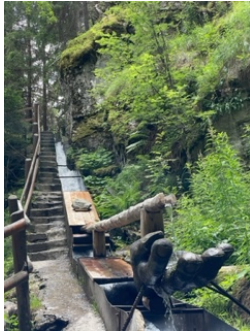


## A POSTCARD FROM SION

Sion, an episcopal city, ancient medieval town, built over 5,000 years of successive settlements, shows its vestiges in the narrow streets which lead to Valère and Tourbillon. Later, the Romans named it Sedunum.



Nestled in the Rhône valley, in the center of the Valais, it is surrounded by fortified hills and steep mountains, through which flow the bisses. Ah, the bisses, those riverside walks that guide family hikers through mountain forests, take them to the top of cliffs overlooking the valley, cast them into lakes of wild flowers, offer them the freshness of glacial springs and a moment of communion with marvellous nature. But I digress...

Back in Sion, I can hear music coming from the windows of the houses in the old town, a boy playing a child's violin, a few piano keys repeating the same scales over and over again, the squeak of a trumpet... it's summer.

The soul of a famous character strides through the alleyways, his familiar silhouette unmistakable. Maître Varga, as his pupils called him, was very popular.



Tibor Varga arrived in Valais in 1956, somewhat by chance, to care for his sick son on the advice of doctors, "a choice that was not a choice at all", he says humorously. His son miraculously recovered a few months later, for which he will always feel "immensely grateful". In 1963, he founded the Academy of Music and the Tibor Varga Superior Bow School, followed by the International Festival in 1964 and the Violin Competition in 1967, making his mark on the Valais musical landscape like no other before him.

He remained in Valais until his death on September 4, 2023. Born in Hungary, he lived day and night in his father's violin-making workshop. His talent as a violinist was noticed at an early age, and his parents sent him to study at the Budapest Conservatory, where he travelled three times a week on the first train. Tibor Varga likes to tell anecdotes from his

childhood, notably how his father, whom young Tibor asked about the quality of certain violins, retorted that there are no bad violins, only bad violinists: "every violin has its own personality, you have to know how to talk to it and if you find its personality it reacts - a good violinist must be able to play with any violin."

One evening in Budapest, he attended a concert given by the great Fritz Kreisler: he was overwhelmed by the master's sound and spent the night trying to reproduce the vibrato that had dazzled him. Finally, he succeeded. A sound that would become legendary in its own right was born. "Talent is not enough, he repeated, you have to look for it".

In Switzerland, his qualities as a musician are unanimously recognized. He taught at the Conservatoire, creating the "Varga School" and giving the Conservatoire Cantonal an international reputation. If the level of his students was high, so were Varga's demands: "I'm stressed, because I'm afraid of disappointing him. Mr. Varga is a very strict and demanding man. He doesn't mince his words," his students told Télévision Suisse Romande in 1993.

Varga confides to the Journal Romand (TSR): "In Valais, the climate is relatively dry, but very pure. Here, my violin sounds much clearer and much more lively. The sound is completely different from when you go to Geneva. For me, working here on the violin is an extraordinary pleasure."



*Photograph : Andrée-Noëlle Pot - Keystone*

René Schenker, President of the Jury of the Tibor Varga Competition in 1993, explains: "One can speak of a Varga sound. This is partly due to the quality of his instrument. (...) The way he attacks the string with his bow gives the Tibor Varga sound an extremely expressive quality. This is also due to his vibrato, which is often very tight" (Viva, TSR).

Varga always put the Valais to the fore, playing with Valais orchestras, choirs and soloists. He also recorded numerous opuses in his Grimisuat studio, once world-famous for its exceptional acoustics and unfortunately destroyed in 2015.

A sought-after and uncompromising pedagogue, revered by his students, Tibor Varga left an indelible mark on the Valais: to the people of Valais, the memory of a personality of great kindness; to his students, the taste for exacting standards and musicality; to the musical world, a unique sound.