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James Madison University

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A Pedagogical Approach to the Technical Aspects
of
Eugène Ysaÿe's Solo Violin Sonatas No. 5 and No. 6

Jianda Bai

A Doctor of Musical Arts Document submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Musical Arts

School of Music

August 2021

FACULTY COMMITTEE:

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this document to my parents in thanks for their love and support throughout my educational journey.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to express my thanks to my violin professor, Dr. Wanchi Huang (who published her own CD on the *Six Violin Sonatas for Solo Violin* by Eugène Ysaÿe) for her ongoing support during my studies in the School of Music at James Madison University. She has inspired me with her love of teaching and violin, and I will take with me her pedagogical lessons throughout my lifetime. I am also very appreciative of the kindness and mentoring she has provided me as a student making a life in a new country.

Secondly, I also owe a great deal of thanks to Dr. Carl Donakowski who has also helped to shape my ideas and broaden my experiences as a string player during my studies, especially in the area of chamber music performance. Both Dr. Huang and Dr. Donakowski also played an integral part in assisting me with the development of my lecture recital topic, of which a related outcome was this document. I am most appreciative of their input and final editing contributions.

Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Lisa Maynard, who has worked with me in formulating and editing the content of this document. I have appreciated her support and enthusiasm for my research. I also enjoyed the opportunity of working with her as her TA during my time and JMU – especially in relation to teaching pedagogy, both in the areas of strings and teaching in higher education.

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Abstract

A Pedagogical Approach to the Technical Aspects

of

Eugène Ysaÿe's Solo Violin Sonatas No. 5 and No. 6

Since the completion of Ysaÿe's *Six Sonatas for the Solo Violin* in 1923, performances of this important work in the violin literature have continually been well received by the public. This collection is frequently compared with J.S. Bach's *Six Sonatas and Partitas for the Solo Violin*, because of the clear connection between these two works. Each of Ysaÿe's pieces were dedicated to six younger violinist contemporaries and were composed in consideration of the character of the dedicatee, forming a kaleidoscope of musical and technical delights for both the performer and their audience.

While each of Ysaÿe's six sonatas offer performers technical and musical challenges, some of the works, such as No. 3 and 4, have been favored with preferential treatment by violin performers over the remaining works. "The first four sonatas are the most important of the set and the most likely to win a permanent place for themselves in the repertory."¹ This document focuses on Solo Violin Sonatas No's. 5 & 6 which, while less frequently performed than their counterparts, possess unique contrasting musical qualities making them worthy of being examined in more detail.

¹ Lev Ginsburg and Herbert R Axelrod, *Prof. Lev Ginsburg's Ysaÿe* (Neptune City, N.J.: Paganiniana, 1980), 532.

The purpose of this document is to examine and discuss these two important works focusing on not only their unique musical and technical elements, but also how to practice and teach them. This document will also explore the historical backgrounds of these two violin masterpieces, with an eye towards understanding the musical and technical skills required for their successful performance. Lastly, questions of how to best practice these sonatas efficiently will be discussed.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE COMPOSER AND HIS WORK

Biography

Eugène Ysaÿe was born in Liege, Belgium in 1858, and died in Brussels in 1931. He was one of the most prominent violinists of the late 19th and early 20th century. Ysaÿe began studying violin at the age of four with his father,² Nicholas Ysaÿe, who was a violinist and conductor. He then started taking lessons at the local Liège Conservatory in 1865, before briefly dropping out and the later re-enrolling in the school. In 1874, Ysaÿe won the silver medal along with a bursary in a competition at the conservatory, which enabled him to study with Henryk Wieniawski (1835-1880) in Brussels, and later with Wieniawski's teacher, Henri Vieuxtemps (1820-1881) in Paris.³

Both Vieuxtemps and Ysaÿe were considered the most outstanding violinists from the Belgian school of violin playing by their peers and have continued to be revered by generations since. Vieuxtemps enjoyed teaching Ysaÿe and would frequently introduce him to his musician friends at his house parties, including Franz Liszt (1811-1886) and Anton Rubinstein (1829-1894). At these parties, Ysaÿe would listen to the guests perform, and he himself would also perform for them.⁴ Between 1879 and 1882, while living in Berlin, Ysaÿe was the principal violinist of the *Benjamin Bilse Orchestra*, which later became known as the *Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra*.⁵

² Ibid., 21.

³ Ibid., 31.

⁴ Ibid., 31.

⁵ Ibid., 35.

After his stay in Berlin, Ysaÿe was invited for a tour of Scandinavia, Russia, and Hungary by Artur Rubinstein, who recognized Ysaÿe's great talent and potential as a performer. After the tour, Ysaÿe continued to establish his career as a soloist in Paris, and quickly settled in to living in France. In his later years, as his health started to deteriorate, Ysaÿe shifted his professional musical focus away from violin performance to a combination of composing, conducting, and teaching.

Ysaÿe was an avid conductor for the majority of his career. In 1894, he established his own orchestra, the *Société des Concerts Ysaÿe*, in which he served as conductor. From 1918 to 1922, he served as Conductor of the *Chicago Symphony Orchestra*. Upon his return to Europe, Ysaÿe resumed his position of conductor for his own previously established orchestra.

In addition to his skill in conducting, Ysaÿe was and is known as a prolific composer and teacher. As a teacher, he was respected for his commitment to helping other violinists. As a composer, his most notable works include solo violin pieces, chamber works, pieces for violin/cello with piano, along with a few show pieces. For violinists today, his most mentioned work remains the *Six Solo Sonatas for the Solo Violin*.

Introduction to the Six Sonatas

The *Six Sonatas for the Solo Violin* were composed in July of 1923. Ysaÿe had long been obsessed with J.S. Bach's *Solo Sonatas and Partitas for the Violin* and had frequently performed the *Chaconne* from the *Partita No.2 in D Minor* in public.⁶ Ysaÿe's inspiration

⁶ Stockhem, Michel. Preface. Ysaÿe, Eugène. *Six Sonatas for Violin Solo, Op. 27*. Ed. By Norbert Gertsch. (Munich, Germany: Urtext. 2004), VII.

for composing his own collection of sonatas originated from hearing his good friend, Hungarian violinist Joseph Szigeti (1892-1973) perform Bach's *Sonata for Solo Violin in G Minor*.⁷ Ysaÿe wanted to carry on the legacy of Bach and offer his own musical tribute to Bach.

As it had been over two centuries since the completion of Bach's solo sonatas, the time period during which Ysaÿe began composing his work reflected the dramatic changes that had occurred in the world of music since the 1700's. Historically, musical styles had evolved through the Baroque, Classical and Romantic periods. Violin techniques developed to meet the musical demands of increasingly difficult repertoire- thanks in part to the contributions of Nicolo Paganini (1782-1840). In this regard Nicolo Paganini played a particularly important role in the early 19th Century. The violin and bow had also gone through multiple changes during this time, including the lengthening of the fingerboard, the addition of the chin rest, and the appearance of the Tourte bow. The Ysaÿe solo violin sonatas were composed with these changes in mind.

All six sonatas were composed during Ysaÿe's stay at his seaside home on the Belgian coast in July of 1923.⁸ He spent less than twenty-four hours sketching out all six of the works, before completing them in the same month. The works were published the following year. Ysaÿe dedicated each of the six sonatas to a different violin virtuoso (coincidentally, each of a different nationality) who as members of a younger generation of up-and-coming performers had long expressed admiration for Ysaÿe's musical

⁷ Ibid., VII.

⁸ Ibid., VII.

accomplishments. These works are often compared to the solo sonatas and partitas written by J. S. Bach, and rightfully so, as they are both challenging in terms of their virtuosic technical demands and also the need for the performer to interpret them in a musically sophisticated way.

It would also appear that Ysaÿe was modeling his sonatas after J. S. Bach's violin partitas and sonatas. Ysaÿe's *Sonata No.1 for Solo Violin* is in the key of G minor. This is, incidentally, in the same key in which Bach composed his own *G minor Sonata for Solo Violin* (which was also the first out of six works). The sonata was dedicated to Joseph Szigeti, which appears to be Ysaÿe's way of acknowledging Szigeti as the source of inspiration for this sonata.⁹

⁹ Curty, "A Pedagogical Approach to Eugène Ysaÿe's Six Sonatas for Solo Violin, Op. 27."

