Three Main Chamber Music Works for Strings and Piano by the Mexican Composer Manuel M. Ponce

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

THREE MAIN CHAMBER MUSIC WORKS FOR STRINGS AND PIANO BY THE MEXICAN COMPOSER MANUEL M. PONCE

By

Virginia Covarrubias Ahedo

A DOCTORAL ESSAY

Submitted to the Faculty
of the University of Miami
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

Coral Gables, Florida

May 2008
UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

A doctoral essay submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

THREE MAIN CHAMBER MUSIC WORKS FOR STRINGS AND PIANO BY THE MEXICAN COMPOSER MANUEL M. PONCE

Virginia Covarrubias Ahedo

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This essay examines the three main large-scale chamber music works for strings and piano written by the Mexican composer Manuel M. Ponce: the *Romantic Trio* for violin, cello and piano (1912), the *Sonata for violoncello and piano* (1922), and the *Sonata Breve* for violin and piano (1930). The purpose of the study is to aid chamber music performers in the understanding, preparation and execution of these works. Written contextually for performing musicians, the format for the study of the individual works includes sections on historical background and commentary on analysis and performance considerations. In addition, each work exemplifies a different musical stage in Ponce’s compositional development. The author traces the composer’s compositional and stylistic evolution throughout the study of these works. The essay also includes a comprehensive biography of Ponce and a general overview of the composer’s chamber music works.
To my husband Rodrigo,

my princess Fernanda

and my little prince Rodriguito.

...with all love.
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Chapter 1

BIOGRAPHY

1882-1904

Manuel María Ponce was born in the town of Fresnillo Zacatecas, Mexico, on December 8, 1882, and soon after his birth his family moved back to their home town in Aguascalientes, where he was raised. He received his first piano lessons from his sister Maria del Refugio and at the age of five he wrote his first piano composition, *La Danza del Sarampión* (the smallpox dance), which he titled after the illness he had recently suffered. During his early childhood he wrote a few simple piano pieces.

At the age of ten, he entered the choir of the Church of San Diego in his hometown. During this time he wrote his first two songs for voice and piano, which he based on his poetry.¹ Between the ages of thirteen and sixteen he served as organist in the same parish, advancing from assistant to principal organist.² These years strengthened his musical vocation and in a romantic keyboard style, he added virtuosic elements to his piano and organ writing. In an interview conducted in 1921, Ponce stated:

> The improvisation in organ playing developed my fantasy; I could easily put in notation what I conceived.³

In 1901, Ponce moved to Mexico City to study piano with Vicente Mañas and harmony with Eduardo Gabrielli. Soon after, he attempted to enter the National

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³ Manuel M. Ponce, quoted in Díaz Cervantes, *Ponce genio de México*, 36.
Conservatory, but the administration would not validate his private studies and he refused to enter at a primary level; therefore, he returned home to Aguascalientes.4

From 1901 to 1904, he developed an active career as a performer, composer, teacher, and to a lesser degree, as a journalist. He also devoted considerably more time to his music writing, which revealed his preference for the vernacular song. While attending the yearly fair of San Marcos, Ponce had had the opportunity to see and hear different aspects of music.5 He became captivated by the vernacular folk song, a genre that he later explored extensively with his arrangements of more than 200 folk songs.6

His search for a way in which he could express the Mexican soul in artistic media was an interest Ponce shared with his talented friends, the poet Ramón López Velarde (1888-1921), and the painter Saturnino Herrán (1887-1918). They often gathered to talk about art, as Ponce related in 1947 interview.7 Despite this interest, his music remained close to the western-romantic style of the nineteenth century, which was well established in Mexico and was referred to as salon music by the previous generation. His works from this period were written primarily for the piano, using short forms such as etudes, miniatures, mazurkas, gavottes (including his well-known Gavotte in G minor), dances

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4 Díaz Cervantes, Ponce Genio de México, 49.


7 López Alonso, Manuel M. Ponce, 3.
and waltzes, plus two acts of an unfinished Opera entitled *Círa* \(^8\) and his first arrangements of Mexican folk songs. \(^9\)

1904-1908

In 1904, Ponce traveled to Europe to continue his musical education. In Italy, he attended the *Liceo Musicale* in Bologna where he studied harmony, counterpoint, fugue and orchestration with professors Cesare Dall’Olio, Luigi Torchi, and Ebrico Bossi. \(^{10}\) A year later he traveled to Berlin to attend the *Stern’sches Konservatorium der Musik*, where he studied with Edwin Fisher and Martin Krause, who was Liszt’s disciple. \(^{11}\) In a letter to his brother, Ponce described his audition in Berlin:

> I played Hummel’s Sonata and my etude: the uneven rhythms called Krause’s attention and he asked me to play it again. I immediately understood what it was all about, so I repeated accenting the first note of each measure. Indeed, he was counting the measures. The Director, with an ironic smile, said in German: Italian style! In that phrase I got the German’s victorious musical pride over the Italians, since the modern composers of this nationality follow more or less the path traced by the colossal Wagner. \(^{12}\)

During his first trip to Europe, Ponce’s growth from the stylistic influence of Liszt’s Romantic School was, in a sense, more technical than idiomatic. \(^{13}\) His more relevant works from this period are, *Canzoncina d’Amore* for cello and piano, *Jeunesse* for violin and piano, *Pasas por el abismo de mis tristezas* (You pass through the abyss of

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\(^{8}\) Díaz Cervantes, *Ponce Genio de México*, 55.

\(^{9}\) Barrón Corvera, *Manuel María Ponce*, 2.

\(^{10}\) Ibid., 4.

\(^{11}\) Ibid.


\(^{13}\) López Alonso, *Manuel M. Ponce*, 25.
my sadness) for choir and string quintet, *Ave gratia plena* and *Bendita sea tu pureza* (Blessed be you purity) for voices and organ, and the piano works, *Bersagliera, Historia de un alma* (Story of a soul), *Legende, Tres Preludios* (Three preludes), *Notturnos* I-II (Nocturnes), and four Fugues.\(^\text{14}\)

1907-1915

In 1907, Ponce returned to Mexico where he stayed until 1915. His return coincided with politically difficult times in Mexico, and in 1910, the revolution was declared. In spite of the precarious situation of the moment, Ponce achieved a prolific musical career through the force of his personal determination.

In 1907, the composer Gustavo E. Campa (1863-1934) assumed the position of Director of the National Conservatory and offered Ponce a post as professor of piano. In an article written in 1917, Campa recalls his motivation for hiring Ponce:

> It was the end of the year 1907 when, because of the very sad and always regrettable death of Ricardo Castro, I was entrusted with the Direction of the National Conservatory… I was captivated by his artistic interpretation, which was fine and discreet, and by his compositions, elegantly written, naive and inspired, but perhaps what most attracted me was his intelligence and modesty. I understood, and I wasn’t wrong, that he would be an element of prime importance to the institution.\(^\text{15}\)

Ponce was an avant-garde pedagogue; in 1912, his students offered, for the first time in Mexico, an all-Debussy piano program.\(^\text{16}\) He also offered the first course on musical folklore in the country, and wrote articles proposing the need for an annual

\(^{14}\) Barrón Corvera, *Manuel María Ponce*, 266.


musical congress with the objective of channeling young composers to write nationalistic music.\textsuperscript{17}

Before long he was gaining recognition among the artistic elite, and he soon became a leader in Mexico City’s musical life. He shared the aesthetic beliefs of the Ateneo de la Juventud (The athenaeum of youth), a group of prominent artists and intellectuals who sought freedom of thought and the revaluation of the folkloric element in all forms of artistic expressions. Among the members of this group were Luis G. Urbina, Pedro Henriquez Ureña, Antonio Caso, Justo Sierra, Diego Rivera, Saturnino Herran, Jose Vasconcelos, and Alfonso Reyes. In December of 1913, this group invited Ponce to give a lecture on the subject “Music and the Mexican song,” which was later published by two magazines, Revista de Revistas and Gaceta Musical. A notable excerpt from his lecture is as follows:

The popular song is the melodic demonstration of the people’s soul. The people sing, because they need an exquisite form of expression to express their more profound feelings. It is the relief of the popular soul that suffers and quiets, and makes no use of words, because only the music can interpret its deeper feelings…I consider it the duty of every Mexican composer to ennoble the music of their country by shaping it in an artistic way, to re-dress it with the robes of polyphony and keep the lovely popular music which is the expression of the soul.\textsuperscript{18}

During this period, Ponce demonstrated a conscious commitment to Mexican folk music by collecting, classifying and harmonizing dozens of folk songs. In this regard he is considered the initiator of research on national folklore in Mexico. He also wrote original folk-like themes. Included among them is his song known throughout the worldwide, Estrellita (Little star).

\textsuperscript{17} Catellanos, Manuel M. Ponce, 35.

\textsuperscript{18} Manuel M. Ponce, quoted in Miranda, Manuel M. Ponce, 31.
Ponce favored programmatic titles which demonstrated his preference for Mexican folklore, not only in his vocal works but also in his instrumental and orchestral music. This effort also helped to promote him as the father of nationalism in Mexican music.

During this time Ponce gave piano and chamber music recitals, and performed as soloist with orchestras. His programs featured his own works for the most part, and often included other big romantic works, such as the Dvorak Piano Quintet.\(^\text{19}\) In 1912, he premiered two of the most representative works of his romantic style, the Piano Concerto, conducted by Julian Carrillo, and the \textit{Romantic Trio}, which he performed with the violinist Valdez Fraga and the cellist Ruben Montiel.

The list of Ponce’s compositions grew significantly to include five chamber works, six original songs, one choral work, twenty-two piano works, a piano concerto, an unfinished opera, numerous arrangements of Mexican folk songs, and his orchestral work, \textit{Tres Cuadros Nocturnos} (Three nocturne pictures), which was retitled \textit{Estampas Nocturnas} (Nocturne impressions) in his 1923 version.\(^\text{20}\) For the first time he introduced large-scale forms in his writing. The composer Carlos Chavez (1899-1987), who was Ponce’s pupil, credited him as the first composer to explore large forms in a country that favored small ones.\(^\text{21}\) The style in his works from this period is romantic and folklore-oriented, which has been referred to as “Mexicanist.” \(^\text{22}\)

\(^{19}\) Miranda, \textit{Manuel M. Ponce}, 2.

\(^{20}\) Castellanos, \textit{Manuel M. Ponce}, 55-61.

\(^{21}\) Barrón Corvera, \textit{Manuel María Ponce}, 7.

\(^{22}\) Moreno Rivas, \textit{Rostrros del Nacionalismo en la Música Mexicana}, 90.
By 1915, the effects of the Revolution had reached the artistic elite. The Conservatory was closed temporarily and the city’s performance activity diminished considerably, prompting Ponce to leave the country and travel to Cuba.

