

In May 2004, I completed my doctoral thesis on Eugene Ysaÿe's Six Sonatas for Unaccompanied Violin, Op. 27. Three years earlier, as I was just beginning my degree, I was struggling with picking a topic. During a lesson on Sonata No. 4 with my teacher and mentor Vartan Manoogian, he was relating some anecdotes about Ysaÿe and his sonatas. I was so taken by them (and always had been) that I realized my topic was right before my eyes. I have spent countless hours researching and practicing these works and I can honestly say that my love and passion for them have only increased. Below is a link to the introduction of my thesis. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

My interest in the violin solo sonata has branched out into more research dealing with the genre as a whole. I will be posting more information about this in the future. Below is the introduction from my doctoral thesis. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or information you would like to share on Ysaÿe

Eugene Ysaÿe and the *Six Sonatas for Unaccompanied Violin, Op. 27* Introduction to the Doctoral Thesis of Erin Aldridge

Eugene Ysaÿe is considered one of the great violinists to emerge at the turn of the twentieth century. He had great success and earned much respect as a performer, pedagogue, conductor, and composer. Born in Liège, he was immersed in a rich Belgian tradition, beginning with his father and continuing through his studies with such noted masters as Henri Vieuxtemps, Rodolphe Massard, and Henryck Wieniawski. Later in his career he was considered by many to be an integral part of the Franco-Belgian violin school.

Throughout his career, Ysaÿe was known for his appreciation and interpretation of new music and was one of the first conductors and performers to present new music in concerts. His appreciation for contemporary music influenced his approach to the violin. As a composer he revolutionized playing style by creating important innovations that would enable a performer to play the harmonic language of contemporary composers. As a duo partner with pianist Raoul Pugno, he was the first to present concert programs that incorporated both contemporary works and sonatas for violin and piano.

By the age of fourteen, he began composing tirelessly continuing the tradition set before him by Vieuxtemps and Wieniawski as a performer-composer. Many years later he would destroy most of the manuscripts because he felt they were "worthless" and "too much of an imitation of his masters Vieuxtemps and Wieniawski."

Before Ysaÿe, Nicolò Paganini was perhaps the most important reformer of violin technique. In many of his compositions, including the *Twenty-Four Caprices*, Paganini required techniques in his own music (such as fingered octaves, tenths, and double harmonics) that many considered to be impossible on the violin. Ysaÿe took many of Paganini's innovations, and combining them with his own, became perhaps the most significant and influential innovator of violin technique. Although these techniques were used in his compositions, Ysaÿe provided technique that both suited his compositions and would enable the performer to tackle the then contemporary music. This was most evident in his *Six Sonates pour Violon Seul, Op. 27*. These sonatas, composed in 1923, exemplified the culmination of Ysaÿe's technical and compositional innovations. They represented a technical achievement embracing modern conventions including quarter-tones, whole-tone double stops, and extensive arpeggios. Written later in life, at the age of sixty-five, the sonatas display his deep love for the violin and his wish to continue his legacy through future generations.

One important characteristic of the sonatas was Ysaÿe's dedication of each sonata to one of six noted violinists of the time: Joseph Szigeti, Jacques Thibaud, George Enescu, Fritz Kreisler, Mathieu Crickboom, and Manuel Quiroga. These violinists were not just colleagues of Ysaÿe, they were also friends to whom Ysaÿe wished to pay tribute in the form of a musical character sketch. Each violinist had a particular relationship with Ysaÿe. Paris was an epicenter for violin study from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century providing a stage for many of the world's leading soloists. Even though the dedicatees were six of the noted violinists of the time and came from different backgrounds, at some point in their respective careers they all made their way to Paris. Ysaÿe heard Hungarian violinist Joseph Szigeti perform the *G Minor Solo Sonata* of Bach and was so overwhelmed that he was immediately inspired to write the six sonatas. Frenchman Thibaud had long been an admirer of Ysaÿe and studied with him for a short period of time. They were lifelong friends. Rumanian George Enescu was one of the great geniuses of the twentieth century who Ysaÿe respected immensely. Fritz Kreisler, an Austrian violinist, was perhaps the closest friend of the six to Ysaÿe. Belgian Mathieu Crickboom was one of Ysaÿe's favorite students and second violinist in the Ysaÿe Quartet. They premiered Debussy's String Quartet together, which is acknowledged in the Fifth Sonata.

They remained friends throughout their lives. Spanish violinist Manuel Quiroga performed several times at the Concerts Ysaÿe, and Ysaÿe was very taken with his style of playing.

There are several other influences apparent in the sonatas. First was Ysaÿe's obsession with Bach, which influenced Ysaÿe's use of genre, movement form, melodic material, and harmonic material. Second was Ysaÿe's relationship to Debussy and the influence of both Debussy's *String Quartet* and *Sirènes* from the *Three Nocturnes* evident in the *Fifth Sonata*. Third, the virtuosity of previous performer/composers, such as Paganini and Sarasate, paved the way for the technically virtuosic passages prevalent throughout the sonatas. Finally, the effects of old age and bad health prompted Ysaÿe to compose an autobiographical legacy for generations to come.

In retrospect these sonatas are such a beautiful and important display of both Ysaÿe's knowledge of the instrument, and his ability to create a story or a poignant characterization. These sonatas offer a lesson in violin playing which is valuable for those of us studying today. They also serve a historical importance, describing a period of time in which the great masters of the instrument were gathered in some form or another in Paris.

Each dedicatee is significant to the violin and should be remembered for what they brought to the music world. Although by today's standards their playing is from a different style and era, there is so much to be learned from their approach.

For the performer, there is a satisfaction attained when one truly learns the sonatas. The demands are such that not only will you grow as a violinist, but more importantly you will grow as a musician

My wish is for Ysaÿe to be placed more prominently among the great artists and pedagogues of all time, and for his works to be established as master works that every violinist should know.