CHAPTER 2: SONATA NO. 5 FOR SOLO VIOLIN

Background to the Work

In addition to his historical roles as a violinist, conductor, and composer, Ysaÿe was also remembered as an outstanding pedagogue, who was devoted to teaching wholeheartedly. Lev Ginsburg (1980) wrote:

From 1886 to 1898 Eugène Ysaÿe held a professorship at the Brussels Conservatoire, training a whole galaxy of excellent violinists. It may be added here that in later years, after leaving the Conservatoire, when he dedicated himself wholly to concert appearances in Europe and America, Ysaÿe never refused to give lessons or advice to violinists who flocked to him from all parts of the world.¹⁰

Ysaÿe's students included Josef Gingold (1909-1995), William Primrose (1904-1982), Jascha Brodsky (1907-1997), Nathan Milstein (1904-1992), and Mathieu Crickboom (1871-1947). Crickboom was the dedicatee of Ysaÿe's *Sonata No. 5 for Solo Violin* (1923). A Belgian violinist, Crickboom was mostly known as Ysaÿe's proud pupil, the second violinist of the *Ysaÿe Quartet*. In his later years, Crickboom was appointed Professor of Violin at the Conservatoire of Liege, and subsequently at the Conservatoire of Brussels, just like Ysaÿe once was.¹¹

¹⁰ Ginsburg, 63.

¹¹ Ibid., 63.

While each of the six sonatas possesses a different character and employs a variety of violinistic techniques, the *Sonata No. 5* stands alone in terms of the uniqueness of its style. The first movement is titled *L'Aurore* in French, which translates into “The Dawn”. This title could be interpreted as being representative of Ysaÿe’s admiration and wishes for Crickboom’s success as his professional career was taking off.

The title of this movement is also reflective of the existing influence of the Impressionist Movement on music and art, during the time period in which it was composed, and bears similarities to the title of Claude Monet’s painting *Impression, Sunrise* (1872). Similarly, the style of the work is also highly impressionistic. Without knowing the composer, first time contemporary listeners of today may aurally identify Impressionistic elements of this work, which was composed in the manner of French musicians such as Claude Debussy (1862-1918) and Maurice Ravel (1875-1937). These characteristics include the ambiguity of tonal center, the usage of pentatonicism, and short and sparse melodic traits.

Eugène Ysaÿe was indeed quite familiar with the French style of composition that was popular during his lifetime. This was partially due to the strong historical connections between Belgium and France. More importantly, having lived in Paris until 1886,¹² Ysaÿe himself was an important supporter and advocate of the Impressionist Movement. While living in Paris, he was a member of an artistic group called *Le Cercle des XX* (“The Twenty Club”) that was founded in 1884, and initially consisted mainly of artists, including Claude Monet, whose painting *Impressio, Sunrise* was believed to be the source of inspiration from

¹² Ginsburg, 47.

which the Impressionist Movement took its name.¹³ After Ysaÿe joined the Twenty Club, it “became a major musical center and the fame of the concerts sponsored by it spread beyond the borders of Belgium.”¹⁴

Additionally, the *Exposition Universelle* in celebration of the 100th anniversary of the French Revolution was held in Paris in 1889.¹⁵ It is argued that this event inspired Debussy to “capture the sounds of the gamelan in his 1903 piano composition *Pagodes*.”¹⁶ This fair also could potentially have broadened Ysaÿe’s view. Therefore, it is unlikely a coincidence that Ysaÿe named the first movement of his fifth solo violin sonata “*The Dawn*” while composing the piece in a rather Impressionistic style. The connections to Debussy will be presented later in this document.

Ysaÿe’s career as a violinist started booming during that time, and he made friends with a number of French composers who were known for their Impressionistic music by the future generations.

The young violinist resumed old acquaintances in Paris and struck up a close friendship with the prominent French composers Saint-Saens, Faure, Debussy, Vincent D’Indy, Chausson, Chabrier and, naturally, the outstanding Belgian composer and organist Cesar Franck, who was intimately associated with the French school of composition. They often

¹³ “Impressionism,” Grove Music Online, accessed September 4, 2020, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000050026>.

¹⁴ Ginsburg, 57.

¹⁵ “Paris Exposition of 1889 (Prints and Photographs Reading Room, Library of Congress).”

¹⁶ Parker, “Claude Debussy’s Gamelan”, 1.

met to discuss all kinds of musical problems, new compositions, their interpretation, and simply to make music. The friendship with these Paris musicians proved to be of immense value for Ysaÿe's artistic development.¹⁷

Some of the works by these composers were dedicated to and premiered by Ysaÿe, including Debussy's *String Quartet*, and Franck's *Sonata for Violin and Piano*. Ysaÿe and his friends would also share musical ideas with each other.

Ysaÿe had a long-term friendship with Claude Debussy. This friendship extended to their music-making as well. The preliminary version of Debussy's *Nocturnes*, scored for violin and orchestra, was intended for Ysaÿe and dedicated to him.¹⁸ Besides the *Nocturnes* and the *String Quartet*, Debussy's opera *Pelleas and Melisande* was also originally dedicated to Ysaÿe, but was later withdrawn due to their relationship being strained in the 1900s.¹⁹

Apart from the aforementioned Impressionistic traits, the regularly occurring references within the composition to the number five—specifically in the title of the work, the use of fifths both melodically and harmonically, the use of quintuplets, and in the time signature itself—could also be indicative of a connection to the group of composers called the Russian Five (Sergei Fedorov, Vladimir Konstantinov, Slava Kozlov, Slava Fetisov, and Igor Larionov) who were contemporaries of Ysaÿe. As Richard Taruskin puts it: “The orientalist trope, with which they filled their music, distinguished them from the composers

¹⁷ Ibid., 53.

¹⁸ Ibid., 153.

¹⁹ Ibid., 154.

of Western Europe, and gave them a means of competing with the older, more established traditions of European music”.²⁰ This oriental trait became the leading characteristic of Russian music, to the western European musicians at the time.

“In the West, orientalism is among the best-known aspects of Russian music, so much so, in fact, that it is widely considered a feature of the Russian national character.”²¹ Notable composers of this style include the Russian Five who were prominently active in the second half of the 19th century. “At about the turn of the twentieth century, Russian music first came to the attention of the Western public in Paris. Presented chiefly with oriental works, the Parisians, unprompted, considered them to be ‘typically Russian’”.²² Among the Parisians were Debussy and Ysaÿe, who based their career in Paris at the time.

It would therefore appear that, as a musician based in Paris during the late 19th and early 20th century, Ysaÿe had plenty of opportunity to be familiarized with both Impressionistic and oriental music. This could potentially lead to these two elements utilized in his Sonata No. 5. The influences of orientalism and impressionism will be discussed later in the document.

²⁰ Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music: Music in the Nineteenth Century* (OUP USA, 2009), 392.

²¹ Francis Maes, *A History of Russian Music: From Kamarinskaya to Babi Yar* (University of California Press, 2002), 80.

²² Maes, 80.

Formal Outline of the Work

Movement 1: *L'Aurore*

The first movement of *Sonata No. 5 for Solo Violin* can be roughly divided into three sections: an opening section from beginning to m. 28; the development section from m. 29 to the first beat of m. 45; and the rest of the work which serves as the impetus to the climax (see Table 1). When comparing the openings, *L'Aurore* starts the slowest of all movements of the six. Although Sonata No. 3, the *Ballade*, also begins slowly, it quickly picks up intensity. *L'Aurore* spends almost twenty measures depicting the slow, yet unstoppable sunrising. Ysaÿe was very specific with his use of musical terminology. He specified seven terms in the first twenty measures, such as *Mesure tres libre* (very free tempo), *simplement* (simply), and *sans hâte* (without haste). Ysaÿe imposed limitations through terminologies, interestingly, to prevent the players from performing with restrictions.



Figure 1: *Sonata No. 5, I. L'Aurore*, m. 6, opening motif.

The long opening section of this work highlights one basic motif, that is laid out from the very beginning, and continues to be developed and varied through the exploration of pitch and dynamic range contrasts. As Jessika Ulrike Rittstiegl (2018) mentioned in her dissertation, “The constructing principles of ‘*L'Aurore*’ are variation technique and

Rapid string crossings continue to be featured in the climax of this movement, focusing heavily on the open G string, the lowest note on the violin. The entire section is made up of all slurs with the exception of the final chord. Starting from m. 50, each set of slurs begins and ends on the low G. The arpeggiated slurs develop gradually in terms of range, dynamics (from *f* to *fff*), and tempo, eventually the melody lands on a B6, the highest note of the piece, thus making the final chord the largest expansion of the movement.