1915-1917

The Mexican Revolution forced the exile of various artists and politicians. Ponce referred to his stay in Cuba as a “voluntary exile.” 23 He traveled to Cuba with his friends, the poet Luis G. Urbina and violinist Pedro Valdés Fraga, and together they participated in musical evenings sponsored by Federico Gamboa, who was the leader of the Mexican exile in Cuba. 24 Ponce’s performances were welcomed and well received. They included his recent piano, vocal, and chamber works. The rich musical folklore of Cuba made an impact on Ponce’s piano writing, and inspired him to write *Tres Rapsodias Cubanas, Suite Cubana, Preludio Cubano, Elegía de laAusencia* (Elegy to the absence), and *Guateque* (Peasant party). During this time he also began working on one of his most beautiful chamber works, the *Sonata for violoncello and piano*.

While living in La Havana, Cuba, he had the opportunity to write articles and concert reviews for two local newspapers, among them “War and German music,” “Your majesty the danzón” and “Cuba symphonic triptych: a critical study.” 25

On March of 1916, he traveled to New York to give an all-Ponce recital at the Aeolian Hall. At the end of that year he traveled to Mexico to spend the holidays with his

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24 Ibid.

family, and while there, he offered a recital and conference on the subject, “The importance of musical folklore in the formation of the soul.” 26

In March of 1917, Carlos Chavez and Agustin Loera, who were favored by the new presidency of Venustiano Carranza, invited Ponce to return to his faculty position at the National Conservatory.

1917-1925

In June of 1917, Ponce returned to Mexico City, and three months later he married the singer Clema Maurel, who would become his lifelong companion.

Immediately after his return, he was appointed principal conductor of the Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional (National Symphony Orchestra). This was his first endeavor in the field of conducting, and as such, his first performances were poor. However, he was determined to grow in his ability hand-in-hand with the newly renamed orchestra (which was previously known as the Conservatory Orchestra). His interest in updating the orchestra’s repertoire was evident; he put together interesting programs and had soloists of major stature such as the cellist Pablo Casals (who performed Haydn’s D major concerto and Schumann’s A minor concerto) and the pianist Arthur Rubinstein. 27

This was Ponce’s most prolific period as an essayist. He wrote thirty-eight articles for various magazines including Cultura, Revista Musical de México, México Moderno, Arte y Labor, and in the newspapers El Heraldo Ilustrado and El Universal. 28

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26 Ibid., 10.
27 Miranda, Manuel M. Ponce, 49.
28 Barrón Corvera, Manuel María Ponce, 184-189.
Ponce was the founder and director of the above-mentioned *Revista Musical de México* (Musical magazine of Mexico), and with the support of the editorial *Ediciones Mexico Moderno*, Ponce and composer Ruben M. Campos published twelve monthly issues which included essays, criticisms, scores and international music news.29

During this time, Ponce’s style advanced gradually toward a more modern language, and his preference for Impressionism is evident in a number of his compositions. He experimented with new textures, dissonance, unresolved harmonies, distant key relationships and nontraditional rhythms. Among his works from this period are *Canción de Otoño* (Autumn song) for violin and piano, *La mort*, a song cycle for voice and piano, *Balada Mexicana* (Mexican ballad) for piano and orchestra, *Interludio Elegiaco* for orchestra, first version of *Chapultepec* (a symphonic poem for orchestra), several piano works, and his first guitar work, *Valentina*.30

It is noteworthy that Ponce achieved such an immense and active career in a country that was suffering serious political and economic instability. In 1925, Ponce traveled back to Europe to revitalize his musical language and become acquainted with the latest compositional trends.

1925-1932

In the 1920’s and early 1930’s, Paris was once again Europe’s center of artistic activity, and housed artists from all over the world who were eager to participate in the latest aesthetic trends. At the age of forty-three, Ponce registered at the École Normale de Musique to continue his music studies with the pedagogue and composer Paul Dukas.

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also studied privately with Nadia Boulanger. Among his classmates are the Mexican composer José Rolón (1876-1945) and the Spanish composer Joaquín Rodrigo (1901-1999).

Ponce’s studies led him to revise his compositional technique and gradually transform his musical language by introducing new elements such as the subtle and colorful sonorities of the French Impressionists into his orchestral works (notably in his orchestral work *Chapultepec*), the use of unusual meters, a return to short forms in a neoclassic style, and the use of modality and polytonality. This was a fruitful period of musical productivity for Ponce, both in terms of quality and quantity. He concentrated on writing works for piano, chamber music and especially guitar music.

Ponce’s contribution to the repertoire for classical guitar is recognized around the world, most notably for his guitar Concerto, *Concierto del Sur* (Concerto of the south), which he concluded in 1941. Prior to making his second trip to Europe, Ponce met in Mexico the world-famous Spanish guitarist Andres Segovia. He was captivated by Segovia’s talent and wrote an arrangement of the folk song *La Valentina* for him, which pleased Segovia enormously. In Paris Ponce and Segovia initiated a reciprocal working relationship which became a lifelong friendship. Most of Ponce’s works for guitar were written in Paris, and within these works he employs different styles ranging from Baroque to the Contemporary, while in others he captures a Spanish flavor. Ponce’s guitar works include five Sonatas, one Sonatina, two Suites, twenty-four Preludes, two sets of Variations and three folk song arrangements. In 1948, Segovia stated:

Next to Turina, Falla, Manén, Castelnuovo, Tansman, Villa-Lobos, Tórroba, etc., more than all of them together, Ponce undertook his noble spirit to

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release the beautiful prisoner. Thanks to him, like the others mentioned, the guitar was rescued from the music written only for guitarists.32

Manuel M. Ponce gained recognition among the musical elite in Paris, and created a special connection with the Latin-American artistic community. In 1928, he founded and directed the magazine *Gaceta Musical*, an all-Spanish-language magazine that served as a link to support Latin-American music and provided music news from around the world. This was a valuable project that unfortunately, did not last long due to its lack of financial support. Among the artists who contributed to Ponce’s magazine were Manuel de Falla, José Vasconcelos, José Rolón, Joaquin Rodrigo, Alejo Carpentier, Paul Dukas, Darius Milhaud, Raymond Petit, Alfred Cortot, Marc Pincherle, Ruben M. Campos, and Joaquin Turina.33

Two of Ponce’s more substantial and complex chamber works were written during this period: the *Sonata Breve* for violin and piano and *Quatre Miniatures pour quatour à cordes* for string quartet, both of which reveal the composer’s mastery of modern compositional language and technique.

Ponce earned his composition degree in 1932. In the bulletin notes of the Ecole Normale de Musique, Paul Dukas wrote:

> The compositions of Manuel M. Ponce have the stamp of the most distinguished talent. They cannot be classified according to any scholastic criteria. I would feel reticent to assign him a grade even if it were the highest one, in order to express my satisfaction of having had a disciple so outstanding and personal.34

In 1933, Ponce returned to Mexico, and with his renewed style and extensive list of new works, he hoped to earn a commission to research indigenous music.

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32 Andrés Segovia, quoted in Mello, “Breve Reseña de la Obra de Ponce,” 5.


34 Paul Dukas, quoted in Ibid.
1933-1948

Ponce resumed his teaching duties at the Conservatorio Nacional and later at the Escuela Universitaria. Throughout his career, he taught piano, pedagogy, aesthetics, folk music, music history, analysis and composition. He founded the first course in musical folklore at the Escuela Universitaria and served as chairman of the same field at the Conservatory. He gave impulse to the first generation of ethnomusicologists in Mexico, and offered a folklore workshop which focused on collecting and organizing folk- themes by region. In an interview dating from 1941, he explained:

There [in the folklore class at the University] I’ve had the opportunity to expand my studies and compatible works, and to accumulate, above all, valuable material that is waiting to be published. My outstanding disciples and I have had the chance to gather, with sacrifice, their [folk melodies] musical traditions, which in many aspects remain free in their indigenous element.

In Mexico, he continued to write articles for several magazines and newspapers, El Universal, Excelsior, Música, Arte, Orientación Musical, México Musical and notably, the magazine Cultura Musical, which Ponce founded and directed with the sponsorship of the Conservatory.

In 1942, he was appointed to the post of music inspector for the department of the Fine Arts Institute, which was responsible for supervising the preschool level of public education. During this period he composed two major pedagogical works for children, Cantos infantiles para los jardines de niños (50 Children’s songs for kindergarten) and Veinte piezas fáciles (20 Easy pieces).

35 Miranda, Manuel M. Ponce, 76.

36 Manuel M. Ponce, quoted in Ibid.

37 Barrón Corvera, Manuel María Ponce, 18.
Ponce continued to write music with twentieth-century idioms, with sonorities and techniques such as dissonance, chromaticism, unresolved harmonies, non-tertian chords, polytonality and modality. Although these elements approach atonality, his works always retained a tonal context. His last compositions feature two compatible styles: a return to Nationalism with indigenous elements and neo-Romanticism.

In spite of his weakening health during the last five years of his life, Ponce was quite prolific, and his late orchestral works reveal his full maturity, both technically and stylistically. His late works include an orchestral version of *Suite en Estilo Antiguo*, a revised version of *Poema Elegíaco, Ferial, Instantaneas Mexicanas* and his masterpiece, the Violin Concerto.

His most notable neo-Romantic work is his world-recognized guitar concerto, *Concierto del Sur*, which received its premier on October 4, 1941, in Montevideo by the Spanish guitarist Andres Segovia.

Ponce made an enormous contribution to the body of Mexican vocal repertoire, beginning with an extensive collection of Mexican folk song arrangements and original songs with folk themes, including his output of entire song cycles, including *Tres Poemas de M. Brull* (Three poems by M. Brrull), *Cinco Poemas Chinos* (Five Chinese poems), *Cuatro Poemas Melancólicos* (Four melancholic poems), *Cuatro Poemas de A. de Icaza* (Four poems by A. de Icaza), *Seis Poemas Arcáicos* (Six archaic poems) and *Tres Poemas de Enrique Gonzalez Martinez* (Three poems by Enrique Gonzalez Martinez).38

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During his last years, Ponce received numerous awards and tributes. He was the first composer to receive Mexico’s National Arts and Sciences Award, and during the award ceremony, Carlos Chavez stated:

> When this prize was first instituted, it focused primarily on the merits of particular work. Now as result of legislative reform endorsed by the executive, it acknowledges the superior merit of a person who has dedicated his entire life to artistic creation. This is the case, unanimously recognized, regarding the figure of Professor Ponce. His historic situation in the development of Mexican music is of fundamental significance. He instituted the large forms, with the Trio and his Piano Concerto, at the beginning of this century. He is the first explorer of popular Mexican Art and the initiator of the first frankly nationalistic tendency in our country. His work, fertile and uninterrupted, has culminated in creations that, like his Guitar Concerto, have reached universal consecration.39

The ceremony took place on February 26, 1948, and two months later, on April 24, Manuel M. Ponce died from an attack of uremia.

