



Notes on the Program

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***Symphonie espagnole* for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 21**

Édouard Lalo

After mastering both violin and cello at the Lille Conservatory, Édouard Lalo moved to Paris, where he numbered the painter Eugène Delacroix among his friends and performed in orchestras under Hector Berlioz. His earliest compositions include a pair of symphonies, although he apparently destroyed both, perhaps already sensing his inclination toward chamber music of the sort that Mendelssohn and Schumann had promulgated in Germany. In 1855 he became a charter member of the Armingaud String Quartet — an ensemble that proved influential in reestablishing chamber music's prestige in Parisian circles. Yet, while relentlessly championing the music of others, Lalo was growing increasingly frustrated by the rejection of his own works. In 1859 he founded his own quartet, and at about the same time he abandoned composition entirely. Fortunately, it would prove a temporary hiatus and in his later years he would produce most of the pieces that have kept his name alive.

In Lalo's modest catalogue of 45 opus numbers

chamber pieces outnumber large-ensemble works, and chamber music aficionados particularly admire his three piano trios. He also produced a good many art songs, inspired by his second wife, who was an accomplished contralto. But his reputation rests chiefly on a single work: the *Symphonie espagnole* (*Spanish Symphony*) for Violin and Orchestra, composed in 1874. It is not Lalo's only concerted work, since it was immediately preceded by an F-major Violin Concerto (1873) and would be followed by such works as his *Allegro Appassionato* for Cello and Orchestra (1875), Cello Concerto (1877), Piano Concerto (1888–89), Russian Concerto for Violin, and a handful of short works for violin and orchestra. Of all these the *Symphonie espagnole* is the only work of Lalo's to still receive regular performances.

In Short

Born: January 27, 1823, in Lille, France

Died: April 22, 1892, in Paris

Work composed: 1874

World premiere: February 7, 1875, in Paris, Édouard Colonne, conductor, Pablo de Sarasate, soloist

New York Philharmonic premiere: December 4, 1910, Walter Damrosch conducting the New York Symphony (which merged with the New York Philharmonic in 1928 to form today's New York Philharmonic), Jaroslav Kocian, soloist

Most recent New York Philharmonic performance: November 10, 2007, Xian Zhang, conductor, Vadim Repin, soloist

Estimated duration: ca. 32 minutes

An Appreciation

In 1924 the American francophile composer and Harvard professor Edward Burlingame Hill (whose pupils at Harvard would include Elliott Carter, Virgil Thomson, Randall Thompson, Ross Lee Finney, and Leonard Bernstein) published a book titled *Modern French Music*, based on lectures he had given a few years earlier in Strasbourg and Lyons. He was unequivocal about his appreciation for Édouard Lalo:

Lalo brought to French music an ardent temperament, denied to Saint-Saëns, great rhythmical vitality, together with precision and finesse, the suppleness and clarity of expression which are among the essential French traits, an unconquerable leaning toward the exotic, and a strong vein of poetic imagination. ... Lalo surely expanded the taste for exoticism which has continued as one of the most marked characteristics of later French music. The Spanish Symphony [*Symphonie espagnole*], the Norwegian Rhapsody, the Russian Concerto and portions of [the ballet] *Namouna* exhibit a picturesque tendency still further emphasized in various works by Chabrier, Debussy, Ravel, Florent Schmitt, Albert Roussel and others. Thus Lalo is the direct forerunner of a foremost feature in French music of the generation immediately preceding the present.

It is a well-worn truism that the best Spanish music was written by French composers. Whether or not you agree with that pronouncement you will likely acknowledge that Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole* deserves a place near the top of the Franco-Spanish list, along with such ensuing works as Bizet's *Carmen*, Chabrier's *España*, and Ravel's *Rapsodie espagnole*. In fact, the *Symphonie espagnole* has a good deal of authentic Iberia in its genes. The surname Lalo is itself Spanish, a testament to the fact that the composer descended from an ancient Spanish line,

although the family had dispersed to Flanders and Northern France by the 16th century.

What's more, the piece was written with a Spanish violinist in mind: the esteemed virtuoso Pablo de Sarasate, for whom Lalo had composed his F-major Violin Concerto a year earlier. That work displayed nothing that could be considered Spanish in flavor, nor did it display much else that would ensure it a place in the repertoire. The *Symphonie espagnole* could not be more different, and Sarasate scored a major hit with it, lending his national insight to interpretation of the score.

Although the *Symphonie espagnole* is a concerto in the way that it gives virtuosic prominence to the violin and builds on the drama between the soloist and the orchestra, it is not structured as one would expect a 19th-century concerto to be. Instead of the normal three, or maybe four, movements, we have five, each within hailing distance of seven minutes in length, except for the rather shorter *scherzando*. (The *intermezzo* was sometimes cut in times past, but it is almost always included in modern performances, as it is here.) The first movement announces grandiose pretensions, but the remainder tends toward the lightweight and ingratiating, recalling the style of violin concertos by Wieniawski and Vieuxtemps. Recognizably Spanish rhythms and melodic turns pepper the piece, and the very famous finale capably infuses the spirit of Iberia into a delightful, quick-paced *rondo*.

Instrumentation: two flutes and piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, triangle, snare drum, harp, and strings, in addition to the solo violin.