed in this section is the double-dotted half note followed by an ephemeral swell-induced eighth note. Brahms repeatedly combines the first whole note of the first theme with the syncopated piano accompaniment figure to combine as a single line in the violin, another instance of surprise which deviates from expectation. The listener expects the interval of a rising perfect fourth after the initial whole note of the first theme but instead the music succumbs to the chromatic descent of the syncopated accompaniment. Finally, nine measures of this descent guide the listener to the recapitulation.

An arrival of the first theme in the violin, an octave lower than in the exposition, marks the recapitulation section. The section progresses as expected until it is disrupted by two forte chords which power a modulation to F-sharp minor (Fig. 9). This interruption is charged by means of both instruments interjecting, trading with each other, in sharp staccato eighth-

note rhythms. This is followed by a shortened quarter note which then connects to the latter segment of the first theme's quarter note, ultimately attached to four separated eighth notes. This motive's interjection is affected by its placement of the quarter note which is accented on the second half of the first beat. Such abrupt musical activity in the recapitulation ultimately calms, leading to one last statement of the first theme (with its second cell sounding twice) as a sustained, gradually dimming ending.

Fig. 9



An *espressivo* marking in the violin and a *legato* marking in the piano are the expressive instructions given for the beginning of the second movement in the comfortable violin key of D major. Comfort is needed so as not to invoke tension in the performer for the sad disposition of the movement. The tempo marking is *Adagio,* and Brahms provides the violinist with a warm lyrical melody perfectly suited for the mellow tone of the instrument's fourth string, G. Playing on this string is frequently a timbral choice for such expressive passages by performers. The 3/8-time signature's swaying feel is accentuated by the dotted rhythm with which the first theme begins. It consists of a dotted eighth note and three sixteenth notes that naturally lean forward to the next downbeat (Fig. 10).

Fig. 10

A recurring element in this pensive movement is the harmonic motion to the dominant of the key by means of a two-measure segment of the theme's three sixteenth-note motive. It is used to gain force from a hardly audible *piano* dynamic to a *forte* complement to the theme (Fig. 11). The harmony then arrives on a B-diminished seventh chord in first inversion, then continues with double stops (two notes sounding on two separate strings simultaneously) in the violin with eighth notes on each downbeat, and also the alternating repetition of a double-dotted second eighth note with a single-dotted second eighth note. This figure descends chromatically, significantly decreasing in dynamic to give way to the second theme.

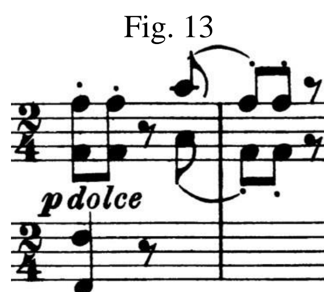
Fig. 11

The second theme is a *dolce* melody, sighing with steady eighth notes, the first two slurred (Fig. 12). This leads to a clearer and more present restatement of the first theme in D major. The musical events that took place up to this point are repeated and lead to the climax by means of the answer to the first theme. The arrival of the *forte* climax leads the listener to one last mention of the former part of the first theme in *piano,* with a sustained swelling of the dominant to three D-major chords.

Fig. 12

The third movement, which is what distinguishes this sonata from Brahms' preceding two, is a *scherzo* in F-sharp minor. Historically, this movement took the form of a minuet, something that Haydn and Mozart had standardized. The sonata as a genre experienced a long and organic transformation and continued to do so well after Brahms in the latter part of the nineteenth century. But it was under Beethoven's guidance – as the transitional composer straddling the Classical and Romantic periods - that the *sonata* experienced a *Romantization* rather than substitution of videlicet, the minuet with the scherzo. *Un poco presto e con sentiment* is the tempo marking at the beginning of the movement in 2/4. It opens with the introduction of the theme by the piano, a two-eighth-note gesture on the down beat, short and quiet. This is followed by an eighth rest and then an eighth note anacrusis slurred to the down beat of the next measure, then connecting to a restatement of the two shortened eighth-notes figure (Fig. 13).

Fig. 13



The slurred eighth notes in Fig. 13 are a falling figure much like the *lagrime* motive of the Renaissance, but in disjunct motion rather than by a conjunct semitone drop from one note to the other. This combination of character and mood conjures a slightly sardonic flavor. As the piano states the full theme, the violin takes its role as accompaniment on short quarter-note off beats. It then restates the theme as the piano resumes its usual role of sixteenth-note, arpeggiated ascending runs. This section (which remains at a *piano* dynamic) features periodic, short swells

which are interrupted by the violin's explosive statement. Its content is derived from the descending, slurred eighth notes of the theme which undergo rhythmically augmented modification. The violin continues with florid arpeggiation and strong homophonic attacks on off beats while the piano reciprocates by matching those chords on the downbeats. The movement continues with a restatement of the opening theme and accompaniment; but here the violin's bolstering off-beats are transformed by use of pizzicato rather than the initial bowed quarter notes. As the instruments switch roles for the final time, the serpentine piano part winds lucidly with arpeggiated sixteenth notes while both instruments murmur two eighth notes on the last two downbeats.

