

Martín Sarasate, child prodigy

Pablo Sarasate was born on the 10th of March 1844 in Pamplona's calle San Nicolás and was christened **Martín Melitón**. He did not change his name to **Pablo** until 1878, when he was 34.

His first music teacher was his father, **Miguel Sarasate** (Pamplona, 1818-1894), bandmaster of the Aragon Regiment. Miguel was married to **Francisca Javiere Navascués**. They had three daughters: Micaela, Francisca and María, who died as a child.

Martín's exceptional musical gift was encouraged by his father, who sent him to the finest violin teachers he could find in the towns he was posted to: in Santiago de Compostela, his teacher was **José Courtier**, the first violinist in the Cathedral, and in La Coruña, it was **Blas Álvarez**, first violin with the orchestra of the Teatro Principal. He gave his first public concert at the age of just seven at this same theatre in 1852, playing variations for violin of Rossini's *La gazza ladra*.

In 1853 Martín was able to move to Madrid, with his mother and sisters, thanks to the allowance granted him by **Juana de Vega, Countess de Espoz y Mina**. In the capital, he was taught by **Manuel Rodríguez**, an outstanding violinist who had studied under **Jules Armingaud** in Paris. His fame as a child prodigy soon spread through Madrid society and he was in great demand to play at get-togethers and soirees. His first performance at the Teatro Real was on the 23rd of March 1854. In May 1855, he played before Queen

Isabel II, who decided that he should be given an allowance to further his studies in Paris.

In July 1855, accompanied by his mother, Martín set off for Paris, passing through Pamplona and San Sebastian, where he gave a number of concerts. In August, they arrived in Bayonne, where they had hoped to meet the violinist **Delphin Alard**, who was from the city and was to be Sarasate's teacher. But a cholera epidemic changed their plans: Alard did not go to Bayonne and Javiere Navascués died, in a few hours on September 20th. Martín was 11 years old and he would die exactly on that precise date, 53 years later. The Spanish consul in Bayonne, **Ignacio García Echeverría**, himself from Navarre, took charge of Sarasate and accompanied him to Paris. There, he was taken in by **Théodore Lassabathie**, the administrator of the Conservatoire, and his wife, who practically became Sarasate's adoptive mother. The Regional Council of Navarre awarded him a new allowance, which added to those he was already receiving from Isabel II and the Countess de Espoz y Mina.

In January 1856, Sarasate passed the entrance exam for the Paris Conservatoire and joined the classes of **Delphin Alard** (violin) and **Napoleon Alkan** (music theory). That same year, he won second prize in music theory and in August 1857, he won first prize in theory and first prize in violin at the Paris Conservatoire by unanimous decision. The jury was chaired by the Director of the Conservatoire, **Daniel-François Auer**, accompanied by the guest members **Rossini** and **Gounod**. The critics pointed out: "Seventeen violinists took part and among them was a hopeful aged thirteen and four months, the young Spaniard Sarasate, one of Alard's pupils, whose wonderful abilities were already well-known throughout the school. [...] Between the young Sarasate and the rest, there was the same difference as there might be between a first-class virtuoso, a Rode, Lafont or Bériot, and a perfect orchestra violinist" (*Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris*, 9th of August 1857).

Sarasate continued his studies at the Conservatoire, signing up for **Reber's** harmony classes, until 1859, the year in which he earned a second prize in the subject.

Hard times

After his years at the Conservatoire, Sarasate was no longer a child prodigy and became a musician who had to open up a path for himself as violin virtuoso and demonstrate his worth. From 1857 on, and particularly in the 1880s, he frequented the music rooms of Paris, including that of **Gioacchino Rossini**, the most influential of all. There, he shared his precocious mastery with that of other musicians such as **Gounod, Auber, Pauline Viardot, Bizet, Rubinstein, Meyerbeer, Liszt...** And there too, he met some of those who were to become his closest friends: **Louis Diémer, Camille Saint-Saëns** and **Édouard Lalo**.

In 1861, he played with the Paris Concert Society for the first time, performing a concerto by **Baillot**. He began to travel in order to make a name for himself beyond Paris: Barcelona and Madrid, London, Baden, Bordeaux and other French towns, Spa and Saint-Malo, Bucharest.

