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Art Music: John Singer Sargent as Listener, Practitioner, Performer and Patron

Music runs like a golden thread through the life and work of John Singer Sargent. He played the piano well, attended fine concerts and opera performances, and counted professional musicians and serious amateurs among his close friends. In lively paintings and drawings he captured an array of music executants and concert-goers, from W.A. Mozart (a student copy, 1872), Judith Gautier (c. 1883), George Henschel (1889) and Gabriel Fauré (c. 1889, 1896, 1898), to Louis de Fourcaud (1884), Mrs George Swinton (1897, 1906, 1908), Ethyl Smyth (1901) and Charles Martin Loeffler (1903, 1917); many of these were uncommissioned, done in admiration or thanks for musical enjoyment received.¹ Sargent's visual treatments of the piano, the violin and the orchestra, moreover, are integral to pictures that feature them, not incidental. And at a working level, he often arranged portrait sittings to include music-making, playing piano duets with his sitter for pleasure and refreshment away from the canvas.² Even the title of his celebrated *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* came from a popular nineteenth-century English song, a three-part glee sung one evening by friends in the Cotswold village of Broadway where he was creating the picture.³

All these links underscore music's importance to Sargent in associative and sociable ways, as one might expect for someone of his cultivation and company. His personal devotion to music itself, from Spanish folk sources to Wagner, was also extraordinary and prompts further investigation. New perspectives on his biography and artistic technique open up when we look more closely at details of his musical engagement - what he heard and saw, where, what he liked or disliked in music, and how his music-intellectual skills may have influenced his work. This last area remains subjective, of course, but in Sargent's case - at least as much as for Albert Moore, J.A.M. Whistler or Thomas Eakins, for example, all of whom used music theoretically or depicted it but could not be said to love or inhabit it

¹ For information on these and other works mentioned, see the catalogue raisonné by Richard Ormond, Elaine Kilmurray and others, published as *John Singer Sargent: The Complete Paintings*. For the Mozart copy, a watercolour given by Violet Paget to the opera scholar E.J. Dent of Cambridge and now in the Fitzwilliam Museum, see <http://data.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/id/object/13528> (accessed August 5, 2017). For further musicians depicted by Sargent see note 51 below. The painting of Fauré, a particular friend, is inscribed 'souvenir affectueux'.

² Mme Subercaseaux reported that Sargent brought some Gottschalk pieces to her sittings; Mrs Philip Agnew recalled Sargent's request for Mr Agnew to come and play Fauré duets, which helped clear the artist's mind; the Playfair family's maid wondered, tongue-in-cheek, how Sargent had any time to paint amid so much piano-playing. Sargent also asked professional musicians including Henschel, Elsie Swinton and Leonora Speyer to sing or play as he worked on their pictures.

³ Evan Charteris, *John Sargent*, 78. For further detail on the musical atmosphere at Broadway, see Elaine Kilmurray, 'Sargent in Broadway, 1885-9', and her catalogue entry on *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* in Richard Ormond with Elaine Kilmurray, 86-93 and cat. 31-2.

so personally⁴ - the potential for transfer between music and painting is especially inviting. Sargent's musical sensitivities were acute and, according to the pianist Percy Grainger, more akin to those of a composer than of a typical music-lover.⁵ It makes sense that they might have infused the technique, sense of movement, off-centredness, panache, even weirdness we perceive in the artist's work whatever its subject or place.

Sargent's use of music seems to have embraced neither involuntary synaesthetic impulses nor a deliberate adoption of musical imagery for metaphorical purposes, as in still other late Victorian artists and writers who posited an equivalence between music and painting.⁶ Rather, his work shows careful reliance on the principles of shape, design and touch which skilled creatives acquire by training and regular practice, and which are essential alike in music composition, performance and painting. In both biographical and technical ways, practical music may turn out to have been more fundamentally important, more formative in Sargent's trajectory and achievement, than commentators have previously understood, and than social connections alone or period and regional music styles can explain.

The subject is worth investigating, too, as a way to begin redressing the consequences of a traditionally narrow historical view of musical culture in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain, where Sargent chose to make his home from 1886. Certainly he knew about burgeoning musical as well as artistic opportunities at that date, and London attracted him; at one point in his mental struggle after the *Madame X* fiasco, while in England, he even considered switching professionally to music, as he confided to Edmund Gosse.⁷ If the idea of London as musically alive, culturally stimulating and socially progressive cuts across embedded art-historical narratives that privilege Paris as the font of all advance, perhaps, again, we need to take a hint from Sargent and follow his lead. After a brief look at the context of London's transformed performance culture from the late 1870s to 1914, I will

⁴ On Moore's appeal to theories of harmony for conceptualizing 'pure art', see Robyn Asleson, 'Nature and Abstraction'. Whistler, a friend of both Moore and later Sargent, used music to suggest colour harmonies across his work, focusing on aesthetic value rather than narrative content, leading to greater abstraction. Eakins aimed for physical precision in portraying amateur musicians: their exact appearance was meant to be directly tied to the music produced, according to Darrell Sewell, *Thomas Eakins*.

⁵ 'Sargent's Contribution to Music', 6 May 1926, in Charteris, *John Sargent*, 149-51 at 150.

⁶ Suzanne Fagence Cooper examines how music was used symbolically in works by D.G. Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones and Frederic Leighton, in 'Aspiring to the Condition of Music'.

⁷ At Broadway in summer 1885 when Sargent was so dissatisfied with Paris, he spent time with Gosse, another colony resident. Gosse reported one conversation to Charteris years later: 'It will perhaps be believed with difficulty that he talked of giving up art altogether. I remember his telling me this in one of our walks, and the astonishment it caused me. Sargent was so exclusively an artist that one could think of no other occupation. "But then," I cried, "whatever will you do?" "Oh," he answered, "I shall go into business." "What kind of business?" I asked in bewilderment. "Oh, I don't know!" with a vague wave of the hand, "or go in for music, don't you know?" ' (quoted in Charteris, *John Sargent*, 76). Another retrospective tribute, by Edwin H. Blashfield, also hinted that Sargent's pianistic skill was good enough to have made a career (see note 37 below). The likelihood of such a change is a different question.

present four brief case studies in aspects of Sargent's musical life - as listener, practitioner, performer and patron. The aim is to demonstrate ways in which his musical experience and understanding may have inflected his art practice - not only his ability to harmonize the physical with the mental side of a given sitter as William Coffin asserted in 1896,⁸ but also his shadowing of music-structural principles when composing a picture and his confidence in taking risks. For permission to include modern recorded extracts of pieces he knew, I am grateful to Naxos Records.⁹

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Music in London

Classical music in London was already highly internationalized in the early nineteenth century, with both resident and touring Italian, German and French musicians regularly performing, composing and teaching. The music profession was small, however, and good public concerts - always entrepreneurial, never state-supported - were limited to a short annual season directed at elite and upper middle-class audiences able to pay for a whole series in advance. By the turn of the twentieth century, listening opportunities had widened dramatically: for little more than the cost of a loaf of bread, anyone could hear world-class music in London on most any day of the year, including Sundays.¹⁰

