

*Caprice Basque op.24* by Pablo Sarasate.  
Way of being interpreted.



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## Table of contents

<b>1- INTRODUCTION:</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2- BIOGRAPHY:</b>	<b>4</b>
2.1- PABLO SARASATE, INFANT PRODIGY:	4
2.2- VIRTUOUS VIOLINIST AND HIS INFLUENCE AT THE SECOND HALF OF THE XIX CENTURY:	7
2.3- SARASATE AS A COMPOSER: PIECES BASED ON SPANISH FOLKLORE / PIECES BASED ON DIVERSE EUROPEAN FOLKLORE:	8
<b>3- ZORTZIKO IN CLASSICAL MUSIC: FIRST EXPERIMENTS WITH QUINTUPLE BARS.</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>4- ZORTZIKO OF THE <i>BASQUE CAPRICE</i> OP.24:</b>	<b>13</b>
4.1- WHAT IS A ZORTZIKO?	13
<b>5- CONCLUSIONS:</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>6- BIBLIOGRAPHY:</b>	<b>23</b>

## 1- Introduction:

The idea of making the research about the *Caprice Basque* op.24 by Pablo Sarasate began when I chose the programme of the second year Master final recital, indeed, at the beginning of the study year. I had heard many times the piece before, never with a score in my hands, but when I started practicing from the score, I realized that it begins with a typical Basque folkloric dance called *Zortziko*. This is not a novelty, being that Sarasate composed a lot of music based on the Spanish folklore but also more specifically in the Basque one because of his geographical nearness between his hometown (Pamplona) and the Basque Country which are next to each other.

The intriguing thing is that this typical Basque dance called *Zortziko* in the Basque tradition is written in the bar 5/8, but Sarasate wrote it in 3/4. Obviously, what Sarasate wrote is a *Zortziko* because of the rhythm of the dance and its structure, but why did he compose the piece in 3/4? I immediately realized that the *Caprice Basque* op.24 (for a person who deeply knows how has to be played a *Zortziko*) loses the sense and the meaning, first of all, because 3/4 bar has one eighth note more than what 5/8 has, what makes a big difference when interpreting it.

This is, then, the research question; actually there is more than one question, which came to my mind.

The main question is:

- Why did Pablo Sarasate compose the first dance of the *Caprice Basque* op.24 in 3/4 bar?

Secondary questions:

- How was Pablo Sarasate influenced by the Basque folklore? Which was the link Sarasate had with the Basque music?
- How would the piece work if you do a transcription or arrangement in 5/8 bar?

The main question gets even more important when, as we will see later in the body of the research, I discovered that at some later opus pieces, exactly at the op.37 (*Zortziko Adiós montañas mías*) op.39 (*Zortziko de Iparraguirre*) and op.42 (*Zortziko Miramar*) Sarasate used the bar 5/8 to write them. Why not in the *Caprice Basque*? A close reading of the manuscript of the piece could give more evidence about his intentions of having composed it in 3/4.

The aim of this research is to show not only the to violin players but to every musician in general how to approach this piece. To show how should be interpreted in a convincing way based on the Basque musical tradition, which, in my opinion, is the best way to interpret it. Not because I say it but because the musical result.

To fulfil this goal, the research process I am going to pursue is the following one: Find all the information and sources to have a good base to build on the research paper, going to libraries, using the Internet as a tool, meeting experienced people on the subject, use the best popular/folkloric Basque song compilations...

To be hundred per cent credible, I need a copy of the manuscript of the piece which only is at the municipal archive of Pamplona. Audio files (also a live performance) might be used during the presentation to show the correct and wrong interpretations of the piece and to make more understandable, clear and precise the explanation.

That is why I have chosen the Research paper format. I want to emphasize a first more theoretical part of the work with a more visual or practical second part. I will also include a transcription of the piece in 5/8, which would be the best example to make the listener understand the different interpretation of the piece.

It is very exciting and motivating for me to have discovered this reason for research, because, as a Basque citizen, is very stimulating to spread out our culture and folklore to the minds of everyone who reads this paper. It is my way of respecting the pureness of the Basque culture.

## 2- Biography:

### 2.1- Pablo Sarasate, infant prodigy:

Sarasate grew up in a period where being an infant prodigy was very appreciated by society. He was one of these prodigies. If we take a look to the newspapers from that time (the middle of the XIX century) we can observe that they are full of news referring to really talented young violinists, pianists or singers.<sup>1</sup> His father, Miguel Sarasate who was a musician, had a big influence in Sarasate's precocity. Some biographers show examples of Sarasate's earlyness based on his father's reports: "His father was already a sixty years old man when he told me that his child learnt and recognized musical signs earlier than the alphabet, therefore, he learnt to read music before he learnt to read books at his first school year"<sup>2</sup>.

The fact that Sarasate made his debut at the age of seven in La Coruña, where his father was musician of the army, confirms his precocity. His first performance, the 13<sup>th</sup> of January of 1852 at the break of the concert of the orchestra, took place at the *sede de la Unión Recreativa e Instructiva de*

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<sup>1</sup> Marc PINCHERLE shows at his book *Le monde des virtuoses* (Paris, Flammarion, 1961) that any art offers so many examples of infant prodigies as the music does, and that the infant prodigy "culture" is not only from the modern period.

<sup>2</sup> ALTADILL, J. *Memorias de Sarasate*, p. 6.

