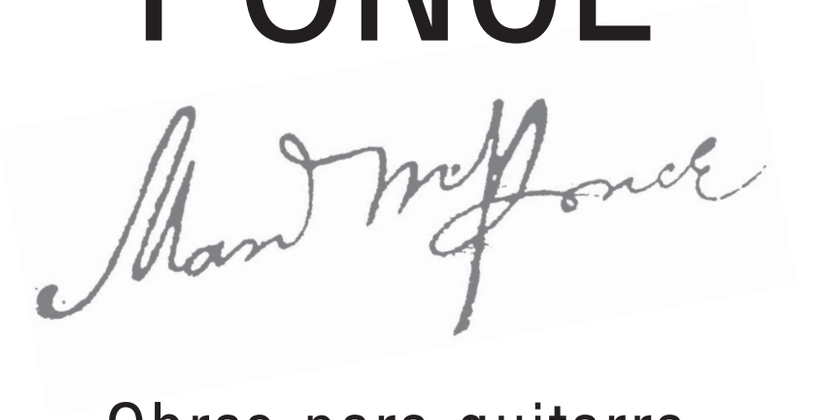
Manuel M. PONCE



Obras para guitarra

COURANTE

Edición crítica y prefacio de Raúl Zambrano

Proyecto Editorial Manuel M. Ponce
Coordinador y revisor general: Paolo Mello

2020
UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL AUTÓNOMA DE MÉXICO
FACULTAD DE MÚSICA

PREFACE

The autograph manuscript of the *Courante* in *E minor* for guitar by Manuel María Ponce is part of a dark green hardcover volume which can be found at the Manuel M. Ponce Archive, kept in the Special Collections of Cuicamatini Library of the Faculty of Music of the National Autonomous University of Mexico.

It is a 68-measure piece that the composer wrote in pencil following a baroque style, using an AB structure which characterizes this kind of dances. Each section consists of 34 measures; their numbering, as usual in the case of Ponce, begins anew at the beginning of the second part. After the final double bar, the manuscript is dated in Paris, December 12, 1930. It was customary to include a repetition bar in each of the sections in baroque dances; however, in Ponce's known manuscripts of compositions that imitate the style of this period–particularly the draft and final manuscripts of *Suite in D*–the repetition appears only in part A. This is probably due to the balance that this baroque structure had had in the classical style sonata form, or perhaps due to the common practice by some interpreters at the beginning of the 20th century which consisted in repeating only the first part; this perspective was quite likely shared by Ponce.

As is the case on many of Ponce's penciled manuscripts, certain changes can be perceived, as well as erased notes and the characteristic use of black ink on certain signs to correct and clarify. Yet the date and signature at the end point towards a finished work. Upon seeing the changes made, it is interesting to follow the musical train of thought behind a finished piece. For instance, the octave shift in the phrase of m. 12 of the first part, or the passage that goes from mm. 21 to 24 of the second part, as well as from m. 28 to the end.[1]

This is the only source of the *Courante.* There is no reference to this piece in the known letters by Segovia, and there is no source for it in the archives of the Fundación Centro de Documentación Casa Museo Andrés Segovia in Linares, Spain. The style is quite similar to the one he would use soon after for the *Courante* of the *Suite in D.* There are two editions of the *Courante in E minor*, one by Ediciones Yolotl in 1990 as *Preludio y Courante*[2], published along the *Prelude* in *A minor*, which Segovia refers to as prelude with capo, published by Schott in *B minor*. The other one can be found in the book containing the complete works of Ponce published by Miguel Alcázar in 2000[3], where he groups it with the *Prélude* and the *Balletto* (originally called *Air de Danse*). According to Alcázar, the *Courante* was probably conceived as part of the *Suite Homenaje a Bach*[4], which is among the pieces that were lost during the Spanish Civil War, as reported by Segovia in a letter from 1936:[5]

> *My house in Barcelona, with my library, music, tapestries, prints, paintings, Paquita's and my abundant silver, souvenirs from the Far East, our jewelry, etc., etc., has been, as expressed by one of Paquita's relatives who vigilantly communicated to us, CLEANED-OUT* [...]
>
> *Among the things that cause me the most pain, having been left back in Spain and destroyed, are your manuscripts. I beg you, dearly, that little by little you start recopying them, according to your sketches, and send them to me. Above all, those that were not yet published, like the first Sonata that you wrote in Mexico for me, the first movement of the Sonatina in homage to Tarrega, the sarabande in E major that should have followed the masked prelude, another Sarabande in A minor and the entire homage*

[1] Or even just for anecdotal purposes, see the correction made by Ponce at the beginning of this composition, where he writes the name of the instrument that the piece is composed for: seemingly influenced by the Spanish word *guitarra*, he uses the French term, *guitare*, but with a double r, later switching it by re-marking only one r and an e.