This remarkable shift came from continual innovation and competition in the music industry, as musician-promoters learned to nurture a range of audiences, educating and serving them. Technological improvements in music printing and publishing, a steady rise in the production of music instruments - notably English pianos - and a flood of music teachers all fed keen consumer demand for music information and expert comment. On the supply side, two rival conservatories produced solid players and singers (Royal Academy of Music, 1823; Royal College of Music, 1883) while an influx of European-trained conductors and the advent of astute agents ensured that performing musicians and paying customers met ever more frequently in the open market, through individual ticket sales at a box office. Events ranged from popular chamber concerts at St James's Hall, Piccadilly (1858-1904), to piano or vocal recitals in small venues attached to piano salerooms, such as the Bechstein (later Wigmore) Hall; and from both of those to the attractive orchestral Crystal Palace Saturday Concerts, directed for much of the year by August Manns at Sydenham in south London (1856-1904). The von

⁸ 'Mr. Sargent's great success as a painter of portraits is no doubt due to the fact that, in addition to a technical equipment of the highest order, he possesses intuitive perceptions which enable him to grasp his sitters' mental phases. His cultivated eye quickly determines the pose which naturally and easily harmonizes the physical side with the mental' (William A. Coffin, 'Sargent and His Painting', 178).

⁹ Graham Bartholomew, Naxos Licensing Manager (UK and Ireland).

¹⁰ For commercial and social factors encouraging concert profusion, and a comparison of series available, see Simon McVeigh and Cyril Ehrlich, 'The Modernisation of London Concert Life'. Promenade concerts cost a shilling, Sunday orchestral concerts as little as sixpence.

Glehn family, to which Wilfrid de Glehn, Sargent's painting friend, belonged, were stalwarts at the Crystal Palace concerts for decades.¹¹

Central London was less well served than the suburbs for orchestral concerts until the late 1870s, when the celebrated Austro-Hungarian conductor Hans Richter, formerly Richard Wagner's assistant, established his own short series using London players in late spring, sometimes autumn, at St James's Hall (1879-1902). Complementing 'the Richters' with their emphasis on Beethoven and Wagner were 'the Henschels', a winter series set up by the singer and conductor George Henschel under the name of London Symphony Concerts at the same hall (1886-97). Both series were considered advanced, serious-minded and modern, but it was Richter who achieved a sea-change in performing standard through his unparalleled command over London players, highly skilled if previously undisciplined in their approach to ensemble playing.¹² The conductor's legendary effect, audible to all, explains Sargent's excitement, with that of Alma Strettell, at the arrival of Richter's prospectus in May 1886, offering a tantalizing choice of substantial Wagner excerpts the two of them wanted to hear.¹³

The full staging of Wagner's key operas - all but *Parsifal* - meanwhile had already taken place in London in the early 1880s, spread between Drury Lane and Covent Garden theatres conducted by Richter and Anton Seidl in competing series. Although this initiative might seem late for a body of operas created between 1840 and 1874, it nevertheless included the first full production outside Germany of at least one pathbreaking piece, *Tristan und Isolde*. As a phenomenon prompting wider appreciation - by the 1890s practically a mania - the combined London Wagner thrust of the 1880s was far in advance of anything in Paris, where Wagner's music polarized both official and public opinion until after 1900. Wagner fever continued in London well into and beyond the First World War, not least at hundreds of popular promenade concerts each summer.¹⁴

¹¹ Valerie Langfield, 'The Family von Glehn'.

¹² 'Never before had London beheld an orchestral conductor of this type - this quiet, dignified, unobtrusive man with the Barbarossa beard and blue eyes, who knew the whole of the Wagner scores by heart and never required a note of music, who conducted more by glance than by gesture, who could play practically every instrument in the orchestra, who could command faultless precision and grace of execution, whose crescendos and climaxes combined sonority and grandeur with the most perfect balance. The man and the method were alike new to us' (Herman Klein, *Musicians and Mummies*, 175).

¹³ Sargent wrote to Alma Strettell from Bailey's Hotel, Gloucester Road, on April 3, 1886, noting that when he returned to London in May he would 'rejoice for are we not the two Comaniacs and is not Wagner our strait Jacket? He is'. He wrote again on May 17: 'Dear Comaniac, ... Richter's plans are now known. "The Grand Wagner Night" is on June 7th and June 10th same programme - 2nd Act of Tristan and almost entire 3rd Act of Siegfried with Malten, Gudehus, Henschel etc. The concerts before contain nothing for us and the last one is Beethoven Missa Solemnis.' Quoted in Charteris, *John Sargent*, 94.

¹⁴ Leanne Langley, 'Building an Orchestra'. See especially Table 2, p. 69, showing how far Wagner performances outnumbered all others for the period 1895-1914.

Sargent was a witness, a real audience member at some of these events, not only the Richter and Henschel series,¹⁵ but also chamber and small orchestral concerts at Bechstein Hall, besides occasionally the opera, and private concerts or musical parties at the homes of friends and patrons including Mary Hunter, Asher Wertheimer, Elizabeth Lewis and Alice Comyns Carr. Clearly he was privileged and musically more experienced than some auditors. But for modern reception study, he still represents a genuine 'common-ear' listener as distinct from those professional if often anonymous newspaper critics who passed judgment in print, aiming to instruct and impress readers.

Indeed Sargent's capture over time of a number of individual music-lovers who were in Henschel's circle or supported his series - Mrs Henry White, Mr and Mrs Albert Vickers, Mr and Mrs Lawrence Harrison, Mrs Robert Harrison, Mr and Mrs George H. Lewis, Mrs William S. Playfair, A.J. Balfour and Henry James - helps bring to life an otherwise hard-to-place segment of the late Victorian amateur musical public, creating a virtual gallery of informed music-loving consumers.¹⁶ It might be thought that once the Robert Harrisons introduced Sargent to Henschel, at Henley in summer 1887, a time when the artist's London commissions were few, the Henschel subscribers offered him a ready-made group of potential sitters: anyone willing to pay for good music might well be willing to pay for a fine picture.¹⁷ Yet direct causal links are unproved: personal recommendation, after admiring a striking Sargent portrait on someone's wall, would have been the more likely stimulant. At any rate, overlap between Henschel subscribers and Sargent sitters is less important in itself than the positive educational function these concerts served, opening an orchestral listening opportunity across the autumn and winter months in London for the first time. A young Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958), whose mother was a cousin to Eliza Wedgwood, gained his earliest exposure to Beethoven's symphonies at the Henschel concerts and never forgot it.

