

This concerto-like work is one of the favorite large-scale violin works of the Romantic era. Its colorful Spanish quality and its flowing, attractive melodies, along with its copious display of violin tricks, have kept it before a public that has largely forgotten the other works of its composer.

Stimulated by Pablo de Sarasate's playing of his First Violin Concerto in 1874, Lalo decided to write another concerto, this time paying tribute to Sarasate's Spanish nationality and his own Spanish descent. Lalo tailor-made the new *Symphonie Espagnole* to fit Sarasate's playing style, which was innovative for stressing a bright, light attack rather than the powerhouse style that had characterized earlier violinists. It is likely that Sarasate collaborated with Lalo in the details of the violin part, for it features the singing line and effervescent arpeggio and scale work that was a trademark of his playing and which are featured in Sarasate's own recital music. Sarasate played it for the first time in Paris on February 7, 1875. It immediately pleased the audience, and happened to hit in the middle of a vogue for Spanish music recently touched off by Bizet's opera *Carmen*.

It has frequently been said that it is not a concerto or a symphony at all, although it does have elements of symphonic form. It is really a suite, whose five movements add up to the dimensions of a symphony, about 30 minutes.

The first movement, *Allegro non troppo*, opens with a full-orchestra statement of a theme that stresses a typical 2/4 + 6/8 Spanish rhythm. The violin then states a main theme in triplets. The soloist also introduces a second subject, which is the main material for the development, where it acquires the triplets of the other subject. The coda has a brief development of the first subject.

The second movement, *Scherzando; Allegro molto*, is a sparkling fast Spanish waltz, which follows an introduction featuring bright pizzicato writing for the orchestral strings. The outer portions of the three-part form are in the Spanish rhythm called the *seguidilla*. The middle part of this movement is rhapsodic, with frequent shifts of tempo.

Lalo made the symphony a five-movement work by adding an *Intermezzo* as the third movement after the premiere. It is, in effect, a second scherzo, though in a slower tempo. It has a nice use of the contrast between minor and major modes. Unfortunately, for some years many violinists adopted the practice of omitting this movement. That is a shame, for the sultry second subject is one of the nicest themes in the symphony.

The true slow movement is the sultry and romantic fourth movement, *Andante*, with a dark and soulful mood.

The finale is a rondo whose main subject sets off a series of dazzling episodes. Lalo begins the movement with a nice trick to raise anticipation: he repeats an accompaniment many times until the violin inserts the theme. After that the movement continues in dance-like mode until the brilliant conclusion.



LALO

SYMPHONIE ESPAGNOLE

Henryk Szeryng, violin
Chicago Symphony
Walter Hendl conducting

Polish-born violinist Henryk Szeryng was probably the finest product of Carl Flesch's legendary teaching career. Possessing an iron technique and a musical intellect of rare insight, Szeryng established himself as one of the pre-eminent concert violinists of the post-World War II decades.

Szeryng was born in 1918 to a wealthy Polish industrialist whose wife had a great love of music. Studies on the piano were abandoned for the violin, though Szeryng remained skilled at the keyboard for the rest of his life. Szeryng progressed quickly on his new instrument and by age nine was sufficiently proficient to perform the Mendelssohn concerto for famed violinist Bronislaw Hubermann, a friend of the family. On Hubermann's advice Szeryng was sent to Berlin to study with Carl Flesch; Szeryng would later declare that his technical prowess was solely due to that masterful teacher's influence. Two years later in 1933, Szeryng made his debut performance in Warsaw with the Beethoven concerto under Bruno Walter. That same year he embarked on a minor concert tour, soloing with orchestras in Bucharest, Vienna, and Paris.

Szeryng immediately took to the city of Paris and settled there for a period of further study and growth as a performer. There he came under the influence of legendary violinists Enescu and Thibaud, though he did not formally study with either. Szeryng also thought about pursuing composition as a career, and for six years took lessons from Nadia Boulanger.

At the outbreak of war in 1939 Szeryng enlisted with the Polish army. Being fluent in seven languages, he was assigned to General Sikorski as a translator, with whom Szeryng helped to relocate hundreds of Polish refugees in Mexico. During the war Szeryng gave hundreds of concerts for Allied troops around the globe, and in 1943, during a concert series in

Mexico City, was invited to take over the string department at the University of Mexico. Szeryng accepted the offer, and assumed his duties in 1946.

He spent the next ten years in Mexico, and eventually took citizenship there. Performing infrequently, Szeryng was largely forgotten in the musical centers of Europe. A chance encounter with fellow Pole Artur Rubinstein in Mexico City convinced Szeryng to re-enter the musical scene. A New York debut in 1956 immediately established Szeryng as a leading violinist of the day, and for the next 30 years Szeryng divided his time between a globe-trotting concert schedule and his teaching duties in Mexico.

As a violinist Szeryng was unique; sometimes criticized for being too restrained, he was nevertheless capable of playing with warmth and fire when he felt compelled to do so (as in his magnificent performances of the Sibelius concerto). His excellent recordings include two full sets of the Bach Sonatas and Partitas, as well as the major violin concertos in the repertory (he has also championed and recorded the work of many composers from his adopted country of Mexico). Recordings of the Beethoven and Brahms sonatas with Artur Rubinstein are particularly rewarding. Of note also is Szeryng's world-premiere recording of Paganini's E major Violin Concerto No. 3, which Szeryng himself reconstructed from parts held in the archives of the legendary Italian violinist's heirs.

Szeryng could at times be somewhat inconsistent. In live performances his calculated precision might turn cold, and in later years it is rumored that troubles with alcohol led to a somewhat deteriorated technical ability. Until his death in 1988 he traveled with a Mexican diplomatic passport, and was involved in various humanitarian projects through the United Nations; Szeryng never ceased believing in music as a unifying, healing power.

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- 1 Allegro Non Troppo 7:40**
- 2 Scherzando: Allegro Molto 4:06**
- 3 Intermezzo - Allegretto Non Troppo 6:09**
- 4 Andante 7:25**
- 5 Rondo: Allegro 8:14**
- Total Time: 33:34**

Recorded by RCA 1961
Engineer - John Crawford Producer – John Pfeiffer

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