Figure 1.1. *Manuel M. Ponce’s portrait.*

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Chapter 2

CHAMBER MUSIC

Overview

Manuel M. Ponce left a valuable legacy in his contribution to Mexican chamber music. Although his list of works for this genre represents only a small percentage of his total compositional output, the quality of these works clearly reveals the evolution of his compositional style.

Ponce was introduced to ensemble music very early in his formative years. During his childhood he sang in the children’s choir of his local church and while working as an organist during his early teen years, he began to write sacred works for vocal ensembles and organ. Some examples of these early works are *Ave gratia plena* (Hail full grace) for three voices and organ, *Bendita sea tu pureza* (Blessed be your purity) for soprano, contralto, tenor and bass with organ accompaniment, and *Pater Noster* for solo voice and organ. One secular ensemble work which also dates from this early period is the *Primera Gavota a cuatro manos* for piano four hands. 40

Ponce was a gifted pianist and often premiered his own works. He was also a noted chamber musician; he toured with the best performers of his time, and their performances gained international acclaim.

Ponce’s chamber music output is dominated by works for strings, the only exceptions being two small pieces for flute and piano and a hymn for trumpet and piano. His overwhelming preference for string writing may have been due to the natural trends of

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post-romanticism in the early twentieth century, an affinity for writing idiomatically for strings, or some combination of the two. His instrumentation combinations, however, were not always typical. In addition to traditional setting such as violin or cello and piano, piano trios, and string quartets, he also wrote works for violin and viola, three violins and piano, guitar and harpsichord, and guitar, violin, viola and cello.

These works can be easily divided into two types: there are sixteen short works and eleven large-scale works. All of these chamber works exemplify traditional forms and can be classified as “absolute” music. Only a couple of short works contain a suggestion of a narrative folkloric character.

Ponce’s scholars have performed a valuable service in cataloguing his music, although there is a distinct lack of continuity in their work, overall. Various authors have catalogued his work alphabetically, chronologically, by genre, by style, by instrumentation and by publisher. With regard to his chamber music, there are inconsistencies among the various listings as to the total number and exact chronology of the works. The most comprehensive catalogue, by the violinist and scholar Dr. Barrón Corvera, lists a total of twenty-seven chamber compositions, whereas most of the catalogues list only twenty-one. Also, most of the listings include the erroneous entry of an arrangement for violin and piano of the song Estrellita, made by the violinist Jascha Heifetz, which is omitted from this author’s list. Ponce’s own arrangements of songs for instrumental ensemble will be included at the end of this list.

In order to create a fully comprehensive as well as practical list of Ponce’s chamber works, this author has listed the works by instrumentation and also chronologically (within each instrument combination). When the date of composition and/or publisher is unknown, a question mark is given.
List of Chamber Music Works

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>PUBLISHER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Violin and piano</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeunesse</td>
<td>1905</td>
<td>Escuela Nacional de Música-UNAM, Mex.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romanzetta y Scherzo</td>
<td>1908</td>
<td>Escuela Nacional de Música-UNAM, Mex.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canción Mexicana</td>
<td>1915</td>
<td>[Manuscript]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canción de Otoño</td>
<td>1920</td>
<td>Peer International Corporation, New York.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonata Breve</td>
<td>1930</td>
<td>Schirmer, New York.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Violin and viola</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Violin and cello</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cadenza für die “Sinfonie Concertante” von J. Christian Bach</td>
<td></td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cello and piano</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canzoncina d’amore</td>
<td>1905</td>
<td>[Manuscript lost]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonata for violoncello and piano</td>
<td>1922</td>
<td>Breitkopf &amp; Haertel, Germany.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Granada</td>
<td>1927</td>
<td>[Manuscript]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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41 The author uses Jorge Barrón Corvera Manuel Maria Ponce A Bio-Bibliography as reference for the dates provided in this list, with the exception of Pastoricito Alegre and Pajarito, which dates were provided by the editors of the first edition of both works.
Violin, viola and cello
anicient
Trío para violín, viola 1943 [Manuscript]
y violoncello
Violin, viola and piano
Trío (1st mov.) 1929 [Manuscript]
Violin, cello and piano
Trío para violín, violoncello 1912 José Giralt e Hijo, Cuba.
y piano (Trío Romántico)
Violin, viola, cello and piano
Canto a las Hadas (1st mov.) 1910 [Manuscript]
String quartet
Andante 1902 [Manuscript lost]
Quatre miniatures pour 1927 Maurice Senart, Paris.
quatuor á cordes
String quartet 1936 Peer Music Classical, New York.
Three violins and piano
Andante 1910 [Manuscript incomplete]
Guitar, violin, viola and cello
Cuarteto 1946 Ediciones Musicales Yóloltl, México.
Guitar and harpsichord
Sonata for guitar and 1929 Peer International Corporation, New York.
harpsichord
Prelude 1936 Ediciones Musicales Yolotl, México.

**Flute and piano**

Pastorcito alegre 1912 Escuela Nacional de Música UNAM, Mex.
Pajarito 1912 Escuela Nacional de Música UNAM, Mex.

**Trumpet and piano**

Alla manera d’un inno 1914 Centro Nacional de Investigación, México.

**Ponce’s song arrangements for voice and/or instrumental ensemble**

Violin, viola, cello and guitar 8 songs (?)

Voice(s) and string quartet 2 Canciones (1925, Tagore)

Estrellita (1912)

La mort (1921, Tagore)

La visita (1934)

Serenata Mexicana (1915) 42

Un soir (1934)

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42 There are two more versions made by Ponce; the first for violin and piano (1915), and the second for violin, cello and piano (1925).
ROMANTIC TRIO (VIOLIN, CELLO, AND PIANO)

Historical Background

The Trio for Violin, Violoncello and Piano, referred to as the Romantic Trio, and the Piano Concerto represent the pinnacle of Ponce’s Romantic style. The Trio has a duration of approximately 33 minutes. It was published in Havana, Cuba in 1912, by José Girald e Hijo Editions. The work was premiered in Mexico City at the Teatro Abreu on July 9, 1912, with Pedro Valdez Fraga, violin, Ruben Montiel, cello and Manuel M. Ponce, piano.43 The program included works by Ponce exclusively, among them the Piano Concerto, Tres Cuadros Nocturnos (Three night pictures, for chamber orchestra) Romantic Trio, and eleven works for piano solo.44 The poet Luis G. Urbina recalled his impression of the concert as follows:

The success was prolonged, intensified, and was like a victorious farewell to the teacher, who in one night, spilled out the treasures of his inspiration[...] Seldom has a public been so chained to the magnetism of an artist.45

This ambitious concert represents a turning point in the history of Mexican music for two reasons: firstly, large-scale forms were added to the repertoire of Mexican concert music and secondly, this marked the beginning of nationalism in Mexican classical music, through the use of authentic folk and folk-like elements.

43 There is record of two previous performances, but it is most likely that neither was a performance of the complete work. The referred concerts occurred on March 19, 1911, and January 16, 1912, both performances featuring Ponce on piano.

44 The Piano Concerto was premiered two days earlier in collaboration with the Conservatory Orchestra, conducted by Julian Carrillo, and Ponce as the soloist.

45 Luis G. Urbina, quoted in Miranda, Manuel M. Ponce, 29.
Ponce started working on the Trio during his first trip to Europe (1904-1906) and finished it on May 11, 1912.\textsuperscript{46} One must acknowledge the mid-nineteenth-century musical language used by the composer prior to his studies in Italy. In Bologna, Ponce was criticized by the famous organist and composer Enrico Bossi. After listening to some of Ponce’s early piano works, the Italian professor commented:

God has given you the principle, which is inspiration and intelligence […] In 1905 one should write music of 1905 or even 1920, but never music of 1830. You have talent but you lack knowledge of musical technique […] I will recommend you to professor Dall’Olio, Puccini’s teacher; in that way you will have, though distantly, an illustrious fellow-student.\textsuperscript{47}

Ponce followed Bossi’s recommendation, enriched his knowledge of music theory, and polished his compositional technique, which allowed him to add complexity in the treatment of his music. But stylistically he expanded his framework only within his preference for the late-Romantic style, since the musical inheritance of his Italian professors was that of Liszt’s School. This influence is seen in the Trio and more evidently in the Piano Concerto.

An additional influence, resulting from his first trip to Europe, was Ponce’s fascination with the music of Debussy. Although the French influence is not as evident here as in his later works.

Prior to writing the Trio, Ponce composed four small chamber works, \textit{Jeunesse} (violin and piano, 1905), \textit{Canzoncina d’amore} (cello and piano, 1905), \textit{Romanzetta} and \textit{Scherzo} (violin and piano, 1908) and \textit{Scherzino} (violin and piano, 1910).

\textsuperscript{46} Catellanos, \textit{Manuel M. Ponce}, 38.

\textsuperscript{47} Bossi’s letter to Gabrielli dated 2 February 1905, quoted in Barrón Corvera, \textit{Manuel Maria Ponce}, 4.
Commentary

This author’s intention in the following commentary is to provide a functional analysis of the Trio for the interpreter. The analysis will cover the basic structure of the Trio, identifying the principal tonalities and thematic subdivisions within each movement. An examination of the thematic structure of each section will give the performer an understanding of the work’s musical content and the composer’s intention, as well as enhance the performer’s ability to capture with ease the character and style of the work, which is discussed in further detail within the performance considerations section of this chapter.

First Movement Analysis (Allegro enérgico)

Exposition: This movement is in sonata form. Within the clearly established sections of the form, Ponce takes great liberty in his thematic treatment; the close relationship between the thematic materials creates a variation-like quality within the sonata form.

Figure 3.1. Manuel M. Ponce, Romantic Trio, first movement, Exposition analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme:</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>A'</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>A*</th>
<th>Closing Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key:</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>f#</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>f#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure:</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The A theme is in the key of B minor. The accented rhythmic pattern in the piano part in measures 1-3 (see Example 3.1) serves as an introduction to the statement of the energetic A theme, which is transformed throughout the movement.

The A’ theme, in the key of G major, is a melodic expansion of the A theme and is rhythmically derived from the \( \frac{3}{4} \) \( \frac{3}{4} \) syncopation found in the A theme (see Example 3.3). In general terms, this movement is harmonically unstable. Ponce seldom stays in one tonality for long, as he employs chromaticism continually in the bass line, the inner voices and the melodic material, and often arrives in distant key areas from the original tonality (see Example 3.2).
Example 3.2. Manuel M. Ponce, *Romantic Trio*, first movement, mm. 25-35.