As for his own musical taste, Sargent remained an enthusiast with eclectic interests, omnivorous, open to anything that intrigued him. It is a description that would surely fit many other concert-goers too, since variety and a certain mixing on long English programmes of high and low styles, instrumental and vocal genres, was entirely characteristic for much of this period. Sargent knew and appreciated the music of German canonic composers including Bach, Beethoven, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Schumann and Brahms, yet he also clearly admired progressive Romantics such as Berlioz, Liszt and Wagner, not to mention rarer items of Hispanic and Caribbean-tinged piano music by Louis Moreau Gottschalk, the two *Iberia* books by Isaac Albéniz, the charming French art

¹⁵ Sargent presumably attended the Richter concert at St James's Hall on June 7, 1886, for example, when Henschel sang King Marke in a scene from *Tristan* (Charteris, *John Sargent*, 94).

¹⁶ For Henschel's description of his series from autumn 1886, with his list of subscribers, see his *Musings and Memories of a Musician*, 318-30.

¹⁷ This idea, and the importance of networking, is hinted at in Charles Merrill Mount, *John Singer Sargent*, 140-1.

songs of Reynaldo Hahn, and Andalusian flamenco song as recorded by Pastora and Tomas Pavón.¹⁸ He learned to select. Soon after Sargent's death, C.M. Loeffler confirmed this skill at delineation to the biographer Evan Charteris:

He discriminated amazingly well. Of Richard Strauss he said: "He is often discouragingly common place, but he has a virility of saying things which is unusual and convincing, often quite in the grand manner." What he liked in Strauss's work was "the organic power, the structural design. The 'charpente' is there; one feels the lungs, the heart, the liver, all are functioning!" Of Debussy's works he liked best "The Afternoon of a Faun," and many of his piano pieces. Strange to say *Pelléas et Mélisande* he thought rather "anemic." On the whole he did not care much for "le précieux" in any art.¹⁹

Sargent's ability to articulate his preferences suggests someone used to forming an opinion, comparing, knowing his own mind and not being overawed by every fresh sensation - whether, for example, Ethyl Smyth's opera *The Wreckers* or Alexander Scriabin's symphony *Prometheus: The Poem of Fire* (with its harmonic and colour associations, visually projected, joined to a mystical philosophy). The artist is reported to have heard both these new works in London by 1914; politely perhaps, he left no comment.²⁰ By contrast Strauss and Debussy were among the most celebrated composers to appear in London before the war, conducting their own scores or standing aside as Henry Wood, André Messager or Thomas Beecham took the baton: it would be hard to miss the positive impact of their attractive new works.

By 1910 London had not one but *four* symphony orchestras of international repute, part of an efflorescence of year-round concert life unimagined just twenty years earlier.²¹ Much of the increase was fostered through new venues, above all the Queen's Hall in Langham Place, Upper Regent Street (1893-1941), and the Aeolian Hall (1904-44), the converted former Grosvenor Gallery in Bond Street. Elsie Swinton sang

¹⁸ Eliza Wedgwood recalled her visit to Majorca with John and Emily in autumn 1908, when they played 'all Brahms' Symphonies, and all Schumann's for four hands, and some Albeniz too'; see letter to E. Charteris, quoted in Richard Ormond and Elaine Kilmurray, *Sargent: The Watercolours*, 144. Sargent wrote to Vernon Lee about his researches into Spanish song around 1879, calling Andalusian malagueñas and soleas the best ones (Charteris, *John Sargent*, 49); he gave his HMV records of flamenco music featuring Juan Brea (or Breba) and the Pavóns to the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum (see also *ibid.*, 50). For examples of further musical opinions see Mount, *John Singer Sargent*, 373.

¹⁹ Charteris, *John Sargent*, 148.

²⁰ Smyth's dramatically intense three-act opera was conducted by Beecham at His Majesty's Theatre in June 1909, and again at Covent Garden in 1910. Scriabin's challenging piece of 1910, featuring colour projections associated with changing harmonies, was conducted by Henry Wood at Queen's Hall on March 14, 1914, the composer taking the keyboard part; no colour projections were included. Despite a growing Scriabin cult in London at this time, many auditors remained unconvinced, drawn instead to the newer attractions of Stravinsky; see Arthur Jacobs, *Henry J. Wood*, 139). I am grateful to Richard Ormond for information on Sargent's attendance at these events.

²¹ See Leanne Langley, 'Joining Up the Dots'.

and appeared with other musical artists at both places, warmly supported by Sargent.²² In all, London's febrile music environment after 1900 with its constant rivalries and ever more exotic, even modernist, musics from Russia, Scandinavia, Australia, Romania, the Czech lands, Spain, France and the USA was a boon to local music lovers, who had never before had so much choice at such a high level. Seen in this light, London was a positive magnet for Sargent, not a consolation prize. He took full advantage.

Listener

All music students know that developing a good ear is fundamental to their progress. Careful listening aids the ability to recall melodic shape, hear pitch and harmonic movement, detect lines in a texture, understand rhythm, characterize vocal or instrumental colour and follow long-range structure. Daily practice helps, like sketching for an artist. Although little is known about Sargent's earliest musical training, he certainly understood solfège and could work out from notated music the exact sound of a tune he had never heard before - that is, to read and sing at sight by mentally hearing the successive pitches first.²³ Pitches played together, moving in harmonic combination, particularly fascinated him. His friend Loeffler reported that Sargent's ear was 'strangely sensitive for unusual harmonic progressions'; he was 'haunted' by certain ones and would work out their mysteries at the piano 'by sheer tenacity of [aural] memory'.²⁴ An ear for harmony can indeed be strong in people who come to music by way of the piano first as opposed to the voice or a single-line instrument; having the full range of pitches under one's fingers helps instil the principles of harmonic movement. On the other hand, a pianist might be challenged to detect separate parts in a blended sound such as an orchestra's; hearing the distinctive tone colours of strings, wind, brass and percussion by watching players in action, separately and in mixed combination, magnifies the intellectual pleasure. Enter the conductor Jules-Étienne Padeloup (1819-87) and his *Concerts Populaires*.

While still an art student in Paris in his early twenties, Sargent left a unique record of this popular concert series, the Padeloup concerts on Sundays at the former *Cirque Napoléon*, renamed *Cirque d'Hiver* in

²² Elsie sang professionally from 1906 to 1911 despite family opposition on grounds of social propriety. David Greer, *A Numerous and Fashionable Audience*, gives a well-documented account of her life and career, including her early years in Russia, friendships with Sargent, Fauré, Walter Sickert and others, and her impressive repertory.

²³ Loeffler testified to the artist's use of *sofège*: 'His musical training must have been from the start unusually good, for I have heard him *sofegise* like a musician difficult passages, that he had not played well at first sight reading' (quoted in Charteris, *John Sargent*, 148).

²⁴ *Ibid.* Loeffler uses 'oral memory' but means aural.

