

Eugène  
YSAÏE

# Sonatas for Solo Violin, Op. 27



Tianwa Yang

Deutschlandradio Kultur

## Eugène Ysaÿe (1858–1931) Sonatas for Solo Violin, Op. 27

The Belgian violinist Eugène-Auguste Ysaÿe was among the leading virtuosi of his day, inspiring admiration rather than jealous rivalry from other great contemporary performers. Born in Liège in 1858, he was taught by his father, Nicolas-Joseph Isaye, a violinist and opera conductor, and entered the Liège Conservatoire in 1865, studying there with D. Heynberg. At the death of his mother in 1868 and after disagreement with his teacher, he left, accompanying his father on concert tours and playing in the orchestras the latter conducted. In 1872 he returned to Liège to study with Rodolphe and Léon Massart, completing his training there with distinction in 1874. He continued his studies with Wieniawski in Brussels and later, from 1876 to 1879, with Vieuxtemps in Paris.

After leaving Paris, Ysaÿe took a position as leader of the Bilsé orchestra in Berlin, where he continued until 1882. The period brought concert tours through Scandinavia and Russia with Anton Rubinstein, a collaboration that he found helped his own musical development. In 1883 he returned to Paris, associating there with leading composers, including César Franck and Camille Saint-Saëns and, from the younger generation, Ernest Chausson, Gabriel Fauré, Vincent d'Indy and Claude Debussy, exercising an important influence on French violin music of the time. Franck's *Violin Sonata* was dedicated to him as a wedding present, and Ysaÿe gave the first performances in Brussels in 1886, and then in Paris. Other dedications included Chausson's *Poème* and *Violin Concerto* and Debussy's *String Quartet*.

In 1886 Ysaÿe returned to Brussels as a professor at the Royal Conservatoire, holding the position there until 1898. In addition to his continuing international career as a performer, he conducted concerts at home, giving exposure in particular to new works by French and Belgian composers. In 1888 he established the Ysaÿe Quartet, with the violinist Mathieu Crickboom, Léon Van Hout and Joseph Jacob, and started the Concerts Ysaÿe, which, with a break during the 1914-18 war, when he was in England and then America, continued until 1940. By 1922 he was in Brussels again, but directed his attention more particularly to conducting, after trouble with his bowing arm. He had suffered for some time from diabetes and in 1929 his right foot was amputated. This

did not prevent him from conducting his last concert in Brussels in 1930 and in March the following year his opera *Pièce li houïeu* (Peter the Miner) was staged in Liège and then in Brussels. His health allowed him to attend the second of these, three weeks before his death on 12th May 1931.

Ysaÿe had considerable influence on the development of violin-playing after Wieniawski and Vieuxtemps, and there are many reminiscences of his playing and teaching. Yehudi Menuhin recalls a visit to Brussels to Ysaÿe, the mentor of his own teacher, Louis Persinger, when he was, quite rightly, told to practise scales and arpeggios, advice that other great teachers have been heard to give. Joseph Szigeti recalled Ysaÿe's father's early prohibition of premature use of vibrato, finding here the reason for Ysaÿe's own disciplined use of this technique, while Carl Flesch declared Ysaÿe's influence the most vital and continuing. In 1937 the Eugène Ysaÿe International Competition was established, an event that later became the Queen Elisabeth of Belgium Competition. As a composer Ysaÿe lacked formal training but wrote a number of works for violin and orchestra, orchestral compositions and chamber music.

Ysaÿe's best known compositions, at least among violinists, to whom they present a constant technical and musical challenge, are the very demanding *Six Sonatas for Solo Violin, Op. 27*, published in 1924, each of them dedicated to a distinguished contemporary player, whose style of performance they reflect. *Sonata No. 1* is for the great Hungarian violinist Joseph Szigeti, who comments briefly in his *A Violinist's Notebook* on the use of sixths in the whole tone scale in double-stopping that involves smooth changes of position and string in the first movement, a feature that he finds characteristic of Ysaÿe's own playing, while elsewhere commenting on Ysaÿe's tendency to live dangerously in matters of fingering. It was Szigeti's playing of the Bach solo violin *Sonatas* and *Partitas* that seems to have inspired the whole set. The opening movement of the first of Ysaÿe's sonatas reflects the first movement of Bach's *Sonata No. 1 in G minor*. As in Bach's sonata, the second movement is in fugal form, the whole worked out with echoes of Bach solo violin figuration. The B flat major third movement, *Allegretto poco scherzoso*, carries the appropriate instruction *amabile*,

an apt description of what follows. The last movement has the direction *Allegro fermo*. It is in the compound rhythm once conventional for such conclusions.

