



CHANDOS

LALO

SYMPHONIE ESPAGNOLE

SAINT-SAËNS

VIOLIN CONCERTO NO. 3

SARASATE

CONCERT FANTASY ON
BIZET'S 'CARMEN'

JAMES EHNES
violin

BBC *Philharmonie*

JUANJO MENA



Camille Saint-Saëns, 1880

Portrait by anonymous photographer, now in a private collection /
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Édouard Lalo (1823 – 1892)

Symphonie espagnole, Op. 21 (1874) 32:20
in D minor • in d-Moll • en ré mineur
for Violin and Orchestra
À Son Ami P. Sarasate

- | | | | |
|---|-----|--|------|
| 1 | I | Allegro non troppo – Sans ralentir | 7:34 |
| 2 | II | Scherzando. Allegro molto – Poco più lento – Tempo I – [] – Tempo I | 4:08 |
| 3 | III | Intermezzo. Allegretto non troppo – Un peu plus lent – Tempo I | 6:11 |
| 4 | IV | Andante | 6:04 |
| 5 | V | Rondo. Allegro – Sans ralentir – Poco più lento – Poco più lento – Accelerando poco a poco – Accelerando – Tempo I [Allegro] – Sans ralentir | 8:08 |

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835 – 1921)

Concerto No. 3, Op. 61 (1880)

27:04

in B minor • in h-Moll • en si mineur
for Violin with Orchestral Accompaniment
À Monsieur P. Sarasate

- | | | |
|---|---|-------|
| 6 | I Allegro non troppo | 8:14 |
| 7 | II Andantino quasi allegretto – Molto tranquillo | 8:27 |
| 8 | III Molto moderato e maestoso – Più mosso –
Allegro non troppo – Più allegro | 10:15 |

Pablo de Sarasate (1844 – 1908)

Concert Fantasy on Bizet's 'Carmen', Op. 25 (1881) **12:28**

Fantaisie de Concert

À Monsieur Hellmesberger, Directeur du Conservatoire de Vienne

9	Introducción [Entr'acte before Act IV]. Allegro moderato –	2:45
10	I [Act I, Habanera.] Moderato – Più animato –	3:00
11	II [Act I, 'Tra la la... Coupe-moi, brûle-moi'.] Lento assai – Pressez – A tempo – Pressez – Lento – Tempo I	2:18
12	III [Act I, Séguedille.] Allegro moderato – Più animato –	1:54
13	IV [Act II, Chanson bohème.] Moderato – Pressez – Animato	2:30
		TT 72:03

James Ehnes violin
BBC Philharmonic
Zoë Beyers leader
Juanjo Mena



Juanjo Mena, conducting the BBC Philharmonic, April 2024

Lalo / Saint-Saëns / Sarasate: Works for Violin and Orchestra

Introduction

Born in Pamplona, Pablo de Sarasate was already a violin prodigy at the age of twelve, when he was sent to the Paris Conservatoire to study. He remained a Parisian for the rest of his life, though always proud of his Spanish birth and ready to display the exciting Spanish idioms for which French composers had a strong appetite. At the Conservatoire, one of his fellow students was Bizet, and although the appearance of *Carmen*, in 1875, might seem to be the tinder that ignited the rage for *espagnolerie*, there had been a strong Spanish presence in French music for several generations. Fernando Sor was the most prominent of several Spanish guitarists working in Paris, and the García family, which included the opera stars Maria Malibran and Pauline Viardot, was intertwined with French music for over a century.

Many concertos were written for Sarasate, not only by French composers. He introduced Max Bruch's famous G minor Concerto to France and was rewarded with the dedication of Bruch's Second Concerto. Wieniawski's

Second was dedicated to him, as was a set of variations by his opposite number in Germany, Joseph Joachim. Dvořák wrote his *Mazurek* (with a Czech flavour) for him.

Sarasate gave the première of Lalo's first violin concerto in January 1874 and of the *Symphonie espagnole* a year later, a month before the première of *Carmen*. In 1878 he gave the first performance of Lalo's *Fantaisie norvégienne*, also dedicated to him, in a concert conducted by Bruch in Berlin. Saint-Saëns's Third Violin Concerto followed in 1880, first performed by Sarasate in Hamburg. He toured Europe and the Americas and was a frequent visitor to England. He devoted much of his time, too, to playing chamber music, especially the Beethoven quartets.