Table 1
Three Sections of "L'Aurore"

Sections	Measure Number	Description
Introduction	1-28	Slow variations with left-hand pizzicato, heavily featuring fifth chords. Expansion & Contraction.
Development	29-45 (1 st beat)	Oscillation between fourths and fifths, arpeggiation based on all four open strings, E & C continues.
Climax	45 (2 nd beat)-59	Arpeggiation continues with heavy focus on open G, E & C continues towards the end.

CHAPTER 3: UNIQUE ELEMENTS AND PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES **IN SONATA NO. 5**

Emphasis on Five

The importance of the element of the number five is clearly evident throughout this sonata. Although Ysaÿe favored the use of pure fifths in all the six sonatas, there exists an unusually high number of fifths in No. 5, which quite cleverly already includes the number five in its title. The interval of a fifth is widely featured both chordally and melodically, such as the fifth chords in measure 35 and the arpeggiation at measure 36 (Figure 3). Sonorities built of stacked fifths, presented both as fingered tremolo and arpeggiation, are featured prominently in the 5th sonata.

Pentatonic scales, another reference to the number five, also occur in the climax section, for example, at measure 47 (Figure 4). In the second movement, *Danse Rustique*, the theme of fifths continues to be developed, along with the addition of fourths. The pentatonic scale could serve as evidence of Oriental influence.



Figure 3: *Sonata No. 5*, I. *L'Aurore*, mm. 35-36, usage of fifths.



Figure 4: *Sonata No. 5*, I. *L'Aurore*, m. 47, pentatonic scale.

Expansion and Contraction

Another important element employed in this movement is the concept of “expansion and contraction”. Ysaÿe utilizes four different forms of expansion and contraction within this movement. Specifically, these occur in the way he varies the melodic line, the dynamics, the tempi, and the arpeggiated circle of fifth figure that occurs in part of the movement.

When expansion in any of these four areas occurs in the work, it is most often followed by an antithetical contraction. As mentioned previously, the combination of the two can be observed throughout the score in one of four ways. Firstly, in Ysaÿe’s treatment of the range of the melody both vertically and horizontally. The vertical movement can be observed in the pure open-fifth chord that consists of the lower two open strings, D and G. It grows by adding an E and then a B (an intervallic leap of a seventeenth), with the open G string constantly droning. This feature occurs in the very first line of the movement as illustrated in Figure 5. When the music keeps going and progresses to the higher strings, and it becomes difficult to maintain the droning effect, Ysaÿe then switches from a persistent chord to a left-hand pizzicato G.



Figure 5: *Sonata No. 5*, I. *L'Aurore*, m. 1-5, the opening statement with expansion and contraction.

Conversely, Ysaÿe's use of what might be described as horizontal range expansion can be seen in his use of motivic echoing (Figure 6). The melody that begins in measure 6 and ends with the first note of measure 7 (the D E B F melodic line), is repeated at one octave lower beginning in measure 8 and ending on the first note of measure 9. In subsequent measures, the open string pizzicato continues to alternate between the lower and higher strings, which continues to develop into G and E, the lowest and highest open strings. This expansion of octaves is created through the concept of spinning.



Figure 6: *Sonata No. 5*, I. *L'Aurore*, mm. 6-9, expansion through echoing and spinning.

The idea of expansion and contraction can further be seen through the composer's use of dynamics in this same section of the work (see Figure 4). These contrasts occur when the dynamic volume reaches a burst of *sf* from *p*, stabilizes at *f*, then gradually radiates down to *pp*. This combination is common in the opening and development sections

also. Although most pieces contain contrasts of dynamic change, the large range of dynamics occurred in a very short time in this movement is unusual.

Towards the final section, the dynamics continue to expand in this way, eventually reaching *fff*. As a further example of the idea of expansion, the aforementioned dynamic change is also often accompanied by an incremental change of tempo in this movement. Ysaÿe used the term *Stringendo* (meaning to accelerate) in the score at measure 51, marking a dramatic tempo difference between the beginning and the end of the movement.

The composer also utilizes expansion in other ways in this movement that further add to the complexity of its core structure. As seen beginning in measure 36, an initial core statement of fifths arpeggiation is established before then being added to and expanded upon beginning at measure 38 when more notes are added (see Figure 7). Initially, five individual pitches (G, D, A, E, and B) in the order of a circle of fifths, are then expanded to include 2 new pitches (A' and D'') as seen in Expansion 1. So that the expansion not only includes additional pitches but also the motif expands rhythmically from eight 32nd notes to twelve 32nd notes played within the same time value.

In measures 39 and 40 we see the concept of expansion occurring through the addition of specific left-hand fingerings. In Expansion 2 we see the addition of the first finger to the circle of fifth open strings, and in Expansion 3 the use of an echo effect whereby 4th finger notes are followed by their open string equivalent. In these two measures, we also see once again an expansion of the rhythm from eight 32nd notes to twelve 32nd notes played within the same time value.



Figure 7: *Sonata No. 5, I. L'Aurore*, mm. 34-40, expansion through addition to skeleton.

As previously mentioned, Ysaÿe also uses the idea of expansion in relation to tempi. Beginning around the development section of this movement (m. 29), a gradual increase in tempo occurs that continues to accelerate until the end of the movement. In addition, a few examples of contractions via slower tempo can also be observed, such as the *poco calando* (gradual decrease in both tempo and volume) in Figure 7. Throughout the movement, Ysaÿe clearly marks these changes in tempi through his ongoing use of a variety of different tempo indications. The piece opens with *Lento assai* (very slow), then arrives at *calme et mesure* (measure 29) and ends up with *stringendo* (measure 53).

Table 2
Expansion and Contraction in "L'Aurore"

Types of Expansion and Contraction	Musical Indicator
Vertical Range (Harmonic and Melodic).	Arpeggiation (e.g., m. 1-5).
Core Structure of Fifths.	Pitch and Rhythm (e.g., mm. 34-40).
Dynamics.	Crescendi/Decrescendi (e.g., mm. 6-9).
Tempo.	<i>Lento assai</i> to <i>Stringendo</i> .

Movement 2: *Danse Rustique*

Possessing the similar character of pentatonicism,²⁵ the *Danse Rustique* provides new challenges for the performing violinist. As Bubanja wrote: “Like the Fourth Sonata, the Fifth is unified cyclically. Both movements are interrelated in that they share a significant amount of material.”²⁶ Instead of using evolving variations as in the first movement, *Danse Rustique* has a traditional structure and employs an A-B-A’-Coda format, as seen in Table 3.

Table 3
Structure of “Danse Rustique”

Sections	Measures	Description
A Section	1-21	Rhythmic dance with multiple meter changes.
B Section	22-64	Flowing, impressionistic.
A’ Section	65-102	Recapitulation of the dance.
Coda	103-end	Building to climax, adopting the idea of expansion and contraction.

²⁵ Bubanja, “The Impact of Eugène Ysaÿe on Performance Practice and Solo Violin Repertoire: A Graduate Recital Inspired by The Master Himself”, 28.

²⁶ Jessica Miskelly, “Fifths: An Approach to Violin Technique for the Left Hand as Taught by Rodney Friend” (Ph.D., United States -- Kentucky, University of Kentucky, 2018),
<https://search.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/2066539627/abstract/2B711D44DD284FAAPQ/1>.

Danse Rustique shares several similar characteristics with *L'Aurore*, including the prominent usage of the number Five. As seen in Figure 8, the fourth chord is also heavily involved, and this proves true for the entire movement. It would appear that Ysaÿe was trying to compose this movement with the “perfect” chords (fourths and fifths).

The A section spans from the opening to measure 21. Just like *L'Aurore*, *Danse Rustique* also opens with the G-D open string double-stop but continues into a dance far more rhythmic and articulated, as notated by Ysaÿe: *bien rythmé* (“well-paced” or “very rhythmic”) (Figure 8). The A section remains relatively steady. Unlike *L'Aurore*, *Danse Rustique* opens more vehemently with “asymmetric and marked rhythms.”²⁷ Crescendi are also frequently featured in this section. One notable characteristic includes consecutive down bows (Figure 9), further accentuating the rigidity of the movement.



