

# FERNANDO SOR (1778-1839)

## The 19th-Century Guitar

### Gianluigi Giglio guitar

SOMMCD 0604

- |                                    |  |       |  |
|------------------------------------|--|-------|--|
| 1                                  | Introduction and Variations on 'Malbrough s'en va-t-en guerre', Op.28 (Meissonnier, Paris 1827)                      | 8:36  |  |
| 2                                  | Les folies d'Espagne and a Minuet, Op.15a (Meissonnier, Paris 1822)  | 4:34  |  |
| 3                                  | Introduction and Variations on a Theme by Mozart, Op.9 (Meissonnier, Paris 1826, dedicated to Sor's brother, Carlos) | 8:40  |  |
| 4                                  | Fantasy in A minor, Op.58 (Pacini, Paris 1835, dedicated to Madame Boischevalier)                                    | 9:28  |  |
| Mes Ennuis – Six Bagatelles, Op.43 |  |       |  |
| 5                                  | No.3: Cantabile  | 4:22  |  |
| 6                                  | No.5: Andante (Pacini, Paris c.1831)   | 5:02  |  |
|                                    | Elegiac Fantasy in E minor, Op.59  |       |  |
| 7                                  | Introduction – Andante largo   | 8:36  |  |
| 8                                  | Marche funèbre – Andante moderato (Pacini, Paris 1836, 'A la mort de Madame Beslay')                                 | 7:30  |  |
| 9                                  | Capriccio in E major, <i>Le calme</i> , Op.50 (Pacini, Paris 1832, dedicated to Mlle Crabouillet)                    | 8:07  |  |
| 24 Progressive Lessons, Op.31      |  |       |  |
| 10                                 | No.23 in E major: 'Mouvement de prière religieuse' (Meissonnier, Paris 1828)   | 3:39  |  |
| Total duration:                    |  | 68:36 |  |

Recorded at Studio Megaride, Naples on January 3-5, 2019

Recording Engineer & Mastering: Gianni Ruggiero

Recording Editor: Lello De Luca

Guitar: René Lacôte, Paris, 1834 (Silk and gut strings. Pitch A = 430hz)

Front cover: Guitar by René Lacôte, Paris, 1834, played on this recording

Design: Andrew Giles

Booklet Editor: Michael Quinn

© & © 2019 SOMM RECORDINGS · THAMES DITTON · SURREY · ENGLAND  
Made in the EU

# FERNANDO SOR

## The 19th-Century Guitar

### Gianluigi Giglio guitar

Includes

- Introduction and Variations on a Theme by Mozart
- *Le calme*
- Fantasy in A minor, Op. 58





Fernando Sor

## FERNANDO SOR

A prolific composer in multiple genres, Fernando Sor is remembered today as a pioneering advocate for the guitar as an instrument that belonged in the concert hall. Himself a guitarist of note, his works for the instrument dominate a wide-ranging output and survive the neglect meted out by posterity to their musical siblings, nine ballets, three symphonies, two operas and much else besides among them.

Born in Barcelona in 1778 into a family with a long-unbroken tradition of military service, Sor was deflected from the dubious attractions of a life in uniform (though he dutifully served his time in the Spanish army) when his father introduced him to Italian opera and the guitar. Aged 10, he began to compose songs (precociously, of Latin texts) and spent time in the abbey choir school of Santa Maria de Montserrat.

He had just turned 20 when Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Spain, an event that prompted some of his earliest works for guitar: morale-boosting pieces set to patriotic lyrics. When the French invader was finally repelled, Sor, under the cloud of collaborating, left his homeland for Paris, never to return.

In the French capital (and later in London, where he spent eight years from 1815) he set about composing with a new vigour, the guitar now his principal muse, his championing of it beginning to broaden into concerns for how best to stake its claim for greater attention.

The solution presented itself in the publication in 1830 of *Méthode pour la Guitare*, a treatise championing the attractions of the classical guitar that embraced technique and theory in what quickly became a seminal text for the instrument.

Its success prompted increasing demands on Sor for pieces suitable for use in the classroom and the home. He responded, much as Bach and Beethoven had to pedagogical expectations, with music that explored the full vocabulary of the guitar while also testing and developing the guitarist's grasp and mastery of technique. More often than not, the two requirements were explored with an acute, over-arching musical sensibility that produced both a satisfying learning exercise and an equally agreeable experience for the listener. It's that duality, caught on the cusp of pedagogy and performance, that has sustained Sor's position as an innovator and trailblazer for an instrument that can claim ubiquity and favour with the piano and violin.