1870.²⁵ As his fellow student William Coffin said of Sargent: 'While he listened he looked, and one day he took a canvas and painted his impression.'²⁶ Several sketches and two finished versions exist for *Rehearsal at the Cirque d'Hiver*. The larger version, with its colourful clowns in the right foreground, was probably done first, possibly in late 1878.²⁷ The smaller version, reproduced here, is probably of c. 1879-80 and shows more subtle detail through its monochrome palette of black, grey, white and taupe (Figure 1).

Figure 1. *Rehearsal of the Padeloup Orchestra at the Cirque d'Hiver*, c. 1879-80. Oil on canvas, 571 x 460mm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The Hayden Collection - Charles Henry Hayden Fund (22.598). Photo: © 2018, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



²⁵ The Concerts Populaires de Musique Classique took place each Sunday in season, normally October to April, at 2:00 pm; rehearsals were on Saturdays. The series began in 1861 and ran consistently to 1884. The Cirque d'Hiver had originally been built for equestrian presentations; it seated some 3900 spectators on narrow benches in three concentric circles.

²⁶ Coffin, 'Sargent and His Painting', 172.

²⁷ The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in its relevant object discussion by Theodore E. Stebbins Jr., agrees with Stanley Olson's dating of the earlier, colourful picture to November 1878, and thus dates the second version, with its reduced palette, more confident handling and greater sophistication, as c. 1879-80. See <http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/rehearsal-of-the-padeloup-orchestra-at-the-cirque-dhiver-31960> (accessed August 6, 2017).

Eliminating the clowns, the artist focuses in on the 'odd picturesqueness of the orchestra', the players themselves.²⁸ Using white to highlight their music, the pegs on the double basses, the violin bows and the delicately shimmering large brass instruments, he experiments with an abstract, blurry look and high oblique perspective. The style is daring, even Impressionist, while in subject matter the picture recalls Edgar Degas and his recent treatments of dancers on the Parisian stage.²⁹

It is impossible to know for certain the music Padeloup and his orchestra were playing when Sargent began his *Rehearsal* picture. But in theory, to illustrate a sound Sargent is known to have heard and liked at this venue, an educated guess can be made from the date, known Padeloup programming and the instruments depicted. The disposition of players is a clue - a large number of string basses, divided; prominent brass, especially trombones with what looks like an (upright) ophicleide in their midst; a row of trumpets and cornets below them, with horns around the curve to their right; two rows of woodwind in front of the trumpets; upper strings on the floor area, with mixed percussion in the picture's foreground. In Sargent's sketches, snare and bass drum are clearly differentiated from timpani, and two harp shapes appear in the middle.³⁰ From these clues and a quick look at the score, a strong likelihood emerges that what we are 'seeing' here is not a bit of Wagner as has occasionally been surmised (a few Wagner selections were increasingly programmed at these concerts in the 1860s, though his music fell out of favour in the 1870s for political reasons),³¹ but rather Hector Berlioz. Berlioz was also modern and closely associated with Padeloup, who had long promoted extracts from the composer's *La damnation de Faust* before a better, rival conductor at the Théâtre de Châtelet, Édouard Colonne, became that work's acknowledged champion. Coffin refers directly to the Berlioz piece in his recollections, implying how much he and his friends liked it:

I remember how much we used to like to go to the Colonne concerts at the Châtelet, and to those given by Maître Padeloup at the Cirque d'Hiver, on Sunday afternoons. Some of us had heard Berlioz's "Damnation de Faust" at the former place fifteen or sixteen times. Sargent, who dearly loved the music, was struck by the odd picturesqueness of the orchestra at Padeloup's, seen in the

²⁸ Coffin, 'Sargent and His Painting', 172.

²⁹ See the Stebbins discussion described in note 27.

³⁰ MFA Boston, accession no. 28.50, <http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/sketch-for-the-rehearsal-of-the-padeloup-orchestra-243058> (accessed August 7, 2017). Further sketches appear in Richard Ormond and Elaine Kilmurray, *John Singer Sargent: Figures and Landscapes*, 189–92.

³¹ Because Sargent's Wagner taste and Padeloup's promotional advance are both independently well known, it has seemed natural to associate them when discussing this picture: imagining the artist to have heard a lot of Wagner at these concerts, his experimental approach in *Rehearsal* is often assumed to reflect Wagner's progressivism. The linkage is suggestive, but by no means inevitable. Further work on Sargent's Wagner interest is in progress.

middle of the amphitheater, the musicians' figures foreshortened from the high point of view on the rising benches, the necks of the bass-voils sticking up above their heads, the white sheets of music illuminated by little lamps on the racks, and the violin-bows moving in unison.³²

Halfway between opera and cantata, *Damnation* is an odd choral work, huge and difficult to bring off.³³ Padeloup began by popularizing three short instrumental movements from it, performing them often from 1868, above all the Marche hongroise, or Hungarian March.³⁴ Could this be what the Cirque musicians are rehearsing? The following music excerpt gives its main theme, then skips to the exciting conclusion. After a trumpet fanfare, listen for characteristic French woodwind colours - flute, clarinet, bassoon; a strong march tempo with dotted rhythms and percussive punctuation; a clear use of low string colour, then individual winds trading off as they build higher, adding trombones and strings while the melodic material is shared out in short phrases, the whole increasing towards a rousing finish.* Trombonists love to play this piece. If Berlioz's Hungarian March is indeed the sound behind the picture, Sargent must have been responding viscerally to its controlled full-score presentation, new and thrilling to him as a listening experience more than as a particular musical style: what he aimed to catch, with blurs and highlights, was the continuous motion and concentrated power coming from the orchestral sound body below his perch.

* Use the link here to listen to Hector Berlioz, *La damnation de Faust* - Marche hongroise. Orchestre National de Lille, cond. Jean-Claude Casadesus; Naxos 8.660116-17 (excerpt total: 2 min., 22 sec.), licensed courtesy of Naxos. https://soundcloud.com/artmusic_johnsingersargent/h-berlioz-damnation-de-faust-marche-hongroise

Practitioner

Sargent's level of pianistic skill can be gauged as high, given that we know from friends and sitters what he played, from Fauré's *Dolly* Suite for piano four hands to Albéniz's twelve-movement *Iberia*, one of the most difficult works in the solo repertory; and from Gottschalk's Cuban dances, blending brilliant passagework with characteristic Afro-based rhythms, to Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, its new harmonies and textures

³² Coffin, 'Sargent and His Painting', 172. This recollection must be slightly misremembered or exaggerated, since neither Colonne nor Padeloup started performing the full *Damnation* until 1877. Coffin is probably trying to convey how often some in their group had heard parts of that work, and how much they all enjoyed the concerts. It is my inference that the students heard the Berlioz, or bits of it, at both places, since *Damnation* was explicitly the central piece on which the Padeloup-Colonne competition was based at this time. See also note 34 below.

³³ *La damnation de Faust* was also a key work in promoting Berlioz's music in the UK, where the original centre of excellence was Manchester, not London, largely owing to Charles Hallé's advocacy and a strong choral tradition in the north of England. See Leanne Langley, 'Agency and Change'.

