

FERNANDO SOR

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Selected Works

Edited by Marc Teicholz

Fernando Sor

Fernando Sor (translations of his name include Josep Ferran Sorts i Muntades, Joseph Fernando Macari Sors, Ferran Sor, Ferdinand Sor, and Ferdinando Sor.) was born in Barcelona on February 14, 1778 and educated at the monastery of Montserrat near

Barcelona. Due to his political affiliations, he was forced to leave Spain. He first lived in Paris, then London, later Russia (he followed a French ballerina there), and, finally back again, in Paris. It was here, during his retirement, that he composed the majority of his guitar works. Although many of these works are rich and varied, he often complained that the demands of the public frustrated his compositional ambitions and forced him to produce simple, nice-sounding pieces that didn't require any special technical ability. His bitterness towards his career during his final decade is palpable. For example, Op. 43 is entitled *Mes Ennuis* ("My Annoyances"), and six of his ballets are dedicated to "whoever wants them." The foreword to Op. 45 morbidly says, "Let's see if that's that. Composed and dedicated to the person with the least patience, by Fernando Sor. Opus 45." His last work was a mass in honor of his daughter, Caroline, who died in 1837. Her death sent the already sickly Sor into serious depression, and he died of tongue and throat cancer on July 10, 1839.

His compositions for guitar include sonatas, studies, sets of variations, divertissements, easy pieces for beginners, and duets. He also composed extensively for opera, orchestra, string quartet, piano, voice (he was himself a very fine singer), and ballet (his ballet score *Cendrillon* (Cinderella) was extraordinarily popular.) He was generally regarded to be one of the greatest guitarists of his age. His guitar music is considered today to be a canonical part of our repertory.

I recommend that for those of you who want to learn more about this intrepid and important composer to read Brian Jeffery's book: *Fernando Sor: Composer and Guitarist*, second edition, Tecla Editions, 1994.

I particularly like Julian Bream's sensitive comment regarding Sor's charming musical style:

"I think Fernando Sor does have to be played with respect but for a certain type of innocence in his music. I think to over apply romanticism to the music is a great mistake. There is a classicism for example not unlike Mozart in his style which to my mind is a style of beautiful understatement. But if you give understatement space and time, it has a positive element that transcends the simplicity or the innocence of the material. Sor needs immense care and affection, and if one invests his music with that, I can't see how anybody can object to it."

Although Sor's *Andante Largo* is from his Op. 5 "Six very easy little pieces," the piece is fairly challenging nonetheless. Here Sor offers two exceptionally beautiful contrasting themes. It is easy to imagine a group of woodwinds playing the innocent major theme followed by the strings for the dark, pulsating minor theme of the B section.

Andante Largo from Six Petite Pieces, Op. 5

This is probably one of the most serious pieces of Sor's output for the guitar. It originally served as the extended introduction of a long and relatively conventional set of theme and variations but its musical power has allowed it to stand on its own.

Strangely, it was originally written in a grand staff (perhaps indicating Sor's commitment to meticulous voice leading) and, probably for this reason, was rarely performed.

Largo from Fantasy No. 2 in C Minor, Op. 7

This most deservedly famous of Sor's variations was first published in London in 1821 with the generous title: "The Favorite Air "Oh Cara armonia" from Mozart's Opera *Il Flauto Magico*, arranged with an Introduction and

Variations for the Guitar, as performed by the Author at the Nobilities Concerts, dedicated to his brother (Carlos) by F. Sor." The theme of the work is in itself a slight variation of an aria at the end of Act I of Mozart's "The Magic Flute" entitled "Das klinget so herrlich." Sor may have used the Italian translation of the aria for his florid title but, interestingly, it was the English setting of the Aria (which when translated to "Away with Melancholy" was forced to change the melody's rhythm to accommodate the new lyrics) that Sor copied verbatim.

Introduction & Variations on a Theme by Mozart, Op. 9

This piece may have suffered a bit over the years from overexposure but it is worth reminding ourselves of the work's enormously playful charm as well as its fresh, untraveled approach to the variation form. Each variation appears as a complete surprise from the last.

A few details need to be mentioned:

1. In the theme, I offered an alternate set of fingerings for the repeats (I did the same for the 1st half