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Cyril Scott, Segovia and the *Sonatina* for Guitar

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Abstract

Cyril Scott's guitar *Sonatina*, composed for Andres Segovia in 1927, was regarded for many decades as a lost work. Following its incomplete premiere in 1928, it disappeared from Segovia's repertoire, remaining unpublished, unrecorded, and unavailable to other guitarists. The manuscript was thought to have perished, and the work acquired almost legendary status in the guitar world. The recovery of the manuscript in May 2001 confirms the *Sonatina*'s significance as a major break from the overtly Hispanic and folkloristically inspired pieces that dominate the pre-World War II repertoire of modern guitar music.

The author's researches into Segovia's reception in Paris and London in the mid-1920s, and into other 'lost' works composed for Segovia at this time, provide a context in which the story of Scott's piece is unfolded and its significance assessed.

Introduction

For many musicians, Segovia is synonymous with the classical guitar. He is widely regarded as having transformed the guitar from a folk or popular instrument into a concert instrument virtually single handed. Such a characterisation is rather too simple. There were other guitarists trying to raise the status of the guitar at roughly the same time, notably Miguel Llobet (for whom Falla wrote his only solo guitar piece, the *Homenaje pour le tombeau de Claude Debussy*), Emilio Pujol and Regino Sainz de la Maza (for whom Rodrigo composed his *Concierto de Aranjuez*). However, Segovia is rightly remembered above the rest because of the extent of his achievements.

Segovia felt that the repertoire that he had inherited was not adequate for a modern concert instrument. Again, he was not unique in this, but the thoroughness of his project to remedy the inadequacies of the instrument's repertoire did make him unique. At the start of Segovia's career, a few years before World War I, the repertoire consisted mainly of works by nineteenth-century guitarist-composers, together with transcriptions of keyboard music and music for violin or cello. Segovia made it his business to seek out new composers for the instrument. Writing to the French journalist, musicologist and composer Henri Collet in the mid-1920s, Segovia said:

... paso la vida pidiéndole a todo el mundo obras para mi guitarra. El renunciar a algunos es cosa que me cuesta verdadero dolor,¹

... I spend my life asking everyone for pieces for my guitar. Rejecting some of them is something which causes me real pain,

From the mid-1920s onwards, Segovia was especially well placed to extend the repertoire of his instrument. Prior to April 1924, he was known mainly in Spain and South America. Following his Paris debut in April 1924, he became an international artist.

There could hardly have been a better place than Paris in the mid-1920s to find new composers for an instrument. Stravinsky was to be found there, for example. He certainly admired Segovia. According to Segovia's friend the English composer John Duarte, Stravinsky once enquired why Segovia had not approached him for a guitar piece. Segovia replied, 'Because I do not want to insult your music by not playing it.'²

With this anecdote we come to one of the several reasons why Scott's *Sonatina* has a call on our attention. Segovia's musical taste did not extend to musical modernism. Not only did Segovia not approach Stravinsky for a piece, but many other leading lights of music were beyond the pale. The contemporary composers whom Segovia favoured were not the most forward looking, and are now for the most part known only to guitarists or specialists in particular aspects of twentieth-century music. The composers most favoured by Segovia between the two world wars were:

Manuel Ponce (1882–1949)

Federico Moreno Torroba (1891–1982)

Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco (1895–1968)

Joaquin Turina (1882–1949)

All these composers wrote fine works for Segovia, but none of them was at the forefront of musical developments. Some of the more advanced composers of the time did write for him. Two especially interesting ones whose works Segovia played were Albert Roussel (1869–1937) and Alexandre Tansman (1897–1986). Both were very much composers of their era, and both tactfully softened the more abrasive aspects of

¹ Letter in private collection of Madame M. T. Clostre-Collet, Paris.

² Duarte, *Andrés Segovia as I Knew Him*, p. 132.

their style for Segovia. Tansman went on to write many more pieces for Segovia after the Second World War, and invariably modified his style.

A conspicuous absence from the developing repertoire of solo guitar pieces between the wars is thus pieces by the major names of the era. Not only was there nothing by Stravinsky; there was also nothing by Ravel, Prokofiev, Bartok, *Les Six* and many other familiar names from the period.³ A few pieces by modernist composers were given to Segovia, but he declined to play them. Examples include Frank Martin's *Quatre pièces brèves* and Pierre-Octave Ferroud's *Spiritual*. Against this background, the piece by Cyril Scott has special significance, which can be summarised as follows:

Modernist, at a time when the guitar very few such pieces.