Brahms uses the 6/8-time signature in this movement marked as *Presto agitato,* conveniently suggesting the sense of the larger two-beat pattern in order to propel the music forward. The double-stopped eighth notes in the violin charge to the end of this D-minor movement. The piano crashes onto the dominant chord of the key as the violin takes off. The four-measure statement is answered by a repeated four-measure melodic phrase which intensely sustains its tones just to jump back into the initial statement. The fifth measure finds a motive that etches itself into the listener's memory. It consists of a dotted quarter note tied to a quarter note, slurred to a flaring eighth note, and then lands with force on the next downbeat (Fig. 14).

Fig. 14

Brahms brings the sonata full circle as this is a direct quote of the same figure from the third measure of the first movement. The movement - though showing no sign of calming

down - then relaxes into a lyrical second theme. It happens in both the violin and piano as slurred dotted quarter notes, still teeming with forward motion but not shaken by eighth notes. Fragments of the two themes then undergo modulation to an A-minor section which combines elements of both the first theme and the accented eighth note pick-up to the down beat.
The combination produces very lyrical results and leads to a syncopated, rhythmically driven ascension to a full beat rest, a desperate gasp for air before the music lands firmly on the running first theme. Brahms masterfully transforms the held note with accented eighth note figure into an *espressivo* passage, a quietly brewing section of syncopations in B-flat minor. The motive then gradually grows in both dynamics and widening of contour, a half step at a time. Because of the syncopated rhythm, the motive has shifted across each bar line so that the emphasis of the primary beat is lost. It regains equilibrium in measure 176 after a bar and a half of eighth notes push the motive forward to a strong *forte* downbeat in F-minor. This entire rhythmically excited section is then repeated, but this time in D-minor. At measure 311, the piano sounds an extraordinary D-minor chord, full of power, on the downbeat (Fig. 15). This marks the beginning of the coda, during which the metric emphasis defined by barlines is repeatedly blurred by slurring eighth notes over them. Accents seemingly occur on arbitrary beats. The movement then halts to a stop after three D-minor chords while the piano avalanches down in descending, arpeggiated eighth notes to the final D-minor chord.

Fig. 15

CHAPTER 3

YSAYE: *SONATA NO. 3, "BALLADE"*

The venerated, Hungarian violinist and teacher, Carl Flesch said of Ysaÿe, he is "the most outstanding and individual violinist I have ever heard in my life."[8] The compliment carried significant weight, knowing the hardly meager company of violinists in Flesch's life, which included his students, Henryk Szeryng and Ida Haendel. But Ysaÿe, regardless of his musical environment and upbringing, did not have the usual early promise, like many great instrumentalists, of becoming a successful violinist.

Violinist, composer, and conductor, Eugène Ysaÿe, was born eighteen years after the death of Niccolò Paganini, in 1858, in Liège, Belgium to a family of musicians. Belgium, known for its rich history of music, notably the 15th and 16th century Franco-Flemish School, had produced important conservatories that would develop and carry out a national style of instrumental playing. Such schools included the Liège Conservatory, which generated graduates such as César Franck, a close friend of Ysaÿe, Franck was one of many composers who dedicated significant works to Ysaÿe. At the age of five, Ysaÿe began his studies on the violin with his father, which he later recalled as the most important lessons he received. Two years later, he entered the conservatory for a brief stay, as they dismissed him, stating that he did not show progress. This event with several others led to the conclusion, by authors such as Henry Roth, that Ysaÿe was not a child prodigy.[9] In fact, Ysaÿe's reason for not progressing at the conservatory was mainly due to his duty as an income-contributing member of his family, working as a violinist in two local orchestras. Later, after a chance encounter with the Belgian

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[8] Jessika Ulrike Rittstieg, "Continuity and Change in Eugène Ysaÿe's Six Sonatas, Op. 27 for Solo Violin" (Phd Thesis, The Open University, 2018), 1, http://oro.open.ac.uk./55874/.
[9] Henry Roth, Violin Virtuosos (Los Angeles, CA: California Classics Books, 1997), 21.

violinist-composer, Henri Vieuxtemps, he was invited back to the conservatory to continue his musical studies with the eminent teacher.[10]