At this time, he began to unveil his own compositions, which met with great success, as well as cultivating chamber music and playing works by other composers. In 1857, Sarasate asked Saint-Saëns to write a concerto for him: that was the origin of *Concertstück Op. 20*, first played in 1867, the first of a long list of works dedicated to the violinist which he would later

introduce to Europe and America. In 1860, **Auber**, the Director of the Conservatoire, dedicated an *O Salutaris* to him which was premiered in the Palais des Tuileries before **Napoleon III**. Saint-Saëns added his most popular work to the concert: *Introduction et Rondo Capriccioso*. **Wieniawski** dedicated his *Second Violin Concerto* to him.

He then completed his first tour of America (1870-1872), with the singer **Carlota Patti** and the pianist **Theodor Ritter**. On an exhausting, two-year tour, Sarasate travelled throughout North America and Canada, and part of South America, from Caracas to Valparaiso. In New York, Sarasate presented the American premiere of **Max Bruch's First Violin Concerto**. He returned to Paris as a consecrated artist.

Sarasate returned to Paris, via Spain, in the spring of 1872. In 1871, Paris had surrendered to Bismarck's forces and Sarasate's adoptive mother had died during the siege. The hardships of war, which personally affected Sarasate—from then on he would advocate a world in harmony—, also helped regenerate the spirit of the French nation. The **National Music Society** was founded—with Saint-Saëns, Franck, Lalo, Fauré and Massenet, among others—to promote the production and dissemination of music by French composers. Sarasate, considered a musician of the French school, formed part of this circle. In 1873, as a result of his performance of **Grandval's Fantasy for Violin and Orchestra**, a reviewer for the Parisian weekly *Le Ménestrel* claimed that "the virtuoso Sarasate takes the leading spot at the head of the young French school".

After his triumph in America, Sarasate, now working under the artistic name of Pablo, began a frenetic agenda of concerts throughout Europe which would only grow, together with his fame, until the end of his life. In the 1870s, he premiered, among other works, the *Violin Concerto Op. 20* by **Édouard Lalo** (1874) and the same composer's best-known work, the *Symphonie Espagnole* (1875), both written for Sarasate. These were also the years of *Airs Espagnols* and one of the most popular compositions of all time: *Zigeunerweisen Op. 20*.

Conquering Germany

Pablo Sarasate won over Europe and America thanks to his violin's ability to fascinate audiences: perfect intonation, elegance, spontaneous virtuosoship and, above all, a crystal-clear, pure, lucid sound which entranced listeners. The violinist **Fernández Arbós** summed up these characteristics when he said: "I have never heard such a beautiful, such a complete sound, such brilliance, such execution. I was enthralled. He is one of those artists who, when you hear them, defy analysis, because they wield such an effect over the audience and it is impossible to see how they do it".

His triumph spread: after France, America and then England, Scotland, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany.

1876, a decisive year. Thanks to a loan of two thousand gold francs from Lalo, Sarasate was able to try his fortune in the land which had defeated France five years before in the battlefield and had brought an end to Napoleon III's Second Empire. His first sortie took place in the capital, Berlin, and Sarasate did not fare well, at least not as far as the critics were concerned: they either paid no attention to the concert at all or accused him, for example, of playing "circus music" and "Spanish dance music, so bad that it is not even culture". The following month, however, Sarasate played Lalo's

Symphonie Espagnole and Saint-Saëns' *Concertstück* at the Gewandhaus in Leipzig; everything changed. He enjoyed great success in Vienna. After Vienna, he returned to Germany—Breslau, Schwerin, Düsseldorf, Cologne, Bonn, Halle—where he laid the foundations for a loyal, devoted relationship set to last for decades, in fact, until his dying day.

Conquering Germany and Austria was decisive for Sarasate's future: not only did he consolidate a growing reputation, but he also met other significant musicians and performers, and in 1877 in Frankfurt, he met **Otto Goldschmidt**, a German pianist who was to become his regular accompanist, secretary and agent.

Among the musicians he mixed with in Germany, we can highlight **Max Bruch**, who became one of Sarasate's closest friends and dedicated his *Second Violin Concerto op. 44* to him; **Joachim Raff**, who wrote his *Violin Concerto No. 2 Op. 206* for Sarasate; and the great violinist **Leopold Auer**, who dedicated his *Rhapsodie Hungroise Op. 5* to him. The most important German violinists of the day, **Joseph Joachim** and **August Wilhelmj**, also dedicated some of their compositions to him.

Following his success in Germany and Vienna, Sarasate made a habit of touring Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire for two or three months each year, normally in the early months. On one of these tours, he met **Antonin Dvorak**, who dedicated his *Mazurek Op. 49* to him.