[2] Manuel M. Ponce. *Preludio y Courante*. Revisión Mario Molina, Ediciones Musicales Yolotl, EMY-G-16, Lomas de Bezares, México, 1990.

[3] Miguel Alcázar (ed.). *Obra completa para guitarra de Manuel M. Ponce de acuerdo a los manuscritos originale*s, México, CONACULTA-Ediciones Étoile, 2000, pp. 190-191.

[4] *Ibid*., p. 184.

[5] The translation of Segovia's letters is included in Peter Segal´s English version of Alcázar's work..

> *to Bach, which fugue I was lately transposing so I could play it*. […][6]

This extract mentions two *sarabandas*, a *preludio enmascarado*, and the *Homenaje a Bach*, hitherto unknown compositions which are probably lost for good.

If the *Courante* were actually part of the *Homenaje a Bach*, that would probably mean that the final version in ink of the autograph manuscript was lost at the time. Notwithstanding, Jorge Barrón[7] sets the elements of the *Suite Homenaje a Bach* as "Preludio, Fuga y Capricho"[8], adducing a 1933 interview where Ponce mentions it as unpublished.[9] This weakens Alcazar's theory (who assumes the *Courante* is a part of *Homenaje a Bach*), unless the *Courante* had become the *Capricho*–which, considering the inherent freedom of the *Capriccio* as a musical form, as well as the capricious habit of the Andalusian guitarist of renaming compositions, is not entirely impossible. However, the *Courante* in *E minor* is clearly composed following the Courante structure with its two-part dance, which makes it hard to imagine such shift.[10] Perhaps this composition was related to one of the missing *sarabandas* mentioned in the letter. Nonetheless, as long as no other data is obtained, the *Courante* is to remain isolated as the sole survivor of something we do not know more about.

Carlos Vázquez[11] added–with his characteristic C.V.–the word *publicada* [published] next to the title, and the phrase "From a suite in E minor that he didn't finish" right below. This phrase is re-marked, and it is possible that both additions were made after 1990, when it was published by Yolotl. It might be worth thinking over where Carlos Vázquez may have got the information to ascertain that it is a *suite in E minor that he didn't finish.* It does not seem feasible that either Segovia or Ponce could have informed him, if Vázquez comments were added after Yolotl's edition, when both artists had already passed away. There is no trace of any follow-up in the dark green volume, which includes the *Final del Homenaje a Tárrega*, dated January 14, 1932, on page 67, after the *Courante*. The fact that there is a manuscript in pencil within Ponce's archives would imply the possibility of there being an ink one in the Linares archives, but there is no such manuscript, nor is it included in the list of lost pieces mentioned in the 1936 letter. It would even be likely for Segovia to have been unaware of the existence of the *Courante*, as there is no reference to it, neither on his letters nor in his programs or recordings, despite being a composition that had been finished since 1930.

And yet, the *Courante* in *E minor* is within the language that Segovia was so enthusiastic about and which he fostered on the guitar. There are many elements employed by Ponce in the construction of the binary structure. The anacrusis in the rhythmic figure that is characteristic of the Italian *courante*–the *corrente*, which moves swiftly along a $^{3}/_{8}$ triple meter–is manipulated by Ponce in a variety of ways: by combining phrases that begin with an upbeat or with a downbeat; using the retrograde version of the melodic contour in certain fragments of both sections; elongating the final note of a previously used figure. However, two elements establish the affirmation and movement points: the repeated notes, so well-liked by Segovia, which reaffirm the key and will only appear in the beginning and at the end of the piece; and the scale movement linking several

[6] Miguel Alcázar (ed.). *The Segovia-Ponce Letters* (trans. Peter Segal). Columbus, OH, Editions Orphée, Inc., 1989, p. 165 (In Alcázar's edition, this letter is number 89; it is undated, like the following one [90], but they are both between letter 88, from May 15, 1936, and letter 91, from February 1937. This letter refers to the events that immediately followed after July 19, 1936).