The B theme is harmonically unstable, although it revolves around the key of f# minor. The A’’ theme is an augmentation of the A theme’s rhythmic and melodic shape, which creates a feeling of melancholy. The close relationship of the A, A’ and A’’ themes can be seen in the thematic index (see Example 3.3).

Ponce prepares for the arrival of the closing theme by increasing the tempo *(accelerando, m. 59)*, the dynamic level *(ff, m. 60)* and the tessitura of the music *(A7 violin, A6 cello, m. 60)*. In the closing theme, Ponce clearly establishes the key of f# minor (see Figure 3.1). The third-related harmonic movement and sweeping inner lines between the changing chromatic harmonies in the closing theme is a departure from traditional harmonic conventions, which is in keeping with late nineteenth-century and turn of the century compositional practices (see Example 3.4).
Example 3.4. Manuel M Ponce, *Romantic Trio*, first movement, mm. 64-78.

**Development:** Ponce uses the three-note opening motive of the A theme throughout the Development, being present in the A theme-related passages and in the transitions.

Figure 3.2. Manuel M Ponce, *Romantic Trio*, first movement, Development analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Section</th>
<th>Part 1</th>
<th>Part 2</th>
<th>Part 3</th>
<th>Re-Transition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme:</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A'</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key:</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>F#</td>
<td>c#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure:</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part 1 is based on the A and A’ themes, which are alternated abruptly, creating an odd transition to the light and fluid C theme to come. The A’ theme is written entirely for the piano and is the only instance in which the piano is given a theme in full.

At the beginning of Part 2, Ponce presents the new material of the C theme in the bright key of F# Major. This theme is an interesting mixture of three elements used previously in the movement; first, the three-note opening motive of the A theme, but with three whole-step intervals which appeared in the B theme; second, the triplet rhythm which is used throughout the movement; and third, the intervals and rhythm of the A theme appearing in retrograde form (see Example 3.5). This mixture exemplifies Ponce’s compositional craftsmanship and corroborates the organic nature of the music, which continually dissolves from one theme to the next.

Example 3.5. Manuel M. Ponce, Romantic Trio, first movement, C theme’s construction.

Part 3 is a continuation of the materials already used in the Development, with the addition of important virtuosic elements in the violin part. In fact, the violin is given soloistic treatment throughout the Development, complete with cadenza-like material in measures 127-137 (see Example 3.9).
Recapitulation: Ponce takes great freedom in his treatment of the final section of this movement, in that introduces a new theme before the statement of the B theme (see Figure 3.3). The D theme has the light arpeggio accompaniment of the A’’ with the recurrent triplet rhythm used throughout the exposition (see Example 3.6).

Figure 3.3. Manuel M. Ponce, *Romantic Trio*, first movement, Recapitulation analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme:</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>A’’</th>
<th>Closing Theme</th>
<th>Codetta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key:</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>Ab</td>
<td>f#</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>b</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure:</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


After the statement of the D theme, Ponce maintains the formal structure as he did in the Exposition, keeping the light, descending arpeggio accompaniment previously used up to the closing theme.

First Movement Performance Considerations (Allegro enérgico)

The first movement of this work represents a major performance challenge for the ensemble, due to the continuous variation of closely related thematic material. This movement requires a creative and subtle interpretive plan in order to provide the audience with a fluid and interesting performance.
Ponce makes modest use of articulation marks, leaving wide open the range of interpretive possibilities for the ensemble. This lack of attention to detail from the composer and/or the editors calls for careful consideration when articulations are actually given. The author encourages ensemble members to collaborate on editing the movement thoroughly, in order to correct and/or add articulation marks where appropriate. One should be mindful of the fact that the Romantic Trio was Ponce’s first work in a large-scale form for a chamber ensemble of more than two instruments; therefore, this early somewhat experimental chamber work should be approached as such. The author believes that accents and slurs should be the primary focus of review in this movement.

**Accents:** Accents appear exclusively in the string parts, and only in three instances; first, in most occurrences of the ascending three-note opening motive; second, in the climactic transition that leads to the closing theme in the Exposition; and third, in the restatement of the A theme in the Recapitulation.

One can readily see the inconsistency in the use of accents in Example 3.7. For example, there is an accent in the violin part on the second beat of measure 170, but none in the identical writing in the cello part. Also, note the absence of accents on the three-note motive in the violin part in measure 169, which is preceded by the motive with accents in the cello part in the previous measure. The natural shape of the phrase indeed requires more weight on the second beat of measure 170; perhaps the composer’s intention was to emphasize the arrival of the Recapitulation.

This is just one of several passages that require editorial attention, and in most cases the mistakes can be easily detected and corrected. In general, the author recommends adding articulation marks in passages which share similar thematic material, making sure the changes are always coherent and consistent with the musical content and structure.

**Slurs:** As with accents, slurs appear mainly in the string parts. Ponce’s slurs relate more to bowings than they do to long phrasing, which has long been a controversial subject among composers, editors and performers. Ponce’s writing reveals his understanding of bowing indications, in spite of its inconsistent realization in the score.
As a rule, Ponce uses slurs to group either four eighth notes (generally in the cello part) or two eighth notes preceded or followed by a longer note value (mainly in the violin part). This editorial approach can be seen in example 3.8: the cello and piano should homogenize their articulations, and decide if it may be more appropriate to play the eighth notes with a slightly detached articulation (mm. 19-21) in order to give emphasis to the legato articulation given in the \textit{pp} passage to follow (mm. 20-24).


\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{example3.8.png}
\end{figure}

General considerations: In general terms, the lyric quality and shape of each theme dictates the phrasing clearly. The performer should differentiate between melodic and rhythmic materials and determinate the articulation accordingly. The inclusion of dynamics, expression marks and tempo indications will then be better realized after making articulation choices.

The violin is the predominant instrument throughout the entire Trio. Ponce makes effective use of the violin’s singing tone quality. The writing is technically more challenging for the violin than for the other instruments and includes detailed articulations (see Example 3.9).
The cello part is secondary to the violin part, but it includes interesting contrapuntal textures and imitative passages that support the violin and give it a feeling of equal importance. In this movement, the piano has primarily an accompanimental role and is the most neglected part in terms of articulation. Ponce premiered and performed the *Romantic Trio* often, which may well be the reason for his disregard of detail in the editing of the piano part.

The author’s general recommendations for the pianist’s consideration are: to emphasize the constant chromatic inner motion; to imitate the string instruments’ articulation; to lean towards legato playing; to use extensive stylistically Romantic pedaling; and to play with freedom in the tempo according to the thematic changes.
Second Movement Analysis (Andante Romántico)

The second movement is in ternary form (see Figure 3.4). The composer maintains the same tonal center throughout the movement, with brief harmonic changes in the B, B’, and B” themes. The simple harmonies and ternary meter recall the composer’s early style, which was influenced by the tradition of salon music established in Mexico near the end of the nineteenth century, most notably by the Mexican composers Felipe Villanueva, Ernesto Elorduy and Ricardo Castro.\(^{48}\)

Figure 3.4. Manuel M. Ponce, Romantic Trio, second movement, analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>B’</th>
<th>A’</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>B”</th>
<th>C”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key:</td>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure:</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The A section has three themes within an arch form (see Figure 3.4). The first theme is an elegant mazurka which exhibits the characteristic shifting emphasis to the second beat of the bar within a triple meter.\(^{49}\) Ponce uses the same melodic and rhythmic pattern in many of his early piano Mazurkas.\(^{50}\) Of particular note is the similarity between the A theme and Ponce’s Mazurka No.23 for piano (see Example 3.10).

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\(^{48}\) Moreno Rivas, Rostrros del Nacionalismo en la Música Mexicana, 91.


\(^{50}\) There are 27 Mazurkas by Ponce, all written between 1900 and 1917.
Example 3.10. Comparison between *Mazurka No. 23* and the A theme.

**A** Manuel M. Ponce, *Mazurka No. 23*, mm. 1-2.

**B** Manuel M. Ponce, *Romantic Trio*, second movement, mm. 1-2.

The arch form of the A section contains an interesting rhythmic transformation. The A theme within the Mazurka style is clearly heard in a fluent and always moving 3/4 meter. The melodic and accompaniment material of the B theme keep the 3/4 meter, but longer melodic note values in the thematic material create the feeling of a slower tempo, and the C theme is perceived as a hypermeter of 2/2, in which each beat is one entire 3/4 measure.

The B section is in simple ternary form. Ponce changes the meter to 6/8 in measure 124, reinforcing the dance-like quality of the movement. Theme D has the light texture of a Ländler, while the E theme has the improvisatory character of a Chopinesque waltz (see Examples 3.11 and 3.12).
Example 3.11. Manuel M. Ponce, *Romantic Trio*, second movement, D theme, mm. 124-129.


The simple harmonic treatment in this movement is compensated for by the fluent connection between the dance styles. Ponce does not introduce Mexican folk themes in his chamber music at this period of his compositional career, but within this movement he resumes the nineteenth-century European conventions of the previous generation.

**Second Movement Performance Considerations (Andante Romántico)**

The Trio for violin, violoncello and piano is often referred to as the *Romantic Trio*, and this movement’s initial tempo marking, Andante Romantico, in hand with the general Romantic character of the work, seems to be credited to the given title.\(^{51}\) The evolution in Ponce’s compositional technique is notable from the first movement to the subsequent one. The music is revealing of the time gap between when the two

\(^{51}\) Jorge Barron Corvera, “Three violin works by the Mexican composer Manuel Maria Ponce (1882-1948): Analysis and performance” (DMA diss., University of Austin at Texas, 1993), 44.
movements were written. As mentioned earlier, Ponce started working on the Romantic Trio from 1904-1906, during his first visit to Europe, and finished it in 1912 in Mexico City.

The second movement already reveals the composer to have a better understanding of the intimate art of chamber music. Some of the advances seen in the second movement include: better integration of the parts, more technical and musical equality in the writing for all the instruments, consistency in the inclusion of tempo and dynamic marks, better attention to the use of articulation marks, and more detailed writing and editing for the piano part.

**Tempo marks:** The ensemble should pay special attention the six tempo changes throughout the movement. It is recommended that the players allow for subtle tempo changes in accordance with the romantic vein of the music. The ensemble should emphasize the meter change from section A to B and feel the rhythmic transformation (within the A section’s arch form) described in the previous section of this chapter.

**Articulation:** This movement also requires careful editing from the ensemble. There are three notable changes in Ponce’s writing in this movement: longer phrasing for the strings, better attention to articulation and phrase markings in piano, and the inclusion of bowings within detailed articulations. These improvements are noteworthy but, unfortunately, they are not consistent (see Example 3.13). The author’s suggested articulations and bowings are shown in parenthesis.