³⁴ Padeloup popularized the 'Menuet des follets--Valse des sylphes--Marche hongroise' selection, which appeared more frequently towards the complete performance of *Damnation* in 1877, repeated in 1878 (twice), although Édouard Colonne, conducting at the Châtelet, became the work's acknowledged champion in 1877. When Coffin was in Paris, testifying to the appeal of both sets of concerts, there were two Padeloup performances of the Marche in February 1877, four in 1878, and one in February 1879, <http://www.hberlioz.com/champions/pasdeloupe.htm> (accessed July 10, 2017). For the competition between Padeloup and Colonne drawing on *Damnation*'s popularity, see Jann Pasler, 'Building a Public for Orchestral Music', esp. 219-22.

transferred from orchestra to piano for accompanying the tenor Denis O'Sullivan and the soprano Blanche Marchesi in a late-night reading of the complete opera.³⁵ None of these examples involves music that can be faked or skipped through lightly. Further, we have earwitness testimony that although an occasional wrong note crept in and not every figurative detail was picked up, Sargent could capture the essence of a piece in motion, quickly, securing rhythm and harmony even where the texture was thick or complex.³⁶ Such a bold approach was not exactly the same as playing *au premier coup*, but it would have been achieved only with the self-confidence that comes from regular practice, immersive experience with other musicians, and both intellectual and tactile grasp of what matters - above all, chords and timing. In brief, Sargent could 'do' the music: he didn't just listen to it or go to concerts.³⁷

To demonstrate another possibility linking his musical skill with painterly conception, consider this excerpt from Édouard Lalo's well-known orchestral work *Symphonie espagnole* - specifically the start of the third, middle, movement entitled 'Intermezzo', its name signifying a relaxed moment amid something more dramatic. This is a piece Sargent loved for its dark Spanish flavour and off-centre rhythms, and one he played himself by means of a piano reduction of the orchestral part. Really a show-off work for solo violin, the *Symphonie* is in fact a concerto, not a symphony; its title is whimsical and the overall form odd, five movements instead of three or four. We know Sargent played it privately as a duet, with his Euro-American friend Loeffler taking the violin solo. In fact it had been in this piece, in Boston in November 1887, that Sargent had first heard Loeffler play, meeting him directly after the

³⁵ For the *Tristan* evening, recalled by Julia Heyneman, see Charteris, *John Sargent*, 146. The occasion is not dated except as July with an obviously mistaken year of 1809; given other Wagner activities of Marchesi and O'Sullivan, the years 1902-06 seem most plausible.

³⁶ Guillaume Ormond (1896-1971), Sargent's nephew and the organist at Truro Cathedral for many years, heard Sargent play, reporting that although he occasionally fluffed the music, his playing was passionate. I am indebted to Richard Ormond for this information, which confirms Grainger's description in Charteris, *John Sargent*, 149: 'To hear Sargent play the piano was indeed a treat, for his pianism had the manliness and richness of his painting, though, naturally, it lacked that polished skillfulness that comes only with many-hourly daily practice spread over many years.'

³⁷ Vernon Lee wrote to her mother in Italy, after reuniting with her childhood friend John when both were visiting London: 'He is just what he was, only much more serious, without spirits or humour. He talked art and literature, just as formerly, and then, quite unbidden, sat down to the piano & played all sorts of bits of things, ends & middles of things, just as when he was a boy.' See letter of June 21, 1881, in *Vernon Lee's Letters*, 63. To run over familiar pieces at the piano was evidently a natural and stimulating activity. Later Sargent's friend Edwin H. Blashfield recalled the artist's excellent sight-reading skill: 'Mr. Johansen has spoken in *The Times* of Sargent's wonderful proficiency as pianist, saying that he might have had a career. This is probable, for he did everything easily and well. In 'eighty-seven he had not quite reached that point but was a wonderful reader and did not tire of playing Wagner for us, especially the *Ring* which he had just heard in Bayreuth' (Blashfield, 'John Singer Sargent: Recollections', 645).

performance.³⁸ Deputy leader of the Boston Symphony Orchestra for twenty-one years (and incidentally a former member of the Padeloup orchestra in Paris, where at the Cirque d'Hiver in 1875 the Lalo piece had received its world première), Loeffler was also a mutual friend of Isabella Stewart Gardner, the Boston art patron. Indeed it was at Mrs Gardner's house soon after their first meeting that Sargent and Loeffler played the Lalo work together.³⁹

Listen especially for the orchestra's tango or *tiento* rhythm, alternating triplet and duplet quavers within 2/4 time (3 + 2 quavers in the bar); as a repeating rhythmic pattern, this idea can sound either limping or dramatic depending on how players interpret it. In the harmony Lalo used minor-mode colouring with an occasional unsettling interval, the 'bent-angle' augmented second borrowed from Andalusian melody. Once the violin enters, note its clear use of octave displacement: the sudden switching from high to low versions of the same pitch in a melody, and back again, not only serves to exploit the violin's low and high registers, but also disrupts the tune's otherwise smoothly seductive line. All together, the music sounds darkly alluring but also abrupt and unpredictable.*

Loeffler was full of praise for how well Sargent handled this movement at the piano, playing with 'complete musical and rhythmical understanding, verve and spirit'.⁴⁰ One kind of direct visual parallel would be Sargent's Spanish-themed works, particularly the studies of dance such as *El Jaleo*, *Spanish Gypsy Dancer*, *La Carmencita* and so on. A less obvious partner, though, invites comparison through its practical resource and sheer quirky inventiveness, *Le Verre de Porto/A Dinner Table at Night* (1884), showing Edith and Albert Vickers having an after-dinner drink at home in Sussex (Figure 2).⁴¹ This is a strangely off-centre picture looking in from an odd angle, whimsical, dark, revealing an apparently calm pause after supper ('intermezzo'). One person is near the middle, the other abruptly cut off as on a postcard - a portrait that is not quite a

* Use this link to listen to Édouard Lalo, *Symphonie espagnole*, III. Intermezzo. Orquestra Simfònica de Barcelona i Nacional de Catalunya, cond. Darrell Ang, with Tianwa Yang, violin; Naxos NX 3067 (excerpt total: 1 min., 59 sec.), licensed courtesy of Naxos. https://soundcloud.com/artmusic_johnsingersargent/e-lalo-symphonie-espagnole-iii-intermezzo

³⁸ *Symphonie espagnole* was performed by the Boston Symphony Orchestra on November 11 and 12, 1887, its première there, with Loeffler as soloist and Wilhelm Gericke as conductor. Up to May 1890 Loeffler played the work another eight times, including under Arthur Nikisch. See the BSO Archives: <http://www.bso.org/brands/bso/about-us/historyarchives/archival-collection.aspx> (accessed August 8, 2017). For Loeffler's account of first meeting Sargent, see Charteris, *John Sargent*, 147: 'He came to the Artists' room that evening and with that irresistible charm of his said a few words which made one rise in one's self esteem and then arranged for our meeting a few days later at dinner in a mutual friend's house.'