Figure 8: *Sonata No. 5, II. Danse Rustique*, mm. 1-2, rigid opening of movement.



Figure 9: *Sonata No. 5, II. Danse Rustique*, mm. 17-18, consecutive down bows.

²⁷ Keith Anderson, liner notes to Eugène Ysaÿe Sonatas for Solo Violin, Op. 27, Tianwa Yang, Naxos 8.555996, CD, 2012.

The B section starts at measure 22 and ends in measure 64. This section, in contrast to the A section, remains soft throughout, and is probably the most impressionistic section of the movement, hinted by the tempo marking *moderato amabile*. The alternation of fifths and fourths is continued, with a few exceptions of sixths, especially in the oscillations (Figure 10).



Figure 10: *Sonata No. 5, II. Danse Rustique*, m. 38, combination of fourths and fifths in the oscillation.

In measure 65, the A section comes back with some rhythmic modifications, including a switch in the meter, from 5/4 to 5/8. A few off-beat accent markings are also added compared with the opening. In this section, the pattern is similar to the “Expansion” (Figure 7) that appeared in *L’Aurore*, with two of the fifths replaced with fourths, further confirming the alternation between fourths and fifths (Figure 11).



Figure 11: *Sonata No. 5, II. Danse Rustique*, mm. 71-72, arpeggiation of fifths and fourths.

The movement ends with a coda section that starts from measure 103. The style of doubling and tripling notes is frequently used to push the intensity of the climax. It is worth noting that between measure 109 and 114, the off-beat accents are again, and more frequently used by Ysaÿe. This pattern will be discussed in depth in the analysis of *Sonata No. 6*.

Rhythmically, the meter is relatively steady in *L'Aurore*, with 4/4 and 3/4 notated for the entire movement. It becomes much more variable in *Danse Rustique*, however. The number five appears again in Ysaÿe's choice of time signatures. A wide variety of irregular meters are employed in this movement, with the majority of them emphasizing 5 beats per measure, thus corroborating the preference of this number even further. The 5/4 notation is not uncommon, as Ysaÿe also uses it in his *Solo Sonatas Nos. 2, 3 and 4*. However, the rhythmic implication and the accent pulses are the strongest in No. 5. It is also the only movement that utilizes this meter predominantly. "Eastern cultures tend to use irregular meters such as 5/16, 7/8, and 11/16,"²⁸ which could relate to the Debussyesque character of this piece, and its potential link to the East.

²⁸ Christy Lane and Susan Langhout, *Multicultural Folk Dance Guide* (Human Kinetics, 1998), 3.

Pedagogical Approaches to Required Technique

The Fifth

The fifth chord is a dominant factor in both movements of Sonata No. 5. It is a perfect consonance,²⁹ which is critical to play in tune. However, it is a very much neglected chord in most etude books, and violinists do not practice it nearly as frequently as other chords such as thirds, sixths, and octaves. Perhaps the fifths chord is simply not used enough in compositions, perhaps it is the misconception that intonation with the fifths is easy because only one finger is used. The tuning of fifth chords can be controversial, however. Some violinists find it difficult, and some find it easy otherwise.

It would appear that this chord has been taken for granted and deserves to be highlighted more often. According to Jessica Miskelly, who learned from her teacher Rodney Friend, practicing fifths as double stops benefit the violinist in five ways: (1) Improving the alignment of the fingers' pad, the hand, and the arm; (2) Enabling the tuning of parallel notes; (3) Fostering accurate, consistent intonation; (4) Improving vibrato; and (5) Increasing of colors.³⁰

Two factors determine the successful production of a fifth chord on the violin: Hardware (the instrument) and the operating system (the player). The layout of the

²⁹ "Perfect Consonance," Grove Music Online, accessed March 16, 2021, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000021314>.

³⁰ Jessica Miskelly, "Fifths: An Approach to Violin Technique for the Left Hand as Taught by Rodney Friend" (Ph.D., United States -- Kentucky, University of Kentucky, 2018), 18-21. <https://search.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/2066539627/abstract/2B711D44DD284FAAPQ/1>.

instrument directly affects the sound production. To state the obvious, the two adjacent strings must be perfectly in tune. Just like practicing for intonation-related matters on all string instruments, the open strings need to be consistently in tune to each other for an effective cumulation of muscle memory. Here are the specific hardware factors that could influence the sound:

1. The heights of the nut and the bridge contribute to the distance between the strings and fingerboard. The higher the gap, the greater the elasticity of the strings, requiring the violinist to press more firmly.
2. The tension of the strings also contributes to the elasticity and determines the pressure needed.
3. The distance between the grooves of the bridge and nut also decides whether the player can place the finger on two strings simultaneously.
4. Strings being false could be another factor.

Together with the distance between strings, the finger width of the violinist could also affect the quality of the fifths. However, a good fifth production depends heavily on the technique of the player. For the violinist, only one finger determines the intonation. Sometimes this finger can behave like a seesaw, however. Adjusting intonation for one string likely will change the intonation on the other string. For instance, when tuning for a third-finger D-A chord on the A and E strings, trying to sharpen the D might flatten the A. Ivan Galamian offered his resolution towards tuning the fifths: “In the playing of perfect fifths, the note that is too flat in pitch may be raised by leaning the finger more heavily

upon that string. This is done best by turning slightly the finger and wrist and moving the elbow more to the right or more to the left as the case may be.”³¹

With the regular left-hand posture, the fingertip contacts two strings with its two sides. As the fingering goes from the first finger to the fourth finger, these two sides become less and less parallel. When using the third and fourth finger, limited by the layout of the left hand, it is difficult to balance the intonation between two strings. Adjustments to the finger (flattening, rotating) can help correct this issue. The player then needs to practice smooth transitions between the adjusted gesture and the regular gesture. This transition becomes more difficult, however, when the fifths are used consecutively as seen in Figure 12. In this case, the editor chose to use shifting to avoid the involvement of third and fourth fingers.



Figure 12: *Sonata No. 5, II. Danse Rustique*, mm. 88, the consecutive fifths.

Pizzicati

“Perhaps due to their differing playing styles, unlike Paganini, Ysaÿe only infrequently used harmonics and left-hand pizzicato in his music.”³² While the use of the

³¹ Galamian, *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching*, 28.

³² Yu-Chi Wang, “A Survey of the Unaccompanied Violin Repertoire, Centering on Works by J. S. Bach and Eugene Ysaÿe” (D.M.A., United States -- Maryland, University of Maryland, College Park, 2005), 94.

right-hand pizzicato in Sonata Nos. 1, 2, 4, and 6 is fairly sparse, left-hand pizzicato is only found in both movements of Sonata No. 5 in a more structural-significant way. In addition, two left-hand pizzicato chords are featured in *Sonata No. 6*.

As Ivan Galamian wrote, “In the playing of the left hand pizzicato, the string is pinched, with one of the fingers on the left hand.”³³ For *L’Aurore*, the left-hand pizzicati are used mostly in the opening section to assist in the creation of a sense of intensity. In this section, the pizzicati take the dominant role and dictate the pace, while a droning accompaniment is played with the bow. Margaret Campbell refers to these pizzicati as being “Bartók-like.” “The pizzicati in the left hand and the percussive beats in *Sonata No. 5* make a clear reference to Bartók” (Figure 13).³⁴ In *Danse Rustique*, most of the pizzicati take on an almost showy characteristic, in preparation for the climax of the piece. These pizzicati are “ingenious Paganini effects” (Figure 14),³⁵ according to Norbert Gertsch, the editor of the Henle edition. Both are well supported. It should be noted that, the pizzicato figure referred to as the “Bartók” figure by Campbell was also used by Paganini in his *Variations on Nel cor più non mi sento*, composed in 1821 (Figure 15).

<https://search.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/304993598/abstract/C15134A807BC4349PQ/1>.

³³ Galamian, *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching*, 30.

³⁴ Margaret Campbell, liner notes from *Six Sonatas for Solo Violin*, Op. 27, Oscar Shumsky, violin, (Nimbus, 1982), 7.

³⁵ Eugène Ysaÿe, *Six Sonatas for Violin Solo Op. 27*, Norbert Gertsch (Munich: G. Henle Verlag, 2016), 41.



