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Guitar Collection

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SOR • AGUADO • TÁRREGA

19th Century Guitar Favourites

Norbert Kraft, Guitar

Guitar Collection

Fernando Sor (1778 - 1839) and Dionisio Aguado (1784 - 1849) were key figures in the early history of the classic guitar, which emerged in its present form some two centuries ago. Both were born in Spain, where they received a sound, formal education in music.

Sor's career was nomadic. He left Spain in 1813 having found himself into a difficult political corner after the Franco-Spanish War, and lived in Paris until 1815; from there he moved to London, where he worked as a performer and taught the guitar and singing, remaining there until 1823, when he returned to Paris (where his ballet *Cendrillon* was performed - he also became a successful composer of opera and ballet music) *en route* for a tour of Berlin, Warsaw, Moscow (*Cendrillon* was performed there too) and St. Petersburg. Thereafter he again went to live in Paris, but he had perhaps been away too long, for he found his services were less in demand than he had hoped. He died there, in, it is believed, reduced circumstances, of cancer of the tongue.

Aguado did not leave Spain until 1826, when he moved to Paris, preceded by his reputation, and remained there until his return to Madrid in 1837. It was in Paris, during Sor's second and last sojourn there, that the two men met and formed a close friendship, living together for some time. Their playing techniques differed radically: Aguado used the nails of his right hand in plucking the strings but Sor did not; Aguado said that Sor's method gave a more beautiful sound, but it was too late for him (Aguado) to change his technique. It was perhaps inevitable that they should play together and it is reported that in November 1836 they played a duo concert in Paris. By then Sor had already published several guitar-duo works and it may be significant that, although some were comparatively easy to play, none predated Aguado's or Sor's arrival in Paris. One of these was *Les deux amis*, Op. 41, the parts of which were marked SOR and AGUADO.

The advent of a new instrument, with a new playing technique, called for the provision of didactic material and an ample supply of this was forthcoming. Both Sor and Aguado published tutor books in addition to a wealth of study pieces. Sor's *Méthode pour la guitare* (Paris, 1830) was also published in translations - parallel German and Italian (Paris and Bonn, 1831) and English (London, 1832), and was later revised and added to by Napoléon Coste (Paris, *ca* 1845). Aguado's (1825/1843, Madrid) has appeared in several later editions that are variously unreliable, some even useless; a scrupulously faithful new one is published by Tecla (London). Aguado also invented the *tripodison*, a stand on which the guitar rested, relieving the player of the need to support it, but though Sor paid tribute to it there is no evidence that he ever used one; neither, it seems, did many others, for it died a quiet death.

The backbone of didactic material is the *study* (*étude, estudio* etc.), a piece focused on a particular aspect of technique or music. Sor composed 97 such pieces in five variously termed sets: Op. 6 (*Studios*), Op. 29 (*Études/Studios*), Opp. 31 and 60 (*Leçons progressives*), Op. 35 (*Exercices très faciles*). Those of Aguado are contained in his *Method* and are similarly divided into *Lecciónes* and *Estudios*. "Lessons" were intended for early-stage students, in order to develop certain basic techniques, whereas "Studies" were for those of advanced levels. In Aguado's *Method* the *Lecciónes* precede the *Estudios*, and Sor composed his Op. 31 because he realised that his two preceding sets (Opp. 6 and 29), which he regarded as being complementary, were not suitable for beginners. Many of those of his Op. 35 are by no means "*très facile*", but those of Op. 60 are among the easiest of all.

Aguado's didactic pieces were embodied in his *Method* and the precise technical purpose of each was clearly explained. Only occasionally did Sor specify the purpose of a study, but where it is musical it is clear, and as he himself explained, where it is technical it can be clarified by reference to his *Method*. Both Sor and Aguado provided adequate fingering for the left and right hands, invaluable in understanding period practice and even interpretation, but not invariably followed by today's performers. For example, the execution of

Op. 31/19 involves, as Sor explains, a type of right-hand fingering that is uncommon today, and the ultimate purpose of its use - technical rather than musical - is now usually served by other means. Norbert Kraft uses the modern mode of execution.

The minuets of Sor and Aguado are graciously dance-like, redolent of those of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven - before he began accelerating them into *scherzos*. The *Minuet Op. 11/6 is* one of a set of two themes with variations and twelve minuets (*ca.* 1822); the other is the last movement of his *Sonata Op. 22* - it was not then unusual to end a sonata in this way. Aguado's *Minuet* and *Andante* are from comparatively early collections.

Though Sor and Aguado were Spanish by birth their guitar music is Viennese Classical in style and form, rarely showing any trace of their Hispanic origins. Both combined fastidious craftsmanship with highly idiomatic writing for the guitar, and showed leanings toward Romanticism, but though Aguado's music is clear-cut, pleasing, and often brilliant, it never attains the poetic expressivity of that of Sor.