[7] Jorge Barrón, violinist, violist and musicologist, expert in Ponce's Works.

[8] In a 1936 program at Wigmore Hall in London, a recital by Segovia is mentioned, in which the second of three parts is dedicated entirely to those pieces by Weiss that were composed by Ponce (Prélude, Allemande, Capriccio, Ballet, Sarabande, Gavotte, Gigue) and it is quite likely that the Capriccio listed there is the one from *Suite Homenaje a Bach*.

[9] Jorge Barrón. *Manuel María Ponce: a Bio-bibliography*, Praeger Publishers, USA, 2004, p.50.

[10] Following such theory, Barrón's statement might be worth mentioning. In his book he mentions that in 1941 the Editorial Cooperativa Interamericana de Compositores announced their plans to publish *Suite Homenaje a Bach*; however, we do not know upon which basis the publishing house made such announcement, nor if they managed to publish it in the end. In fact, on the inside back cover of their edition of Ponce's *Cuatro Danzas Mexicanas* (dedicated as a tribute to Paquita de Segovia in this edition), *Homenaje a Bach* appears listed as number 29 in the editorial calendar of the publishing house. Manuel M. Ponce, *Cuatro Danzas Mexicanas*. Editorial Cooperativa Interamericana de Compositores, Publicación No. 5, Montevideo, 1941.

[11] Carlos Vázquez (1920-2013), student of Ponce, as well as his heir.

measures–thus breaking up the rhythmic cell–which in this piece is used within the dominant in order to arrive at a new key.

In spite of the balance achieved by its 34 measures per section, the piece is not conceived in phrases of recurring metric; part of its charm lies in the occasional use of two-measure fragments among four-measure sequences, thus gaining in vigor and motion by displacing ideas, breaking up the regular design. However, it should be noted that in mm. 17 to 20 of both sections, right in the middle of each part, there is a four-measure phrase which will evolve into the dominant with the scale figure that will establish the final key of parts A and B. Nevertheless, these two four-measure cadences found at the same position of each section will not be exactly the same. It is interesting to compare mm. 17 to 20 in part A, which will reach *F♯ major* as the dominant of *B major*, with their counterpart in B: mm. 17 to 20, which will try to reach *B major* as the dominant of *E major*. It is through those differences, through the use of different solutions, that the image of an accomplished creation and the singular universe of every work of art, expressing the language of its author, comes to being; beyond the overall personal discourse of Ponce, that which is a reflection of its era (which, in some sense, every work of art is), also lies the language that becomes so essential (and the limitations of the guitar enable it) as to be capable of inhabiting every style.[12]

The 1930 *Courante* in *E minor* is witness of the manifold possibilities used by Ponce to establish, in the AB structure, the pathway to the dominant and its return to the tonic. He achieves this in a highly accomplished baroque style, within a brief space and with a harmonically limited instrument, thus reaching the essential strokes for rhetoric and drama. This exciting piece, lively and nimble on the guitar, is still a joyous mystery for whomever plays or listens to it.

Raúl Zambrano
Brussels, October 25, 2018

Notes

This edition is presented without fingering or legato suggestions by the editor. Both Mario Molina's edition in Ediciones Musicales Yolotl, and Alcázar's, from his *Obra completa para guitarra de Manuel M. Ponce*, will be considered as a historical reference, but not as a source.

Source

Autograph manuscript on pencil located on page 66 of the dark volume under catalog number 08-612002, which can be found at the Manuel M. Ponce Archive, kept in the Special Collections of Cuicamatini Library of the Faculty of Music of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM).

[12] In this regard, it is worth comparing the variations found in the analogue fragment of the *Courante* from the *Suite en Re*,–between both manuscripts: the draft version in pencil and the final one in ink–in order to confirm the composer's search for unity within a long-term discourse congruous with the rest of the piece by means of an element that traverses his catalogue.