*Sonata No. 2 in A minor* is dedicated to the French violinist Jacques Thibaud, who died in a plane crash in 1953. A pupil of Marsick at the Paris Conservatoire, he established a leading position for himself among French violinists and is still remembered for his chamber music performances with Casals and Cortot, preserved on record. The *Obsession* of the first movement is immediately apparent in the quotations from the *Prelude* of Bach's *Partita in E major*, mingled with references to the opening of the *Dies irae* of the Requiem Mass, which assumes final prominence. The muted E minor *Malinconia* leads gently forward to a free statement of the *Dies irae* motif. The third movement, *Danse des ombres* (Dance of the Shades), starts with the plucked notes of a G major *Sarabande*. A first variation is bowed, followed by a *Musette* over a sustained open G, with reminiscences of the *Dies irae* ever more apparent. The third variation is in G minor, while the fourth has a running accompaniment in the upper part to the now familiar motif below. The fifth variation is in triplet rhythm and the sixth is still rapider figuration. The movement ends with a bowed return to the opening. The *Dies irae* soon returns in *Les furies*, with its use of sinister *sul ponticello* effects and final climax.

The single-movement *Sonata No. 3 in D minor, Ballade*, is dedicated to the great Romanian violinist and composer George Enescu, the principal later teacher of Yehudi Menuhin in Paris. It opens in the manner of a recitative, leading to a passage in 5/4 and then a 3/8 *Allegro giusto* with dotted rhythms, as the tale unfolds, followed by rapid

triplet figuration and a brief relaxation, before the dotted rhythms return, leading to the excitement of the ending.

Ysaÿe dedicated *Sonata No. 4 in E minor* to Fritz Kreisler, a violinist whom he held in particularly high regard. There is inevitably something of Bach about the opening *Allemanda*. The *Sarabande* opens with plucked notes, moulded round an inner four-note descending motif that is heard in the bowed section that follows, leading eventually to more elaborate arpeggiation. The figuration of the brilliant finale inevitably suggests some of Kreisler's own writing. It is interrupted by a contrasting section, before resuming its original impetus.

*Sonata No. 5 in G major* is dedicated to Ysaÿe's pupil Mathieu Crickboom, a member of the Ysaÿe Quartet, and then founder of his own quartet, an important performer and teacher in the Belgian tradition. *L'aurore* (The Dawn) breaks gently and imperceptibly in terms familiar in French music of the period, gradually growing in power. A rhythmic *Danse rustique* follows, its asymmetric and marked rhythms forgotten in the central section, before the dance proper returns, now varied.

*Sonata No. 6 in E major* is dedicated to the Spanish virtuoso Manuel Quiroga. The first part of the work, which suggests what is to come, includes a great deal of virtuoso writing in what is by no means the least technically demanding of the sonatas. It is in the second part of the work, marked *Allegretto poco scherzando*, that Spanish rhythms and turns of phrase become evident, leading to a final flourish of virtuosity.