The progress of Ysaÿe's career as a violinist was slow at first. He continued to play in orchestras while studying with violinists Lambert Massart and Henryk Wieniawski, as well as Vieuxtemps. He was less well known to the public than to well-known violinists and other European musicians. Some mentored him while others performed with him. One important performance was Beethoven's C minor Sonata for violin and piano with none other than the German pianist and composer, Clara Schumann, wife of Robert Schumann, in 1879.[11] During his European travels, Ysaÿe was also introduced to Joseph Joachim- violinist, composer, and teacher of many of the great 19th and 20th century violinists. Joachim was an important guide to Johannes Brahms when composing for violin, especially his violin concerto in D major. Ysaÿe's acquaintances occurred not merely by chance, but as a result of Ysaÿe's reputation for violin technique, musicianship, and the individual sound described by Flesch. Thus, while never a child prodigy, as his talents developed and he encountered important musicians on the continent, and after a series of successful performances in Vienna, Ysaÿe was finally recognized as a significant violinist by the age of thirty-two.[12]

Ysaÿe was described as an imposing figure both in presence and personality. Physically, he was a large towering man who gave quite an impression on stage. But this characteristic gave him severe health issues, which probably contributed to an early death. He was also known to live a Dionysian lifestyle, with a voracious appetite and had chronic diabetes which led to the

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[10] Allan Kozinn, *Misca Elman and the Romantic Style* (Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1990), 64.
[11] Henry Roth, *Violin Virtuosos* (Los Angeles, CA: California Classics Books, 1997), 21.
[12] Andrey Curty, *A Pedagogical Approach to Eugène Ysaÿe's* Six Sonatas for Solo Violin, *Op. 27,*DMA diss., University of Georgia, Athens, 2003, Retrieved from https://getd.libs.uga.edu/pdfs/curty_andrey_200305_dma.pdf.

partial amputation of his right leg.[13] With the cumulation of physical ailments came an uncontrollable shaking in his right, bow-holding arm, causing his legendary tone to suffer.

A career span's length does not always parallel with the impact of a person's legacy. Mozart, for example, accomplished a lifetime's worth of musical achievement in his thirty-five years. Rossini was similarly productive in his thirty-seven years of composing, though his was a decision to retire at the zenith of his career, to tend to his other passion- cooking- unlike the early death of the young Austrian composer. In his early fifties, Ysaÿe's trembling right arm forced an end to his violin playing career. A brilliant career that essentially began at the age of thirty-two thus lasted little more than two decades. Carl Flesch, whose admiration for Ysaÿe did not change in his life, had a different opinion of the cause of the shaking right arm. Flesch, who authored literature on building proper left hand technique, always emphasized correct physiology in order to build these techniques in a lasting manner. In other words, he insisted that the student be cognizant of hand position to avoid pain and ultimately injury. An expert in right and left hand violin techniques through years of observation of both students and virtuosi, Flesch explained that Ysaÿe's problem was neglecting to use the pinky of his right hand when he drew the bow toward the frog (the part of the bow held under the right hand). The function of the pinky at that point, according to Flesch, is to assist in keeping the tip or the other end of the bow from dropping.[14]

There is a plethora of descriptions of Ysaÿe's violin playing by his contemporaries and their students. These descriptions include the frequent use of slides, melodic passages played with non-vibrato, frequent use of *flautando* (the technique of drawing the bow across the string without any pressure) which gives an airy sound quality, and the hyper-emotional grimaces while

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[13] Ibid., 26.
[14] Henry Roth, Violin Virtuosos (Los Angeles, CA: California Classics Books, 1997), 22.

playing. However, it was Ysaÿe's sound quality that made the most vivid impression. Most descriptions were accompanied by a preamble which explained the utter difficulty in describing his unworldly sound. The number of recordings of Ysaÿe's playing is quite small. While the sound quality of those recordings parallels the germinal period of recording technology, multiple characteristics of his playing are conveyed. A stand-out detail is his ability to play as though he is exhibiting a collection of musical gestures. His violin playing can be likened to Impressionist art: the listener hears, when focused, every note and harmony clearly, but must "stand back" aurally in order to hear the whole picture. Similarly, Ysaÿe's compositions have Impressionistic characteristics. This is no surprise, given Ysaÿe's friendships with important Impressionists like Debussy, Chausson, and D'Indy.