Fritz Kreisler's wife described Sarasate as the greatest *grand seigneur* in musical history. He looked like a grand duke. He had a mass of grey hair, but his moustache was dyed pitch black. He played with the greatest nonchalance. When he had his violin under his chin and everybody thought he was about

to start, he would drop it again, clamp a monocle into his eye and survey his audience. He had a way of seeming to drop the fiddle, taking the audience's breath away. He would let it slide down his slender figure, only to catch it by the scroll of the neck just in time.

The fiddle in question would have been one of his two Stradivari violins; one he later gave to the Paris Conservatoire, the other to the Madrid Conservatoire.

Lalo: *Symphonie espagnole*, Op. 21

Édouard Lalo (1823 – 1892) was born in Lille and, unlike most French composers, was never a student at the Paris Conservatoire. This may lie behind the repeated difficulties which he faced hoping to be taken seriously by French critics, a notoriously unmusical (but influential) collection of nobodies. He earned his living as a violinist and was for many years a member of the Armingaud Quartet. He benefited greatly from the resurgence of French music after the war of 1870 – 71, for his music was regularly played by the Société nationale de musique under Saint-Saëns's leadership. His main orchestral output consisted of four violin concertos, a fine cello concerto, and a symphony. For the ballet he wrote *Namouna*, in 1882, and with

his opera *Le Roi d'Ys*, at the Opéra-Comique, in 1888, he finally won wider recognition as a composer.

Sarasate was one of Lalo's closest friends. 'Without you', Lalo wrote in 1878,

I would have carried on writing
worthless things for my quartet
colleagues, but with you the concerto
was born. I was asleep and you awakened
me.¹

The *Symphonie espagnole* has always been his most popular work, played by all the great violinists who have followed in Sarasate's footsteps. It is not truly a symphony, and is perhaps more than a conventional concerto, as it has five movements and a special focus on Spanish rhythms and style in homage to its dedicatee. There is no cadenza. The style is crisp and lively; Lalo offers a wealth of great tunes and shows a fondness for single emphatic chords, often on an unexpected beat of the bar. His style, derived from the language of Schumann and Gounod, is not unlike that of Bizet, which places Lalo in a different camp to that of Franck and Wagner, and even of the impressionists who followed.

¹ Sans toi j'aurais continué à écrire des bribes insignifiantes pour Armingaud, Jacquard; avec toi est né le concerto; je dormais, tu m'as réveillé.

After a noisy introduction the main tune of the first movement is unmistakably Iberian, threes in alternation with twos and the ends of phrases clipped. In contrast, the second subject is a melody of great beauty and great simplicity, revealing Lalo's warm heart. The development gives the soloist a chance to show off his technique.

The second and third movements may be seen as surplus to the normal three-movement pattern of a concerto, and in both, Lalo provides the three elements that enliven the whole work: sprightly rhythms, languorous melody, and violin fireworks. The Intermezzo is a very sophisticated habanera. Only in the fourth movement, the *Andante*, does the mood darken, the soloist's decorative musings including insistent Spanish snaps. The final Rondo has the orchestra impatiently repeating its accompaniment before the soloist deigns to enter with a memorably joyous tune. Lalo has moved to the major key, D, as though in tribute to the similar closing mood, in the same key, of Beethoven's Violin Concerto.

Saint-Saëns: Violin Concerto No. 3 in B minor, Op. 61

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835 – 1921) told his publisher, in July 1879, that the violin concerto he was then writing (the Third)

would be his last, and although he lived another forty-two years, he never wrote another. He did later write an *Havanaise* for a Cuban friend, Rafael Díaz-Albertini, and a *Caprice andalous*, on Spanish themes, both for violin with orchestra. Sarasate told him that he was interested in the *Havanaise*, but he never played either piece. After the violinist's death Saint-Saëns recalled that Sarasate 'came to me when he was very young, with barely a hair on his chin, to ask for a piece'. The piece he then wrote (in 1859, when Sarasate was fifteen and Saint-Saëns was twenty-four) was a *Caprice brillant*, with a virtuoso violin part and a Lisztian piano part, obviously designed for themselves. They probably played it in private, although the first public performance, in 1862, was given by a Cuban violinist, José White Lafitte, with the composer at the piano. This piece has never been published.

