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Anders Clemens, Guitar

Manuel María Ponce

Sonata Romántica, Sonata Clásica

24 Preludes





Manuel María Ponce (1882 -1948)

Manuel María Ponce Cuéllar (1882 - 1948)

Manuel María Ponce was a Mexican composer active in the 20th century. His work as a composer, music educator and scholar of Mexican music connected the concert scene with a mostly forgotten tradition of popular song and Mexican folklore. Many of his compositions are strongly influenced by the harmonies and form of traditional songs.

He was famous for being a musical prodigy; according to his biographers, he was barely four years of age when, after having listened to the piano classes received by his sister, Josefina, he sat in front of the instrument and interpreted one of the pieces that he had heard. Immediately, his parents had him receive classes in piano and musical notation.

Ponce wrote music for solo instruments, chamber ensembles, and orchestra. His piano and guitar works outnumber those dedicated to other solo instruments within the set of pieces we know.

Ponce's guitar music is a core part of the instrument's repertory, the best-known works being *Variations and Fugue on 'La Folia'* (1929) and *Sonatina meridional* (1939). He also wrote a guitar concerto *Concierto del sur*, which is dedicated to his long-time friend and guitar virtuoso Andrés Segovia.

In 1925, Ponce was named Professor de perfeccionamiento de piano at the Conservatorio Nacional. However, soon thereafter, at the age of 43, the composer once again vacated Mexico - this time for Paris, and enrolled in the composition class of Paul Dukas at the École Normale de Musique in a bid to learn the latest composition techniques.

Significantly two of his fellow students were likewise to make important contributions to the 20th century guitar repertoire - the Spaniard Joaquin Rodrigo and Brazilian Heitor Villa-Lobos.

During the years Ponce lived in Paris (1926-1932) he rekindled his friendship with Segovia who also resided in that city. The two collaborated closely and it was in this period that the majority of Ponce's guitar compositions were created. Included in these were 5 sonatas, 2 suites, 2 sets of variations, 24 preludes, and numerous short pieces.

The Mexican maestro returned to his homeland once again in 1933, whereupon he taught piano at the Conservatorio Nacional. He also wrote for, and edited the conservatory's periodical Cultural Musical. Orchestral music became his compositional focus and his symphonic work, *Chapultepec*, was premiered in Philadelphia in 1934 with Leopold Stokowski conducting, a performance at New York's Carnegie Hall followed a few days later. In addition to these activities he also taught folklore, and worked as Professor of Rhythmic Gymnastics, playing piano at school festivals.

Ponce spent his last years composing and teaching at Escuela Univesitaria de Musica, where in 1943 he was named Chair of folklore. His former pupil Carlos Chavez organized a festival comprised purely of Ponce's works in 1947. The festival saw the Mexican premiere of the Concierto del Sur, performed by Andrés Segovia. Ponce was awarded the prestigious "Premio Nacional de Artes y Ciencias" (National Prize of Arts and Sciences) in the same year. After a rapid deterioration of health Manuel Ponce died of uremic poisoning at the age of 66. He is buried next to his wife in the "Roundhouse of the Illustrious Men in the Pantheon of Dolores" in Mexico City. The state of Aguascalientes, where Ponce grew up and first studied music, honored the musician with a board of recognition at the base of the Column of The Exedra, next to the fountain from a spring dedicated to this musical poet.

Anders Clemens

Born into a family of artists and musicians in Oslo (Norway) in 1976, Anders Clemens started playing guitar at the age of 12. After studying guitar at the College of Music in Drammen, Norway and the State Academy of Music in Oslo, with Jan Danielsen, he continued his studies in Den Haag (Holland) and Barcelona (Spain) with Zoran Dukic, Sadahiro Otani and Alex Garrobé.

A grant from the Norwegian government for studies abroad enabled him to complete his musical training, finishing with a Diploma “cum laude”.

He has participated in many festivals and courses, receiving classes from Manuel Barrueco, David Russell, Marco Socias and John Williams.

