

Pauline Viardot-Garcia (1821-1910)

Pauline Viardot-Garcia was the daughter of two opera singers, Manuel Garcia and Joaquina Garcia-Stitchès. Her parents' careers took the family to London, New York and Mexico during Pauline's early childhood, and by the age of six she was fluent in Spanish, French, English and Italian. After her father's early death she studied voice with her mother, piano with Franz Liszt and harmony and counterpoint with Anton Reicha. Her sister, Maria Malibran, became one of the most celebrated singers in Europe before her tragic death at age 28, following a fall from a horse. Pauline made her first appearance as a singer with Maria's husband, the violinist Charles de Bériot. She caused a sensation with a cadenza called "Cadenza du Diable," based on Paganini's violin piece, "Trillo del Diavolo" (Devil's Trill). Less than a year after her debut, she was married to Louis Viardot, an operatic impresario twenty-one years her senior.

Mme. Viardot, as she called herself from that time forward, had one of the most exciting careers in music history. I strongly recommend that the serious musician read one of the books listed below because a summary cannot do justice to the level and scope of Viardot's accomplishments.

Viardot made her operatic debut in London, singing Desdemona in Rossini's *Otello*. The following year she became prima donna for the Italian Opera season in Paris. Her company was one of the first to take Italian opera to Russia, and she became the toast of St. Petersburg, both because of her extraordinary singing and stage presence, and because she occasionally threw in an aria in Russian, pronouncing the language with such skill that many took her for a native speaker. This latter accomplishment was due in part to the efforts of her language coach, Ivan Turgenev. The author and playwright was so overwhelmed by the young diva that he formed a lifetime attachment to her. Viardot's opera career took her to most of the major houses of Europe and was concluded with a triumphant revival of Gluck's *Orfeo*, in which she performed the title role 150 times. She collaborated with Hector Berlioz on his new version of the Gluck masterpiece. After her retirement from opera at age 41, she continued to give recitals, and she taught until the time of her death at age 89.

Viardot's close friends and admirers included most of the great European artists and intellectuals of her time. Brahms wrote the *Alto Rhapsody* for her, and Saint-Saëns wrote *Samson et Dalila* for her. Schumann, Gounod, Meyerbeer and Faure all composed for her, and Turgenev and George Sand wrote literary works in which she was the principal character.

In her spare time, Viardot wrote more than 100 songs, four operettas, one opera, many piano works, and two volumes of violin music. In spite of her frequent opera and recital tours, Viardot had a happy and intense family life. Her son Paul became a concert violinist, her daughter Louise Heritte-Viardot became a composer and writer, and two other daughters became concert singers.

This edition of the *Sonatine* is based on the first published edition, found in the Library of Congress. It is labeled "Paris: E. Gerard, 189-. CM 11344."

The *Sonatine* was dedicated to Hubert Leonard, Paul Viardot's violin teacher. Leonard was known for the beauty of his interpretations rather than the fire of his pyrotechnics, and he championed the work of Brahms, Saint-Saëns, Fauré and Laló. The work alternates lyrical sections with bravura passages, and there are several examples of Viardot's Spanish-gypsy background, a heritage which was frequently referred to by those who admired both her performance and her composition.

In this edition, the markings of the first edition (dynamics, articulation, phrasing) are preserved unless they conflict with the manuscript or seem clearly at odds with the composer's intent. Performance suggestions by the editor are shown in lighter print. Since no manuscript is available, a study of Viardot's many published songs, and a general knowledge of nineteenth century musical practices have been used as guidelines. The music itself is of a very romantic and expressive quality, and the performer should feel free to take liberties with tempi, phrasing and dynamics, just as Mme. Viardot did in her own performances: George Sand wrote of Viardot: "... the suave and unconstrained movements, the astonishing freedom from every sort of affectation, how transfigured and illumined all this appears when she is carried away by her genius on the current of song."

Linda Burian Plaut, 1993

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