A Manuel M. Ponce, *Romantic Trio*, second movement, mm. 1-5.

B Manuel M. Ponce, *Romantic Trio*, second movement, mm. 30-34.

C Manuel M. Ponce, *Romantic Trio*, second movement, mm. 164-168.
Third Movement Analysis (Scherzo)

The third movement is a Scherzo in rounded binary form (see Figure 3.5) and Trio in da capo ternary form.

Figure 3.5. Manuel M Ponce, *Romantic Trio*, third movement, analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section:</th>
<th>Scherzo</th>
<th>Trio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub Section</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme: A:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key: f#</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure: 1</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The A theme has a question and answer quality (see Example 3.14). Ponce states the theme four times with frequent variations in articulations, dynamics and instrumentation. The B theme is a brief lament which is interrupted by the “question” motive of the A theme (see Example 3.15). Ponce elaborates the transition to the coda by using the rhythmic motive (see Example 3.16)

The Trio features the C theme, which is one of the most beautiful themes of the entire work. The C theme is perceived in a slower duple meter, but it is actually written with the same fast pulse and triple meter of the scherzo. The long note melody’s values were written expressly for the cello’s rich, deep tone and voice. This is the first time the cello is given a theme in full. The C’’ theme is a preparation for the return to the Scherzo, accompanied by the violin with thematic material from the A theme.

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52 Ibid., 54.
Third Movement Performance Considerations (Scherzo)

Articulation: Ponce achieves the *giocoso* character of a scherzo with a playful dialogue between the piano and the string instruments. The rhythmic nature of the A theme and its constant repetition are well suited to elaboration with different articulations: Ponce writes five different versions of the A theme, but unfortunately the articulations seem to exhibit inconsistencies in his writing more than conveying a conscious interpretative search for variety (see Example 3.17).

Example 3.17. A theme’s articulation inconsistencies.

There are several instances which clearly demonstrate Ponce’s intention to use three different articulations within the first four-measure A theme: legato (first measure), portamento (second measure) and staccato (third measure). There are also accents on the first beat of the third and fourth measures. This alternating articulation principle can be manipulated in different combinations in order to create a more interesting performance.
Dynamics: This movement is somewhat lacking in dynamic markings. In general terms, the dynamics in the Scherzo indicate a gradual increase in sound, and in the Trio, a gradual decrease. The author recommends that the ensemble add contrast to the repetition of the Scherzo by inverting the order of the dynamics or by increasing the contrast in dynamic level, to mention just two possibilities.

Tempo: The single tempo indication of the movement, “Vivace”, can be interpreted in different ways. This author’s suggestion is to determine the tempo according to the tempo of the Trio. The scherzo’s 3/4 meter can be felt in one pulse in order to arrive at the slow but flowing C theme.

Fourth Movement Analysis (Allegro Moderato)

The last movement is in sonata allegro form and is in the key of B minor (see Figure 3.6).

Figure 3.6. Manuel M Ponce, *Romantic Trio*, fourth movement, analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section:</th>
<th>Exposition</th>
<th>Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub Section</td>
<td>Bridge</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme:</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key:</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure:</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section:</th>
<th>Recapitulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub Section</td>
<td>Bridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme:</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key:</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure:</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the Exposition, Ponce makes use of two contrasting themes, the A theme has a restless quality and the B theme is lyrical and romantic.

The three instruments all state a varied version of the B theme, first separately and later in an eloquent dialogue. Ponce’s writing here is tasteful and idiomatic.
In the Development, Ponce makes use of his contrapuntal skills with fugue-like material (mm.104-149) which moves from one brief key center to another. The Recapitulation is similar to the Exposition, and the coda ends with a delicate *morendo*-like C theme.

**Fourth Movement Performance Considerations (Allegro Moderato)**

The fourth movement is technically more demanding than the previous three movements. The A theme includes constant detached sixteenth notes in a fast tempo for all three instruments. Ponce reserved his more aggressive material for the end of the work. Some of the characteristics of the fourth movement are subito *f p* dynamics, *marcato* writing, detached sixteenth notes in a fast tempo, and augmented chords in fast chromatic motion (see Example 3.18). The ensemble should keep the vivid excitement of the music within a controlled tempo, keeping in mind the composer’s tempo marking of Allegro Moderato.

The last movement shows a decrease in the composer’s attention to articulations. The rhythmic quality of the fast sections mainly require detached articulations, and the author suggests: *staccato* playing for the sixteenth notes, *portato* playing for the eighth notes, and *tenutos* for the quarter notes.

The fugue-like section (see Figure 3.6) should be subjected to a more refined study and choice of articulations and interval phrasing in order to effect the Baroque-influenced quality of the music. Notice that the decrease in tempo in this fugue-like section (Allegro non troppo) works well to support this kind of refinement.
The lyrical sections of this movement are fully characteristic of Ponce’s Romantic style. There is a common performance practice in Mexico of playing Ponce’s music with too much *rubato* and extreme inflections of tempo. Whether or not one might question this practice as being accurate or tasteful, the performers should keep in mind that this music is not to be played in a rigid manner.
Chapter 4

SONATA FOR VIOLONCELLO AND PIANO

Historical Background

Ponce started working on the *Sonata for violoncello and piano* during his stay in Havana, Cuba, from 1915 to 1917, and finished it in Mexico City in 1922. The manuscript is dated October 27, 1922, and is dedicated to the Uruguayan cellist Oscar Nicastro.\(^{53}\) The work was premiered at the Teatro Principal in Mexico City on October 8, 1922, with cellist Oscar Nicastro and the composer at the piano.\(^{54}\) Alba Herrera y Ogazón commented on the premier of the Cello Sonata:

> With the sonata for violoncello and piano recently premiered, Ponce confirms his personality as a musician of high capacities and international future [..] The above-mentioned work is conscientious and beautiful. It is also an extremely modern work, poured in the models of the composition “up-to-date”.\(^{55}\)

The Cello Sonata was first published in 1922 by the German publisher Breitkopf & Haertel. A second, more recent edition was published in 2005 in Mexico City, by the Escuela Nacional de Música (National School of Music-ENM) of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (National Autonomous University of Mexico-UNAM).

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\(^{54}\) Manuel M. Ponce, *SONATA Violoncello y Piano*, prepared from autograph and earlier print by Gustavo Martín Márquez and María Teresa Frenk Mora, rev. ed. (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma de México Escuela Nacional de Música, 2005), 5.

\(^{55}\) Alba Herrera y Ogazón, quoted in Barrón Corvera, “Música de Cámara para Instrumentos de Arco,”(Chamber music for bowed string instruments) *Heterofonía* 118-119, January-December, 1998, 76. Alba Herrera y Ogazón was one of the first female musicologists in Mexico.
The 2005 edition of the Sonata, produced as part of the Special Edition Clema Ponce, was carefully edited by cello professor Gustavo Martín and piano professor María Teresa Frenk.

It is worth mentioning that an historic event changed the course of history for Ponce’s music. In 1998 the National School of Music (ENM-UNAM) received the entire private library of Manuel M. Ponce’s works, which was donated by the pianist Carlos Vázquez, Ponce’s former student, dear friend and sole heir. The wealth of this generous donation of more than 600 titles includes manuscripts, first editions and even photocopies of works believed to have been lost. Initially the music was placed in the reserved fund of the library Cuicamatini of the ENM-UNAM. The University made the commitment to organize, catalogue, preserve and, above all, spread Ponce’s music. The project is being coordinated by the prominent scholar and pianist Paolo Mello. The editors of the 2005 edition of the Cello Sonata worked on a copy of the manuscript, as the original has been lost.

Manuel M. Ponce’s first compositional efforts in sonata structure produced his Piano Sonatas No.1 and No.2, dated 1913 and 1916, respectively. Both works serve as precedents to the Cello Sonata, which was Ponce’s first endeavor in instrumental sonata writing. There are four sonatas in his chamber music output: the Cello Sonata, the Violin and Viola Sonata, the Guitar and Harpsichord Sonata and the Sonata Breve for violin and piano. In addition, he wrote six sonatas and one sonatina for guitar,\(^{56}\) and three sonatas and one sonatina for piano, a total of fifteen sonatas in all.

\(^{56}\) One of the Guitar Sonatas has been lost.
In the first chapter the author mentioned that Ponce is credited with introducing large-scale forms and folk elements into the Mexican concert music repertoire. In relation to sonata writing, it is important to clarify that Ponce was not the first Mexican composer to write a sonata, but the first to use large-scale forms in large multi-movement works.  

In Mexico, the earliest attempts at sonata writing were made during Mexico’s Colonial Period and were influenced by Baroque style. Examples of these early works are: 13 Sonatas in the MNA Manuscript (1759), 13 Sonatas in the Guadalupe Mayner’s Codex (1804), and 34 Anonymous Sonatas in the Cathedral of Mexico’s Codex. In the generations before Ponce, we find Sonata by Melesio Morales (1883), Sonata by Aurelio Lopez (1902) and a Suite by Ricardo Castro (1904) which employs sonata form in the last movement.

The Cello Sonata and the Piano Sonata No.2 are Ponce’s first attempts to modernize his compositional style. Ponce departs from the late-nineteenth century Romantic style of his Romantic Trio, and makes use of a more complex harmonic treatment in a composite language reflective of the late Romantic and the French Impressionist styles.

57 Castellanos, Manuel M. Ponce, 32.


59 Castellanos, Manuel M. Ponce, 32.

60 Barrón Corvera “Música de Cámara para Instrumentos de Arco,” 76.
Ponce defined his Cello Sonata as “a discreetly modernist essay”. With this modest comment, Ponce delimits his earlier neo-Romantic style and reveals his preference for a modern style, more in accord with his time. It is important to mention that Ponce’s Cello Sonata is still considered one of the most important works in the Mexican cello literature.

The Cello Sonata was written ten years after the Romantic Trio. Ponce’s compositional evolution is evident when comparing the two works. The Cello Sonata reveals Ponce’s greater understanding of the intimate nature of chamber music. Some evident improvements include: equally balanced writing for both instruments, idiomatic writing with full knowledge of the technical possibilities of each instrument, use of detailed articulation and dynamics, use of non-redundant and contrasting thematic material, well defined and balanced forms, and an increase of technical difficulty for both instruments.

The structural dimensions of Ponce’s Cello Sonata resemble those of Frederic Chopin’s Sonata for cello and piano. It is very likely that Ponce used Chopin’s Sonata as a reference for his own, since they both share common characteristics, such as; the key of G minor, a four-movement structure, a first movement in sonata form, a second movement in ternary form with a Scherzo-Trio structure, a lyrical and slow third movement, and a rhythm-dominated fourth movement.

