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FERDINAND LAUB

BALLADE, Op. 4, No. 2
POLONAISE, Op. 8

FOR
VIOLIN

WITH
PIANO ACCOMPANIMENT

EDITED AND FINGERED BY
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WITH A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR BY
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Few of the great violinists of the nineteenth century had a more triumphant career, or left a deeper impression of mastery, than Ferdinand Laub. It was a time that saw the most splendid additions to the art erected on broad and solid foundations by the great masters of Italy—a time that brought the achievements of virtuosity to their highest development and united them with the insight and deep musical feeling of great musicianship. The mid-century was a period of giants in the art of the violin. Laub, however, one of the greatest of them, traced his artistic lineage back, not directly to the great Italians, but rather to the German school developed at Mannheim—that little town whose contributions to the development of the art of instrumental music were so noteworthy. Frinkel, through Pixis and Mildner, was his artistic forerunner; and though he was a Bohemian by birth and training, he was thoroughly representative of the German school. Among the greatest of that school, he maintained a place scarcely overtopped by any.

Laub was born on January 19, 1832, at Prague. His father, Erasmus Laub, himself an excellent musician, discovered a precocious talent in the boy, and fostered it, giving him his earliest instruction himself. By the time he was six years old he played De Beriot's variations, and at the age of nine he made a concert tour through Bohemia as a "prodigy child." Fortunately his fate was more propitious than that of most prodigy children, his father's purposes for him more intelligent than those of most such fathers. When he was eleven years old, Moritz Mildner heard the boy play at a concert in Prague, and was struck with the evidence of his talent, so much so that he offered to become his teacher and to care for his musical education. Mildner was one of the most prominent violinists of the German school of the day, and had just been appointed professor of his instrument at the Prague Conservatory; thus Laub's future was assured, so far as it depended upon the opportunity for study under the best instruction. So far as it depended upon talent, industry and the decisive force of a musical personality, he assured it for himself. He became a pupil of the Prague Conservatory. There he soon centered attention upon himself. Berlioz, in one of those periodical flights from his native land that made life supportable for him, saw the boy, and was interested in him. Of more immediate significance, perhaps, was the fact that Ernst heard him play and perceived in him something more than talent. A few years later, still more substantial appreciation came to him from the Archduke Stephen, who gave him his royal favor, bestowed an Amati violin upon him, and sent him to Vienna with letters that assured him attention in the most influential quarters; that was in 1847, and though he was but fifteen years old, his public career began then and there with a series of concerts that fixed his standing in the musical world. He continued his concerts in the principal towns of Southern Germany, working his way toward Paris; and when he reached that capital he renewed his acquaintance with Berlioz, then a powerful influence in the press, who showed him every mark of favor. In 1851, he visited London. In these years his fame steadily increased, establishing his position with greater and greater definiteness as one of the foremost players in Europe. In 1853, he was appointed to succeed Joachim as Concertmeister at the Weimar opera, then at the height of its fame, under Liszt's direction, as the most advanced and enlightened operatic institution in the world. But the steady routine of such a position, even in so stimulating an atmosphere as prevailed at Weimar, was not for Laub. He stayed two years, and then sought a new field in Berlin, where he became professor of the violin at the Stern-Marx Conservatory, with Von Bülow as one of his colleagues. The next year he was made Concertmeister of the Royal orchestra, and was given the title of royal chamber virtuoso. The title was no empty one, for he had already made a deep impression through the performances of a string quartet organization, of which he was the leader. It speedily became one of the
most famous in Europe, especially noted for its performances of the later Beethoven quartets. But the Wanderlust again seized him, and in a few years he joined forces with Carlotta Patti, Jaeli the pianist and Kellermann the cellist, for a long and lucrative concert tour through the Netherlands, Southern Germany, and Russia. In Russia he arrested his course once more, and became, in 1866, first professor of the violin in the St. Petersburg Conservatory, and conductor of the Musical Society of Moscow. His liberal leaves of absence brought about his re-appearance in the cities of western Europe on prolonged concert tours, so that he was never long out of the public eye. His incessant activity was interrupted in 1874 by illness. It was the beginning of the end. He gave up his work and went to Carlsbad for recuperation, in which he seemed, at first, so far successful that he planned for a resumption of his concert tours. But he could not escape the disease that was upon him, and died at Gries, in the Tyrol, on March 17, 1875.

The records of Laub's contemporaries make it clear that he was an artist of the highest rank. Mendelssohn says that his playing was "in every way the most masterly imaginable, and was marked not only by a remarkable facility and golden purity of tone, but a mighty fullness paired with an exceptional finesse and elegance. His bowing and the technique of his left hand were of a truly wonderful development, and his performance, now bold and strong, now full of feeling, exhausted the depths of whatever composition he was playing. He was thus equally great as a soloist and as a quartet player." Handel celebrated, in his quartet playing, the power and bigness of his tone, the fire and vehemence of his execution; and though he will not allow him invariable purity of style and refinement of feeling, puts him high in the first rank: "a prodigious violin virtuoso." Some years later, the Viennese critic considered Laub's tone to surpass Joachim's in vigorous power; his performance could hardly be more certain, correct and fiery, but it was still lacking in refinement and poetry; and his endurance, in the execution of pieces of incredible technical difficulties, was astonishing. Fétis particularly praised the technique of his left hand, the boldness and originality of his performance, but felt his lack of delicacy and elegance.

Laub wrote a number of compositions, including an opera, and many solo pieces for the violin; an "Elegie," a "Rondo giocoso" of formidable difficulty, and the famous "Polonaise," which has long been a favorite piece for virtuosos, on account of its brilliancy and effectiveness, and with its gratefulness for the performer.

RICHARD ALDRICH.
Polonaise.