*Artesanos de La Coruña*<sup>3</sup>. Three months later, he did it in Madrid at some special musical evenings and at a concert offered by the students from the conservatory. Every performances of the young violinist provoked the same reactions among the critics: a perfect tuning and a prodigious ability with the instrument. It was unavoidable to compare him with the great Paganini.

Due to the Countess of *Espoz* and *Mina*, which became the patron of Sarasate, he moved in 1853 to Madrid with his mother and sisters to study with the violinist Manuel Rodriguez. Sarasate was involved in a very demanding work rate watched over by his father. That is why soon, the training possibilities in Madrid fell very short for him and he was suggested to follow his studies in Paris. He not only performed in a lot of musical evenings in different halls but also in prestigious places like the Royal Palace for the Queen. His precocity and ability with the instrument explains the attention he got from the media:

[...] Sarasate, infant prodigy, at the age of nine years (at that time he already was eleven) has the talent of a true artist. He has a bright and correct execution, a remarkable intonation and aplomb on stage, an admirable sense of the musical phrase. He is so natural that excited the enthusiasm and admiration of the audience that could hardly believe what they were hearing at the moment. It is a pity that for lack of protection, like always occurs in our unfortunate country, this emerging artists will completely get lost.<sup>4</sup>



One month after that words, (July, 1855) Sarasate went to Paris with his mother and helped economically by the before mentioned Countess of *Espoz* and *Mina*, and the queen Isabel II herself.<sup>5</sup> This trip became tragic due to the death in Bayonne of the mother of Sarasate, Javiera Navascués. Some biographers have always idealized the image of

Sarasate, emphasizing his success and introducing him like a lucky artist with an easy live. However, this is not true, in fact, his 10 first years of artistic career were not easy at all and he had to overcome many obstacles.

In 1856, six months after being admitted at the Conservatory of Paris, his violin teacher Delphin Alard wrote the following report: "*facilité étonnante, justesse irréprochable, grandes espérances*".<sup>6</sup> His solfège teacher Napoleón Alkan

<sup>3</sup> Created in 1847, it was the first concert association in La Coruña.

<sup>4</sup> *Gaceta musical de Madrid*, 10/06/1855.

<sup>5</sup> Later another economic help came from the Delegation of Navarre.

<sup>6</sup> "Surprising ease, impeccable tuning, high hopes. (*Examen du Mercredi 25 Juin 1856. Classe de Violon M. Alard. Paris, Archives Nationales, AJ37/274\**)".

also wrote at the same report: “ *Intelligence rare et précocce, très grand lecteur, mais malheureusement étranger et comprenant trop peu de français encore pour bien raisonner ses principes*”.<sup>7</sup>

The hopes of Alard were confirmed soon: after a year and a half of musical studies at the Conservatory of Paris, Sarasate got a first prize in solfège, and more important even, also a unanimously given first prize his main subject, violin. It is worth to read and analyze the press review about this exam. The *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* described the event this way:

Dix-sept violonistes se présentaient dans la lice, et parmi eux se trouvait un concurrent de treize ans et quatre mois, le jeune Espagnol Sarasate, élève d'Alard, dont toute l'école connaissait les facultés merveilleuses. Non seulement cet enfant joue du violon comme un maître, mais il est musicien comme la musique; il a remporté un premier prix de solfège et déchiffre tout ce qu'on lui présente, comme s'il l'eût appris par cœur, avec un goût parfait, avec sentiment, avec style. Sans doute, il y avait à côté de lui d'excellents élèves, comptant beaucoup plus d'années de travail, mais qui jouaient et lisaient beaucoup moins bien. Entre le jeune Sarasate et eux, il y avait la même différence qu'entre un virtuose de premier ordre, un Rode, un Lafont, un de Bériot et un parfait violon d'orchestre. Fallait-il donc les placer sur la même ligne et leur accorder la même distinction? Le jury ne l'a pas fait et ne devait pas le faire. Première cause d'irritation chez les partisans des violons d'orchestre, et ils sont nombreux; ils se tiennent par la main; ils se lèvent et ils sifflent dans l'occasion comme un seul homme. Que leur boîte à violon leur soit légère! Le jeune Sarasate, élève d'Alard, a donc *seul* obtenu le premier prix, comme M. White, autre élève d'Alard, l'avait obtenu *seul* l'année dernière.<sup>8</sup>

The next ten years of Sarasate's life (1860-1870) consisted in making himself known both in Paris and other European countries without forgetting Spain. After having some job offers to become teacher at the Conservatory of Madrid and the one in Paris, one of the most important steps in Sarasate's life as a soloist came when he decided to go to America in 1870. As expected, Sarasate had a big success in America at his two years tour and he went back to Spain in May of 1872 turned into a very important artist.

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<sup>7</sup> “Rare and precocious intelligence, great reader. Unfortunately he is foreigner and understands too little French to argue his principles”. (*Examen du Mardi 24 Juin 1856. Classe de Solfège M. Alkan*).

<sup>8</sup> Seventeen violinists came to the stage, among them a thirteen years and four months contestant, the young Spanish Sarasate, pupil of Alard, whose talent is very well known in the Conservatory. This child not only plays the violin as a master but he is also as musical as the music itself; He has been awarded with a first prize in music theory and has decipher everything as if he had already memorized, with a perfect taste, with feeling, with style. There were excellent students besides him, with many more years of work behind them, but they played and read much worse. Between the young Sarasate and the rest of the students was the same difference as between a first-order virtuoso like Rode, Lafont, or Bériot, and a perfect orchestra violinist. Should the students have been judged the same way? The jury has not done and should not. That is the first cause of irritation among the supporters of orchestra violinists, and there are many; They hold hands; They rise up and whistle at the time as one person would do. The young Sarasate, disciple of Alard, won the first prize as M. White, another pupil of Alard, got it last year “(PS, “*Imperial Conservatoire de Musique et de clamation decade. Concours public* ” *Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris*, 09/08/1857).