Sonata No. 3 in D minor, subtitled, "Ballade," is part of a cycle of six solo sonatas for violin that Ysaÿe wrote in the summer of 1923. While the group of works, overall have a quasi-impressionist sound with long chromatic gestures, each are personalized by the style of violin playing or national background of six contemporary violinists of Ysaÿe. The first sonata was dedicated to the Hungarian violinist, Joseph Szigeti, for whom composers such as Bartók dedicated works. The second sonata was for a close friend, the French violinist, Jacques Thibaud. The third Sonata, "Ballade," was dedicated to the Romanian violinist, George Enescu. While dedicated to Enescu, this sonata was first performed by Ysaÿe's student, Joseph Gingold, a Belarussian violinist who later had significant influence as a teacher of many violinists in the United States. The Viennese violinist-composer of the early part of the twentieth century, Fritz Kreisler, was the dedicatee of the fourth sonata. The fifth was for Ysaÿe's student and second violinist of his string quartet which bore his name, Mathieu Crickboom. Written in the style of a Spanish habanera, the sixth solo sonata was dedicated to the Spanish violinist, Manuel Quiroga.

The “Ballade,” whose structure and style so clearly imply the title that without it, the listener would nonetheless conclude it to be so, is a one-movement sonata in two parts. It begins with a direction from the composer, under the tempo marking, which reads, *In modo di recitativo*. (The “ballade” to which Ysaÿe is referring is probably the French poetry form of the medieval and Renaissance which was set to music). This section, which begins the sonata, as a musical manifestation of the spoken word, serves as an introduction to the *Allegro* section to which it slowly transitions. The piece begins with a blooming of sixths across three octaves from a single held A3, which is one note higher than the lowest note possible on the violin. It is as though the composer gradually shines light on the violinist’s ensuing monologue. This section is devoid of bar lines, which allows the performer to play in the *rubato* style while periodically arriving at *fermatas,* which keeps its pensive quality.

This *recitativo* section has a climactic point that involves an interesting technique: a six-note chord. The violin has four strings, which until Ysaÿe, limited performers to the ability to play four-note chords. Whether the chord was broken two-by-two or arpeggiated, it only incorporated four notes. This was so even in Paganini’s music, who wrote chords of a large range (utilizing open strings which frees up a finger), but still only used four notes in a chord. Ysaÿe takes it further, as though the violinist suddenly has a sustain pedal with which they can roll (arpeggiate) a limitless number of notes. He uses as the climax to the *recitativo* section, a C major 9th chord and doubles the fifth, in this case the *G.* This results in a six-note chord, next to which he puts the symbol for the rolling or arpeggiating of the chord (Fig. 16). As the recitativo picks up momentum and intensity, Ysaÿe adds bar lines in and finally incorporates a time signature of 5/4, with a new tempo marking, *Molto moderato quasi lento.* The purpose of this second half of the first section is to transition from the slow *recitativo* to the Allegro, by

rhythmic acceleration. For the first two measures, each beat contains two eighth notes, followed by two measures in which each beat receives eighth note triplets. He then condenses the amount of measures per new note value to one measure of sixteenth notes, and then another measure of sixteenth note quintuplets. This is additionally driven by the instruction, *animandosi e poco a poco accelerando.*

Fig. 16

The second, and larger section is based on a three-note motive. In its top voice of the double stops, the motive initially begins on *A*, moves down a semitone to *G-sharp,* and down again another semitone to *G-natural* (*A-G#-G*). It is used to create the first theme in 3/8 time, which uses as its most memorable rhythm, the sixteenth-note triplet with a dotted, second sixteenth note, leaving an accented thirty-second note (Fig. 17). This accented thirty-second note is the *G#*, which is followed by the third note of the motive, an eighth note *G*. This rhythm produces the impetuous and intense character of a storm. The second theme, though still in 3/8, divides each measure into two groups of three sixteenths. This serves well for its lyrical character before returning to the first theme. This section is multi-voiced, so the violinist is preoccupied with ubiquitous double stops and chords, reminiscent of the polyphonic, solo violin works of J.S. Bach.

Fig. 17

What follows is a long, seamless, thirty-second note triplet-driven calm before the storm. This progresses to its culmination, a *G-sharp diminished seventh chord*, which is hit like waves against rocks. With the same force that it hit the chord, it falls with furiously alternating sixths and tenths, rapidly descending by means of thirty-second note triplets (Fig. 18). The scene then calms with a section of thirty-second notes above which point Ysaÿe writes *grazioso* and *calme.* It is hard not to imagine that Ysaÿe wrote this section with his own playing style in mind. The notes are slurred almost a measure per bow. This is the ideal point at which the performer may take advantage of one of the many characteristics of Ysaÿe's technical arsenal, namely, flautando. This section again grows to reach another statement of the first theme until it reaches the coda. Here, the composer takes the performer and listener through a *D-minor* whirlwind which runs into thirteen sweeping chords that end on the tonic, *D.*

Fig. 18

The "Ballade" displays a variety of techniques for the violin. Ysaÿe uses these techniques to produce an array of colors to depict the many moods that make up this single movement sonata.

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