It's a measure of his sensitivity towards the potential of the instrument and the needs of students that Sor's music incrementally grew in complexity to place ever-greater expectations on the guitarist while also enhancing the rewards for the listener. Where the early Op.6 is a collection of only 12 studies, the late Op.60 stretches to 25 such exercises, each conspicuously more exacting than their predecessors. Based on a theme from *Die Zauberflöte*, the Op.9 Introduction and Variations on a Theme by Mozart and the Op.22 Grand Sonata in C major remain essential components of the contemporary guitarist's repertoire.

That the majority of Sor's guitar works – 63 of which are exclusively granted opus numbers in his far more prolific output – were composed in semi-retirement in the last years of his life (he died in 1839, aged 61) points, surely, to one reason for their abiding attraction and interest.

These are no mere thrown-off indulgences or bill-paying obligations. As the title of his six Op.43 bagatelles, *Mes Ennuis* ('My Annoyances'), and the caustic dedication "to the person with the least patience" of his pointedly titled Op.45 Six Easy Pieces suggests, Sor was often vexed and frustrated by the growing demands for undemanding fare for the instrument he had done so much to popularise. Instead they are the product of a life spent with unwavering conviction in the guitar's ability to communicate with the utmost directness and expressiveness and dedicated to rescuing it from the tavern for its rightful place in the concert hall.

Michael Quinn © 2019



During the early fourteenth century, and even up to the early part of the nineteenth century, guitarists had not yet gained a definite sense of direction. Only a few could have imagined that the six-stringed guitar would be the instrument of the future.

The majority continued to play on a five-stringed guitar and managed to survive those who favoured the baroque five-stringed guitar with double strings. The so-called 'virtuosos' of the age were those who could accompany a melody in arpeggiated chords. Music was still written in a mixed version of struck chords as well as those written in mensural notation, that is in precisely measured note values which rested within the limits of mediocre dilettantism.

However, in a matter of the few years between 1806 and 1810, there was evidence of spectacular progress. The public discovered virtuosos who astounded both those who loved the instrument as well as its sternest critics in the world of music in general. Virtuosos, who in that era were also composers, presented their written compositions with parts correctly developed. New and rational guitar manuals were published that still serve today as the basis for study, and many works of that time remain masterpieces of the guitar literature. The speed with which this progress occurred still remains a mystery and a source of bewilderment to the modern scholar who can only admire the sudden great blossoming of talent, quite unique in the history of instrumental music.

The Spanish guitarist Fernando Sor (1778-1839) was among the greatest protagonists to explore new frontiers. His success arrived a little later than that

of Mauro Giuliani in Vienna (1806) and that of Ferdinando Carulli in Paris (1808), but his compositions for guitar were readily judged as exceptional for their virtuosity and for the complexity of their harmonic style, deriving mainly from the study of polyphonic music in his early youth.

*Malborough s'en va-t-en guerre* was a very old song and, as many others, still known and sung in the nineteenth century. It was said that the governess of the royal household sang it as a kind of lullaby to the Dauphin to put him to sleep. The rocking rhythm of the melody appealed to Sor who preferred not to complicate his Op.28 **Introduction and Variations** based on the song, but to maintain their eighteenth-century structure with simple embellishments. Only in the final variation does Sor enunciate the theme in the middle parts of the harmony, mainly developed on the fourth and third strings, as he has done in other of his compositions, with great skill.

Of ancient Portuguese origins, the theme of **Les folies d'Espagne** has inspired an infinite number of composers, including those of modern times. For his variations Sor adopted the E minor tonality rather than the more established D minor. In this case too, Sor's writing remains faithful to the rules of diminished and embellished variations. It is not clear if the final Minuet was thought to be an integral part of the work or suggested by the editor to fill a gap. One can't help remembering the variations entitled *Variationes sobre un tema de Sor*, which guitarist Miguel Llobet, like Sor from Barcelona but born exactly 100 years later, wrote as a transcription of Sor's variations and adding his own.

The influence of Mozart, Sor's most loved author, is both evident and recurrent in his music. The Op.9 **Introduction and Variations** on a theme taken from *Die Zauberflöte* are among his most famous works and also among the most performed in concert and in the repertoire of recorded music. In these variations he began to detach himself from tradition in order to find new and expressive means of his own invention whilst introducing, with great command of instrumental mastery, decorative features that retain only the harmonic structure while modifying rhythm and melody.

The **Fantasy in A minor**, Op.58, is a mature work, composed for the noble and refined skills of a female student, requiring particular virtuosity and interpretative grace, always in respect of a composition in three parts on which Sor had founded his technique. The work develops in three parts: following an *Andante largo* in the minor a brief chromatic cadence introduces the *Andante* in a major tonality with references to the introduction. The work ends with a brilliant *Mouvement de valse*.

**Mes Ennuis** is the title of the six bagatelles comprising the Op.43, six short *feuilles d'album* which encapsulate the poetic essence of Sor's music. In particular, the Third and Fifth bagatelles, developed by Sor in alternate major and minor modes, have an extended singability (realised in two different styles in the two pieces) in which he excels as a composer. The Fifth bagatelle anticipates the tuning of the sixth string in D instead of E, yet another example of his mastery.