## 2.2- Virtuous violinist and his influence at the second half of the XIX century:

Since then, we could summarize Sarasate's story until his death as a success story. He almost did not find any failure and he became the most important violinist of his period. On his return he reintegrated himself into the Parisian musical life not only as a performer but also by joining a group of young composers from the French school.

In 1876 a major event takes place in the career of Sarasate, indeed, presentation in Germany. The "Franco-Spanish" violinist, as described in the reviews, was received with curiosity and suspicion. Years later, Otto Neitzel who later would become a great friend and piano accompanist of Sarasate, wrote his first impression about Sarasate:



That young boy played something unknown by a French (Saint-Saens) composer, which confirmed our opinion about the French people who cannot stand a comparison in terms of depth of feeling with us. Then he played Chopin's Nocturne in E flat: it was unnecessary because Wilhelmj played it some days before transcribed to D. He also played a Spanish dance. Qualified as such bad music that it was not considered even culture<sup>9</sup>.

Despite this, the conductor of the Gewandhaus, Karl Reinecke, invited Sarasate to play with the orchestra in Leipzig the 19<sup>th</sup> of October. Reinecke himself wrote some years later:

He offered a brilliant proof of dominating the power of the orchestra when Sarasate chose for his first appearance in Leipzig in 1876 the Spanish Suite by Lalo among some other works. Following the instructions of guest artist, the leadership of the instrumental parts felt on the violin and so, therefore, Sarasate gave the score to concertmaster Röntgen, but he rejected it wishing that, exceptionally, I would conduct of

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<sup>9</sup> Article published in the *Kölnische Zeitung* (Cologne Gazette) on 27 September 1908 on the death of Sarasate, quoted by ALTADILL, J., *Memorias de Sarasate*, pp. 42-43.

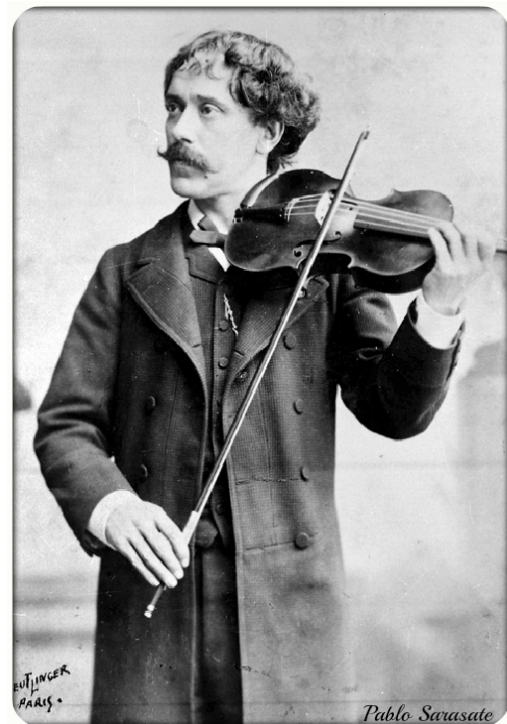
the solo pieces. After this, Sarasate put the score in my hands and asked, exhausted, how many rehearsals could we do, due to the difficulty of the piece. I answered: " Until you get satisfied, as many as necessary. After playing the whole first movement and I asked if he wanted to rehearse it in sections or from the beginning to the end. He shook his head and played the entire Suite in a row without any repetition. "You have a wonderful orchestra," he said.<sup>10</sup>

After his success in Leipzig he also played in Vienna where his triumph was even bigger. After that year, he would visit every year Germany and Austria, which would become his most regular destinies behind the United Kingdom where he also travels every year. Later, the Nordic countries, Spain and so on came. In February of 1889 Sarasate wrote in a letter:

I've led a dizzying life ... I left Paris in late October, and visited all Switzerland, Holland and a big part of Germany, not counting what we have left to go before going to London. My concerts in Berlin have been magnificent and every time we had to refuse more than a thousand people. The hall behind the orchestra is full of people, and there were fans waiting for me after twelve o'clock to give me a standing ovation.<sup>11</sup>

### 2.3- Sarasate as a composer: Pieces based on Spanish folklore / Pieces based on diverse European folklore:

He actually never wanted to be a composer, only a performer. He only studied two years of composition at the conservatory with Henry Reber but, since the beginning of his career, he always played pieces by other composers. His pieces are, like Iberní (musicologist, critic and professor at the Complutense University of Madrid) quoted, "the kind of pieces which we could name as easy listening, easy music and without big depths".<sup>12</sup> We can see he never composed concertos or sonatas, just fantasies based on opera themes, and a lot of compositions based on folkloric music:



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<sup>10</sup> REINECKE, Carl, *Erlebnisse und Bekenntnisse*, herausgegeben von Doris Mundus, Leipzig, 2006, p. 108.

<sup>11</sup> Cited in ALTADILL, J., *Memorias de Sarasate*, p. 56.