Performed publicly by Segovia, albeit incompletely, and possibly only once or twice.

Non-hispanic.

Composed by a renowned composer of the period.

Segovia in Britain

It is not known when Scott first heard Segovia perform, but he would not have lacked opportunities. Segovia gave his first UK performance in London in December 1926. An article in a British musical magazine describes the audience reaction at one of Segovia's London concerts of the 1920s:

... the public demanded more and more encores; half the hall lights were switched off in order to compel the audience to leave, but the audience wanted more... Two enthusiasts immediately behind me were clapping most vigorously. I turned round ... to find that they were De Groot [violinist] and Cyril Scott.⁴

Segovia and Scott had a mutual friend in Pedro Morales (1879–1938),⁵ a Spanish-born critic and amateur musician living in London at this time, and dedicatee of 'Exotic Dance' from Scott's piano collection *A Pageant* (1920). It is likely that Morales would have brought Scott and Segovia together. Whatever the manner of

³ Some members of *Les Six* did compose guitar music after the Second World War, but not for Segovia.

⁴ A Chess 'The revival of the Classical Guitar', *BMG* April 1931, p 374, quoted in G Wade and G Garno *A New Look at Segovia*, p. 74.

⁵ Scott says of Morales that he was one of only two Spanish friends he had, the other being the conductor Angel Grande (*Bone of Contention*, pp. 204–5). Segovia refers to Morales as a friend in *The Segovia-Ponce Letters*, p. 17.

their meeting, by July 1927 Segovia was in possession of a composition by Scott. Writing in that month to his friend the Mexican composer Ponce, Segovia said:

Besides toiling away on your score, I am also working on a Sonatina by Cyril Scott (without great enthusiasm, I confess).⁶

The following year (on 11 May 1928), Segovia premiered a piece by Scott in London. It was reviewed in *The Times* as follows:

A 'Reverie' by Cyril Scott, dedicated to the recitalist, was given its first performance, but even Mr Segovia could not make it hang together as a continuous piece of musical thinking.⁷

There is good reason to believe that the *Reverie* referred to was actually the first movement of the *Sonatina*, as will be explained later. Scott's piece, under whatever name, dropped out of Segovia's repertoire fairly quickly. He did not record it or edit it for publication, unlike the many pieces he did take into his repertoire. He nevertheless continued allude to it. In an interview in 1930 with the Barcelona based journal *Musica* Segovia mentions Scott in a list of 'maestros' who had written pieces for him:

posibles ejecutantes es, en nuestros días, reducido al mínimun... Sin embargo, he conseguido que **maestros como Ciril Scott, Albert Roussel, Samazeuilh, Tansman, Migot, Pierre de Bréville, Bastarde, Fornereau, Goossens, escriban música para guitarra.** ⁸

From a guitarist's point of view, what is particularly interesting in this list are the missing names. There is no mention of Ponce, Torroba, or Turina. I suspect that Segovia was picking out the names that would be most impressive to readers. Scott's name carried a lot of weight, and came at the start of the list. It is especially interesting to see the name of Goossens, who is Eugene Goossens, the British composer and conductor who was a good friend of Scott. My efforts to track down this piece have been fruitless.

The existence of a guitar piece by Scott was of considerable interest to the next generation of guitarists. In his book *The Foundations of a Musical Career* Stuart Button describes the efforts made on behalf of the young Julian Bream to get hold of

⁶ Alcázar (ed.) *The Segovia-Ponce Letters*, p. 11/13.

⁷ *The Times* 14 May 1928, p. 21

⁸ *Musica*, October, 1930, pages 272-4.

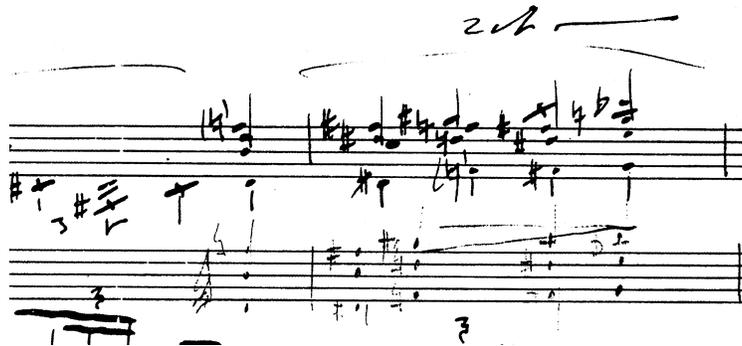
this piece so that he could have a worthwhile piece of contemporary British music to include in his repertoire.⁹ Approaches to the composer yielded nothing.