Twenty years later, after Saint-Saëns composed his First Violin Concerto and his popular *Introduction et rondo capriccioso*, both for Sarasate (the Second Violin Concerto is a much earlier work, mis-numbered), the *Caprice brillant* was resurrected as the finale of the Third Violin Concerto, the piano part radically transformed for the orchestra. The concerto was dedicated to Sarasate, who played

it several times, as late as 1905. Like Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole* it was taken up by all the great violinists of the next generation: Eugène Ysaÿe, George Enescu, Jan Kubelík, Fritz Kreisler, and others.

Saint-Saëns was a composer of faultless taste, with a perfect technique in all branches of his art. As an unwavering admirer of Mozart, he was proud of the superb orderliness and clarity of his music. He paid the price of being despised by modernists, but he left an enormous body of music which never fails to satisfy the highest standards of musicality. His originality can frequently surprise us, but the music never crosses into the territory of the bizarre. He was appalled by the clumsy groping of Satie, for example, and lived into an age when Strauss and Stravinsky broke down barriers which he had always regarded as sacred.

The classical feel of the first movement of the Third Concerto is no hindrance to our appreciation, for it has both brilliance and charm to commend it. Perhaps the most original movement is the central *Andantino*, notable for its lilting melody and relaxed mood; the movement naturally extends into a meditation on its themes. A short cadenza is followed by a haunting close in which the violinist's harmonics are set two octaves, then

three octaves, above a solo clarinet. All of this is in the key of B flat, remote from the key of the outer movements.

The soloist's attacking chord at the beginning of the finale comes as a shock, and although the declamatory introduction returns in the course of the movement, its main purpose is to drive the music home with brilliant virtuosity and some calmer melodies. One of these is a chorale the return of which at the end, on the brass, provides the concerto with a deeply satisfying wholeness. Perhaps this was in his mind when Saint-Saëns said that this violin concerto would be his last. For a composer who knew he would never stop composing but could not know that he would live to be eighty-six, this was a bold commitment to make.

Sarasate: Concert Fantasy on Bizet's 'Carmen', Op. 25

Pablo de Sarasate (1844 – 1908), like many other great violinists, was also a composer. His music was all for violin, most of it based on folk tunes from different areas of Spain, including gypsy music. Some Scottish airs were a rare exception. It was natural that he would work on the Spanish tunes in *Carmen*. Bizet was an old friend, and they had performed Lalo's Violin Sonata together in 1873.

His *Fantasy* opens with the Entr'acte before Act IV, followed by the famous *Habanera* with which Carmen introduces herself in Act I. The second section moves through Act I with Carmen's sultry song on 'Tra la la la', and the third section is the lively *Séguédille* that follows. The final section is the *Chanson bohème* that opens Act II. Sarasate went no further into the opera, so there is no Toreador's song, and his arrangements leave the music intact, merely inserting a solo part every bar of which exploits one or more of the arrows in a virtuoso's quiver: double stops, harmonics, tunes in octaves, *glissandi*, left-hand *pizzicati*, stratospheric runs, and more. This is not a piece to be attempted by the novice violinist.

Carmen was not the only opera on which Sarasate worked his special magic. He also wrote fantasies on *Der Freischütz*, *Don Giovanni*, *Faust*, *Die Zauberflöte*, and other popular operas of the day; adventurous violinists should surely explore them, but only if they have something close to Sarasate's legendary technique and beautiful tone.

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James Ehnes has established himself as one of the world's foremost musicians.

