

ÉMILE SAURET

24 ETUDES CAPRICES

Op. 64

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Solo Violin / Violine solo

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## PREFACE

### Émile Sauret (1852–1920)

There is something demoniacal about his playing; his audience must follow him, must feel, laugh, weep, jest, or be sad with him. In the powerful spell which he casts over his audience, he is – perhaps – the only violinist who approaches Paganini.<sup>1</sup>

The violin virtuoso, pedagogue and composer, Émile Sauret was admired by some of the greatest musicians of the century including Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Saint-Saëns, Bruch, Hans von Bülow, Wagner, Grieg, Mahler, Svendsen, and Rossini. He gave numerous concerts with Liszt, Rubinstein, and Moszkowski, and often played duets with Sarasate. Perhaps it is ironic in the light of *The Musical Times* review (1900) cited above that, in the present day, he is predominantly remembered by violinists and music lovers alike for the fiendishly difficult cadenza he composed to Niccolò Paganini's first violin concerto.

Victor Gilbert Émile Sauret was born, the second of three children (sons), on 22 May 1852 in Dun-le-Roi (now renamed Dun-sur-Auron), a town south of the city of Bourges, France. One of the only biographical sketches to elaborate on Sauret's early violin instruction (1858) comes from Charles Rondolet and appears in the January 1900 edition of *The Musical Times*. It proceeds to suggest that the family soon moved to Strasbourg, where Sauret studied under M. Schwaerderlé.<sup>2</sup> During a period of residence in Paris, Sauret continued his studies under the guidance of the founder of the Franco-Belgian school of violin playing, the renowned Belgian violinist and pedagogue, Charles de Bériot. The 1900 *The Musical Times* sketch conveys that Sauret 'at this time, benefited by a dual pupilage, as he also took some lessons from Vieuxtemps'. Sauret is later quoted in the article, recalling of Vieuxtemps' kindness when the latter presented him with his bow following a performance. Although details of Sauret's violin training are few, it seems reasonable to assert that he was one of the last major advocates of the nineteenth-century Franco-Belgian school. While in Paris, Sauret also studied harmony with M. Victorin de Joncières.<sup>3</sup>

Following a public concerto debut at the age of eight, Sauret embarked on a busy performing career, travelling through the major cities of Italy, Vienna, Germany and London. In France, he was invited to play on many occasions at the court of Napoleon III.<sup>4</sup> He first appeared in London for the 1862 International Exhibition where the ten-year-old violinist featured in the French section, giving concerts to showcase Herz pianos. In these concerts he was accompanied by his older brother, Auguste, at the piano.<sup>5</sup> The London papers foresaw their incredible promise:

These children, in short, seem to be juvenile Joachims and Hallés; and if they go on as they have begun, will assuredly make a noise in the world.<sup>6</sup>

Subsequent tours to England commenced from 1866, when they performed at the Covent Garden Theatre as part of Alfred Mellon's season of Promenade Concerts.<sup>7</sup> One of Émile's many engagements in the Queen's Royal Theatre, The Oxford Music Hall and at the Agricultural Hall included a collaboration with the renowned double bass virtuoso Giovanni Bottesini, described by *The Musical World* as creating 'a furore, encored in a hurricane of applause'.<sup>8</sup>

In 1876, Sauret commenced a long and fruitful partnership with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchester, making his début there on March 23, performing Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto, Op. 64 and Ernst's *Airs Hongrois Variés*, conducted by Carl Reinecke.<sup>9</sup> This concert was characterized in one word, 'grace', in the *Zeitschrift für Musik*, which went on to describe Sauret's innate virtuosic mastery:

