

SPECIAL FEATURE on VICTOR MIRECKI LARRAMAT

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Full name: Victor Alexander Marie Mirecki Larramat
born in Tarbes, Altos Pirineos, France, 21st July, 1847
died in Madrid, 7th April, 1921

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The son of important Polish aristocracy, Aleksander Mirecki and Marie Zelinne Larramat, Victor spent his early childhood in a remarkable musical environment. His father, a marshal and a hero of the Polish Revolution of 1830-1831 against Russia, but also a talented violinist, had taken refuge in France. In 1857, aged ten, Victor moved with his family to Bordeaux, the city where his father was to become violin professor at the Conservatory.

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In April 1862, the cellist Adrien François Servais and the violinist Henri Vieuxtemps toured, passing through Bordeaux, were welcomed into the Mirecki house. Young Victor, so impressed by the performance of these masters, that he spent two years intensely practicing the instrument, together with his brother Maurice and under the supervision of his father. His studies in Bordeaux ended with him obtaining the first prize and the medal of honour from the Conservatory, and the award of an extraordinary scholarship to continue his studies in Paris.

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With the help of his father and his teacher, he worked regularly in the orchestras of the various Parisian theatres, and thus being able to make contact with the great composers and performers of the time who were regularly in Paris: for example, he developed close friendships with Pablo Sarasate, Édouard Lalo, Camille Saint-Saëns and Jules Massenet, to name just four...

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At the age of just eighteen years old he was hired as principal cello in the orchestra of the Lyric Theatre of the Imperial Conservatoire. As an anecdote, his debut there was in the premiere of Charles Gounod's opera 'Faust' (one of the longest operas there are, a fiery baptism!). He also performed as a soloist in the Pasdeloup Classical Concert Society, and in the Philharmonic Societies of Lyon, Bordeaux, Valenciennes, Poitiers, Lille and Pau, amongst others.

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However, in 1869 he abandoned orchestral work to fully devote himself to a solo career, and began touring in France, England, Belgium and Spain. His first Spanish tour came about by the invitation of Queen (Doña) Isabel II in 1870 - and then came events out of his hands. The sudden French failure in the Franco-Prussian war a big surprise - and he happened to be in San Sebastián at that very moment! So...from the Basque Country city he decided to travel southwards towards Madrid, and although he did not know it yet, that proved a huge turning point in his life as his residence was to become permanently established in the Spanish capital from then on.

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At the end of 1870 the Madrid (Orchestral) Concert Society called auditions/exams to fill vacant places, and Víctor Mirecki easily obtained the place of principal cello, and joined the Madrid orchestra on 11th February, 1871. In fact, many of his new colleagues were old acquaintances from Paris (I suppose they were fleeing from possible German reprisals?), which meant there was an influx of new symphonic music from France and Germany, certainly enriching the repertoire of that time in the Spanish capital.

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Encouraged by Sarasate himself, he prepared a European tour in 1874 when things had calmed down, which was to take him to Lisbon, London and Paris, but he temporarily cancelled it when the exam for cello professor came up in the recently created National School of Music in Madrid and entrance exams for professors were announced. However, the selection then became postponed for administrative reasons (that's nothing new in Spain, haha!), and so Mirecki was able to fulfill that projected tour, and to such a great success. His fame in Portugal was virtually unknown for a cellist or indeed for any musician at all, and as a foreigner he was awarded the highest distinction available in the kingdom, being a "Knight of the Order of Christ". But he duly obtained the Madrid cello chair and also his entry into the Court of Alfonso XII, and so he began his conscious stabilization in Madrid. Mirecki was faithfully loyal to Madrid from then on. For example, in 1887 he received a call from his brother Maurice from Paris, where the cello chair had also become vacant after Franchomme's death, and incredibly the management of the Paris Conservatoire decided to offer him the post without any exam; and yet Mirecki was to refuse the offer so as not to have to leave his work in Madrid.

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In 1904, after a severe crisis suffered by the Madrid Concert Society, he was one of the founding masters of the new Madrid Symphony Orchestra, which held its first concert on February 7th of that year at the Teatro Real. But the most enduring work of Mirecki was undoubtedly his teaching. For over forty years he was the head professor of the cello department at the Madrid Conservatory, that meaning that nearly all the main Spanish cellists of that era were his disciples. His training system was generally based on classic methods, insisting on the possibilities of the movement of the bow to achieve greater sound, in this sense rather close to the techniques employed by the Belgian virtuoso Adrien François Servais. According to 'La Crítica' (1890), referring to his cello technique: "*Mirecki gave a most complete expression through a technical mechanism whose pulsation indicates the great studies he has done on such a difficult instrument.*"

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Names such as Agustín Rubio, Luis Sarmiento, Luis Amato, Miguel Tejada, Alfredo Larrocha, Julia Terzi, José González, and his son Rafael Mirecki all came 'out of his hands'. Special mention above all, however, should be made of Juan Ruiz Casaux, perhaps his preferred student and who was to marry his daughter María Teresa, and who was to become the head of the next generation of Spanish cellists.

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Victor Mirecki died in 1921, aged 73. In the Yearbook of the Royal Conservatory for that year appeared this comment: "*Eminent teacher and admirable artist, a true 'priest' of teaching, he has carried out for nearly FIFTY years (!) an enormous pedagogic labour. The numerous phalanx of notable cellists, among whom stand out some celebrities, is all his work*"

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From Mirecki, passing through Casaux, we have a line of Spanish cellists that arrive up to this very day - YES, there is a notable Spanish cello school and we have to thank Mirecki for establishing it!

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