He began violin studies at the age of four, became a protégé of the noted Canadian violinist Francis Chaplin aged nine, made his orchestral début aged thirteen, with the Orchestre symphonique de Montréal, and graduated from The Juilliard School in 1997, having won the Peter Mennin Prize for Outstanding Achievement and Leadership in Music. Gifted with a rare combination of stunning virtuosity, serene lyricism, and unfaltering musicality, he is a favourite guest at the world's most celebrated concert halls. Recent orchestral highlights include performances with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, Philadelphia Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Cleveland Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, and Orchestre national de France. As a chamber musician, he is the Artistic Director of the Seattle Chamber Music Society and the leader of the Ehnes Quartet. James Ehnes is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, and a Member of the Order of Canada and the Order of Manitoba. In 2017 he received the Royal Philharmonic Society Award in the Instrumentalist category, and in 2021 was named Artist of the Year by the magazine *Gramophone*. He plays the 'Marsick' Stradivarius, of 1715.

The **BBC Philharmonic** is reimagining the orchestral experience for a new generation – challenging perceptions, championing innovation, and taking a rich variety of music to the widest range of audiences. Alongside a flagship series of concerts at Manchester’s Bridgewater Hall, the orchestra broadcasts concerts on BBC Radio 3 and BBC Sounds from venues across the North of England, annually at the BBC Proms, and from its international tours. It also records regularly for Chandos Records and has produced a catalogue of more than 300 discs and digital downloads. Championing new music, it has recently given world and UK premières of works by Anna Appleby, Gerald Barry, Erland Cooper, Tom Coult, Sebastian Fagerlund, Emily Howard, Robert Laidlow, James Lee III, Grace-Evangeline Mason, David Matthews, Outi Tarkiainen, and Anna Þorvaldsdóttir, the scope of its output extending far beyond standard repertoire. Its Chief Conductor is John Storgårds, with whom the orchestra has enjoyed a long association. The French conductor Ludovic Morlot is its Associate Artist, Anna Clyne, one of the most in-demand composers of the day, its Composer in Association.

In May 2023 the orchestra performed at the Eurovision Song Contest, both at a

free concert with the previous Ukrainian winner, Jamala, and in the final itself with the Italian artist Mahmood for a rendition of John Lennon’s *Imagine* during the Liverpool Songbook medley. The orchestra continues to deliver a programme of engagement with children and young people. At the end of 2023 it released *Musical Storyland*, a major new ten-part series featuring the musicians of the BBC Philharmonic, which brings famous stories from around the world to life using the power of music. This was the first time an orchestra has been commissioned to make a series of films for UK network television. Through all its activities, the BBC Philharmonic is bringing life-changing musical experiences to audiences across Greater Manchester, the North of England, the UK, and around the world. www.bbc.co.uk/philharmonic

One of Spain’s most highly regarded conductors, **Juanjo Mena** held the position of Chief Conductor of the BBC Philharmonic from 2011 to 2018, highlights of his tenure including concerts both in Manchester and at the BBC Proms, performances of symphonies by Mahler and Bruckner, a Schubert cycle, several acclaimed recordings, and seven worldwide tours. He has been Artistic Director of the Bilbao Orkestra

Sinfonikoa, Chief Guest Conductor of the Orchestra del Teatro Carlo Felice, in Genoa, and Principal Guest Conductor of the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra. Most recently he was Principal Conductor of the Cincinnati May Festival, his tenure reinvigorating the Festival's repertoire with previously unheard works and new commissions. He has worked with major European orchestras such as the Berliner Philharmoniker, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Rotterdams Philharmonisch Orkest, Orchestre national de France, Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestre national du Capitole de Toulouse, Orchestra Filarmonica della Scala, Milan, Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, and Danish National Symphony Orchestra.

He has conducted most of the leading North American orchestras, including the

Baltimore, Boston, Cincinnati, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Montreal, New World, and Toronto symphony orchestras, New York and Los Angeles Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra, Minnesota Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra, and Philadelphia Orchestra. His discography for Chandos with the BBC Philharmonic comprises recordings of works by Ginastera, including a disc to mark the composer's centenary, Arriaga, Albéniz, Bruckner, Manuel de Falla (Recording of the Month in *BBC Music Magazine*), Gabriel Pierné (Editor's Choice in *Gramophone*), Montsalvatge, Weber, and Turina, all of which have gained excellent reviews from the specialist music press. Juanjo Mena has also made a critically acclaimed recording of Messiaen's *Turangalila-symphonie* with the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra. www.juanjomena.com

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James Ehnes

FRENCH VIOLIN CONCERTOS – Elnes/BBC Philharmonic/Mena

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