The twentieth Gewandhaus concert, on March 23rd, can be characterized most briefly if we say that it had "Grace" written on its forehead... The second soloist of the evening, Mr. Sauret, is a violin talent of the first order and at the same time gifted enough in taste to do justice to a work as fine as Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto from an intellectual point of view, so that

he can safely be counted among the first of the virtuosos now living. We have hardly heard the Hungarian Airs as perfect as from him, because every kind of double trills, octaves, etc. the like came out of Mr. Sauret's hand as fluently as if they were the easiest single-voiced passages; even the bowing of the same hardly made one think that all such artistic skills need to be learned – they just appeared as something innate. Upon stormy demand, Herr Sauret admitted a little more; it was an arrangement of the sextet from Donizetti's 'Lucia' from Saint-Lübín, which the artist had in places made even more full-voiced and brilliant.<sup>10</sup>

Sauret temporarily settled in Leipzig while taking lessons in composition from theorist, Dr Salomon Jadassohn.<sup>11</sup> From this period onwards, he struck up interesting encounters and collaborations with some of the most acclaimed musicians of the century, including Liszt, Brahms, Bruch, Hans von Bülow, Moszkowski, Xaver Scharwenka, Richard Strauss and Tchaikovsky.

In early 1877, Max Bruch recorded an anecdotal impression upon dining together with Pablo de Sarasate and Sauret in a Leipzig hotel at the beginning of May:

... It pleased me to see how well-behaved and nice the two rivals were to one another. As far as technique goes, there are some in Vienna and Leipzig who rate Sauret above Sarasate...<sup>12</sup>

Xaver Scharwenka held a similar opinion, having reviewed one of Sauret's concerts in Berlin in 1879:

Great indeed, and justly deserved, was the success which greeted Herr Emile Sauret, especially as Ernst's violin concerto in F sharp minor, which he had selected for performance, offered ample opportunity for the display of his powers from the most advantageous and brilliant side. The prominent characteristics of his playing consist in a magnificent power of execution, which seems to know of no difficulties, combined with an irresistible pathos, which completely captivates his audience, added to a thoroughly artistic repose and symmetry. Such faultless pure double-stopping and passages of thirds and sixths I have not heard given even by Sarasate and Wieniawski.<sup>13</sup>

This year, 1879, was to be the start of a new chapter, as Sauret took up an extended residence in Berlin, starting a line of professorial appointments.<sup>14</sup>

An advertisement in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* publicized Sauret's concert in Düsseldorf on January 28, 1879,<sup>15</sup> where he programmed Paganini's Concerto No. 1, Ries' Violin Suite and a work of his own, *Scherzino*,<sup>16</sup> marking the start of his appearance as a performer/composer. The graceful qualities of his *Scherzino* were highlighted in the January 1880 edition of the *Monthly Musical Record*.<sup>17</sup>

Sauret's remarkable performing and teaching career took him on an extensive journey across large swathes of Europe, Scandinavia, Russia, Turkey and the United States. With an impressive repertory comprising 70 concertos and a vast range of miscellaneous works, Sauret appeared as a soloist with the world's leading orchestras, including the London Symphony, New York Philharmonic, Budapest Philharmonic, and the Chicago, Boston and Cincinnati Orchestras. With the Gewandhaus Orchester and Berliner Philharmoniker Orchester, he gave numerous concerto performances (between 1876 and 1911) presenting rarely performed concertos by Busoni, Godard, Raff, Rubinstein, Gernsheim and Moszkowski, under the composers' batons. He was a huge success on his returning tours of the US and the success of his concerts in the Carnegie Hall on January 10-11, 1896 were described in *The New Haven Morning Journal and Courier*:

In listening to Sauret no one could believe that the violin is a difficult instrument to play, that it ever could sound out of tune or have a scratch, rough tone. Sauret's tone is pure silver; he is a most even player, each phrase being perfected in polish and correct in weight and proportion. His technique is amazing, his manner clearly individual; without being eccentric he is so far beyond those bounds which a limited technique infers that he has been able to make for himself a characteristic style, which is the last attainment and the crowning glory of an artist. Sauret is undoubtedly the finest violinist that has ever landed upon our shores. His rendering of the Mendelssohn concert[o] was the most finished, smooth and poetic of any that has been given here.<sup>18</sup>