After the deaths of Sor, Aguado and their contemporaries the guitar went into recession, squeezed out by the louder-voiced piano and the orchestra, which better suited the scale of full-blown Romanticism. A later generation of virtuosi followed in their wake, notably Napoléon Coste (1805 - 83), Johann Kaspar Mertz (1806 - 56) and Giulio Regondi (1822 - 72), but the good times had passed. The guitar became little more than a suitable pastime for well-bred young ladies and a minor inhabitant of musical evenings, both domestic and in the salon. There it rested until a recovery, gradual but more effective than politicians are wont to initiate, began through the work of another Spaniard, Francisco Tárrega Eixea (1852 - 1909), whose crusade to restore the guitar to a position of respectability culminated in the work of Andrès Segovia (1893 - 1987).

Tárrega studied harmony and composition at the Conservatory in Madrid, and followed a successful concert career throughout Europe, but his most significant contributions were in the development of technique, composition, and the refinement of the art of transcription, the arrangement of other music

for the guitar. In the mid-nineteenth century the construction of the guitar was modified by the luthier Antonio de Torres (1817 - 92), strengthening its projection. Tárrega's revision of playing technique enabled advantage to be taken of this. Like Sor, Tárrega played without the use of his right-hand nails, but though later generations have rejected this feature in favour of 'Aguadoism' Tárrega's technique formed the basis on which they built. He published no method but his principles were transmitted by his students. These changes created no pressing need for new technical study pieces, but Tárrega wrote 28 various *Estudios* and four more so subtitled - The *Estudio brillante*, not one of these, is an arrangement of a piano piece by Jean-Delphin Alard (1815 - 88). Most of his original compositions were salon pieces, in which he displayed a strong gift of melody and cultured harmony, great charm and an occasional touch of humour.

Most of Tárrega's dances were those which were popular in the ballrooms of the day (polka, mazurka and waltz), but *Maria* was born of the then-current revival of interest in earlier forms of music; it was fashionable to write pieces with early-dance titles. Tárrega's *Gavota* bears only notional resemblance to the baroque gavotte - his (here unrecorded) *Pavana* bears even less, but we may accept them both for what they are, charming miniatures. *Recuerdos de la Alhambra*, a wistful tremolo study, is the most famous of all his pieces and has been described as the guitarist's national anthem; many countries have anthems of less charm.

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Norbert Kraft

The guitarist Norbert Kraft won early distinction in 1975, when he was awarded the Grand Prize in the Canadian CBC Radio Competition, following this in 1985 with first prize in the Segovia International Competition in Mallorca. He enjoys a substantial career as a concerto soloist and appears regularly with important orchestras, particularly in Canada and in the United States of America, as well as in Europe and the Far East. He was chosen to represent Canada at World Expo '90 in Osaka and again in Seville in 1992. Norbert Kraft is a faculty member of the Manhattan School of Music in New York and professor of guitar and chamber music at the University of Toronto and the Royal Conservatory of Music. He is founder and director of the Toronto Guitarfest.

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STEREO

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Norbert Kraft, Guitar

DDD

Playing Time: 69'06"

Fernando SOR

1 Menuet, Op. 11, No. 6 (2:19)

8 Etudes

2 Op. 35, No. 22 in B Minor (2:52)
3 Op. 31, No. 19 in A Major (1:36)
4 Op. 35, No. 17 in D Major (1:21)
5 Op. 6, No. 9 in D Minor (2:59)
6 Op. 6, No. 6 in A Major (2:38)
7 Op. 6, No. 11 in E Minor (3:24)
8 Op. 35, No. 13 in C Major (0:42)
9 Op. 6, No. 12 in A Major (4:58)
10 Minuetto, Op. 22 (3:16)

Dionisio AGUADO

11 Menuett (2:27)
12 Andante (3:46)

6 Etudes

13 Lección 15 (1:21)
14 Lección 29 (1:25)
15 Lección 19 (0:37)
16 Lección 26 (1:39)
17 Estudio 17 (1:15)
18 Lección 24 (1:07)

Francisco TÁRREGA

19 Rosita - polka (1:30)
20 Marieta - mazurka (2:18)
21 Sueño - mazurka (2:02)
22 Adelita - mazurka (1:19)
23 Mazurka en sol (2:44)
24 Estudio brillante (2:01)
25 Gran Vals (3:14)
26 Endecha (1:21)
27 Lágrima (2:03)
28 Alborada - capriccio (2:22)
29 Recuerdos de la Alhambra (4:18)
30 Maria - gavota (1:34)
31 Preludio No. 1 (1:34)
32 Preludio No. 11 (1:04)

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Music Notes: John W. Duarte

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