Figure 13: *Sonata for Violin Solo*, I. *Tempo di ciaccona*, m. 19, left-hand pizzicato with arco in the Bartók Solo Violin Sonata.³⁶



Figure 14: *Caprice No. 24*, Var. 9, mm. 1-2, alternating left hand pizzicato and arco.³⁷



Figure 15: *Variations on Nel cor più non mi sento*, mm. 6-7, usage of left hand pizzicato while arco³⁸

³⁶ Béla Bartók, *Sonata for Violin Solo*, Sz. 117, First edition (London: Boosey&Hawkes, 1947).

³⁷ Nicolò Paganini, *24 Caprices, Op. 1, for Violin Solo* (New York: International Music Company, 1973).

³⁸ Nicolo Paganini, *Variations on Nel Cor Più Non Mi Sento*, Tibor Ney (Budapest: Editio Musica Budapest, 1968).

Similarly to the fifth chords discussed earlier in this document, left-hand pizzicato is another one of the difficult yet less used techniques in this work. Typically, for violinists, right-hand pizzicato is more often encountered, as seen throughout the standard orchestral repertoire frequently. The use of left-hand pizzicato, however, is less called for in both the solo violin and orchestral repertoire.

Left hand pizzicato is generally employed when the composer seeks a series of percussive sound that need to be performed at a relatively fast tempo, which only the left hand is capable of playing, except for the guitar-like strumming from the right hand, such as the passage in the finale of the Glazunov Violin Concerto (Figure 16). The strumming is limited to chords instead of single notes, however, as it is unrealistic to strum just one single string throughout.



Figure 16, *Glazunov Violin Concerto*, III, mm. 169-170, right-hand guitar-like strumming in the *Glazunov Violin Concerto*.³⁹

When the composer wishes to quickly alternate between pizzicato and arco, such as the passages in the first and second movements of Sonata No. 5, the use of left-hand pizzicato becomes more necessary. The difficulty of this pizzicato is twofold. Firstly, without the right hand involved for sound production, the violinist must take an extra step,

³⁹ Glazunov, *Violin Concerto*, Op. 82, 14.

and pluck the finger higher than the target note along the fingerboard. For instance, when playing a C on the A string with a bow, the player simply puts the second finger on the fingerboard. With left-hand pizzicato, the second finger must be set in place earlier than normal before the plucking finger takes motion. The choice of which finger will be used for plucking also depends on its relationship with the notes before and after in order to save time.

Secondly, violinists are used to placing the fingers on the fingerboard from above, curving them to avoid tension, and leaving the sound production to the bow. However, this technique does not work for left-hand pizzicato. For left-hand pizzicato the plucking finger needs to lie to the side of the string, as opposed to on top, and should be a bit tense, almost spring-loaded like, and swipe horizontally across the string for the vibration to happen. The E string is the string closest to the fingerboard, due to the contour of the bridge. Simon Fischer offered his resolution on plucking the E string: “On the E string, left-hand pizzicato is easier if you place the elbow more to the left than usual, bringing the base joints down very low.”⁴⁰

As mentioned previously, two types of challenging left-hand pizzicati are used in the Sonata No. 5: The “Bartók” and the “Paganini” (named by Campbell and Gertsch). In *L’Aurore*, left-hand pizzicato appears repeatedly in the opening section, with the right hand playing arco at the same time. As the right hand pulls the bow slowly, any extra motion in the left hand will cause the scroll to shake, further destabilizing the sound. Therefore, it is important for the performer to secure the violin with the shoulder and chin.

⁴⁰ Simon Fischer, *Practice* (London: Peters Edition Limited, 2004), 140.

The finger placement also influences the clarity of sound production on the violin when performing this work. In the entire opening section, the open strings are plucked by a finger within each variation. Meanwhile, another left-hand finger (associated with arco) presses either on the lower or higher string. This means the finger pressing down must stay out of the way of the open string for clarity. When it is on the higher string, it does not affect the sound production. However, in measure 9 (Figure 17), for instance, it is written that the violinist should use the first finger to press down the lower string while plucking open A and E strings. As mentioned in the previous section, parallel fifth is easier with the first finger on the violin. For the same reason, the first finger is the easiest to accidentally touch an adjacent string, due to the shape of the hand. This contact will diminish the sound considerably. Therefore, it is worth considering changing the fingering to avoid the first finger.



Figure 17: *Sonata No. 5, II. Danse Rustique*, m. 9, first finger not recommended for the F.

In Measure 45 of *Danse Rustique* (Figure 18), the difficulty of incorporating the pizzicato escalates. The first and second fingers of the left hand sustain throughout the slur. After the first left hand pizzicato note, the violinist needs to add an additional C to the ongoing slur, with the first finger already pressed down. Two options are available for the player: The first option involves moving the finger in parallel position towards the left and

pushing the G string with the fingernail. Alternatively, the player can also choose to lift the first finger slightly, just enough to also cover the G string. Option One is relatively easy, but the sound may be compromised as a result of insufficient pressure against the string. Option Two is more difficult but has the better tonal outcome. To ease the process, the initial press of the first finger can lean towards the outer side, leaving the inner tip for the transition.



Figure 18: *Sonata No. 5, II. Danse Rustique*, m. 45.

The “Paganini” pizzicato mentioned by Gertsch in his editorial notes that are referred to earlier in this document, has long been an obstacle for violinists when they first learn the Paganini *Caprice No.24* and encounter left-hand pizzicato. Unlike the “Bartók” left-hand pizzicato mentioned by Campbell, the “Paganini” is usually performed at a faster tempo, and the two hands work together in a synchronized way. As the result of the tempo requirement, the performer cannot afford the time to shift to pluck all the notes with the left hand. For instance, in the run into measure 64 of *Danse Rustique* (Figure 19), each highest note of the string is performed arco, with short spiccato so that it matches the sound of the left-hand pizzicato. Playing this combination at fast tempo is only achievable with the scale going down (when the fingers are being removed from the fingerboard), as it is

natural for the left hand to pluck away from the strings towards the right side, which also sets up the next note. With all fingers pressed down, the pitches are already in place.



Figure 19: *Sonata No. 5, II. Danse Rustique*, m. 64.

For this part of the work, the choice of contact point for the bow, should be in the upper half for the spiccato, where the bounce happens most naturally and efficiently to blend in with the pizzicati. There is potential for the player to lose control of the bow in the upper half, however. During the spiccato the bow spends most of the time in the air, striking the string momentarily and bouncing back. To maintain a consistent contact point between the fingerboard and the bridge, several frequently mentioned tips might be helpful, including hugging the bow stick more with the index finger, and slightly pushing out the elbow. Performers should also take caution against exerting excessive pressure onto the bow, which causes the bow to bounce too high and in so doing, can disrupt the rhythm.

Coordination can also be more challenging in the “Paganini” pizzicato than the “Bartók”. Similar to the pitch finger needing to be placed early so that it can be plucked by another finger, the bow also needs to start traveling towards the string prior to the beat in order to be on time. A good way to improve coordination is to practice in groups, each group led by the arco. The bowings for the arco sections are not specified, but it is

reasonable to start with a down bow and then alternate between consecutive up and down bows.

Other than the issues discussed, left-hand pizzicato can also be difficult when plucked with the first finger. According to the traditional left-hand gesture, this finger is already in a stretched-back position, and there is not enough room for it to spring back. The fourth finger can also be difficult to pull the sound of a stopped third finger. This can be improved by practicing specific etudes that work on the independence of fingers, such *Etude No. 9* from Kreutzer's *42 Studies for the Violin* (Figure 20).



Figure 20: *42 Studies for the Violin*, No. 9, mm. 5-6, practice of finger independence.

Accents

All the six violin sonatas for solo violin are extensively notated by Ysaÿe. These notations include references to dynamic contrasts, tempo stretches, some of his personal notes and symbols, and very importantly, the accents. *L'Aurore* is one of the less accented movements, due to its slowly progressing and calm nature. Yet, when proceeding to the climax, the accents on specific notes during the slurred string-crossing are disputable. Both the Schirmer edition (edited by Antonie, Eugène's son) and Henle edition notate the accents in this fashion, as seen in Figure 21.



Figure 21: *Sonata No. 5*, I. *L'Aurore*, mm. 51, placements of accents in the climax section of *L'Aurore*.