³⁹ Loeffler continues: 'On this delightful occasion Sargent played with me "en petit Comité" the *Symphonie Espagnole* in which he revealed himself as the admirable musician which he innately was. He was quite amazing in accompanying the 3rd movement ("Intermède"), a quite splendid piece of music with rather complicated rhythms in 5/8 time [*recte*: 2/4 time, with 5 quavers in the bar], which he played with complete musical and rhythmical understanding, verve and spirit. In his luminously intelligent manner he spoke of the various characteristics of Spanish rhythms in music, quite in the manner in which M. Édouard Lalo had expounded these intricacies to me in prior years' (Charteris, *John Sargent*, 147).

⁴⁰ Quoted in *ibid.*, 147.

⁴¹ Cat. 29 in Ormond with Kilmurray, *Sargent: Portraits of Artists and Friends*, 94-5.

Figure 2. *Le Verre de Porto (A Dinner Table at Night)*, 1884. Oil on canvas, 514 x 667mm. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. Gift of the Atholl McBean Foundation, 73.12. Photo: © Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.



portrait - while a triplet of red lamps lights the scene, one of these supported by a cottage piano in the background. The wall shadow might hint that something is not right, or that a disruption under the surface needs attention, but really, there is no narrative. Of course the picture is not remotely Andalusian (nor was the French composer Lalo a Spaniard); yet in its combined oddity and relaxed familiarity, it still recalls indicative traits in the Lalo concerto. A slightly altered classical form infused with colour, the violin concerto tells no story either, but simply explores sonority and creates mood. Perhaps the comparison yields a random resemblance, no more - including the assymetry of three lamps, two people, five pictures (almost). Still, in an artist of Sargent's intelligence and facility, should we never wonder whether his inherent love of certain soundworlds and his rhythmic élan might have influenced his art experiments, and vice versa? Again, surface style is not the telling comparator between music and painting but something more fundamental in compositional resource and conception.

Performer

Sargent was keen to play the piano among friends, not a paid public performer. Yet his London life was suffused with observing and depicting professional platform artists - performers in the act of singing, playing or speaking, in concert or on stage, as themselves or in character. In fact role-play and identity run like motifs throughout Sargent's portraiture; his care over dress, background, props and pose was so instinctively theatrical that every sitter seems to exude a personality constructed by the artist, an identity 'on display' perhaps distanced from the real person. Gesture and flamboyance played their part, as did Sargent's alertness to the sitter's spirit and vitality. He also understood that in composing a picture, some aesthetic licence and expressive flair

were helpful in communicating liveliness and character.⁴² Meanwhile each time Sargent arranged a sitter's clothes or suggested a pose, he was performing his own identity - as artistic creator.

For a third perspective on Sargent's musical life we might ask whether his interest in performance, his capture of a performative moment, can evoke appreciation for an associated music perhaps less well known or valued now than it was at the time: the artist's compelling treatment of the performer might enhance modern understanding of what was performed. In the case of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, for example, he sought out the actress Ellen Terry as his subject, having seen her in late December 1888 in an impressive Lyceum revival conceived by the actor-manager Henry Irving, who also played *Macbeth*.⁴³ That same production drew some of the finest English theatre music of the century out of a composer better known for other things - parlour songs, hymns, cantatas and, with his writing partner, comic operas - none other than Arthur Sullivan (1842-1900). Sargent left no particular comment on Sullivan's score, but he was astounded by Terry's appearance in the full production, as was much of London. Sullivan's overture and effective incidental music, 200 pages of it, was central to the whole *Macbeth* production and deserves to be better known.⁴⁴

Sargent's *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth* (1889), a stunning picture on a grand scale, was executed as soon as the artist could persuade the actress to let him paint her - that is, as soon as she believed the play, with her Saga-like interpretation, would succeed (Figure 3). Sargent was insistent, convinced from the start. He thought Terry's green and blue dress with its bright glimmering beetle wings magnificent, not to mention her 'magenta hair'.⁴⁵ In composing the picture, he certainly tipped his hat to English Aestheticism, performing Pre-Raphaelitism with approval and

⁴² By contrast, Thomas Eakins, whose background and training resembled Sargent's and who also portrayed musical performers, was more interested in realistic depiction of a body part in action, such as Weda Cook's throat and mouth muscles or the conductor's hand in *The Concert Singer* (1892). The music seems almost incidental, whereas with Sargent, a performing impulse appears to enliven his subject.

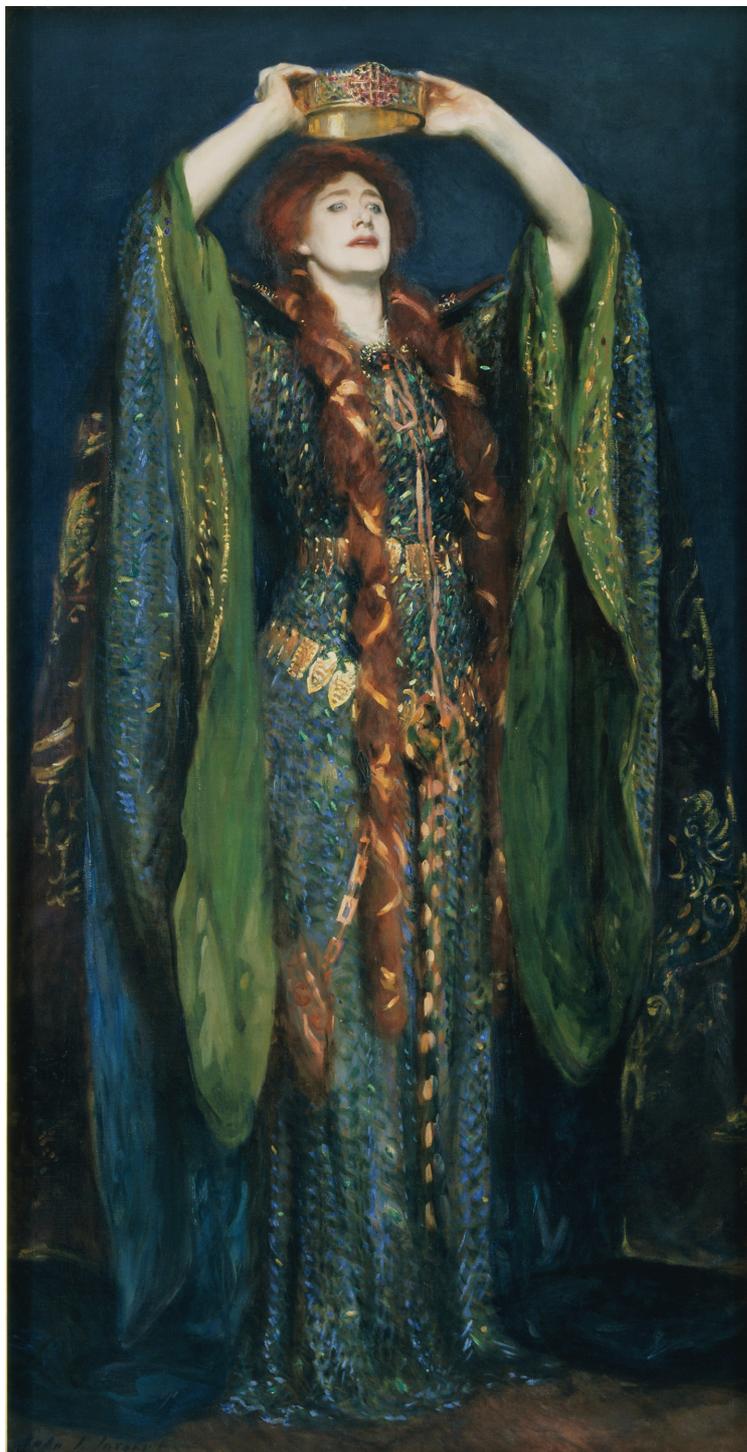
⁴³ The production opened on December 27, 1888 and ran to summer 1889. It was a theatrical watershed, with massive, detailed sets, supernatural effects, newly commissioned music, large orchestra, hundreds of costumes, extensive press coverage and imaginative interpretations by Irving and Terry.