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Commentary

First Movement Analysis (Allegro selvaggio)

During Ponce’s two-year stay in Havana, Cuba, he had the opportunity to become acquainted with the rich musical folklore of that country. This influence is evident in the first movement of the Cello Sonata. The rhythmic pattern in the piano accompaniment of the opening theme is based on the Cuban “cinquillo”, an Afro-Cuban rhythm comprised of five syncopated notes, most commonly noted: 2/4 \( \frac{3}{4} \) \( \frac{3}{4} \) \( \frac{3}{4} \) \( \frac{3}{4} \).\(^{62}\) Ponce used the same rhythmic resource in other works from this period and in later compositions as well, most notably in his vocal work *Elegia de la Ausencia* and the guitar work *Rumba* (see Example 4.1).

Example 4.1. Three different works by Manuel M. Ponce which include the Cuban cinquillo.

A Manuel M. Ponce, *Sonata for violoncello and piano*, first movement, mm. 1-3.

---


![Elegia de la Ausencia](image)

C Manuel M. Ponce, *Rumba*, mm. 1-5.

![Rumba](image)

Ponce defines the rumba as “savage and obscene”, which is echoed in his tempo marking for this movement, “Allegro selvaggio” (savage Allegro). One should consider the origin of this Afro-Cuban dance. The rumba originated in the dances of the Congo cult in the region of southwestern central Africa, and it was danced with extensive hip and shoulder movements and improvised acrobatics. In Cuba, the rumba is defined by its accompaniment, which is most often played by percussion instruments.

**Exposition:** The first movement, in the key of G minor, is in sonata form (see Figure.4.1).

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Figure 4.1. Manuel M. Ponce, *Sonata for violoncello and piano*, first movement, analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section:</th>
<th>Exposition</th>
<th>Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Section:</td>
<td>Bridge</td>
<td>Transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme:</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key:</td>
<td>g</td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure:</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section:</th>
<th>Recapitulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Section:</td>
<td>Bridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme:</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key:</td>
<td>g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure:</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first statement of the A theme is presented in the cello, with the “Cuban cinquillo” accompaniment in the piano (see Example 4.4 A). In the second statement, the instruments alternate parts. The A theme is harmonically ambiguous starting with a “soft” tonic minor seventh chord, shifting away in parallel harmonic motion, then going back to this i7. The B theme is in the key of Eb major, and has the romantic, lyrical and emotional characteristics that are found in the works from Ponce’s earlier period. Similarities can be seen in the piano writing in mm. 39-40 of this work and in mm. 85-86 of the first movement of the *Romantic Trio* (see Example 4.2).
Example 4.2. Comparison between piano writing of *Sonata for violoncello and piano* and *Romantic Trio*.

A Manuel M. Ponce, *Sonata for violoncello and piano*, first movement, mm. 39-40.

![Musical notation](image1)

B Manuel M. Ponce, *Romantic Trio*, first movement, mm. 85-86.

![Musical notation](image2)

**Development:** In the Development, Ponce elaborates on the dominant rhythmic motives of the A and B themes. The recurrent rhythmic motive: 4\( \frac{3}{4} \) \( \frac{1}{2} \) \( \frac{3}{4} \) \( \frac{1}{2} \) \( \frac{3}{4} \) \( \frac{1}{2} \) \( \frac{3}{4} \) presented in the beginning of the Recapitulation, is a variant of the cinquillo, the dominant rhythmic motive in the accompaniment of the A theme. Ponce also makes use of rhythmic-intervallic elements from the cello’s opening motive of the B theme, elaborating on various intervals such as the perfect fifth, the major sixth and the minor seventh. Ponce prepares the arrival of the Recapitulation by using minor chords in ascending minor-third
progressions, creating a prolonged resolution to intensify the recapitulation’s arrival (see Example 4.3).

Example 4.3. Manuel M. Ponce, *Sonata for violoncello and piano*, first movement, mm. 136-139.

Recapitulation: In keeping with traditional sonata form, the A theme is restated exactly as it appeared in the Exposition (see Figure 4.1). A fast harmonic progression (m.171) forms the transition which leads to the statement of the B theme, in the key of G Major. Ponce uses the same small codetta presented at the end of the Exposition to finish the movement.

**First Movement Performance Considerations (Allegro selvaggio)**

The author strongly recommends that performers use the recent second edition.65 The mistakes and inconsistencies found in the manuscript and in the Breitkopf und Haertel Edition were carefully reviewed and corrected by the editors, Gustavo Martín (cello part) and María Teresa Frenk (piano part), in addition to which they included their own valuable musical suggestions.

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As mentioned earlier, the first movement comprises two contrasting ideas which are united by a similar rhythmic-intervallic opening motive. The first, the A theme, has a strong rhythmic character and the second, the B theme, has a lyrical quality.

It is important to establish the editorial and compositional differences which occur in various appearances of the same thematic material. Ponce’s writing reveals a more aggressive character for the cello part in the exposition. Notice, for example, the rhythmic difference and detailed articulation given to the cello part in comparison with the piano part for the statement of the A theme in the Exposition (see Example 4.4). In the recapitulation, however, Ponce gives both instruments the same rhythmic values used in the cello’s first statement of the A theme. In his earlier works this could have been attributed to a lack of consistency on the composer’s part, but not on the Cello Sonata. Therefore, it is important to emphasize these rhythmic differences.

Example 4.4. A theme’s rhythmic difference between cello and piano parts.

A Manuel M. Ponce, Sonata for violoncello and piano, first movement, mm. 1-5.
B Manuel M. Ponce, *Sonata for violoncello and piano*, first movement, mm. 16-21.

The first edition includes the metronome marking of a half note = 68, which is also included in the second edition with a foot-note from the editors. All the metronomic indications found in the German edition were added by the composer. This author, however, suggests not exceeding 63 for the half note in order to preserve the “selvaggio” character of the movement. This quality should be achieved through the music’s rhythmic excitement and not through speed.

The first movement includes some technically awkward passages for both instruments, most notably in the transition from the B theme to the codetta, in both the Exposition and the Recapitulation (see Example 4.5). Notice the fast ascending arpeggio in both hands in the piano and the descending chords in dotted rhythm. The editor of the piano part in the second edition makes excellent fingering suggestions.
Example 4.5. Manuel M. Ponce, Sonata for violoncello and piano, first
movement, mm. 49-55.

Second Movement Analysis (Allegro alla maniera d’uno studio)

The second movement is in compound ternary form, in the key of Eb Major (see Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2. Manuel M. Ponce, Sonata for violoncello and piano, second
movement, analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section:</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>Coda</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Transition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Section</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme:</td>
<td>A'</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B'</td>
<td>A''</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key:</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>eb</td>
<td>Eb</td>
<td>Eb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure:</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The editors of the second edition of the Cello Sonata found that Ponce changed
the wording of the original tempo indication alla maniera d’uno scherzo, by scratching
out the last word and changing it to *studio* (study). The nature of the movement is indeed that of a Scherzo-Trio, but it is likely that Ponce changed the word due to the difficult technical demands of both parts in the A section.

The A section is in rounded binary form (see Figure 4.2). Its construction revolves around a quintuplet rhythmic figure which increases in technical difficulty from one section to the next. The author views the thematic materials in this movement more as an addition to the technical display than as the music’s main focus of attention. One interesting section is the return to the A’ theme (mm. 37), in which the bass line in the piano part takes part of the original scheme with a right-hand virtuoso quintuplet figure, while the cello line plays a B’-related theme (see Example 4.6).

Example 4.6. Manuel M. Ponce, *Sonata for violoncello and piano*, second movement, mm. 35-41.

Again, this movement has a feeling of harmonic instability. Ponce centers movement around the keys of Eb Major and its relative minor (C minor), making continuous use of chromatic harmonies (A’ theme), long pedal points (B theme and coda) and blurred harmonies (B section).
The contrasting B section is reflective and lyrical. Blurred harmonies within a walking line in the piano part support the emotive, long melody lines played by the cello. Ponce’s use of long sustained notes displays the beautiful, singing tone quality of the cello. The cello writing in this section can be compared to the similarly lyrical cello writing in the third movement of the *Romantic Trio* (see Example 4.7).

Example 4.7. Comparison between cello writing in *Sonata for violoncello and piano*, and *Romantic Trio*.

A Manuel M Ponce, *Sonata for violoncello and piano*, second movement, mm. 75-81 and mm. 92-99.
B Manuel M. Ponce, *Romantic Trio*, third movement, mm. 112-122 and mm. 145-150.

Second Movement Performance Considerations (Allegro alla maniera d’uno studio)

The tempo indication for this movement is Allegro, with a quarter note = 96. This tempo indication obviously does not match the tempo range of Allegro, but rather the tempo of an Andante. In any event, this author recommends not exceeding 80 for the quarter note. As seen in previous movements, the metronome markings are somewhat high. It is important to adjust the tempo of each movement by allowing the character and the natural flow of the music to dictate the speed.

This movement is technically very demanding and requires intense individual preparation from both performers. Ponce’s writing reveals an inclination toward detached articulations, an even more difficult task given the speed and technical difficulty of the
music. The ensemble should strive for clarity and delineate rhythmic subdivisions with clear articulations.

Ponce writes just one *ligadura* for the left-hand passage of the piano part in the A theme (see Example 4.8), and provides a more detailed articulation for the cello part, especially for the quintuplet passages. Notice the cello’s detailed articulation in the statement of the B theme in measures 17-24 (see Example 4.9). The editorial details in this passage are worth considering for the unedited right-hand piano part in the similar passage of the return from the B section to the A section.


The B-related thematic material in the A section of this movement has a Spanish flavor, with syncopated pedal notes in the left hand of the piano part, and the melodic cello line with the emphasis on the two sixteenth notes of the first beat of measures 18, 20, 22 etc. (see Example 4.9). The performers should interpret this passage with a Spanish “cante jondo” (deep song) feeling. 66

The B section requires the subtle use of tone-color changes, *a la Debussy*, in order to enhance the blurred, fluid harmonies which support the emotive cello line.

**Third Movement Analysis (Arietta-Andantino affettuoso)**

The third movement has the key signature of D Major and is in ternary form. The movement is underscored by the recurrent presence of two motives. The primary motive 1 is presented in the piano part and has an introductory function, and motive 2 is

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66 *Cante Jondo* is a generic term encompassing the purest and oldest strata songs of the flamenco tradition, which originated in the provinces of Andalusia in southern Spain.
presented in the cello line as an ending gesture (see Example 4.10). Motive 2 is strongly related to motive 1 by the piano accompaniment, which is a variant of motive 1.

