PREFACE

The autograph manuscript of the *Allegretto* in B minor for guitar by Mexican composer Manuel M. Ponce can be found in the Special Collections of Cuicamatini Library of the Faculty of Music of National Autonomous University of México. It was received in August 2009 as a gift from guitarist Ronald Crandall to become part of the Manuel M. Ponce Archives, where it is now kept. [1]

It is a short 36-bar piece, untitled and written in pencil by the composer. The form of this *Allegretto* is a three-voice *fugato.* It does not get to develop the fugue, but merely reaches the exposition of the theme –subject–, a brief episode and a repercussion, that is, presenting the theme once again.

The time signature is 4/8. The subject is an eight-bar anacrusis, made up by two parts, four bars each. The first establishes a melody in the scale of B minor. In the second there is a descent, with a chromatic fragment which ends the first voice in the third degree (mediant), the second in the dominant and the third in the mediant half a tone upward, making up a B major chord as a dominant to E major, which opens a short four-bar episode. The response of the *fugato* is tonal. The voices, which present such theme rigorously, enter according to the following scheme: alto, tenor (one fifth below), soprano (one octave above the original). The short four-bar episode is followed by eight closing bars, where the tenor starts a final exposition of the subject, in the original tonality (this being the only voice that had not done so) one octave below the original exposition, and the second part of the subject leads, for the first time, to the tonic, granting a sense of conclusion and formal equilibrium to the piece.

This short piece, being a *fugato*, is written in the composer's neoclassical style. Nonetheless, the chromaticism in some of the bars grants it a modernist atmosphere of great expressiveness.

Though it can be deemed completed, this work is a draft page: we can appreciate the swift scribbling and the absence of a series of rests which shows it is actually unfinished. Some fingering marks in purple pencil can be found all along the piece, clearly written by someone who was not Ponce, as well as a group of re-marks over several music signs in black pencil; both notes and accidentals, as well as bars and stems have been re-marked, not in order to modify them but to make them easier to read.[2] In bar 27 an *acciaccatura* was added not by Ponce but by the author of the fingerings. The C that signals the use of fretting as well as the shape of the numbers and the similarities in certain calligraphy inconsistencies would lead us into thinking it was Andrés Segovia who made the additions in purple and the marks in black pencil. [3] It is also interesting to cross check, when looking at the manuscript closely, some notes that were deleted, probably by Ponce himself, since that offers a chance to view it as a piece that has been re-worked; one in which the author made decisions that complete it. Thus, in the first beat of bar 16, a F^4 substitutes a F^3, in that of bar 19 an A^3 was substituted by a rest and in that of bar 25 one E^3 was omitted.

At the upper right, there is a dedication written and signed in pen: *To my dear friend Mr. Ramangé, this music draft, as a fond memento. Manuel M. Ponce Paris, January 24th, 1933.*

Once he was back in Mexico after his stay in Paris, Ponce makes reference, in a couple of

[1] It was delivered by David McDevitt, at the time a student of Music at James Madison University in Virginia. Ronald Crandall mentions having acquired the manuscript on line from a bookshop in Paris that sent it to New York by mail.

[2] Bar 28 is noteworthy due to the strength used to re-mark $A\sharp^3$, probably deforming its duration, as well as the use of the color purple, which up to that moment was used solely for the fingering, to add an eighth rest to the second quarter of the lower voice, to underscore the F^3 in the last eighth (the stem and the flag to the right side which are a characteristic of the Segovian music handwriting can be seen here), and to add a tie joining two D^5 in the middle voice, which is also exceptional on account of being a prolonged duration symbol, different from the slurs which only established the articulation proposed in the fingering.

[3] In the fair copies left by Segovia with the fingerings, in general the fretting is marked with Arabic numerals as opposed to Roman numerals. Nevertheless, in his editions, Roman numerals are used. On the other side, there are similarities between these Roman numerals and the ones he uses to date his letters, where he also drifts between both numbering styles. The proposal of the *acciaccatura* seems to be closer to the work dynamics of the two musicians than in the later aggregate of a guitarist owning the manuscript.

letters addressed to Clema Maurel, to a friend of Segovia under whose name Andrés would be renting an apartment in Paris, where Clema and Ponce's furniture could be installed.[4]

Mexico, March 15th, 1933
From Manuel M. Ponce to Clementine Maurel.

…Andrés will be leaving to Havana on the 22nd. He has made a brilliant tour, in every sense of the word. We have agreed that you will be in charge of installing the furniture in the new apartment. As he will be passing by Paris at the end of the month, he will let you know whether he has opted for the building where Tata Nacho lives, as well as the name of the person under whose name it shall be leased (¡Pincherle, Damongé (the Argentinian), Huvelin) Andrés will decide…

Mexico, March 28th, 1933
From Manuel M. Ponce to Clementine Maurel.

Forgive me if I have not answered some of your questions, but of lately, due to my work and looking after Andrés, I haven't been able to think about anything. Our dear Segovia's season has ended as successfully as it began. He must now go from Havana to N[ew] York where he will sail to Europe. According to his calculations, he will be in Paris by the 10th or 11th of April. You shall arrange with him what seems best. Perhaps the new apartment might be leased under the name of his friend Debangé (?), the Argentinian who is so fond of him, as you know…

Ponce writes the last name of "the Argentinian who is so fond of him" wrongly in both letters (Damongé and Debangé), but considering the dates when Ponce writes the dedication and the letters, it is perfectly feasible to assume that he refers to the same person. Thus, it is also possible to imagine that it may have been Segovia himself who suggested offering the draft as a present to his Argentinian friend. [5]

At the upper left, there is a heading: ***B minor scale***, and there is also a number ***6*** on top of the G clef and the key signature of this tonality, preceding the sign *Allegretto.* At the lower left, there is another note: ***A major scale***, indicating a piece to follow, which is not there, and on top of the G clef and the key signature of the tonality the number **7** can be seen. All is handwritten by the composer in pencil.[6]

The fact that the name of the corresponding scale appears at the heading, along with the number ***6***, suggests a project in which Ponce worked for several years at the request of Andrés Segovia, on the preparation of a series of studies for the guitar, in a tonal cycle, where each of the pieces should be preceded by the scale of the tonality in which it was written. In the end, this led to the creation of a series of preludes.