⁴⁴ 'No production of Mr. Irving's management has excited such widespread interest as the present revival of *Macbeth*. From a histrionic, musical, scenic, and literary point of view it is the most important production that the modern stage has known' (*Ladies' Pictorial*, January 5, 1889), quoted in Kenneth DeLong, 'Arthur Sullivan's Incidental Music', at 151n7. DeLong provides an excellent discussion of the full production, including music analysis and reception. For a recent summary of the fault line between serious and light music in Sullivan's reputation, see Benedict Taylor's Introduction to his *Arthur Sullivan: A Musical Reappraisal*, 1-5.

⁴⁵ Letter to Mrs Gardner, January 1, 1889, now in the archives of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston (quoted in Ormond with Kilmurray, *Sargent: Portraits of Artists and Friends*, 139). The dress was designed by Alice Comyns Carr, who aimed for a look of 'soft chain armour' that would also give 'the appearance of the scales of a serpent'. Her idea of adding a thousand iridescent green beetle wings - real ones - was an afterthought to give the dress more brilliance. See Carr, Mrs. J. Comyns Carr's 'Reminiscences', 211.

even taking colour advice from Edward Burne-Jones, as Terry recalled.⁴⁶ More directly, he immortalized the actress's complex emotional portrayal - Lady Macbeth as imperious and controlling but also gently loving - thus helping Terry to perform herself.

Figure 3. *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth, 1889.*
Oil on canvas, 2210 x 1143mm. Tate:
Presented by Sir Joseph Duveen, 1906.
Photo: © Tate, London, 2018.



⁴⁶ Terry, *Story of My Life*, 332, quoting from her own diary: 'Sargent's picture is almost finished, and it is really splendid. Burne-Jones yesterday suggested two or three alterations about the color which Sargent immediately adopted, but Burne-Jones raves about the picture.'

Sargent took care to invent the emphatic self-crowning pose, to capture Terry's intense, wild-eyed expression, and to encourage lively public discussion of the portrait by having it hung in the New Gallery on Regent Street; Terry's memoirs reported 'dense crowds round it day after day', noting that the picture was quarrelled about as much as her way of playing the part.⁴⁷

As for the music, listen to the accompanying excerpt from the beginning of Sullivan's eight-minute Overture to *Macbeth*, an arresting artistic work in its own right. The atmospheric introduction starts with three symbolic hammerstrokes for the three witches and chromatic contouring in the main theme to create intensity and intrigue. If not quite as overwhelming as real Wagner (the style is in places closer to Mendelssohn), this piece still interweaves musical motifs of power, anguished yearning, guilt and triumph that might be said to resemble some of Wagner's earlier music. It sets the scene for what is to come on stage, including returning motifs laced into orchestral accompaniments at crucial dramatic moments.*

* Use the ink here to listen to Arthur Sullivan, Overture to *Macbeth*. RTÉ Concert Orchestra, cond. Andrew Penny; Naxos MP 363 (excerpt total: 2 min., 36 sec.), licensed courtesy of Naxos. https://soundcloud.com/artmusic_johnsingersargent/a-sullivan-macbeth-overture

To be sure, the *Macbeth* overture is more advanced - harmonically restless, emotionally charged and motivically integrated - than Sullivan's other dramatic scores. It uses a type of leitmotif technique within sonata form to create foreboding around the Macbeths' battle with legitimate power. As contemporary listeners observed, it bears no hint of medieval Scottishness in sound; instead it adopts a convincing modern idiom, seductive and finely orchestrated, to convey ambiguous, even tender, personal feelings. Critics recognized the overture's maturity, and it turned out to be Sullivan's most important serious piece after 1870, with a modest platform life of its own beyond the Lyceum production.⁴⁸ Moreover, with orchestral Preludes to four acts (another Wagnerian trait), melodramatic underscoring, a chorus, and the whole of the incidental music serving Irving's drive towards coherence in production - an intentional *Gesamtkunstwerk* in which scenic effects, costumes, music, lighting and gestures were all conceived together - Sullivan's full *Macbeth* music made a decided advance on English theatre scores of the time.⁴⁹ The Lyceum production, including its music, was a marked success that ran for 150 nights. Those performances have now vanished; Sargent's picture and Sullivan's music remain. That the picture can help turn new attention to the composer's serious side, to real Victorian art music of a

⁴⁷ Ibid., 331-2. Joseph Comyns Carr, Alice's husband, was co-manager of the New Gallery.

⁴⁸ The *Macbeth* overture made a deeper impression when performed in 1890 at the Leeds Festival, away from chattering theatre audiences. It was also taken up by Manns and the Crystal Palace Orchestra (five performances, 1889-95), the London Philharmonic Society (five performances, 1890-1906), and Henry Wood at the Proms (fifteen performances, 1895-1936).

⁴⁹ Sullivan's music for *The Tempest* (1862) had been followed by three further Shakespeare commissions - *The Merchant of Venice* (1871), *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1874) and *Henry VIII* (1877). When Irving approached him for *Macbeth* after his decade of Savoy operas with W.S. Gilbert, he was already trying to break from the comic mould. The notion that Sullivan should write a full *Macbeth* overture came from the writer and critic Herman Klein, who later praised it as a conspicuous feature of Sullivan's finest incidental music, strangely neglected afterwards (Klein, *Musicians and Mummies*, 163-4).

very high order, is itself evidence of another facet to Sargent's legacy as a performer.