Guitar historians generally assumed that Scott must have kept no copy of the piece, and that Segovia must have lost his copy – possibly during the sacking of his house in the Spanish Civil War when many of his manuscripts were destroyed. Scott's piece passed into legend as a lost work.

Rediscovery of the *Sonatina*

The status of the *Sonatina* was transformed in 2001, when Angelo Gilardino, composer and artistic director of the Andres Segovia Foundation in Linares, Spain, explored several crates of documents which Segovia had assembled towards the end of his life. They contained many manuscripts of considerable interest, including Scott's *Sonatina*, and also a hitherto unknown work by the youthful Lennox Berkeley, among many unknown pieces. Scott's *Sonatina* turned out to be a three-movement work, lasting about 11 minutes in performance. Within a year it was published by the Italian publishing house of Bèrben. I was fortunate to play a small part in this publication myself by putting Angelo Gilardino in contact with Cyril Scott's family, and by contributing a preface to it.

As far as is known, the manuscript copy of the *Sonatina* in Segovia's collection is the only surviving manuscript of this piece. In addition to Scott's handwriting, it carries some emendations by Segovia, such as re-voicing of certain chords, as shown in the lower staff below:



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These emendations to the first movement suggest that Segovia worked on it for a performance, and lead to the conclusion that the *Reverie* performed by Segovia in London in 1928 was the first movement of the *Sonatina*.

⁹ Button, *The Foundations of a Musical Career*, pp. 81–82).

Analysis

The guitar has a reputation for being a tricky instrument to write for, but this is largely because it has not featured in courses on orchestration and composition. There's no reason why a composer who can write for the standard instruments should not be able to write playable music for the guitar. All the same, it is undeniable that some composers have not grasped the kind of textures that work well on the instrument. Scott is not among them, and he succeeds remarkably well for the most part. There are a few places where he writes chord voicings that are not feasible, but not many; and he avoids the besetting sin of so many pianist-composers of treating the guitar as a small piano, and writing thick chords and multiple independent parts.

The introduction of the *Sonatina* has several points of interest. The extract below is the introduction, leading to the first subject.

Adagio quasi introduzione

The musical score is presented in four sections, each with a label below it:

- (a)**: Shows the first four measures of the introduction. It features parallel chords with guitar-specific markings: 'XII' (12th fret), 'CI' (1st fret), and 'CII' (2nd fret). The first measure has a circled '1' above it. The dynamics are marked *p* (piano).
- (b)**: Shows a single measure with a chord voicing that utilizes the open strings of the guitar.
- (c)**: Shows measures 4 through 8, featuring a rhythmic pattern of ascending and descending eighth notes. Each measure has a '10' above it, likely indicating a fingering or a specific technique. The dynamics are *p*.
- (d)**: Shows measures 5 through 8. It begins with a circled '4' and a '4' above the first measure. The notes are circled, and the dynamics are marked *espressivo e sonoro* and *p*. The section concludes with a circled '3' above the final measure, which is marked *mp* (mezzo-piano).

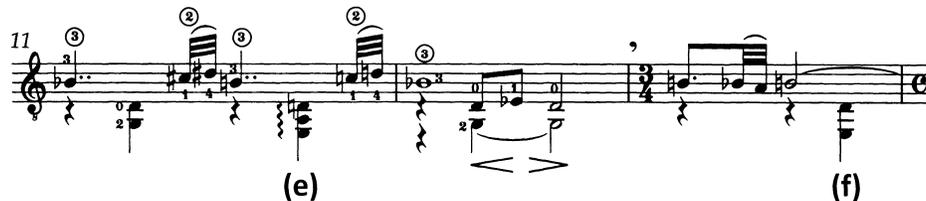
Molto moderato

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The opening bars have parallel chords at (a). This kind of parallelism is a feature of Scott's style, and recurs throughout the piece. It suits the guitar very well. Provided the chord doesn't require open strings, the player can slide the chord shape up and down the neck as required.