The first mention to such project appears on the letter dated May 22nd, 1928: [7]

My dear Manuel: Here are some formulas for the studies. I have included some for the right and the left hand. Since they can be made easily, please don't settle for one of each kind, but write two of them to choose the one closer to the proposed difficulty, or both. [8]

[…] In those for the last grade, studies for speed and polyphony. For the latter, you could compose short preludes followed by fugues, which will be a formidable success.[9]

Probably, the *Allegretto* was part of the polyphonic studies included in this method, perhaps designed to be the fugue that was to follow a short prelude.

In 1930 Schott edited, under a new scheme, two series of six Preludes by petition of Segovia (*Préludes I 1-6* y *Préludes II 7-12*), from among all the materials written by Ponce, discarding a fair amount of the materials on account of not finding them very appropriate for his instrument:

[4] These letters are quoted with the consent of Dr. Ricardo Miranda from a research project of his.

[5] The fact that it is uncommon to see Ponce giving away a draft may be added to such thesis. The manuscripts that he offered as gifts tend to be carefully revised and many a time written expressly with that purpose in mind.

[6] In the upper left corner one can see the figure 142/53, handwritten with pencil, by someone other than the composer, as well as a word impossible to decipher: (*scrus2* or *scrms2* or *score82*); this may be the reference code at the archives where it may have belonged before it arrived at what then was the National School of Music of National Autonomous University of México.

[7] Miguel Alcázar (editor), *The Segovia-Ponce Letters*, Columbus, OH, Editions Orphée, Inc., 1989. [Translation of these fragments for the present text by M. Celis]

[8] *Ibid*., p. 30.

[9] *Idem*.

> *By the way, the preludes are impracticable, in the way they have been conceived. For the most part they are of a difficulty which is incompatible with the character of elementary studies implied by the scales preceding them, while others are completely impossible.* [10]

Apparently, the issue was not again dealt with until much later, when Segovia reproached Ponce for having the project paralyzed, in a letter dated February 14th, 1938:

> *[…] The whole idea of the method is paralyzed because of you. Please let me know when you feel up to carrying on with it. I assure you that the financial success would be rather important.*[11]

It is difficult to assign an exact date for the writing of the *Allegretto*. It may have been part of the set of Preludes composed between 1928 and 1930, which Segovia discarded as unplayable, but the careful fingering points in a different direction. It is also possible that it were written after 1930, carrying on the effort to conclude this cycle. If Ponce offers this draft as a gift to Segovia's friend early in 1933, it may be plausible to imagine they would be working on it during 1932.

In any case, it is worth wondering why a fair copy was not preserved if the manuscript was meant to be given away. Perhaps it was made by Ponce but was lost, just as many of his autograph manuscripts. Perhaps it was made by Segovia and underwent the same fate. Perhaps neither the copy nor the gift announced by the dedication were ever made, either for not giving away some work of which there is no back up, either for not having asked Ramangé the favor –neither Segovia nor Ponce ended up settling in Paris and, in consequence, there was no need to respond to the nice gesture–, or because Ponce may have written again, in black ink, the name in an imprecise manner. Or simply because Ponce did not write a fair copy of this *Allegretto* just as he did not continue with the method of studies for the guitar. He had already written enough materials and after returning to Mexico he devoted more fully to his personal projects than to his collaborations with Segovia.

The autograph manuscripts of nineteen Preludes are grouped in an album found in Manuel M. Ponce Archive Collection. Guitarist Miguel Alcázar includes three more pieces in his edition, which were found on a loose leaf within the aforementioned Collection. From the remaining two, No. 3 in G major has not been located. Alcázar mentions having taken *Prelude No. 6* in B minor, "from a little notebook containing several sketches for guitar".[12] Perhaps the *Allegretto* answers Segovia's request for writing two of each kind, but it is also possible that this one is the *Prelude* in B minor of the cycle.

The *Allegretto* is not the final piece of the puzzle for the 24 *Preludes* for guitar; however, it gives us further information and a new perspective towards their study, deciphering its historical trajectory, its place within Ponce's catalogue in order to understand its articulation. Thus, it is interesting, when comparing this short piece with the *Preludes* in this cycle, which are polyphonic or imitative, to listen to the counterpointistic clarity of the *Allegretto*, with its three voices within a miniature, as the most ambitious and accomplished of them. It is a bagatelle, simple if one may consider it so, but it is an essential study of this kind of writing and of its interpretation on the guitar. The most astonishing quality of this short work is the brilliant synthesis of Ponce's musical thinking, since, in a kind of formal equilibrium, it assembles its counterpoint, chromaticism and a solid harmonic invention, all within only 36 bars.

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Luxembourg, May 2015

(Translated by Martha Celis)

[10] *Ibid*., p. 67.
[11] *Ibid*., p. 184.
[12] Miguel Alcázar, Obra completa para guitarra de Manuel M. Ponce, de acuerdo a los manuscritos originales, México, CONACULTA-Ediciones Étoile, 2000, p. 118.