At this time, Great Britain also became one of Sarasate's annual destinations. He used to tour the United Kingdom in spring, meeting with great success. The Scottish composer **Alexander C. Mackenzie** dedicated some of his works to him: *Violin Concerto Op. 32* and the suite for violin and orchestra *Pibroch Op. 42*.

In Russia, which he visited from 1879 onwards, he made friends with **César Cui** and **Tchaikovsky**.

The consolidation of a myth

From 1880 onwards, Sarasate's life was a continuous succession of tours throughout the world. His concerts were mass events and he received honors, and was officially named Honorary Son of the City of Pamplona (1900).

In 1880, he made his first triumphal tour of Spain, with a route which covered the entire peninsula, including Lisbon. In 1882, he travelled to Italy for the first time. Over the same period, he extended his routes through Europe, reaching as far as Copenhagen in 1888. In was in the 1880s that the great pianist **Berthe Marx** became his regular accompanist on some of his tours.

Between November 1889 and April 1890, he toured America for the second time, meeting with absolutely glorious success, with the pianists **Eugen d'Albert** and **Berthe Marx**, on an exhausting, intense route which took him to countless US cities, from New York to San Francisco; Canada (Montreal and Toronto); and Mexico. He continued touring throughout Europe over the next few years, visiting the Netherlands, Belgium, Russia, Italy and Spain, although most of his travels saw him in the United Kingdom and German, without forgetting, of course, his adopted home, France. Sarasate's prestige had been consolidated; he had

become a myth; his success would not cease now until his death.

In the year of his death, Sarasate came, as he did every year, to the Fiesta of San Fermin, where he gave four concerts. Two months later, he died at the age of 64 in his villa in Biarritz as a result of complications of the lung condition he suffered, which had seen him cut short a concert mid-performance the previous year in the German town of Darmstadt.

Right up until the last moment, Sarasate maintained his perfection, the purity of his sound, his lyricism and that way he had of playing, in the words of the violinist **Fernández Arbós**, "like nobody had ever done before nor ever would do after".

"All the London newspapers today dedicate an entire column to Pablo Sarasate. About no other contemporary Spaniard would they write so much on the day of his death. He was the epitome of Spanish prestige beyond Spanish borders. And he deserved to be. No other Spaniard of our day has, in his field, reached the heights which Sarasate reached in his", wrote **Ramiro de Maeztu** in a chronicle sent from London. Sarasate's violin fell silent for ever more on the 20th of September 1908.

Sarasate made the most of his travels to collect popular melodies to use in his own compositions: this practice gave rise to *Airs Ecossais* (1891), *Mélodie Roumaine* (1901) and his *Chansons Russes* (1902), although, above all, works based on Spanish folk music were the mainstay of his creative work in this period: *Airs Espagnols Op. 26* (1881), *Jota Aragonesa* (1882), *Serenata Andaluza* (1883), *Petenera* (1894) or *Jota de Pamplona* (1903), among others. Nor did he forget the ballroom genre or fantasies based on opera themes, his *Fantasy on Carmen* (1881) being worthy of note for its popularity.