In beats one and two, the accents are notated on the fourth note, yet the last accent is marked on the fifth note for the third beat. Norbert Gertsch, the editor of the Henle edition, noted: “Placement of > in mm. 51 f. taken from first edition; the autograph engraver’s copy places the first and second > in this bar between the fourth and fifth 1/32 note of each group.”⁴¹ This placement is intentional, as it is not rare for Ysaÿe to put accents in the latter half of slurs, such as Measure 190 of *Sonata No. 6* (Figure 22).



Figure 22: *Sonata No. 6*, mm. 190, off-beat accents.

Realistically, placing the accent at the beginning of the slur is easier, as the result of added friction from the bow change, but Ysaÿe’s arrangement stirs up the perception of rhythm to create a special effect. Limited by the intensity of the running notes, the

⁴¹ Eugène Ysaÿe, *Six Sonatas for Violin Solo Op. 27*, Norbert Gertsch (Munich: G. Henle Verlag, 2016), 38.

performer would have to increase both the amount of bow used, and the bow speed to maintain rhythmically correct. Bow distribution is critical to performing such accents. It is suggested that the performer practices such passages with staccato and exaggerates the amount of bow used for the accented notes. It would also be helpful to work on dotted rhythmic patterns to get familiar with rapid bow speed changes within a slur.

Table 4
Difficulty and Suggestions of Sonata No. 5

Difficulty	Suggestion
Fifth chord: 1. Intonation. 2. Connection of consecutive fifths.	1. Adjust hand position to allow a flatter fingertip covering both strings. 2. Avoid third and fourth fingers.
Left-hand pizzicato: 1. The “Bartók”. 2. The “Paganini”.	1. Steady left hand, design suitable fingering. 2. a. Rhythmic exercise. b. The plucking finger initiates from the left side of string instead of the top.
Off-beat accents.	1. Bow distribution. 2. Practice with staccato. 3. Dotted rhythm practice.

CHAPTER 4: SONATA NO. 6 FOR SOLO VIOLIN

Introduction

Like *Sonata No. 5*, the *Sonata No. 6* by Ysaÿe is a less popular option out of the collection. Nonetheless, the difficulty of techniques alone marks its historical importance. “The sixth, dedicated to the Spanish violinist Manuel Quiroga, is a *tour de force* of virtuosity.”⁴² Just like the first movement of *Sonata No. 5* was titled *L’Aurore* to express Ysaÿe’s best wishes towards his success, *Sonata No. 6* was composed with Quiroga’s technique proficiency in mind.

Manuel Quiroga (1892-1961) was a renowned violinist who had an active performing career in the early 1900s. Born in Spain, he was commended as “the finest successor of Pablo de Sarasate”.⁴³ He gave his first public concert at the age of eight, which marks the beginning of his soloist career. At the age of 17, Quiroga and his father set out to leave Spain and study with Fritz Kreisler in Berlin. They stopped halfway in Paris, however, to audition for a spot at the Paris Conservatoire, which he won.⁴⁴ He subsequently studied with Jacques Thibaud, made acquaintances with renowned musicians, won competitions and signed recording labels. He also became familiarized with Eugène Ysaÿe, who dedicated his sixth solo violin sonata to Quiroga. This sonata was the only one out of the six that never saw its public performance by its dedicatee.

⁴² Lev Ginsburg and Herbert R Axelrod, *Prof. Lev Ginsburg’s Ysaÿe* (Neptune City, N.J.: Paganiniana, 1980), 532.

⁴³ Ana Luque Fernandez, "The Works of Manuel Quiroga: A Catalogue." Order No. 3057382, Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College, 2002, 1. <https://search.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/works-manuel-quiroga-catalogue/docview/276040423/se-2?accountid=11667>.

⁴⁴ Fernandez, 8.

In 1937, Quiroga's performing career was tragically and prematurely terminated by an accident in New York during his tour, when he was hit by a truck. After his injury, Quiroga was forced to divert his focus from performing to composing and painting.⁴⁵ Partially due to his relatively short career, Quiroga's name has been more tied with the dedication of Ysaÿe's *Sonata No. 6* rather than appearing as a soloist in history. Conversely, the tragic ending to Quiroga's career could also be the cause of *Sonata No. 6*'s obscurity compared with its siblings.

Formal Outline of the Work

Ysaÿe's *Sonata No. 6* is another one-movement piece like *Sonata No. 3*. It appears to be in Sonata form and can be divided into three sections. Measures 1-105 contain the Exposition with a tonal focus of E major. Measures 106-150 serve as the Development in the key of C# Minor, and starting from measure 151 until the end of the piece marks the Recapitulation with the key back to E Major. In contrast to the *Sonata No. 5*, this sonata is consistent with the 2/8 meter.

In terms of tempo markings, the contrast between *Allegro giusto non troppo vivo* and *Allegretto poco scherzando* is apparent. According to Pintér and Fejérvári: "Fundamentally, Bartók classified the rhythm of folk music into two groups, denoting the character of both tempo and performance, namely 'parlando-rubato' and 'tempo giusto'."⁴⁶ Giusto means "in strict tempo." This helps bring out the vigorous side of the Spanish music.

⁴⁵ Fernandez, 14.

⁴⁶ Csilla Mária Pintér and Boldizsár Fejérvári, "The Significance of the Varieties of Parlando-Rubato in the Rhythmic Language of 'Bluebeard's Castle,'" *Studia Musicologica* 49, no. 3/4 (2008): 369.

The *scherzando*, in contrast, reflects the tender folksy side (*Habanera*), which will be discussed later.

The one-movement form is not the only similarity shared between *Sonata No. 3* and *Sonata No. 6*. Just like the *Ballade*, *Sonata No. 6* opens with a freely composed introduction, which ends in measure 12 (Figure 23). In the *Ballade*, Ysaÿe notates a variety of dynamic directions and musical terminologies, while in the opening *Sonata No. 6*, there are only three fortes marked in the score. This lack of specification does not mean to play without direction. Rather, this cadenza-style opening invites performers to perform with freedom, “*ad libitum*”, instead of following the directions of the composer (which Ysaÿe had a preference for in several of his other sonatas).



Figure 23: *Sonata No. 6*, mm. 1-11, the Cadenza-ish introduction with off-beat sforzandos.

In the beginning measures of the movement, the same motif is repeated three times, with hints that each should become more intense. For instance, the first pick-up note B is a 16th note, while the next two intensify into 32nd notes. The ending chord also ends higher

one after another, with the top note forming a C# Minor chord. The rhythmic progression is also patterned: the division of the eighth note beat starts with a subdivision of 4, and then increases from 6, to 8, and then to 10.



Figure 24: *Sonata No. 6*, mm. 12-14, the main motif.

A dotted rhythm motif enters after the introduction (Figure 24), accompanied by the first notation “*con brio*” (with vigor). It is noticeable that the sforzandos in the 16th notes that precede the subject always land on the second 32nd note instead of on the down beat. This could be Ysaÿe’s attempt to prevent the piece from sounding too squared to allow the sequential flow. This pattern of avoiding accenting the downbeat is also discoverable in the main motif, where the accent is put on the second half of the dotted rhythm.

Starting with the main motif, the music proceeds with a variation of ideas that require a mixture of techniques that occur while the Spanish-like vigorous character of the work is set (Figure 25). For instance, the melody at m. 36 develops into several variations, with up bow staccatos, running thirds and octaves, along with arpeggiating chords. Numerous notations are recorded by the composer for a planned dramatic effect. The dynamic contrast in this section ranges from *piano* to *fortissimo*.



Figure 25: *Sonata No. 6*, mm. 35-43, repeating phrases with notations.

At the end of the exposition section, a grand pause with a fermata occurs to allow for the transition into a different mood in character: that of the *Habanera* style (Figure 26). In the development section, the dotted rhythm pattern becomes more ingrained, while changing into the *Habanera*-ish character, with which we are not unfamiliar in Romantic Spanish music, such as the many compositions that echo the musical ideas of Bizet's *Carmen*. Similar to the variations in the Exposition, the "Habanera" is repeated with variations and utilizes relatively easier violin techniques.



Figure 26: *Sonata No. 6*, mm. 106-107, the Habanera motif.