<sup>12</sup> IBERNÍ, Luis G., *Pablo Sarasate*, p. 27



Fantasies and opera themes variations	Ballroom pieces	Compositions based on Spanish folkloric themes	Compositions based on European folkloric themes
<i>Grand Duo Concertant sur La Juive d'Halévy</i> (with Louis Diémer)	<i>Fantaisie Caprice</i>	<i>Sérénade Andalouse</i> op. 10 <i>Airs espagnols</i>	<i>Moscoviènne</i> op. 12
<i>Souvenirs de Faust de Gounod</i>	<i>Réverie</i> op. 4	<i>Danzas españolas</i> op. 21: <i>Malagueña y Habanera</i>	<i>Zigeunerweisen</i> op. 20
<i>Fantaisie sur La forza del destino by Verdi</i>	<i>Confidence</i> op. 7	<i>Danzas españolas</i> op. 23: <i>Playera y Zapateado</i>	<i>Airs Écossais</i> op. 34
<i>Hommage à Rossini</i> (with Louis Diémer)	<i>Souvenir de Domont (valse de salon)</i> op. 8	<i>Caprice Basque</i> op. 24	<i>Introduction et Tarantelle</i> op. 43
<i>Fantaisie sur La Dame Blanche by Boieldieu</i>	<i>Les Adieux</i> op. 9	<i>Danzas españolas</i> op. 26: <i>Vito y Habanera Jota</i>	<i>Mélodie Roumaine</i> op. 47
<i>Caprice sur Roméo et Juliette by Gounod</i>	<i>Sommeil</i> op. 11	<i>Aragonesa</i> op. 27	<i>Chansons Russes</i> op. 49
<i>Caprice sur Mireille by Gounod</i> op. 6	<i>Los pájaros de Chile</i>	<i>Danzas españolas</i> op. 28: <i>Serenata Andaluz</i>	
<i>Nouvelle fantaisie sur Faust de Gounod</i>	<i>Prière et Berceuse</i> op.17	<i>Boléro</i> op. 30	
<i>Fantaisie sur Der Freischütz by Weber</i>	<i>Le Chant du Rossig- nol</i> op. 29	<i>Muiñeira</i> op. 32	
<i>Mosaïque sur Zampa by Hérold</i> op. 15	<i>Ballade</i> op. 31 <i>La Chasse</i> op.44	<i>Navarra</i> op. 33	
<i>Romance et Gavotte de Mignon by Ambroise Thomas</i> op. 16	<i>Nocturne-Sérénade</i> op. 45	<i>Peteneras. Caprice espag- nol</i> op. 35	
<i>Réminiscence by Martha de Flotow</i>	<i>Gondoliera Venezia- na</i> op. 46	<i>Jota de San Fermín</i> op. 36	
<i>Fantaisie sur Carmen by Bizet</i> op. 25	<i>L'Esprit Follet</i> op. 48 <i>Le Rêve</i> op. 53	<i>Zortzico Adiós montañas mías</i> op. 37	
<i>Fantaisie sur Don Juan by Mozart</i> op. 51		<i>Viva Sevilla!</i> op. 38	
<i>Fantaisie sur La Flûte</i>		<i>Zortzico de Iparraguirre</i> op. 39	
		<i>Introduction et Fandango varié</i> op. 40	
		<i>Introduction et caprice-jota</i> op. 41	
		<i>Miramar, zortzico</i> op. 42	

Enchantée by Mozart op. 54		Jota de Pamplona op. 50  Jota de Pablo op. 52	
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He composes the kind of music for showing his virtuosity as a performer. These compositions has some patterns in common to each other: They all have technically very difficult passages, but in contrast, very well chosen melodies which maximize the pure and natural sound of the violin. Is not a coincidence that some of them have become masterpieces among the violinist, for instance: *Spanish dances* op. 21 (1877-1878) until op. 28 (1883), *Carmen fantasy* op.25, *Zigeunerweisen* op. 20 and so many pieces based on folkloric music like the *Caprice Basque* op. 24.

As I explained at the introduction of the paper, first of all, to answer to the question “why did Sarasate compose the first dance of the *Caprice Basque* in the bar 3/4? (And not in 5/8?)” We need to see which was the use of quintuple bars in the classical music of that time.

### 3- ZORTZIKO in classical music: first experiments with quintuple bars.

The *Caprice Basque* was composed exactly the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August of 1880 as it says in the manuscript. One of the hypotheses is that he did not compose it in 5/8 because of the underutilization of the quintuple bar at that period in the occidental classical music. It is known that the quintuple bars were integrated with normality in the occidental classical music with the raise of the nationalisms, which often invoke folk-music elements.

During Baroque and Classical periods, we can only include as a proper use of the 5/8 bar, the one, which appears in *Orlando* opera by Haendel. There are two little passages with this bar in the second act of the opera.

At the XIX century, composers could find more motivations for the use of quintuple bars, such like demonstrating technical skills, to evoke excitement in the music, and as I said before, one of the strongest reasons was to include the folk-music in the classical music. So we can say that the quintuple bar became more usual during this period but still not common. Now, some examples of the use of quintuple bar during the XIX century:

The operas of the Russian composer Mikhail Glinka are one of the first signs of the quintuple bar in the nationalistic music.<sup>13</sup> The opera *A life for the Tsar* (1834–36) was the first time a composer of music set the pentasyllabic hemistichs<sup>14</sup> of Russian wedding songs in quintuple meter instead of adapting it to a more conventional one. In his next opera *Rusland and Ludmila* (1837–42) Glinka repeated the effect in the opening. We can also find examples in later folk-songs by Tchaikovsky: *Fifty Russian Folk Songs* for piano four-hands (1868–69), *Children's Ukrainian and Russian Folksongs* (book 1: 1872, book 2: 1877), and *Sixty-Six Russian Folk Songs* for voice and piano (1872), where quintuple meter is notated by regularly alternating signatures, 2/4 and 3/4.