Keith Anderson

Deutschlandradio Kultur



Photo: Friedrun Reinhold

### Tianwa Yang

Tianwa Yang has quickly established herself as a leading international performer and recording artist. She has recorded critically acclaimed interpretations of Sarasate's complete music for violin and orchestra (8.572191, 8.572216, 8.572275, 8.572276), and for violin and piano (8.557767, 8.570192, 8.570893, 8.572709). These Naxos debut albums were followed by Piazzolla's *Las Cuatro Estaciones Porteñas* (8.572271), with the Nashville Symphony and Giancarlo Guerrero, and a coupling of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* and Piazzolla's *Las 4 Estaciones Portenas* arranged for violin and strings (8.551228 / Naxos Germany only), followed by Rihm's *Complete works for Violin and Piano* (8.572730). Her recording of Mendelssohn's two *Violin Concertos* (8.572662) has won the highest praise. Her recording of Paganini's *24 Caprices*, made at the age of thirteen, make her the youngest artist to have recorded these works. She also appears on the Naxos 20th Anniversary Gala concert DVD (2.110277) live from the Wigmore Hall, London. Her most memorable concert performances with some of the most prestigious international orchestras include those given in the Gewandhaus, Leipzig, the Salle Pleyel, Paris, the Philharmonic Hall, Berlin, the Rose Theater, New York and the Gasteig, Munich, as well as appearances at the Ravinia Festival, USA, the Schwetzingen Festival, Germany, and on tour throughout the major cities of Canada. In May 2012 she was selected to perform for Naxos' 25th Anniversary Gala celebrations and for the inaugural event of *Classical Next* in Munich. Born in Beijing, Tianwa Yang began studying the violin at the age of four, winning six national competitions even in childhood. At the age of ten she entered the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, and in 2003 she was awarded a scholarship by the German Academic Exchange Service to study chamber music in Germany, where she remains a resident. While admiring the music of Brahms, Mozart, Schubert and Ravel, Yang feels a strong affinity with the work of Wolfgang Rihm, which she finds emotionally compelling, diverse and unique. She is a multi-faceted artist with wide-ranging artistic interests. She extends her gratitude to Lin Yaoji, Jörg-Wolfgang Jahn and Anner Bylsma for their musical insight and support throughout her career. In this recording Tianwa Yang plays on a Violin of Petrus Guarneri (Venice) 1729, on kind loan of Mr. Rin Kei Mei in Singapore.

Eugène Ysaÿe was a towering figure in the history of the violin. He also composed a number of important works, most inspirationally the cycle of *Six Sonatas for Solo Violin*, which rank among the greatest and most demanding of the twentieth century. Each is dedicated to a fellow violinist and friend [indicated below], whose style of performance and musical preoccupations they reflect. Echoes of Bach are present, as are dance motifs, and virtuoso figuration, reflecting the eminence of the dedicatees.

**Eugène  
YSAÿE**  
(1858–1931)

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## Sonatas for Solo Violin, Op. 27 (1924)

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|--|--------------|--|--------------|
| <b>Sonata No. 1 in G minor</b>           | <b>19:23</b> | <b>9 Sonata No. 3 in D minor: Ballade:</b> |              |
| <b>[Joseph Szigeti]</b>                  |              | <b>Lento molto sostenuto</b>               | <b>7:33</b>  |
| <b>1 Grave: Lento assai</b>              | <b>6:00</b>  | <b>[George Enescu]</b>                     |              |
| <b>2 Fugato: Molto moderato</b>          | <b>5:22</b>  | <b>Sonata No. 4 in E minor</b>             | <b>13:28</b> |
| <b>3 Allegretto poco scherzoso:</b>      |              | <b>[Fritz Kreisler]</b>                    |              |
| <b>Amabile</b>                           | <b>4:46</b>  | <b>10 Allemanda: Lento maestoso</b>        | <b>6:22</b>  |
| <b>4 Finale con brio: Allegro fermo</b>  | <b>3:06</b>  | <b>11 Sarabande: Quasi lento</b>           | <b>3:45</b>  |
| <b>Sonata No. 2 in A minor</b>           | <b>14:13</b> | <b>12 Finale: Presto ma non troppo</b>     | <b>3:19</b>  |
| <b>[Jacques Thibaud]</b>                 |              | <b>Sonata No. 5 in G major</b>             | <b>10:40</b> |
| <b>5 Obsession: Prélude: Poco vivace</b> | <b>2:41</b>  | <b>[Mathieu Crickboom]</b>                 |              |
| <b>6 Malinconia: Poco lento</b>          | <b>3:17</b>  | <b>13 L'aurore (The Dawn): Lento assai</b> | <b>5:00</b>  |
| <b>7 Danse des ombres (Dance of the</b>  |              | <b>14 Danse rustique (Rustic dance):</b>   |              |
| <b>Shades): Sarabande (Lento)</b>        | <b>4:49</b>  | <b>Allegro giocoso molto moderato</b>      | <b>5:40</b>  |
| <b>8 Les furies: Allegro furioso</b>     | <b>3:24</b>  | <b>15 Sonata No. 6 in E major:</b>         |              |
|  |              | <b>Allegro giusto non troppo vivo</b>      | <b>8:16</b>  |
|  |              | <b>[Manuel Quiroga]</b>                    |              |



**Tianwa Yang, Violin**

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