The **Elegiac Fantasy in E minor**, Op.59 represents the closest to which Sor approaches Romanticism, both for its floating spirit and the harmonic writing which seem inspired by the music of Mendelssohn and Schubert. This is one of the best examples of a work in four parts tenaciously perfected by Sor during his early years and it is filled with a feeling of condolence on the death of its dedicatee, Lady Beslay. The words written at the end of the score: "Charlotte... Adieu!" recall *The Sorrows of Young Werther* by Wolfgang Goethe.

The caprice titled **Le calme** (Op.50) represents one of the rarest moments, perhaps unique, in which Sor writes in a descriptive-sentimental style (beloved of Italian authors), probably influenced by the new programmatic style in music found in Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*. The composer who came closest to programmatic music which was good, as well as persuasive, was Sor's student Napoleon Coste. In this caprice, Sor describes the feelings and impressions of those listening to the whistling wind and enjoying its moments of "calm".

Taken from the Op.31 *24 Progressive Lessons*, the third-movement étude **The movement of a religious prayer** (*Mouvement de prière religieuse*) is a rare and unique example of Sor's output of music for guitar, an instrument normally dedicated to non-religious music *par excellence*. This short composition, written in E major – Sor's preferred tonality – stands as an example of beautiful polyphony in perfect harmony with his inspiration.

Mario Dell'Ara © 2019  
translation: Siva Oke

Nei primi anni del secolo XIX, e fin verso il 1806, l'orientamento dei chitarristi era ancora nebuloso: solo pochi avevano intuito che la chitarra a sei corde sarebbe stata lo strumento del futuro, molti suonavano ancora la chitarra a cinque corde e sopravvivevano i nostalgici della chitarra barocca con cinque corde doppie. I virtuosi, si fa per dire, erano quelli che riuscivano ad accompagnare appropriatamente una canzone con accordi arpeggiati; la musica era ancora scritta nella doppia versione intavolata e mensurale e non varcava la soglia di un mediocre dilettantismo. Nel giro di pochi anni, tra il 1806 e il 1810, si verificò un progresso vorticoso: si presentarono al pubblico virtuosi che seppero stupire gli appassionati e la critica più severa del mondo musicale in genere: i virtuosi, che all'epoca erano anche compositori, presentarono al pubblico le loro musiche scritte con il corretto cammino delle parti; furono editi Metodi nuovi e razionali, ancora oggi alla base dello studio; molte musiche di quegli anni sono capolavori della letteratura chitarristica. Come tutto ciò sia potuto verificarsi in breve tempo resta un mistero e lo studioso moderno ne rimane stupefatto non restandogli che l'ammirazione per tanto talento sbocciato improvvisamente, unico nella storia degli strumenti e della musica.

Il chitarrista spagnolo Fernando Sor fu tra i maggiori protagonisti che percorsero le nuove frontiere; il suo successo arrivò poco più tardi di quello di Giuliani a Vienna (1806) e di quello di Carulli a Parigi (1808), ma le sue composizioni per chitarra furono subito giudicate eccezionali per l'impegno virtuosistico e per la complessità della scrittura armonica, derivante principalmente dal suo studio della musica polifonica acquisito negli anni giovanili.

*Malbrough s'en va-t-en guerre* era una canzone vecchia di secoli e come tante altre ancora nota e cantata nell'Ottocento. La tradizione diceva che la nutrice di Casa reale la cantava al Delfino per farlo addormentare: insomma una ninnananna. Il ritmo cullante della melodia fu rispettato da Sor che non volle complicare le sue Variazioni, ma rispettarne la struttura settecentesca con semplici fioretture. Solo nelle Variazione finale Sor enuncia il Tema nelle parti intermedie dell'armonia, svolto prevalentemente sulla quarta e terza corda, come farà magistralmente in altre occasioni.

Il Tema della *Follia*, di antiche origini portoghesi, ha stimolato un numero infinito di compositori, compresi quelli moderni. Per le sue Variazioni Sor adottò la tonalità di Mi minore, anziché quella di Re minore, più consolidata. Anche in questo caso la scrittura di Sor si mantiene fedele alle regole delle Variazioni diminuite e fiorite. Non è ancora chiaro se il Minuetto finale sia stato concepito come parte integrante dell'opera o se sia stato suggerito dall'editore per riempire uno spazio vuoto. Viene spontaneo ricordare le Variazioni intitolate *Variaciones sobre un tema de Sor*, che Llobet, barcellonaese come Sor e nato esattamente cento anni dopo, scrisse trascrivendo le Variazioni di Sor e aggiungendovi le sue proprie.