Hector Berlioz used the 5/8 metre only for 8 bars in his piece *Les troyens*. Some little sections of the unfinished symphony (third symphony) of Alexander Borodin are also in 5/8.

At the middle of the century composers like Carl Loewe, Charles-Valentin Akan (virtuoso pianist), Wagner, Alban Berg or Arthur Rubinstein used the bar 5/4 at some of their pieces although it was not usual. But, three of the best-known examples of the use of the quintuple bar are placed on the late XIX century: At the second movement of the *Pathétique* symphony op. 74 of Tchaikovsky (which is in 5/4 bar), at *The isle of the dead* op. 29 by Rachmaninof and at the beginning of *The planets* by Gustav Holst<sup>15</sup>.

As we appreciate, the composers of the XIX century started to add this quintuple metre language to their pieces but in a “shy” way. It was not the most common thing yet.

At the XX century with the start of composers with nationalistic tendencies, the quintuple bar grew in its use and became more popular and common at the musical language. Here are some examples of this fact:

*Prelude of Unison* from orchestra suite No.1 by George Enescu (1903), *Mikroskosmos* by Bela Bartok<sup>16</sup> (1926, 1932-39), *Chanson épique* from the cycle *Don Quichote a Dulcinee* by Maurice Ravel<sup>17</sup> (1932-33), *Sinfonía India* by Carlos Chávez (1935-36)...

Coming to the Basque tradition, with the reason of being more specific, one of the first and most important composers including Basque themes and rhythms

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<sup>13</sup> Glinka, M. 1907. Жизнь за царя [Zhizno za tsaria], forward by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and: Alexander Glazunov. Leipzig: M. P. Belaieff.

<sup>14</sup> *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1993. 514.

<sup>15</sup> Holst, G. 1979. *The Planets: Suite for Large Orchestra*, op. 32. New edition prepared by Imogen Holst and Colin Matthews. Hawkes Pocket Scores 22. London: Boosey & Hawkes.

<sup>16</sup> Bartók, B. 1940. *Mikrokosmos: Progressive Piano Pieces = Pièces de piano progressives = Zongoramuzsika a kezdet legkezdetétől*, 6 vols. New York and London: Boosey & Hawkes.

<sup>17</sup> Ravel, Maurice. 1934. *Don Quichotte a Dulcinée*. Paris: Editions Durand.

on his classical symphonic compositions was Gabriel Pierné. At the overture of the piece *Ramuntcho*<sup>18</sup> he quotes the typical Basque “Zortziko” rhythms:

**Nº 1**

**O U V E R T U R E**  
sur des thèmes populaires basques

**Allegro moderato** (208 = ♩)  
*très long*

PIANO

The musical score for the piano part of the Overture 'sur des thèmes populaires basques' by Gabriel Pierné. It is marked 'Allegro moderato' with a tempo of 208 = ♩, and 'très long'. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The score includes dynamic markings such as 'ff' (fortissimo) and 'p léger' (piano léger). The piano part features a 'Zortziko' rhythm, which is a characteristic Basque rhythm.

At the end of the second act of *Ramuntcho* Pierné includes an arrangement of the Basque unofficial anthem *Gernikako Arbola* by José María Iparraguirre, which also is in “Zortziko” rhythm.

He also includes the quintuple metre at his piano quintet op.41 and at the *Fantasie Basque* for violin and orchestra op.49. At the beginning of the *Fantasie* he even marked “rythme de Zortziko”:

**Rythme de Zortziko**  
(\*) (92 = le 1<sup>er</sup> temps, ♩.)

Fl.

C. cl.

Harpe

Violon Solo

The musical score for the 'Rythme de Zortziko' section of the *Fantasie Basque* by Gabriel Pierné. It is marked 'Rythme de Zortziko' with a tempo of 92 = le 1<sup>er</sup> temps, ♩. The key signature has one sharp (F-sharp). The score includes dynamic markings such as 'pp' (pianissimo) and 'ppp' (pianississimo). The score is for a full orchestra, including Flute (Fl.), Clarinet (C. cl.), Harp (Harpe), and Violon Solo (Violon Solo).

<sup>18</sup> Pierné, Gabriel. 1908b. *Ramuntcho: Overture sur des thèmes populaires basques*. Paris: Enoch & Cie.

#### 4- Zortziko of the *Basque Caprice* op.24:

##### 4.1- What is a Zortziko?

The Zortziko is a traditional Basque dance rhythm, which is also used as accompaniment rhythm of vocal melodies like the *Gernikako Arbola* I have already mentioned by José María Iparraguirre. It has the distinctive of the 5/8 bar signature with its characteristic three subdivisions of 1, 2, and 2 eighth notes.<sup>19</sup>

It has always been a big discussion in the Basque Country between different musicologists and intellectuals at the beginning of the XX century about the origin of the 5/8 bar in the Basque tradition and the etymology of the word “Zortziko”. With the aim of a better understanding of the origins of the “Zortziko” I will now explain the most important opinions and discussions about it. We do not have to forget that the goal of this searching is to know how to interpret the first dance “Zortziko” of the *Caprice Basque*, for which is essential and indispensable to know the tradition and background of the dance. I will structure the most important opinions in a chronological way to see how have evolved:

First of all I have the obligation to mention Juan Ignacio de Iztueta (1767-1845), who was a Spanish historian, Basque writer and folklorist and a pioneer in the recompilation of the Basque traditional music in which later discussions were based at.

