

Program Note

Eugène Ysaÿe - Six Sonatas for Solo Violin,
Op.27 (Sonatas No.1-5)

Eugène Ysaÿe (1858–1931), often called the "King of the Violin," was not only one of the greatest violinists of his era but also a visionary composer who expanded the expressive and technical boundaries of the instrument. In 1923, inspired by hearing Joseph Szigeti perform Bach's solo sonatas, Ysaÿe set out to create a modern counterpart: a cycle of six solo sonatas that would reflect the musical language, personality, and playing style of six virtuoso violinists of his time. The result is a monumental contribution to the violin repertoire- works that fuse late-Romantic lyricism, Belgian finesse, and intense modern gestures with polyphonic writing indebted to Bach.

Although each sonata in Op. 27 stands independently, performing them sequentially reveals an extraordinary spectrum of colors, characters, and technical innovations. The first five sonatas performed in this program trace a dramatic arc from strict Baroque-influenced gravitas to vivid impressionism and mystical introspection.

Sonata No. 1 in G minor - dedicated to
Joseph Szigeti

The opening sonata pays explicit homage to Bach through its architectural clarity and contrapuntal design. Cast in four movements, it demands a severe purity of tone and sharply etched articulation.

Grave unfolds like a solemn overture, combining weighty chordal writing with a declamatory line.

Fugato launches into a tightly

constructed fugue, requiring
impeccable left-hand clarity.

Allegretto poco scherzoso offers
a fleeting moment of wit within a
disciplined structure.

- Finale: Con brio concludes with fiery
virtuosity that blends Baroque drive
with modern intensity.

This sonata reflects Szigeti's intellectual,
sober playing style- precise, restrained, and
deeply musical.

Sonata No. 2 in A minor "Obsession"
- dedicated to Jacques Thibaud

Perhaps the most psychologically charged of
the set, Sonata No.2 juxtaposes sacred and
diabolical imagery. Ysaÿe quotes the opening
of Bach's E major Prelude obsessively,
ultimately colliding with the medieval Dies
Irae chant.

Obsession: Prelude distorts Bach' s material into restless fragments.

Malinconia sinks into a dark, veiled lyricism.

Danse des Ombres builds a haunting passacaglia from whispered pizzicati.

Les Furies unleashes demonic energy with raw brilliance and rhythmic violence.

This sonata mirrors Thibaud' s refined elegance but transports it into a surreal, almost hallucinatory world.

Sonata No. 3 in D minor "Ballade" -
dedicated to George Enescu

The third sonata - perhaps the most frequently performed- compresses a vast emotional journey into a single movement.

Opening with a rhapsodic recitative, the work unfolds freely, as if improvising, before erupting into a tempestuous virtuoso section marked by rapid-fire passagework and

Romanian-influenced harmonic colors. Its narrative intensity reflects the expressive depth and improvisatory flair associated with Enescu, one of the 20th century's most poetic musicians.

Sonata No. 4 in E minor - dedicated to Fritz Kreisler

Sonata No. 4 blends Ysaÿe's modern harmonic language with the charm and elegance of Fritz Kreisler.

● Allemande introduces a noble Baroque dance refracted through lush, late-Romantic harmony.

Sarabande sings with tender simplicity, its lines shaped by Kreisler's warm Viennese tone.

Finale: Presto ma non troppo dazzles with agile fingerwork and playful rhythmic twists.

The sonata pays homage not only to Bach

but also to Kreisler's characteristic grace, wit, and golden sound.

Sonata No. 5 in G major - dedicated
to Mathieu Crickboom

The fifth sonata steps into a new aesthetic:
atmospheric, pastoral, and impressionistic.

- L ' Aurore (Dawn) depicts the awakening of nature through floating harmonics, delicate trills, and shimmering textures.

Danse Rustique brings earthy vitality, rustic rhythms, and folk-like exuberance.

Dedicated to Ysaÿe's student and fellow Belgian, Crickboom, this sonata showcases a quieter poetry- intimacy rather than fire, contemplation rather than spectacle.

Conclusion

Together, these five sonatas reveal Ysaÿe's profound understanding of the violin's expressive possibilities. They merge past and present, tradition and innovation, intellect and passion. Performing them as a cycle creates not just a technical exhibition but a multidimensional portrait of the violin itself—an instrument capable of evoking philosophy, mythology, nature, and the human soul.