Example 4.10. Manuel M. Ponce, *Sonata for violoncello and piano*, third movement, motive 1 (mm. 1-3) and motive 2 (mm. 14-17).

Motive 1

![Motive 1](image1)

Motive 2

![Motive 2](image2)

Of the four movements in this sonata, this movement most closely resembles the language of French Impressionism. Blurred harmonies within an ostinato accompaniment support the varied A theme, which always arrives at the same final gesture (motive 2), in a ii-V7-I progression in the key of D Major (see Figure 4.3). The unusual key relationships within sections and between thematic statements appear to be based on whole-step and half-step movement, rather than on key signature relationships (see Figure 4.3), which, perhaps, represents an effort to create the feeling of a “floating” tonal center.
Figure 4.3. Manuel M. Ponce, *Sonata for violoncello and piano*, third movement, analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section:</th>
<th>A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motive:</td>
<td>1 2 1 2 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme:</td>
<td>A A' A&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key:</td>
<td>d# d# D f# C# D Bb B D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure:</td>
<td>1 4 14 20 26 32 38 45 49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The B section is clearly Impressionistic. Ponce captures the style effectively through the use of tremolos, trills, fast descending runs, soft dynamics and unresolved harmonies, and within this new texture Ponce arrives once more at the recurring final gesture (motive 2). The return to the A section is a conclusive statement.

**Third Movement Performance Considerations (Arietta-Andantino affettuoso)**

The lyrical third movement encompasses moments of great tenderness and languor. During his lifetime, Ponce was classified as a “romantic” composer, a description which relates more accurately to his talent for expressing the deepest human emotions rather than whether or not he wrote in a Romantic musical style. This movement particularly shows Ponce’s gift for lyrical expression.

The movement has a vocal quality, which is in keeping with the title *Arietta*, a small aria. The structure of the piece can be easily assimilated if one views the A themes as vocal, improvisational strophes, and the motive 2 as an instrumental *ritornello*. The music should be played with free use of tempo inflections, with a return to the original tempo at the entrance of motive 2.
A particularly difficult passage for the pianist is the B section; therefore the ensemble should start the movement in sufficiently relaxed tempo so as not to compromise this *Animato* section. This section strongly resembles the music of the French Impressionistic style. One should notice that this is the first time the composer included a pedal indication in the piano part (see Example 4.11). The pianist should incorporate an ethereal sound with subtle color changes, and give freedom to the fluid writing with tempo inflections. It is important to give direction to the left-hand eighth notes in order to maintain the ensemble’s unity and return to the forward motion of the movement’s ending gesture.

Example 4.11. Manuel M. Ponce, *Sonata for violoncello and piano*, third movement, mm. 52-61.
Fourth Movement Analysis (Allegro burlesco)

The last movement is in the key of G Minor, and the rhythmic A theme dictates the development of the entire movement. Sections A and A’ carry the weight of the piece while the short B sections, in a slower tempo, are transitional (see Figure 4.4). The main theme can be divided into three small motives which are explored extensively throughout the movement (see Example 4.12).


Ponce makes excellent use of contrapuntal technique, most notably in the fugal section. He avoids establishing clearly defined tonal centers for long periods, and moves quickly from one harmonic progression to the next.

The B section is highly chromatic, and the constant use of dissonance in all three voices resembles a more contemporary language.

Figure 4.4. Manuel M. Ponce, *Sonata for violoncello and piano*, fourth movement, analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section:</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>A’ (Fugue and fughetta)</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>Coda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme:</td>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key:</td>
<td>g</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>Bb</td>
<td>g</td>
<td>Bb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure:</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fourth Movement Performance Considerations (Allegro burlesco)

The personality of the movement’s principal motive is joyful with a medieval and minstrel-like quality verging on rhythmic primitivism. Also, the burlesque character suggested by the composer is a new facet of his compositional style. Here, Ponce’s writing is very detailed in all respects, leaving no unanswered questions in terms of the music’s execution and its interpretation.

The movement is technically very demanding for both instruments, and the author recommends slow metronomic practice. The transitions between repetitions of the motive interrupt with energetic, nervous passage work. Ponce indicates detached articulations for most of the sixteenth-note passages, and includes very specific dynamic marks. One example of this demanding writing can be seen in the piano part in mm. 45-50 (see Example 4.13).

Example 4.13. Manuel M. Ponce, Sonata for violoncello and piano, fourth movement, mm. 43-51.
Ponce omits marks of articulation in several measures of the fugue-like section of this movement. Performers should edit such passages in accordance with the composer’s marks elsewhere in the movement (see Example 4.14). The author’s suggestions for adding articulation marks are the handwritten additions shown in Example 4.14.

In general, the pianist should take care not to overpower the cello’s sonority, which is a possibility due to the generous writing for the piano part. Two specific areas of concern in this matter are the return to the A section and the coda.
Chapter 5

SONATA BREVE (VIOLIN AND PIANO)

Historical Background

The Sonata Breve has a duration of only eight minutes. The manuscript is dated December 2, 1930, indicating the piece was written during Ponce’s fifth-year studies at the École Normale de Musique in Paris. The first public performance of the Sonata Breve took place at the same School of Music on February 9, 1934, with violinist Aurelio Fuentes and pianist Hélène Huvelin. The only existing edition of the work was published in 1934, by G.Schirmer, Inc., and is no longer in print.

Ponce lived in Paris from 1925 to 1932, and it was during this period that he modernized his compositional technique under the guidance of Paul Dukas (1865-1935) and Nadia Boulanger (1887-1979). Many of his compositions from this period incorporated elements associated with Neoclassic and the Impressionist styles, and the Sonata Breve employs specific characteristics of French neoclassicism, such as: clarity and brevity of form, modality, polytonality, thematic construction based on intervallic relationships, tonal instability, and the wide use of chromaticism and dissonance.

One might have expected Ponce to adopt the influences of his teachers and contemporaries without reservation, but he refused to abandon his convictions regarding tonality, and introduced modern elements into his music in conservative, carefully measured doses. In his book, Nuevos Escritos Musicales (New musical essays), Ponce expressed his opinions frankly on the subject of modern music:

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Atonality with its inseparable companion, boredom, scared away the public from the concert halls, and the musicians of true talent had to make use of the popular inspiration to regain the enthusiasm of the music lovers. Manuel de Falla, Igor Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Bartok and others realized that the concept of tonality is necessary in the musical creation. But theirs is not the same tonal concept that was followed by the old classic and romantic masters. Modal instability, frequency of temporary modulations, and the linking of the so-called dissonances without preparation, change the exterior aspect of contemporary music, and indicate a new cycle in the evolution of music.  

It is evident that Ponce did not need to look for a “revival” of classic forms, as classic forms were already in his music, but he did balance and abbreviate works during this period, as his titles reveal: Sonatine for piano (1930), Quatre Miniatures for string quartet (1927), Petite Suite dans le style ancient for orchestra (1927), Sonatine for piano (1930) and 3 Preludes for cello and piano (1931).

In an interview conducted in 1928, Ponce commented on his recent compositions and declared his admiration for the music of Igor Stravinsky:

My recent compositions are different from the previous. There are those who make modern music for fashion, or because they feel the need to be in vogue. I do not. If I write modern music it is because my style has been honestly modified by getting in contact with this new world of notes … Above all, Igor Stravinsky…is for me the genius… he who has followed the parabolic projection of his inspiration will agree that this master has no comparison.  

Ponce’s efforts to incorporate a more modern musical language caused controversy in Mexico. Outcries were heard, both from the conservative musicians who objected any change in Ponce’s Romantic style and also from the contemporary Mexican composers who thought Ponce’s efforts to modernize his compositional language were vague and noncommittal. Ponce’s stylistic evolution was the result of his unfailing,

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69 Manuel M. Ponce, quoted in Ricardo Miranda, Manuel M. Ponce, 63.
honest commitment to music. He did not confine himself to one idea of aesthetic expression, but responded to his eclectic nature by experimenting with various styles and techniques. When Ponce was questioned about his most brilliant modern work, the Violin Concerto, he declared:

I continue to be the same romantic, but I have to evolve. I have not committed more sin than one who has written a concert that the world applauded. I wrote the Violin Concerto with the same sincerity with which I wrote the Piano Concerto thirty years ago, but these three decades have not passed in vain: how much sadness I would feel if during those long years I had remained girded in my youthful style.70

Commentary

First Movement Analysis (Allegretto mosso)

The first movement has the key signature of E major and is in sonata form (see Figure 5.1). Ponce achieves a concentric form by avoiding thematic redundancy, by lack of long transitions and closing themes. The exposition consists of three themes, A, B and C, which are presented successively, and separated only by a one-measure division. The A and B themes have an improvisatory quality, while C theme is more rhythmic (see Example 5.1).

Figure 5.1. Manuel M. Ponce, Sonata Breve, first movement, analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section:</th>
<th>Exposition</th>
<th>Development</th>
<th>Recapitulation</th>
<th>Coda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme:</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C :Ⅱ</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key:</td>
<td>c#</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure:</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

70 Manuel M. Ponce, quoted in Moreno Rivas, Rostros del Nacionalismo en la Música Mexicana, 127.
Example 5.1. Manuel M. Ponce, *Sonata Breve*, first movement, thematic index.

The A theme is nine-measures in length. It is presented three times in succession, not as a series of reiterative or varied repetitions, but as one long, improvisatory statement in three parts. The A theme is presented first as an introduction in the left hand in the piano part (mm. 1-9), next as a principal thematic statement in the violin (mm. 10-18) and finally as climactic and conclusive material in an alternated dialogue between both instruments (mm. 19-27). The brief one-measure division found at the end of the A and B themes takes the place of a transition or bridge.

The B theme has the same nine-measure construction and improvisatory character as the A theme, but with an open-interval construction (unlike the step-wise motion of the
A theme). The one-measure division before and after the B theme confirms its new thematic identity.

The C theme provides welcome contrast to the horizontal, linear writing of the two previous themes. Its constant rhythmic activity and widely-voiced intervals with detached articulations give this theme a joyful feeling.

The Development is a contrapuntal presentation of motivic fragments derived from the three principal themes. In addition, the movement’s complex harmonic language, created by the interaction of various modes and/or scales, intensifies in the Development to create a feeling of tonal instability. The Development also contains interesting passages with dissonant effects, as in measures 58-59, where the piano is given similar descending patterns on white keys for the right hand and black keys for the left hand (see Example 5.2). This technique is employed throughout the sonata, most notably in the third movement.


The Recapitulation is presented formally as seen as in the Exposition, with the addition of a short cadenza-like passage (mm.138-141) just before the Coda. These four measures have the same divisional function as the one-measure pause in the Exposition.

