

Pablo de Sarasate
(1844 – 1908)

Zigeunerweisen, Op. 20

Performed by Colette Goh

Pablo de Sarasate was born in Pamplona, known for its annual running of the bulls. He inspired a number of composers to write pieces for him to play. Among them were Max Bruch, Edouard Lalo and Camille Saint-Saens. Sarasate was one of the most renowned Spanish musicians of his day and was regarded as one of the finest violinists of the late 19th century. Of his many pieces, Zigeunerweisen was one of his best known today.

Zigeunerweisen, which means “Gypsy Airs”, was published in 1878 in Leipzig. After a strong piano opening, the violinist takes control. The first section features a sense of yearning with the melody that tugs at your heartstrings. Sarasate is successful in capturing the deep emotional power, which can still be heard in Gypsy music. The piece challenges me to perform it at a high level of maturity. It opens in the key of G minor and features soulful sighs and hesitations through the use of pauses. It yet features many technical challenges again through pizzicato, harmonics, and many other melodic decorations. The accompaniment is humble in its role and sets a melting and expressive character.

In the section before Allegro molto vivace, the mute is used to create an effect of longing for a loved one. The soulfulness of the tone that is produced evokes one to silent tears. This is then changed into G Major, with springy steps and rhythmic energy that I am able to relate due to my playful personality. The melody uses acrobatic tricks that lead to a sparkling ending. This spectacular ending, which is made up of grouped quavers is extremely demanding of the performer to set the pace and rhythm. It brings out what a violin can do and it is indeed one of the greatest violin showpieces of all time.