- Francisco Gáscue (1848-1920): Was a mining engineer, musicologist, publicist and politics scientist. He was the first after Iztueta who spoke about the origin of the 5/8 bar based on what Iztueta wrote at his recompilation of the Basque folkloric music. The following lines will show the opinion of Gáscue about the origins of the 5/8 bar in his words: “ the collection of songs of Iztueta printed in 1826 does not contain any Basque song composed in 5/8 nonetheless, some of them are sung in the “Zortziko” way. Why is that? Does it mean that Albéniz (musician and transcriber of the songs of Iztueta) made a basic mistake writing the “Zortzikos” in 6/8? Albéniz was from San Sebastián, he lived in Madrid and he had much musical knowledge. It is not possible to make such a basic mistake. Here is my humble opinion. The thing is that the “Zortziko” in his nowadays form was not that usual and common nor old as was supposed. There is no music teacher or choir band or orchestra conductor who does not appreciate the difficulty of conducting precisely a bar of two

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• <sup>19</sup> Laborde, Denis. 2001. "Basque Music". The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, second edition, London: Macmillan Publishers.



parts. The time which the stick stays up is a tiny shorter than the time that stays down. Very little conductors mark in a precise way the two parts of the bar. Most likely the primitive bar of the “Zortziko” was the 6/8 bar, which, due to the practical difficulty I have just mentioned, the second part was shorten becoming a 5/8 bar.

The expert in Basque music Jose Ignazio Ansorena has a really good answer for what Francisco Gáscue said about the mistake of Albéniz (writing the “Zortzikos in 6/8). Ansorena says that when Albéniz was doing the transcriptions for Iztueta, around 1820, the possibility of transcription in 5/8 was very less known. Albéniz himself wrote some “Zortziko” dances thought to be played and danced in 5/8 but written in 6/8.

- Resurrección María de Azkue (1864-1951): He was a Basque priest, musician, writer and Basque language academic. He also did an updated recompilation of the traditional music called *Cancionero Popular Vasco* (1918-1921), which contains a selection of 1001 pieces from a previous recompilation of around 2000 pieces which, was done for a kind of competition the Basque government did for recovering the Basque folkloric music. María de Azkue won this competition. There are two master recompilations of the Basque music, this one and the one of the reverend Jose Antonio de Donostia. There is not a better summary of the Basque musical tradition than this two until nowadays. Azkue said contradicting what Gáscue thought about the origin of the quintuple 5/8 bar, that it already existed in the Basque tradition but before the “Zortziko” became a dance, it was sung. This means that the “Zortziko” was not dotted (like the typical rhythm of nowadays is). They started to play it with dots to ease the dancers to make their jumps and acrobatics. According to what the great Belgian musicologist Gevaert, we could see the quintuple bar (without dots) in other traditions like the Hungarian and Lapp. The Greeks worked also the quintuple rhythm. Here is an example: the hymn to Apollo, found in 1894 in Athens.



At his *Cancionero Popular* Azkue criticizes what Gáscue thought about the “Zortziko” and its origins. Azkue thinks the reasons that Gáscue mentions at his essay are not “scientific” enough to show

that the quintuple bar was not as common as we think and refutes him asking in a rhetoric way if there are not batons in Germany, England or France. Why do not these countries have the same problem with the 6/8 bar that becomes a 5/8?

Azkue at his *Cancionero Vasco* of course, includes many "Zortziko" songs.

There is, in fact, a proof, which shows that at the early XIX century the "Zortziko" were already used in the dotted way. There is a piece edited in Paris in 1813 by Antonia de Moyúa y Mazarredo (a Basque composer woman) or by her daughter Juana Mazarredo. It is unsure the provenance. At that publication was another "Zortziko" composed by the Count of Peñaflorida (1723-1785).

ZORTZICO

Chanson et Danse Biscayenne

Composée par M<sup>lle</sup> MAZARREDO

Allegretto.

N<sup>o</sup> 20.  
PIANO.

676.

There is also a more actual official discussion about the origin of the 5/8 between the already mentioned musician, expert in Basque music, Jose Ignazio Ansorena and Carlos Sanchez Ekiza. They do not only speak about the “Zortziko” but I will focus in that field. I particularly find very interesting and the closest research to explain the reality of the “Zortziko” the version by Jose Ignazio Ansorena.

- Jose Ignazio Ansorena (1953): In his words, the only issue to solve around the “Zortziko” is the origin of the 5/8. First of all, he analyses in a semantic way the word *Zortziko*, which, is a word that has more than one meaning. It exactly means “of eight” so depending in what this eight things would be, the meaning of the word varies.
  1. An eight bars melody in rhythms of 2/4, 6/8 or 5/8. Is the typical pattern of Iztueta and the Basque dances of the XVIII century, which, become more common among the schooled musicians of the Basque Country during the XIX and XX century.
  2. A melody with rhythm of 5/8 with the phrases not necessarily of eight bars, despite is the most common. They were written mostly at the second half of the XIX.
  3. Dance with eight dancers, therefore, the melody has also the same name.
  4. Strophe of eight verses from the *bertsolaris*<sup>20</sup>.

He also thinks that the 5/8 comes from the 6/8 like Gáscue did, but with a different and more logical reason, indeed, that when the Basque musicians started to learn deeply music theory becoming schooled musicians, they thought that the 5/8 bar fitted better to the “Zortziko” dancing melodies than the 6/8 ones.