In 2002, Anders was selected as one of four young Norwegian musicians to participate in “Norwegian state concerts”, which promotes highly gifted musicians by providing them with numerous concerts throughout Norway and abroad. He has won many prizes in international competitions, but his greatest success came in 2003, when he became the first Scandinavian winner of the famous “Andrés Segovia Competition” in Granada (Spain).

His performances have been broadcast on television and radio in Brazil, India, Sri Lanka, South Korea, Norway and Spain.

Anders has performed concerts in many countries in Europe, Asia and America and has participated in some of the most important music festivals. He is also an active chamber musician, collaborating regularly with singers, cellist, flutists and violinists.

He has released nine cds with Nordic Sound. All cds have been praised for their warm and brilliant interpretations.

“in the hands of Anders Clemens the sound becomes seductive...”

“illuminated by musicality...”

“few guitarist can match Anders Clemens today..”



Ponce - selected guitar works.

“To hear the notes of the guitar played by Andres Segovia is to experience a feeling of intimacy and the the well-beeing of the domestic herth; it is to evoke remote and tender emotions wrapped in the mysterious enchantment of things of the past; it is to open the spirit of the dreams, and to live some delicious mementos in the surrounding of pure art that the great Spanish artist knows how to create...” (Ponce in El Universal 1923).

During his years as a mature student in Paris the Mexican composer, Manuel María Ponce, acquired the skill of writing in the style of various composers. Indeed to commemorate the centenary of Beethoven’s death in 1927 Ponce’s teacher Paul Dukas would have his students imitate, or write in the style of, the great composer of Bonn.

After meeting Andrés Segovia, Ponce would continue to write for the guitar throughout his productive years as a composer. Given the musical preferences of Segovia, Ponce would adapt his music to please the virtuoso from Linares. So when Segovia asked for a sonata in the style of Sor, or indeed Haydn, Ponce would provide him with the *Sonata Clásica* (1928). This four movement classical sonata is perfectly written as a work that could well have been composed by Sor himself (indeed Segovia would announce the work as being written by Sor). The balance of form and the part writing suiting the instrument all contribute to the sense of an archetypal classical sonata.

And when Segovia wanted a work close to the style of Schubert, Ponce wrote his *Sonata Romántica* (1929). Again the remarkable talent of adapting a composers style that the Mexican composer possessed is apparent. The sonata is close to the musical language of the great composer from Wien. Most of the traits of Schubert’s music is present.

The typical mayor-minor turns, the phrases lingering over the bar-line, the Neapolitan sixth chord and the mediant harmonic relationship are all trademarks of Schubert’s music. the third movement even receives the title “movement musical” in a clear homage to the piano work with the same title by the composer of “Winterreise”.

The preludes, written around the same time as the other two works presented in this recording, constitutes 24 small pieces in all keys. Schott published only the preludes which Segovia considered the most idiomatic and thus ignored the ones written in the keys most foreign to guitar. This recording presents them all according to the edition of Miguel Alcázar (Ediciones Étoile, 2000).

Given the nature of the preludes we can perceive a great variety within the cycle. From the folklore elements in many of them (Prel. No. 19, Prel. No. 24), others with clear impressionistic influences (Prel. No. 12, Prel. No. 9) and preludes with a distinctive romantic language (Prel. No. 8).

The idea of writing a cycle which includes all the keys is of course not new, the most striking predecessor being Bach’s well tempered clavier, but the concept of attempting this on an instrument conditioned by it’s open bass strings (E, A, D) is challenging and Ponce succeed without venturing beyond the scope of the guitar.

In some of these preludes we find some of the most intimate and moving music that Ponce wrote for guitar. In the end the small-scale pieces might suite the instrument’s intimate nature the best.

Anders Clemens Øien

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Background photo: "Stubbe i Veltseterberget" by Ove Berg.

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Guitar: Alejandro, 1996.

Manuel María Ponce: Wikipedia & Maestros of the guitar.com

For further information please visit our web site:
www.nordicsound.no

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