The chord at (b) uses the open strings, and the figuration in (c) is just the open strings ascending and descending. A pentatonic motif appears at (d), just before the first subject begins at the 'molto moderato' above. This pentatonic motif is derived from the open strings of the instrument, which from low to high are E A D G B E. Bringing these notes into the same octave and rearranging them in ascending order gives the

pentatonic scale E G A B D E, the notes used in the motif at point D. This set of notes is significant for this movement. In his autobiography *Bone of Contention*, Scott wrote that he often used a chord that was not based on a triad (notes 1, 3 and 5 of a scale) but on the notes 1, 4 and 7. (The 7 is flattened relative to the seventh note of a major scale.)¹⁰ Such a chord can be created from the pentatonic scale above by using the notes E, A, D. Scott uses this chord frequently in the *Sonatina* (sometimes omitting the A) in a recurring figure that wavers melodically between B and B flat. In the following example, which is part of the first subject, the 1, 4, 7 chord appears at (e), against a B natural, and minus the middle note (A), at (f), again against a B natural.



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In the above example, when the note B is inflected down to B flat, it is harmonised with a two-note chord of G, D, making a G minor harmony. This again is a recurring feature of the movement.

When Scott mentions the 1, 4, 7 chord in *Bone of Contention*, he does so in relation to the standard dominant-seventh chord type (1, 3, 5, 7), which he says he does not use. This suggests he regarded the 1, 4, 7 chord as unstable, and requiring to move to another chord – which could be a version of the same chord on any chromatic degree of the scale. At points of repose, such as at the end of each movement of the *Sonatina*, Scott uses standard triadic harmony.

The pentatonic scale E, G, A, B, D, E omits the notes F and C. The omitted notes imply a chord of F (major or minor). This chord becomes the harmonic goal of the movement, and is spelled out as an arpeggio in the final bar. Whereas the resolution of a conventional sonata-form movement is tonal, here it is replaced by a different sort of resolution – the stable arrival at a chord based on the ‘missing’ notes of earlier material.

Although the first movement of the *Sonatina* is not a conventional sonata form movement, it does have distinct first and second subjects. The second subject (below) is characterised by a triplet motion. Despite its chromaticism, it circles round G harmony, as spelled out repeatedly in the bass:

¹⁰ Scott, *Bone of Contention*, p. 237.

dolce e tardamente

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In a conventional sonata-form movement, a second subject would be presented in the exposition in the dominant, and recapitulated in the tonic. In the *Sonatina*, the second subject returns in the recapitulation a tone lower than in the exposition, preparing the way for the final F major chord.

Sadly there is not time in this presentation to explore the other two movements. However, I should point out that Scott appears to have been uncertain about the ending. There's a rather enigmatic note in imperfect German at the end of the piece suggesting that he could improve the ending if required. Yet the final movement is full of confidence (see below), especially in its bravura parody of some of the clichés of Spanish music. Incidentally, final movement quotes from the first, which is a fingerprint of Scott's 'sonata' compositions.

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Concluding remarks

Other speakers in this conference session are better qualified than me to assess this work's significance in relation to Scott's *oeuvre*. However, it is worth pointing out that sonatas and sonatinas do not loom large in Scott's abundant output. The recovery of a hitherto lost *Sonatina* is therefore more interesting than would be the discovery of another picturesque character piece of the kind Scott dutifully produced to please his publisher.

From the guitarist's point of view, the fact that this piece is a *Sonatina* and not a picturesque miniature is equally significant. The guitar is over-provided with picturesque miniatures. The fact that Scott did not produce such a piece for Segovia indicates that he considered the instrument, and its leading exponent, worthy of serious attention. More to the point, he appears to have grasped that the repertoire lacked substantial works.

My final point is a somewhat chauvinistic. One of the success stories of twentieth century guitar music is British music. Britten's *Nocturnal* and Walton's *Bagatelles* are almost in danger of becoming warhorses. Add to those the excellent pieces by Michael Tippett, Lennox Berkeley, Peter Maxwell-Davies, Stephen Dodgson and Malcolm Arnold and you have a substantial body of works that is often more prized outside Britain than within. We now appreciate that the story of British guitar music by estimable composers begins earlier than had been supposed. Prominent in the enlarged story is Cyril Scott's *Sonatina*.

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