He says that we always have to keep in mind that the classification of the traditional culture is not as sharp, specific and closed as the scientific culture.

He specifies that throughout history, many questions have been referred to the 5/8 bar:

### **How should be written a particular bar which is named “Zortziko” by the Basque people?**

This question was already made from the middle XVIII to the beginning of the XIX centuries. In a general form we can say that at the middle of XIX century the 5/8 succeed but still they kept another ways of writing it.

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<sup>20</sup>Bertsolaritza or bertsolarism is the art of singing extemporary composed songs in Basque according to various melodies and rhythming patterns.

### Where does the 5/8 bar come from?

This question is made at the end of the XIX century and they have written a lot about it since the beginning of the XX. There have been many non-specific answers, sometimes even fanciful answers because they tried to find more than a musicologist answer.

### How should be interpreted the Basque 5/8?

When, from the XX century, many international Basque composers began to include this bar at their pieces, musicians all over the world wanted to know how to interpret it.

These are the steps and variations that the “Zortziko” has suffered to become a 5/8 bar according to Jose Ignacio Ansorena:

- The 6/8 “Zortzikos” usually interpreted by the *tamborileros*<sup>21</sup> or drummers for being danced, it appears spontaneously due to the flexibility of the traditional music to help the dancers.
- Through the *tamborileros* this new rhythm got unified which, in the first moment, the musicians were confused and they did not know how to transcribe it. This fact happens together with what we have said before about the *tamborileros* “became musicians” (started learning music and composing more difficult things).
- Somebody proposed the 5/8 to transcribe this common rhythm and there were people who accepted it, and some others, as always, not. This takes place along the XVIII century. At the end of it the 5/8 is already used, and in XIX it was more expanded.
- Why was the “Zortziko” form in 5/8 so successful during the second half of the XIX and begging of the XX? One of the reasons is that the Basque composers of that time gave a lot of importance to this metre. For instance, Jose María Iparraguirre composed many songs, which later became anthems in the Basque society, in 5/8. This way it became the most traditional way of Basque music form.
- How should be interpreted the 5/8 bar called “Zortziko” by the Basque people?



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<sup>21</sup> The combination of a Basque drum and Basque flute which is the most popular formation of musicians to play in the streets.

- It should be interpreted in 3 beats divided this way: 1, 2, and 2 eighth notes.
- When the “Zortziko” is sung and not played, we can see many transcriptions done without dots.
- The most traditional “Zortziko” pattern is the following one:



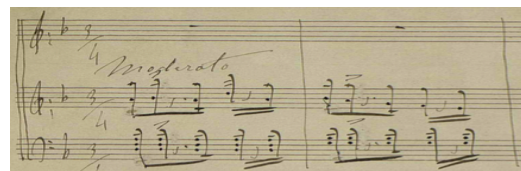
Carlos Sánchez Ekiza (1963): Composer and musicologist from Pamplona. At one of his articles Sánchez Ekiza says that the origin of the 5/8 bar has to do with the needs of the dancers that required a fixed and marked rhythm. He doubts about the theory of Jose Ignacio Ansorena which I find it the most interesting, very well explained and admitting that anybody can prove scientifically what really happened.

I would like to do a little summary of two concepts, which I want to be really clear to clarify and simplify what we have already read:

- 1- The word “Zortziko” was not understood during the XVIII century the same way we do nowadays. At that time the meaning of “Zortziko” was: a melody made of regular 8 bar phrases regardless the rhythm of the pieces. They were written in 2/4 or 6/8.
- 2- The word “Zortziko” after the beginning of the XIX it came to mean a melody in 5/8 with a specific rhythm which not necessarily needs not have 8 bar phrases, despite many of them do.

After all these researches and discussions about the origin of the 5/8 “Zortziko”, is time now to focus at the *Caprice Basque* op.24 and make a little analysis to discover and understand how should be interpreted. For it, we need to work with the manuscript of the piece<sup>22</sup>, which I found it at the municipal archive of Pamplona.

As we know, the first dance of the piece, in which we will focus, is written in 3/4 with the time signature of *Moderato*. After a little introduction of the piano, the melody of the violin starts at the bar nine. It is instantly recognizable the rhythmical ostinato with which all this dance was composed. It is the already mentioned traditional “Zortziko” pattern. This pattern continues during the whole dance. As we see,



<sup>22</sup> See the annex of the Research.





Sarasate adds an accent to the second eighth note of the accompaniment, which would be, as in the traditional way, the first eighth note of the second part or the bar. (Remember: 1+2+2). It

makes a lot of sense because it gives a support to the dancers and flow to the music. This accent on the second beat is very important because of the way of accentuation of the traditional “Zortziko” which has three accents, one in each beat. But, hierarchically, the first notes of the second and third beat are more important than the first one, which obviously has a little accent for being the downbeat.