Left-hand pizzicato is also used here (Figure 27), but more for decoration purposes, rather than the functional approach necessitated in *Sonata No. 5*. Unlike the Exposition, the Development features very few notations left by the composer, possibly out of consideration for the free style of the Spanish music. The dynamics in general also remain

calm, without much guidance from the composer. It is worth noting that, towards the end of the development section, Ysaÿe included a cadenza run (Figure 28), which is the only occurrence of all six sonatas.



Figure 27: *Sonata No. 6*, mm. 130-131, left-hand pizzicato in the development section.

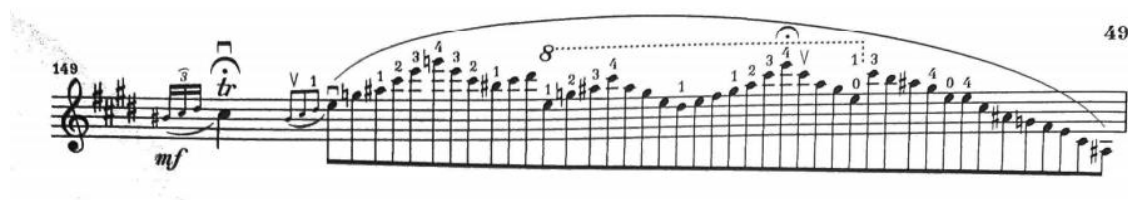


Figure 28: *Sonata No. 6*, mm. 149, the cadenza run.

Measure 151 (*Allegro Tempo 1*) marks the return of the exposition. Similarly, the main motif at m. 159 does not appear until after a brief introduction. The off-beat sforzandos continue with increased occurrences (Figure 29). More sforzandos occur on the last 32nd note of the beat. Ysaÿe also used accents on the last notes of the arpeggiations. This type of accent typically lands on the up bows and is more difficult to execute than down bow accents. It will be discussed in detail in the following section. This section in general carries more momentum than the exposition and contains much fewer rests.

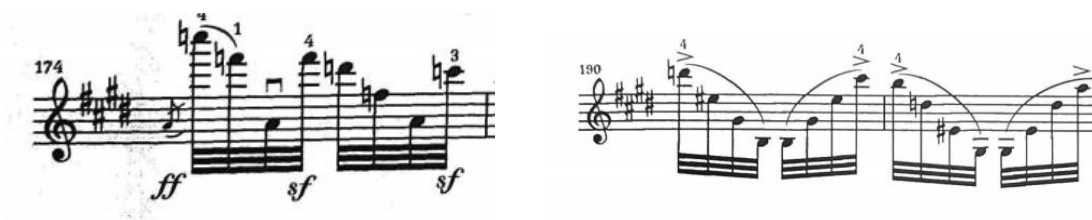


Figure 29: *Sonata No. 6*, m. 174 and m. 190, off-beat accents.

CHAPTER 5: PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES TO REQUIRED TECHNIQUE

While the musical aspects of this work are challenging in themselves, the techniques applied in this piece are much more difficult than in the Sonata No. 5. In most cases, left and right hand challenges occur at the same time. In terms of the bow, the seemingly most challenging technique in this sonata is the up and down bow staccati.

Up-bow Staccato

Up-bow staccato has been a long-lasting popular topic in the violin world. Technically there are two ways to achieve this effect. The first way is to tense up the entire arm, which helps the bow hand to start and stop the bow on the string firmly and quickly. This tends to be the easiest way to complete an up-bow staccato, but realistically this method becomes too mechanical, and does not work well in context, where relaxation is often required after the staccato. Additionally, as the result of extra tension in the arm, the staccato sound may become suppressed.

A more relaxed staccato is therefore the better choice. This is achieved by finer control of smaller muscle groups instead of the whole arm. There are also a few ways to describe this motion, as individuals may feel differently about how this staccato is approached.

First, by constantly pinching the thumb and index finger, while pulling the bow up. This is the method I personally find easiest to understand. As the bow is supported by the hoop formed by the bow hand, the index finger is in charge of pressing the bow hair onto the string. When it presses down, the thumb automatically receives tension. Compared with

the tensed arm method, this method keeps the hand relaxed and connects passages in a better way. This can also be described as simply pressing and releasing the index finger, but I think it is important to also include the thumb in the description as they form a loop together.

This finer muscle movement can also be achieved more horizontally. One can think about zig-zagging along the string, i.e., playing dotted rhythm with separate bows. The down bow acts as a counter force against the up bow so that the bow can stop abruptly. By practicing making the pickup note shorter and shorter, eventually the down bow becomes so short that the sound of the pickup note should be replaced by silence.

Whether horizontal or vertical, both ways of thinking require the bow hand, especially the fingers to be flexible, that can quickly gain and release tension. Therefore, the “correct” bow hold must be mastered to successfully perform up bow staccato. By correct, I do not refer to either of the two popular schools of bow holds: The Russian bow hold and the Franco-Belgium bow hold. The key to the bow hold does not lie in merely the posture, which is only the first step of functioning the bow hand correctly. Rather, the fingers must gain independence and should become flexible as needed.

The up-bow staccato is not difficult to execute at a low speed. When performed faster, however, it becomes a problem that many performers struggle with. There are a few tips that may be helpful for performers:

1. Position the right elbow slighter higher than normal, also pronate the wrist so the hand is more perpendicular to the bow.
2. Tilt the bow hair towards the outside to reduce partial friction.

3. Pull the elbow inwards during the upbow so that the bow is not entirely parallel to the bridge.
4. Pronate the bow hand towards the bow, i.e., lean more with the index finger. Some performers would lift their pinky off the stick for more pronation.

Sometimes performers may experience issues with coordination between the two hands. It is recommended to first practice open string up bow staccatos with a metronome. Once the subdivisions become clear, the two hands can start working together.

In real-life scenarios, up-bow staccatos often involve string crossings. As seen in Figure 30, all four strings are involved in this up-bow staccato. The player may experience loss of articulation during the string crossing. This could relate to the synchronization of the elbow with other moving parts of the right arm. Dotted rhythm exercises can also be helpful. Additionally, the player can choose to practice each string separately, taking a short break between each string crossing.

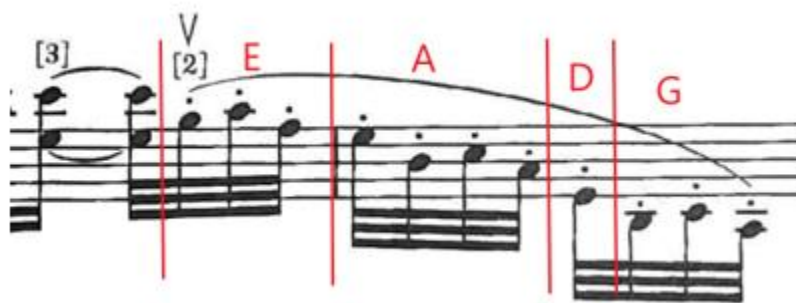


Figure 30: *Sonata No. 6*, m. 38-39, string crossings in up-bow staccato.

According to Andrey Curty, “Measures 38 and 39 present the challenge of the up-bow staccato. Here, the performer may wish to consider use of a ‘flying staccato.’”⁴⁷ When the bow travels towards the upper half, the contact point becomes further away from the bow hand. Pedagogically, the upper half is sometimes considered the harder part of the bow to control. This does not hold true for slurred staccatos. Contemporary violinists are trained to hold the upper arm still until the bow travels to the lower third. In the upper half, the finer muscles (fingers and wrist) are in control. When traveling to the lower half, the upper arm becomes involved, disrupting the delicate movement of the staccato, leading to an involuntary bounce.

Curty (2003) suggested “flying staccato” for the up-bow staccatos, which is a correct resolution for the piano dynamic. However, performers should also be aware that, as the contact point becomes higher in the bow, the difficulty to execute a controlled bounce would increase. Therefore, I suggest limiting the bow usage on the previous bow, so that the up-bow staccato can start around a third from the tip. It is also practical to initial the bow stroke with a firm staccato, which turns into a bounced staccato as the bow travels towards the frog.

⁴⁷ Curty, “A Pedagogical Approach to Eugène Ysaÿe’s Six Sonatas for Solo Violin, Op. 27.”

Specific Figures in Solo Sonata No. 6

Tenths Chords



Figure 31: *Sonata No. 6*, mm. 85-86, alternating Major and Minor 10th chords (m stands for minor and M stands for Major).