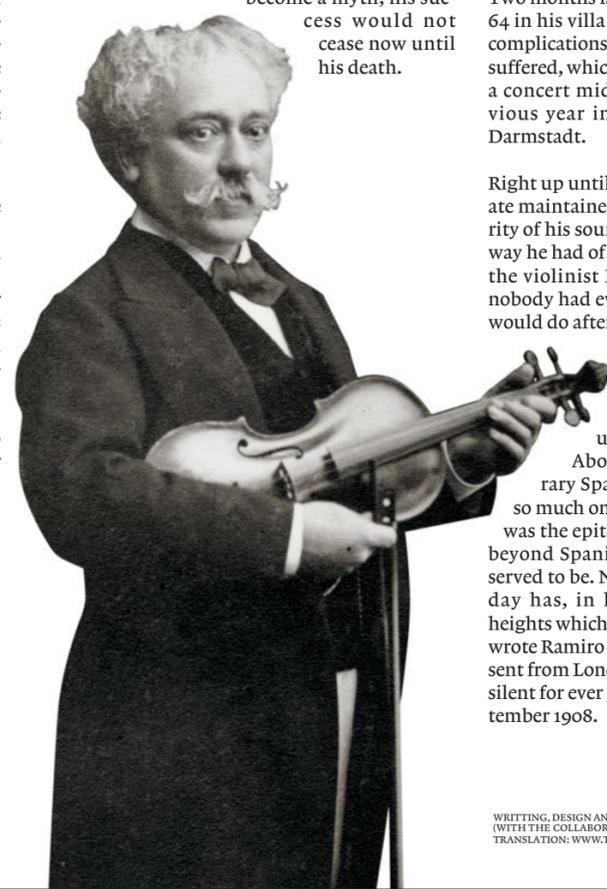
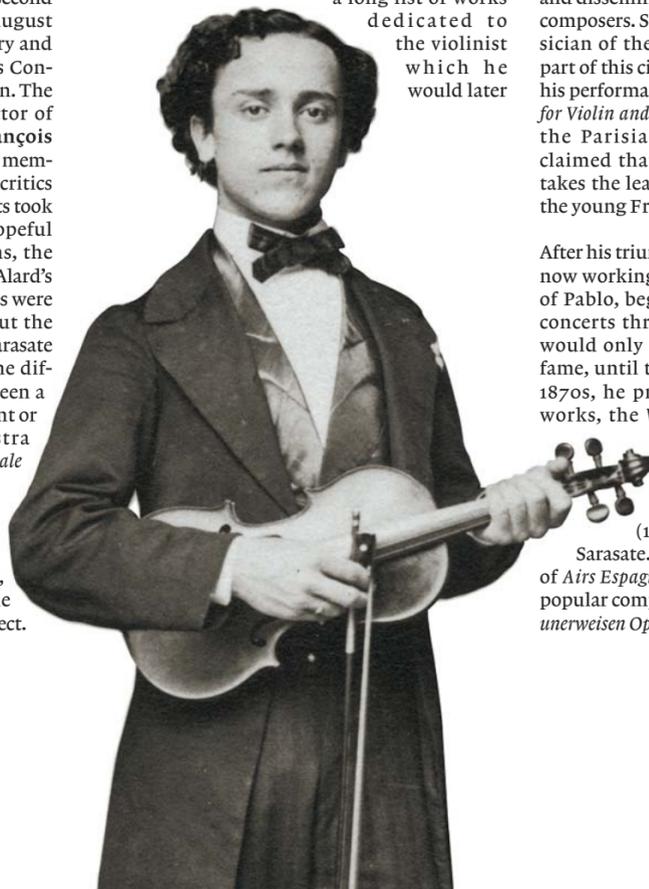
His repertoire was always completed with classical works and others by contemporary composers, some even dedicated to him, such as **Max Bruch's Scottish Fantasy**, **Mackenzie's Pibroch** or the *Third Concerto for Violin and Orchestra* by Saint-Saëns.

In addition to his activity as a concert virtuoso, he also developed a lesser known side of his art over these decades: chamber music, creating his own quartet with second violin **Armand Parent**, **Walfelghem**, **viola**, and **Jules Delsart**, cello.

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PABLO SARASATE EXHIBITION

Palacio del Condestable
Calle Mayor, 2. 31001 Pamplona

OPEN

Tuesday to Saturday: 11 am to 2 pm and 6 pm to 9 pm
Sundays: 11 am to 2 pm
Mondays: closed



THE SAN FERMIN CONCERTS

Sarasate and Pamplona

In 1856, the same year he joined the Paris Conservatoire, Sarasate came to Pamplona for the Fiesta of San Fermin de Aldapa. The summers of 1872, 1876 and 1877 saw him return and from 1879 until the year of his death, his engagement in Pamplona was a regular feature in his diary: he played for the Fiesta of San Fermin every year –except 1884 and 1889– with the Santa Cecilia orchestra, which gave its first season of concerts in 1878 and “officially” became an Association in 1880, as part of the concerts organised in the Teatro Principal in the Plaza del Castillo, which in 1903 became known as the Gayarre Theater. The orchestra was founded by Joaquín Maya, who already conducted an orchestra of teachers from the music school and another in the Nuevo Casino. But it was Sarasate who really sponsored it and gave it the boost it needed. Together with Otto Goldschmidt, he designed the San Fermin fiesta matinee concerts, bringing guest musicians and getting reinforcements for the orchestra, normally using musicians from Madrid. The San Fermin concerts of 1882, with the participation of Sarasate, Gayarre, Arrieta, Zabalza, Guelbenzu, Larregla, Maya and Chapí, were particularly noteworthy. A generation of which Pérez Galdós wrote: “Pablo Sarasate is from Navarre. I have said before that all of Spain’s musicians are from Navarre” (*Arte y crítica*, 1923).