Ponce provides extraordinarily detailed articulations and expression marks in the writing for both instruments. This music resembles the language and idiomatic writing of
composers such as Prokofiev or Hindemith, and, as in their works, Ponce communicates his interpretative intentions clearly.

**First Movement Performance Considerations (Allegretto mosso)**

The first and only edition of the *Sonata Breve*, made in 1943 by G. Schimer, Inc., is quite satisfactory. The violin part is carefully written, and the attention to detail in the areas of articulation, dynamics, fingerings and bowings suggests that Ponce (or his editor) received careful guidance from a professional violinist. In spite of the overall excellent realization of the parts, one finds that there are a few discrepancies which should be subject to review.

**Articulation:** Both the violin score and the violin part in the piano score contain some mistakes in the area of articulation. One example is found in the A theme in both the Exposition and Recapitulation: in the Exposition the violin part in the piano score lacks articulation marks in one measure (see measure 26 in Example 5.3) and in the Recapitulation the comparable measure of the A theme contains two slurs (see measure 112 in Example 5.4). The violin score includes one long slur over the entire measure in that same phrase, in both sections (see measure 26 in Example 5.5).

Example 5.3. Manuel M. Ponce, *Sonata Breve*, first movement, mm. 25-29.
Example 5.4. Manuel M. Ponce, *Sonata Breve*, first movement, mm. 108-112.

Example 5.5. Manuel M. Ponce, *Sonata Breve*, first movement, violin score, mm. 25-30.

This inconsistency in the piano score relates more directly to the violinist’s likely interpretation, for a string player is more apt to choose the articulation given in the piano score as seen in Example 5.4.\(^1\)

The writing for the piano is not as detailed as it is for the violin, but it is consistent. Ponce omits phrasing in the piano part for several measures; in these instances, the pianist should observe previous and/or later articulations that appear in musically comparable passages, and incorporate these articulations accordingly.

One example of the approach the author recommends for editorial adaptation is found in the piano writing at the end of the Development. The violin part has staccato markings for the sixteenth notes in the previous passage; the right hand of the piano part (mm. 77-82) should imitate the violin’s articulation (even in measure 77), since this

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\(^{71}\) Refer to page 30-31 in Chapter 3 for further discussion.
passage is musically a continuation of the previous passage in which the instruments are exchanging the same thematic material (see Example 5.6).

Example 5.6. Manuel M. Ponce, *Sonata Breve*, first movement, mm. 75-85.

This work requires clarity and precision, and the concentric form within the specific articulations, dynamics and tempo marks leaves no space for varying the tempo. Helpful stylistic references for the performers are Hindemith and Prokofiev’s violin and piano sonatas.

**Second Movement Analysis (Adagio)**

The second movement is an introspective lament in A minor. It is through-composed and is in a declamatory style (see Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2. Manuel M. Ponce, *Sonata Breve*, second movement, analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section:</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key:</td>
<td>a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure:</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The three sections of this movement are established by a subtle declamatory pause between sections. The movement is harmonically complex and highly dissonant, with
only vague tonal references. The construction is dominated by the climax in measure 13, which extends up to measure 19 with an increase in harmonic density, dynamic intensity, tessitura and tempo. The denouement occurs in the last two measures with the last chord in the right hand of the piano part, which suggests the Spanish flavor of the movement to come (see Example 5.7)

Example 5.7. Manuel M. Ponce, *Sonata Breve*, second movement, mm. 9-16.
Second Movement Performance Considerations (Adagio)

The short slow movement reveals another aspect of Ponce’s expressive compositional vocabulary. Within a modern harmonic language, Ponce portrays sorrow and distress in the seemingly improvisatory lament. The violinist should vary the tone colors and manipulate the vibrato according to the music’s expressive needs. The pianist is responsible for providing support and giving continuity to the violinist’s quasi-improvisatory line, and for keeping the music always moving in a forward direction within the natural inflections of the music’s shape. The pianist should give careful support in the climactic section of the movement; the constant sixteenth-note motion in the piano part dictates the speed and intensity of this crescendo-animato section. It is important to emphasize the dissonances with a detached, almost marcato articulation and a profound, robust sound. A distinctive change of color is necessary for the last chord of the movement, which announces the next and final movement.

Third Movement Analysis (Allegro alla spagnuola)

The last movement is based on the Spanish folk song “Anda Jaleo” (a cheerful idiomatic Spanish phrase), a folk song from Andalusia, the southernmost region of Spain.72 This final movement is in ternary form (see Figure 5.3). Of the three movements, this is the one that establishes tonal centers with the clearest definition. Ponce makes use of the Phrygian mode throughout the movement, but he raises the third note of the mode in order to create a Spanish flavor (E-F-G#-A-B-C-D). This is a common practice in Spanish music, in Andalusian cadences and flamenco scales.73 The impetuous and

72 Castellanos, Manuel M. Ponce, 40.

irregular rhythmic patterns assimilate the passionate energy and cross-rhythms of the flamenco dance, which is characteristically performed with heel-stamping and hand-clapping.

Figure 5.3. Manuel M. Ponce, *Sonata Breve*, third movement, analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>A'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Section:</td>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>Canon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme:</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key:</td>
<td>E phrygian</td>
<td>D# phrygian</td>
<td>E phrygian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure:</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The A theme has an introductory function. Rhythmically, it is dominated by the constant use of hemiolas in the left hand of the piano part, which is another common characteristic of Andalusian music. In the transition of the A section (m. 20), the piano takes the role of a guitar player; notice the resemblance of an open-string arpeggio,74 and the rasgado-like (quick strumming-like) passage in mm. 21-32 (see Example 5.8).75

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74 Barrón Corvera, "Música de Cámara para Instrumentos de Arco," 81.

75 Rasgado (quick strumming) guitar music is purely chordal in style, lacking a discernible melody and a proper bass line.
Example 5.8. Manuel M. Ponce, *Sonata Breve*, third movement, mm. 17-34.

In contrast to the two predominantly rhythmic themes of section A, the C theme appears in section B, and resembles the deep sorrowful singing quality of flamenco music. An unexpected novelty is the inclusion of a canon-like passage in which a dialogue between the two instruments occurs within a light and playful texture. The *subito* return to the A theme is effective and in perfect accordance with the music.

The Coda, in a faster tempo, creates a bright and virtuosic ending to the sonata.
Third Movement Performance Considerations (Allegro alla spagnuola)

The last movement is quite demanding technically for both instruments. The metronomic indications for the Sonata Breve, similar to the Cello Sonata, seem to jeopardize the character and natural flow of the music. Ponce indicates that a dotted quarter note = 79, but the author recommends a maximum tempo of 65 for the dotted quarter note.

The instrumental writing is very idiomatically Spanish, which should be the context in which the performers approach the different thematic materials. The flamenco guitar-related writing is highly evident in the piano part (see Example 5.8). As was mentioned earlier, the piano writing imitates the guitar’s “rasgado” (quick strumming). In this and similar instances a somewhat percussive sound is required.

Also part of the flamenco style, the fast sixteenth notes written for both instruments in the A theme relate easily to the “palmeo” (hand clapping), and the hemiolas in the left hand of the piano part relate to the “zapateado” (feet stomping), (see Example 5.9).
Example 5.9. Manuel M. Ponce, *Sonata Breve*, third movement, mm. 1-16.

The C theme is clearly a “*cante jondo*” (deep song) which requires a bright singing tone quality from the violinist (see Example 5.10). The accents in the piano part in this passage can again be related to the rhythmic-oriented performers of flamenco: the guitarist, the dancer or the percussionist.
Example 5.10. Manuel M. Ponce, *Sonata Breve*, third movement, mm. 45-61.

A close stylistic reference for the performers is the music of Manuel de Falla (1876-1946). As mentioned earlier the inspiration for the third movement is the original folk song “*Anda Jaleo*” (see Example 5.9) upon which the poet and musician Federico Garcia Lorca (1898-1936) based his poem of the same name (see Figure 5.4). Lorca himself made an arrangement of this traditional Andalusian folk song for voice and piano.
Example 5.11. Andalusian folk song, *Anda Jaleo Jaleo*!.

**Anda Jaleo**

```
Gm     F
Yo me su br aun pi no ver de por ver
si la div is a ba, por ver
si la div is a ba.
```

```
Anda ja le o, ja le o.
```

```
Gm     F
Ya se a ca b el al bo ro to yaho ra em pie z a el ti ro te o, yaho ra em pie z a el ti ro te o.
```

```
E    D
```

```
```
Figure 5.4. Federico Garcia Lorca, poem collection *Poemas del Alma* (Poems of the soul), *Anda Jaleo*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANDA JALEO</th>
<th>COME ON UPROAR, UPROAR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yo me subí a un pino verde</td>
<td>I climbed up a green pine tree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>por ver si la divisaba</td>
<td>to see if I could distinguished her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>por ver si la divisaba</td>
<td>to see if I could distinguished her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y solo divisé el polvo</td>
<td>And I just saw the dust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>del coche que la llevaba</td>
<td>from the car that carried her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>del coche que la llevaba</td>
<td>from the car that carried her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Anda jaleo, jaleo</em></td>
<td><em>Come on uproar, uproar.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ya se acabó el alboroto</em></td>
<td><em>The racket is already over.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>y ahora empieza el tiroteo.</em></td>
<td><em>and now the shooting starts.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No salgas paloma al campo,</td>
<td>Don’t go, dove, to the countryside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mira, que soy cazador</td>
<td>because I’m a hunter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mira, que soy cazador</td>
<td>because I’m a hunter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y si te tiro y te mato</td>
<td>And if I shot you and I kill you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>para mí, será el dolor</td>
<td>I will be in pain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>para mí, será el quebranto.</td>
<td>I will be in sorrow.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Yo me subí a un pino verde*  
To see if I could distinguish her  
And I just saw the dust from the car that carried her  
*Anda jaleo, jaleo*  
Come on uproar, uproar.  
The racket is already over and now the shooting starts.  
Don’t go, dove, to the countryside because I’m a hunter  
And if I shot you and I kill you I will be in pain  
I will be in sorrow.
<table>
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<th>Come on uproar, uproar.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ya se acabó el alboroto</td>
<td>The racket is already over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>y ahora empieza el tiroteo</td>
<td>and now the shooting starts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Por la calle de los muros</td>
<td>Through the streets of the walls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>han matado a una paloma</td>
<td>a dove has been killed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>han matado a una paloma.</td>
<td>a dove has been killed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yo cortaré con mis manos</td>
<td>I’ll cut with my hands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>las flores de su corona</td>
<td>the flowers for its wreath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>las flores de su corona.</td>
<td>the flowers for its wreath</td>
</tr>
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