Similar to chords of thirds, a compilation of tenths will also involve the alternation between major and minor tenths. As shown in Figure 31, the performer is recommended to practice this run in sections by taking small breaks before switching. This helps the player better build muscle memories in terms of when to change the finger positions.

While completing the tenths chords, the right hand is also required to perform a up bow staccato. It is recommended to distribute the bow unevenly, use little bow for the first half of the slur, and much more bow for the second half as the contour climbs higher.

Slur of High Chords

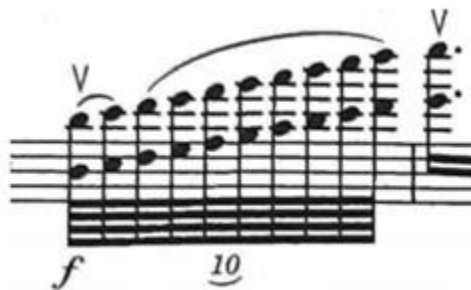


Figure 32: *Sonata No. 6*, mm. 11-12, slur of high chords.

As shown in Figure 32, the first up bow needs to be played with enough length to cover the upcoming longer down bow. Similar to the previous figure, it is preferred to save bow as the position becomes higher for the crescendo. Additionally, performers may observe that as the bow approaches the end of the slur, the sound becomes scratchy. This could partially be due to insufficient bow room left, but there are also two important factors involved: First, the bow needs to be closer to the bridge, as the result of the gap between the left hand and the bridge becomes shorter. Second, despite the difficulty of performing in the higher positions, the speed of the bow must be held constant, if not faster.

In this specific figure, the run consists of fingered octaves. This technique is relatively more difficult to execute in the lower positions. For players with smaller hands, it is recommended to turn the elbow more towards the torso to gain more reach for the fingers.

bow staccato of the right hand. There are differences, however. With the up-bow staccato, the right wrist and fingers need to remain relatively relaxed flexible. With the descending chromatic glissando, Ivan Galamian offered his suggestion: “The finger making the glissando should be in rather a stretched (elongated) position. The wrist should be curved outward toward the scroll, the hand and arm rather tense, and the finger pressure solid.”⁴⁸

In the case of Figure 34, it is suggested to practice with the slur divided into four smaller beats, i.e., four consecutive upbows with tiny breaks in between. This is because performers tend to ignore the chromatic middle notes and focus only on the beginning and ending.

Detaché and Martelé

Despite all the technically challenging techniques utilized in these two sonatas, the key to a successful performance lands on the solid understanding of Detaché and Martelé, aside from left hand techniques including management of intonation.

Detaché and Martelé are two types of bowings learned at the very beginning of a violinist’s playing career. All the subsequent, more advanced bowing techniques can be traced back as variations of Detaché and Martelé. Although fundamental, the two bow strokes tend to be ignored in daily playing, and the player’s shortcomings become more exposed, especially when performing more complicated repertoire. For instance, the first movement of Ysaÿe’s *Sonata No. 5* requires a smooth and sustained Detaché, while the second movement calls for a clean Martelé.

⁴⁸ Galamian, *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching*, 31.

The keyword to a playing with good Detaché is “sustaining”. It would seem straightforward that, in order to produce a smooth and sustaining sound, the bow speed and pressure should remain the same throughout. Earlier in the document, I mentioned that as the bow goes towards the tip. Students are often instructed to gradually increase the pressure as the bow travels towards the tip. This is correct, but only half of the recipe. In order to achieve a smooth bow change, the player must not slow down the bow. In fact, it would be more effective if the performer thinks about speeding up the bow towards the bow change.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

As previously mentioned, since the completion of Ysaÿe's *Six Sonatas for the Solo Violin* in 1923, performances of this important work in the violin literature have continually been well received by the public. While each of Ysaÿe's six sonatas offer performers equal technical and musical challenges, some of the works, such as No. 3 and 4, have been favored with preferential treatment by violin performers over the remaining works. Consequently, the purpose of this document was to focus on the less played *Solo Violin Sonatas No's. 5 & 6*, with a focus on the musical and technical elements which make them both unique and challenging for those who choose to play them, and perhaps, even more significantly, those who teach the works to their own students.

Despite being the two least performed of the of six Sonatas, Sonatas No. 5 and No. 6 remain equally fascinating in their unique ways. The *Sonata No. 5* is less challenging overall than its siblings, but the less practiced left-hand pizzicati and fifth chords do possess challenges for the performer. The strong French character of the Impressionistic style also demands high artistry on the part of the performer. *Sonata No. 6* presents more straightforward virtuosic techniques for the violinist especially in relation to the work's vigorous Spanish character.

Players who aspire to learn this piece need to be highly technically and musically proficient. However, in most cases, deficiencies exist in one's performance, whether technically or musically related. While this document focuses more heavily on the technical performance challenges, the author by no means indicates that the musicality within these two pieces is simple. In fact, good musical expression requires solid fundamentals from

the violinist, just like a good speech requires clear enunciation from the speaker, and such is also the case in the musical requirements of these two exceptional works.

While some of the technical challenges of these two works have been previously addressed by other pedagogues, such as the up-bow staccato, and fingered octaves, some of the other technical challenges have been less explored, including the fifths (and often times, the fourths). It is the author's intent that this document will further enhance the existing body of pedagogical literature currently available, and as such, that it will also prove a helpful teaching tool in providing supplementary details towards the challenges of the *Sonata No. 5* and *Sonata No. 6*. Through these works, Ysaÿe's lasting legacy as both a performer and pedagogue lives on.

APPENDIX: COMPLETE RECORDINGS OF THE SIX SONATAS
FOR SOLO VIOLIN⁴⁹

Ruggiero Ricci (Vox-Candide, 1974)
 Gidon Kremer (Melodiya, 1976)
 Charles Castleman (Music & Arts, 1981)
 Oscar Shumsky (Nimbus, 1982)
 Rudolf Werthen (EMI, 1985/ reprint: Pavane Records, 1988)
 Lydia Mordkovitch (Chandos, 1988)
 Yuval Yaron (Accord, 1990)
 Evgenia-Maria Popova (Leman, 1991)
 Mateja Marinkovic (Collins, 1992)
 Vilmos Szabadi (Hungaroton, 1992)
 Stéphane Tran Ngoc (REM, 1994)
 Frank Peter Zimmermann (EMI, 1994)
 Tomoko Kato (Denon-Japan, 1995)
 Vincenzo Bolognese (P&P Classica, 1991/ reprint: Arts Music, 1997)
 Philippe Graffin (Hyperion, 1997)
 Takayoshi Wanami (Denon-Somm, 1997)
 Leonidas Kavakos (BIS, 1999)
 Laurent Korcia (Lyrinx, 2000)
 Ilya Kaler (Naxos, 2001)
 Jassen Todorov (Gega New, 2001)
 Benjamin Schmid (de) (Oehms Classics/Naxos, 2002)
 Hana Kotková (Forlane, 2002)
 Arisa Fujita (Intim Musik, 2004)
 Shunsuke Sato (Live Notes-Japan, 2004)
 Thomas Zehetmair (ECM, 2004)

⁴⁹ “Six Sonatas for Solo Violin (Ysaÿe).”

Marianne Piketty (Maguelone-France, 2006)
Fanny Clamagirand (Nascor, 2007)
Ray Iwazumi (Japan CD, 2008)
Henning Kraggerud (Simax, 2008)
Rachel Kolly d'Alba (Warner Classics, 2010)
Wojciech Koprowski (Accord/Naxos, 2010)
Judith Ingolfsson (Genuin, 2011)
Wanchi Huang (Centaur, 2012)
Tai Murray (Harmonia Mundi USA, 2012)
Tedi Papavrami (Zig-Zag Territoires, 2012)
Olga Guy (Arion Paris, 2012)
Kristóf Baráti (Brilliant Classics, 2013)
Žiga Brank (RTV Slovenia Klasika, 2013)
Tianwa Yang (Naxos, 2014)
Alina Ibragimova (Hyperion, 2015)
Jae-hong Yim (DUX, 2016)
Ksenia Milas (ANIMA Records, Paris, 2017)
Paolo Ghidoni (OnClassical, 2017)
Sergey Malov (Solo Musica, 2017)
Niklas Walentin (Naxos, 2019)
Kerson Leong (Alpha Classics, 2021)

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