The last concerts were held two months prior to his death and featured Ricardo Villa as conductor of the Santa Cecilia orchestra, Berthe Marx on the piano, Remigio Múgica conducting the Orfeón Pamplonés and Otto Goldschmidt accompanying Sarasate on

the piano. Another Pamplona-born violinist, Santiago Vengoechea, joined Sarasate to play the *Jota Navarra*, which Sarasate had dedicated to the Regional Council of Navarre, and the orchestra, accompanied by the Orfeón, played *Himno a Sarasate*, composed by Villa for the presentation of the Grand Cross of Alfonso XII, which would turn out to be the last of a long list of accolades which Sarasate earned during his lifetime.

Sarasate and bullfights

Sarasate was a great fan of bullfighting –he wrote a pasodoble dedicated to the bullfighter Alcarreño– and had his own box in the stands of Pamplona’s Monumental, which was decorated with musical motifs for the bullfights held at the Fair of San Fermin, which, on a few occasions, he even presided.

Sarasate and his monuments

The Museo Sarasate was created in 1897 as the result of Sarasate’s donation of some of the objects of value he possessed, a collection which gradually grew before his death. In 1900, the City Council of Pamplona agreed to officially name Sarasate Favourite Son of the City, an honour finally made effective in 1902. In 1903, the Council paid him tribute by lending his name to the city’s main boulevard, which became the Boulevard de Sarasate, now Paseo de Sarasate. Following his death, the Council erected a monument in his honour in the Park of La Taconera in 1918. Finally, the bust which crowned the monument was moved to the façade of the new Conservatoire (now in calle Aoiz), which was named after him, and a new monument was unveiled in 1959 in the Park of the Media Luna.

The Santa Cecilia Orchestra with the harpist Pilar Michelena, Pablo Sarasate, the conductor Ricardo Villa and the chairman of the Sociedad Santa Cecilia, Alberto Huarte, in the first row.



PHOTO EMILIO PLIEGO. PAMPLONA



THE LOCATIONS OF THE MUSEUM

Pablo Sarasate’s legacy

In his will of 1893, Sarasate left Pamplona City Council “en toute propriété” his art collection, decorations, canes... and some of his violins, among them the Vuillaume and the Gand & Bernardel. Between 1894 and 1897, the violinist gave the Council several objects, including silver wreaths and different jewels. Following his death in 1908, Pamplona City Council set up a Museum on the top floor of the old Town Hall to house the legacy in accordance with the list of possessions drawn up by his manager and friend Otto Goldschmidt. Demolition work on the old Baroque building meant that the museum had to be closed in 1951. Fourteen years later, in

Top, first Museum set up in the Town Hall; bottom left, location of the Bequest in Conservatorio Pablo Sarasate in calle Aoiz; bottom right, Museum in the chapel of the old Seminary of San Juan Bautista.

Bellow, Sarasate in his flat at Malesherbes 5, Paris; on the right, living room in Villa Navarra, Biarritz.



1965, the bequest was exhibited on the ground floor of the recently-opened Conservatorio Pablo Sarasate in calle Aoiz. It remained there until 1977. Fourteen years on, a new Museum was opened in the chapel of the old Seminary of San Juan Bautista in calle Mercado, the premises of the Municipal Archive. It stayed there from 1991 to 2008, when this Exhibition was opened in the renovated Palace of the Condestable in calle Mayor.

THE WILL

“I bequeath full ownership of my watches, tie-pins, rings, diamond jewellery, decorations, laurel wreaths, trophies, diplomas, bronze statues, paintings, busts and mementoes to Pamplona City Council. This collection is to be exhibited in a special showcase, indicating the origin of each object. Likewise, I bequeath it my Vuillaume violin, my Gand violin (which I received as first prize in the Paris Conservatoire) and my bows... These violins are to be exhibited in the showcase containing my professional mementoes, duly protected from dust and humidity. I bequeath the Council all the furniture and moveable property of all kinds found in my room in Paris... This entire collection of mementoes, instruments and moveable property is to be installed in a special room, fully accessible to the public, bearing my name.” (From the last will and testimony of Pablo Sarasate, Paris, 28th of September 1893).

EXHIBITION

Pablo Sarasate

Pamplona 1844 - Biarritz 1908