Patron

The artist's tangible support for musicians was legendary and liberal. It came in the form of personal recommendations, gifts, invitations, sponsored concerts, enthusiasm, friendly nagging and even hard cash, not to mention portraits painted in exchange for musical enjoyment, as suggested above. All these were an outgrowth of Sargent's generous spirit, and more especially of his positive listening experiences. The Australian pianist Percy Grainger (1882-1961) spoke warmly of how much it meant to him simply to be encouraged by Sargent in London, where open doors were not always easy to find.⁵⁰ Other beneficiaries, all friends of the artist, included the singer Elsie Swinton, the pianist Léon Delafosse, the violinists Johannes Wolff and Leonora Speyer, and the composers Isaac Albéniz, Emmanuel Chabrier, Paolo Tosti, Charles Martin Loeffler, and above all Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924). Sargent lifted the status of all musicians permanently by the very act of capturing so many of them on canvas or paper - more than once for Swinton, Loeffler, Speyer and Fauré.⁵¹

Fauré's music indeed completes a triad of the artist's favourite musical tastes, after Wagner and Spanish-inflected works. The Frenchman's style is hard to describe. Fauré was a Wagner enthusiast who never succumbed to writing like Wagner; an academic who knew the rules but stretched them, carefully; a harmonic colourist who pushed the bounds of tonality yet kept key and formal structure secure; an artist who made his grounded thoughts sound ethereal. In a country mad for opera, Fauré wrote piano and chamber music. He became head of the Paris Conservatoire, but was resisted for his progressive agenda there: he wanted students to be less concerned with virtuosity and more with intelligence as well-rounded artists. No wonder Sargent loved him.

Listen to the beginning of Fauré's late Second Piano Quintet in C minor, op. 115, of 1921 (first movement). This is one of the glories of French chamber music - lyrical but delicate and unpredictable, highly formal but also sensual and nuanced, pure sound, no story. It is a beautiful work poised between clear statement and the feel of nostalgic impression; note the rocking static bass figure in the piano part, and the

⁵⁰ Grainger's extensive tribute to Sargent appears in Charteris, *John Sargent*, 149-51. The Australian had based himself in London, 1901-14, to establish his career. Partly with Sargent's help, he appeared as a society pianist, gave concerts and joined the first wave of English folksong collectors, making important early use of the phonograph to collect country songs. For that purpose he visited Gloucestershire twice, working with Eliza Wedgwood to record local songs on wax cylinders in 1907 and 1908.

⁵¹ Further musicians depicted by Sargent in paintings or charcoal drawings include Mabel Batten (*Mrs George Batten Singing*, 1897; an amateur singer), Joseph Joachim (1904), Manuel Garcia (1905), Percy Grainger (c. 1906), Blanche Marchesi (c. 1910), Lena Kontorovich (1914), Walter Parratt (1914), Frederick Septimus Kelly (1915), Jascha Heifetz (1918), Myra Hess (1920), Hugh Allen (1925) and George A. Macmillan (1925; an amateur musician who was George Grove's original assistant on the *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*).

* To listen use the link here: Gabriel Fauré, Piano Quintet No. 2 in C minor, op. 115, I. Allegro moderato. Cristina Ortiz, piano, with Fine Arts Quartet; Naxos 8.570938 (excerpt total: 1 min., 38 sec.), licensed courtesy of Naxos. https://soundcloud.com/artmusic_johnsingersargent/g-faure-piano-quintet-no-2-in-c-minor-i-allegro-moderato

accumulation of staggered string lines rising above it.* Beyond France, Fauré's music took some time to be accepted. Britain was more receptive than most places, but even there, it was the strong Germanophile chamber culture around Joseph Joachim that prevented quicker takeup. And although Sargent was not Fauré's only admirer in the UK (Frank Schuster was also a well-known supporter), he was one of the most committed over many years. In gratitude for real monetary support, Fauré gave him the manuscript of this very quintet. Its music had been dedicated to Paul Dukas, but in tangible thanks Fauré ensured the working manuscript, a material gift, went to Sargent. It now resides at Harvard University.⁵²

If one were to suggest an earlier scenic parallel to Fauré in Sargent's output, capturing a sense of reflexivity and support between artists, of artists making art, celebrating friendship in a highly structured but apparently natural work, it might be *An Out-of-Doors Study* (Paul Helleu *Sketching with his Wife*) of 1889 - in effect Sargent painting Helleu painting (Figure 4). Clearly there is no direct correspondence between



Figure 4. *An Out-of-Doors Study*, 1889. Oil on canvas, 659 x 807mm. Brooklyn Museum, Museum Collection Fund, 20.640.

this particular picture and Fauré's quintet - that is, some correlation between colour or mood and sound, in which the picture gives rise to the music or the other way round. But certain technical traits shared between them are nevertheless suggestive - the music's underlying three-part sonata plan (or geometry of form in the painting), directional lines of fugato melody to build the piece (canvas, easel and boat as organizational), a pulsating piano ripple around and under the main subjects (waving grass), Fauré's unexpected modulations (the picture's

⁵² Gabriel Fauré, 2ème quintette, March 1921, catalogued as MS Mus 36, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

enigmatic spatial quality, lacking any horizon). These are structural analogies, not colouristic, yet they still give a clue to the artist's search for new conceptual means, experimenting with ways to stretch his technique in the late 1880s. At the very least, taking Sargent's musicality seriously helps us perceive his attention to form and his imaginative constructions in a new way - and to know why he liked Fauré so much.

* * *

Practical music and its techniques clearly stimulated Sargent, giving him ideas and confidence, helping to push his creative instincts away from the conventional. This is a stronger claim for music's effect on his life and work than has usually been made, an influence that at the same time was distinct from how music is usually interpreted in reading nineteenth-century art, whether as decoration, borrowed symbol, psychological gift or aesthetic doctrine. With Sargent, music was not subversive, mysterious or allegorical; it was normal and functional, a working tool in the box of his brain, a way of thinking. The four biographical roles explored here suggest how he used and understood music. Neither linear nor discrete in Sargent's career, these identities worked together as the artist moved back and forth among friends, commissions and locales. If we take the world of London as a pivotal site for Sargent's cultural work, and treat his musical skill as fundamental to the man's individuality rather than as an occasional affinity, we can discover even more about details of his artistic thought and practice, reassessing his larger achievement as a result. In the meantime, hearing the music he valued adds another dimension to appreciating Sargent, alerting us to a depth in his life, work and relationships, and in the music of his time, which we may not have been able to access or articulate before.

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Abstract

Music was more than a side interest or social activity in the life and work of John Singer Sargent. Studying, playing and listening to it for most of his career equipped him with perceptual and tactile skills that appear to have influenced his artistic technique. Further, his move to London in 1886 opened fresh opportunities for musical engagement, underrated in art historical narratives heretofore. By examining aspects of Sargent's musical development as listener, practitioner, performer and patron, alike through specific pieces he knew and design parallels in his paintings, this article shows how integral music was to Sargent's individuality.

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