Nella musica di Sor sono evidenti e risonanti gli influssi di Mozart, il suo autore più amato. Le Variazioni tratte dal *Flauto Magico* sono un'opera tra le più famose di Sor e tra le più eseguite nel repertorio concertistico e discografico. In queste Variazioni Sor incomincia a svincolarsi dalla tradizione e trovare nuove vie espressive, forte della sua padronanza strumentale,

introducendo stilemi decorativi che mantengono solo la struttura armonica ma modificano ritmo e melodia.

La *Fantaisie* Op.58 è un'opera della maturità, scritta per il nobile e raffinato dilettantismo di una allieva, che richiede un discreto virtuosismo e grazia interpretativa nel rispetto di una scrittura sempre a tre parti sulla quale Sor aveva fondato la sua tecnica. La composizione si sviluppa in tre tempi: dopo un Andante largo in modo minore, una breve cadenza cromatica introduce l'Andante che passa alla tonalità maggiore, con richiami al primo tempo. Un brillante *Mouvement de valse* conclude la composizione.

*Mes Ennuis* è il titolo delle sei Bagatelle che formano l'op.43, sei brevi fogli d'album che condensano la poetica dell'Autore. In particolare la terza e la quinta Bagatella, che si sviluppano nell'alternanza del modo maggiore con quello minore, hanno una spiegata cantabilità (con due e diverse scritture nei due pezzi) in cui eccelleva l'arte compositiva di Sor. La quinta Bagatella prevede la scordatura della sesta corda, accordata in Re invece che in Mi, altro accorgimento in cui Sor si dimostra, ancora una volta, maestro.

La *Fantaisie élegiaque* è il punto di Sor più vicino al Romanticismo, sia per lo spirito che vi aleggia sia per i procedimenti armonici che paiono ispirati a quelli di Mendelssohn e di Schubert. In essa ricorrono i migliori modelli di scrittura a quattro parti, caparbiamente perfezionati fin dagli anni giovanili, pervasi da un alto sentimento di condoglianza per la morte della dedicataria, la signora Beslay. Le parole, scritte alla fine della partitura: *Charlotte... Adieu!*, ci rimandano alla lettura de *I dolori del giovane Werther* di Wolfgang Goethe.

Il Capriccio intitolato *Le calme* è uno dei rari momenti, forse l'unico, in cui Sor affronta il genere descrittivo-sentimentale (già caro agli autori italiani) influenzato, probabilmente, dal nuovo corso della musica tracciato da Berlioz con la sua *Sinfonia fantastica*. Ad avvicinarsi alla musica a programma sarà poi, con maggiore convinzione e buoni risultati, il suo allievo Napoléon Coste. In questo Capriccio Sor si limita a descrivere le impressioni e gli stati d'animo di chi ascolta sibilare il vento o gode dei suoi momenti di "calma".

Anche il *Mouvement de prière religieuse* (Étude Op.31, No.23) è un caso unico nella produzione di Sor, e rarissimo nella letteratura della chitarra, strumento profano per antonomasia. La breve pagina, scritta nella tonalità di Mi maggiore, la tonalità preferita, si dipana in una bella polifonia perfettamente aderente alla sua ispirazione.

Mario Dell'Ara © 2019



# Gianluigi Giglio



Gianluigi Giglio studied at the San Pietro a Majella Conservatoire of Naples, where he earned a diploma in guitar performance with highest honours. He earned his Master's degree with highest honours. While pursuing his music studies, he was also awarded a Master's degree in Architecture at the University of Naples.

His repertoire ranges from Renaissance to contemporary music, including concertos for guitar and orchestra as well as a variety of chamber ensembles. In the contemporary music field, he has performed a complex composition by Pierre Boulez, *Le Marteau sans maître*, with the Freon Ensemble (Rome) and collaborated to release the monographic CD of the compositions by Franco Donatoni. His analyses of contemporary music (Ernst Krenek, Maurice Ohana, Manuel De Falla), critical articles and reviews, have been published in specialist magazines.

His performances have been broadcast by Rai, Rai Radio Tre and Rai Radio Filodiffusione (Italy's national public broadcasting company).

For the last several years he has focused on early nineteenth-century guitar repertoire which he plays on a Fabricatore guitar, dating from 1817, and on a Lacôte dating from 1834.

He regularly performs in a trio consisting of flute, viola and guitar; their CD of Francesco Molino's trios on the Tactus label was considered Best CD of 2009 by the English magazine *Classical Guitar*. In 2014, he was the artistic director of the Heartstrings Guitar Festival in Ravello. He is currently a professor of classical guitar at the Giuseppe Martucci Conservatoire in Salerno.



Gianluigi Giglio wishes to thank Mario Dell'Ara for his help with this recording.

Luthier Restoration Service: Gabriele Lodi