Lets compare it now with the later composed “Zortzikos” by Sarasate op.37 (*Zortziko Adiós montañas mías*) op.39 (*Zortziko de Iparraguirre*) and op.42 (*Zortziko Miramar*). They all are written in 5/8 and these are the rhythmical patterns of the pieces:

Op.37 *Adiós montañas mías*:



Op.39 *Zortziko de Iparraguirre*:



Op.42 *Zortziko Miramar*:



As we appreciate, the rhythmical patterns are exactly the same least one difference. At the *Caprice Basque* Sarasate adds a dotted eighth note rest at the beginning of the second part of the 3/4. This rest is what makes the difference between a 5/8 and a 3/4. If the *Caprice Basque* is played in 3/4 the music loses a lot of sense. Obviously Sarasate wanted to write a “Zortziko”, first of all, because the piece has the title of *Caprice Basque* and second, because of the recognizable folkloric music pattern. This means that for a reason we can not be hundred per cent sure that Sarasate wrote it in 3/4 because he did not dare to use the 5/8 bar at the year 1880 despite there were already some “Zortzikos” composed in 5/8. This research brings me to think that he did it in 3/4 for being played “easily” by any musician. To be accepted by the musicians although the dance was in danger of losing its essence. Anyway, he only knew how would he like to perform it. (There is no recording of the *Caprice Basque* played by Sarasate).

Before coming with the conclusions, I would like to open a discussion about the interpretation of the piece. I have listened many recordings and there are three types of them (of course all of them played in 3/4 because it does not exist in an other way): 1- where the violinist plays it respecting what written.

2- where the rhythm and timing are not really clear. 3- where the interpretation resembles the 5/8 (what means that the interpreter is not respecting what is written in the score hundred per cent).

Here is an example of each type. We will listen recordings of three great violinists in the violin history such as Maxime Vengerov, Yehudi Menuhin and Isaac Stern and analyse their interpretations:

1. Maxim Vengerov: This is a clear case of the first type. He respects carefully what is written in the score, clearly playing in 3/4. We can prove it subdividing in eighth notes to see if six of them fit in a bar. They do. For my point of view, this interpretation is kind of “robotic”, is a non-danceable dance. Despite that, he does a very honest and virtuosistic interpretation with a lot of taste. This is the way should be interpreted if you follow what is written in the score.
2. Yehudi Menuhin: Starting from he does not respect the “*Moderato*” time signature written in the score, choosing an extremely fast tempo, in my opinion this is one of those interpretations that the interpreter takes a lot of licences. Although it is rhythmically ambiguous, Menuhin shows a very skilled violin playing.
3. Isaac Stern: This recording is very surprising because it is very close from what I think it should be interpreted. If we do the same exercise of subdividing in eighth notes, they hardly fit six notes in each bar. We can even feel the 1+2+2 division of the bars, which as we said during the research is the typical 5/8 division at the Basque Country. So my question is: Why does Isaac Stern interpret this *Basque Caprice* this way? Did he know something about the Basque tradition? Although this is the closest interpretation to the “Basque way”, I have to say that he does not respect what is written in the score and that he is not rhythmically precise at all.

So, how should be interpreted the *Caprice Basque*?<sup>23</sup> I have transcribed the original manuscript from 3/4 to 5/8 to show how in my opinion should be interpreted the *Caprice Basque* and how small is the difference in the score but remarkable when interpreting the piece.

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<sup>23</sup> See the transcription of the original *Caprice Basque* in 5/8.

## 5- Conclusions:

After having analysed all the elements related to the “Zortziko” and the 5/8 bar, the origin, opposing opinions, the development or transition over the years...we still cannot certainly confirm how the “Zortziko” rhythm and the 5/8 bar arose in the Basque tradition not for the lack of documentation but just because sometimes the changes in the folkloric matters, emerge subtly from among the people without being in any particular moment when the changes are made. Despite that, we can deduce many things from all the information. It is clear that the 5/8 came out in the transition between the music, just played music, and the danced music. When the music happened to be danced, unconsciously the musicians slightly changed the rhythm of the pieces to make them more natural for the dancers, indeed more danceable. That is the reason why the 6/8 bar became 5/8. The exact moment is unknown.

Coming again to the *Caprice Basque* and Sarasate, after all the investigation I defend the opinion of interpreting it in the typical “Zortziko” rhythm, in 5/8. As we see at the third section of the research (Zortziko in classical music: first experiments with the quintuple bar) in 1880 when the *Caprice Basque* was composed the quintuple bar was not spread enough among the occidental musical language to consider it a common bar. That is the reason why Sarasate could have composed it in 3/4, to make it easier to the interpreter, to find acceptance on the musician’s community. Despite he knew the “Zortziko” dance perfectly, first because of the geographical closeness of Pamplona (his hometown) and the Basque Country, and second, because there were in the Basque tradition some written 5/8 “Zortziko” examples as the one we have seen of 1813 by Antonia de Mazarredo or her sister Juana de Mazarredo, at occidental classical music it was unusual to find this kind of writing so he decided to simplify the piece turning a 5/8 melody to a 3/4 melody by the simple step of adding just an eighth note which apparently there is not much difference, but when interpreting the piece, there is a lot. We have to keep in mind that in the folkloric music often the musicians do not play what is written in the score really precisely. Sometimes what is written in the score is just an approximation of what it sounds. Is at the second half of the XIX, when, the folkloric music gets analyzed by expert musicians, that we start to see the relation between what we listen and what we read in the scores. This is exactly the case of Pablo Sarasate. He knew about the 5/8 bar when he composed the *Caprice Basque* but despite he wrote it in 3/4, it is completely sure that he would interpret it like the traditional way.

I have indicated that the 5/8 “Zortziko” is measured in three beats, just like a 3/4. The only difference is that in the first beat instead of 2 eighth notes there is only one: 1+2+2. Another difference is the accentuation of the beats. It has three accents, being more important the second and the third beat. This is also very important to give the flow and necessary character to the music.

This is how the *Caprice Basque* op.24 should be interpreted to keep and preserve the full sense of the piece and the pureness of the Basque tradition.

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