

READ ME FIRST

1. In this edition the studies are presented in the chronological order in which they were originally published. See the section on Suggested Grouping (page 201).
2. Each study has been engraved from the source which in the opinion of the editor is closest to the composer.
3. The notation in the source editions has been followed. Unusually inconsistent in barring and stemming have been regularised; but care has been taken to preserve the value or musical function of any note. All slurs have been retained (see note 7 below).
4. Variations between the various editions consulted are listed in the Commentary (page 175). For clarity we have indicated in this edition to note content; articulation is not covered. The versions of this edition are indicated with an asterisk.
5. All original texts and fingerings have been retained, but with obvious errors silently corrected. The original fingering has been set in roman in the music text.
6. All fingerings in *italics* in the original editions and slurs and stems in square brackets are also editorial. Precautionary accidentals have been added sparingly in round brackets. The fingerings are editorial and are not in the source editions. *Staccato* in this edition is without slurs and not as they appear in the source editions where some place slurs to the main note and others not. Today's editors will most probably choose to use slurs in most, if not all.

Cover design by Exakt.de

The portrait of Sor on page 2 of this edition is reproduced by courtesy of Matanya Ophce
 Cover painting: Ramón Bayeu "El majo de la guitarra" (1786), reproduced by kind permission of the Museo del Prado, Madrid

INTRODUCTION

by Matanya Ophée

Historical Background

The earliest collection of didactic pieces by Fernando Sor, the *12 Studies* op. 6, was first published in London in 1815. The last one, the *Introduction to the Study of the Guitar* op. 60, was composed in 1837, just two years before the composer's death.¹ Together with the other collections contained in the present volume the *12 Studies* op. 29, the *24 Lessons* op. 31, the *24 Exercises* op. 35 and the *Twenty-four little pieces to serve as lessons for beginners* op. 44, this material so rich in the wisdom and compassion of a great teacher has enjoyed the respect and admiration of generations of guitar teachers and their students. The didactic pieces written and published by Fernando Sor throughout his entire creative life have remained in print for well-nigh a century and a half now. In spite of the appearance of more recent developments in guitar literature, these pieces have demonstrated a resilience of purpose seldom seen in guitar music of the early nineteenth century. Indeed, this was, and will remain so, the mainstay of guitar pedagogy.

Some of these collections were published during the composer's life time in secondary and tertiary editions in several European countries. Over the intervening years they have been reissued many times in one form or another, some even without mention of the composer's name. In the last many editions also published in this century, the most recent being the famous collection of studies published by Segovia in 1945. The great authority of his name has led to 50 years or so have come to pass since the first recordings and concert performances by Segovia, as well as through this present volume, Sor's collection continues to enjoy the respect and admiration of a large body of guitar practitioners.

In recent years there has been a certain amount of scepticism in a blind acceptance of the printed editions of Sor's music. Editorial practices have been questioned, and what the composer really meant, especially the earlier autograph manuscripts of the *12 Studies* and *Introduction to the Study of the Guitar* which we have been able to see are the most recent editions of his music published during the composer's life time, and later by his students and admirers.

Taking these editions as a guide for what the composer wrote, perhaps *meant* to write, is not always a reliable procedure. We have no idea what interventions were thrown into these editions by their publishers or engravers. In later life, Fernando Sor took direct responsibility for publishing his own music. Before he broke off his business relationship with the publisher Meissonnier in 1828, Sor may not have had direct control of the final printed image of his music. It is unwise to assign authoritative importance to the graphic image of these editions without some corroborative evidence.

Fortunately, we do have a rather subjective tone of verbal discussions of the music, particularly that of a didactic nature, by the composer himself.

In 1830, within four years of his return to Paris in 1826, Fernando Sor published his *Méthode pour la Guitare*, a volume of pedagogical discussions, but also containing a great deal of light on the composer's education as a teacher. When used in conjunction with the musical methods contained in the studies, the pedagogical discussions of the various pieces supposedly becomes clear. It is not that this were so. The difficulty lies in the text, regardless of its title, that is not a guitar method in the traditional sense of the word. It is rather a manifesto, an attempt to lay out a theory in relation to applied technique. Sor's ideas in a hotchpotch of fanciful suggestions and contradictions. It is often difficult to understand in his book what exactly Sor's ideas were and how they were to be applied. The idea of what a method should be expressed by himself in too uncertain terms:

Tratado de los principios y reglas que sirven para guiar las operaciones.

Method: A treatise on logical principles on which the rules that should guide the operations are based. (My translation MO.)

In other words, according to Sor, his Method does not necessarily contain instructions or rules for practical operations. It is enough that it expresses the author's philosophical principles. Actual musical instruction is to take place, he seems to insinuate, in other contexts. Perhaps the most realistic description of the true nature of Sor's book is contained in a mid-nineteenth century version of it, edited and published by his pupil Napoléon Coste. In the *Introduction*, Coste says:

¹ There are three biographies of Fernando Sor currently in print. Brian Jeffery, *Fernando Sor, Composer and Guitarist*, London, Tecla Editions, 1977, reprinted essentially unchanged in 1994. Also: Wolf Moser, *Fernando Sor Versuch einer Autobiographie und gitaristische Schriften*. Cologne, Gitarre & Laute Verlag, 1984. Also: Bernard Piris, *Fernando Sor, Une Guitare à l'Orée du Romantisme*, Paris, Aubier, 1989. All three books seems to be based on the same material, mostly the writings of Sor himself. Many questions about Sor's personal biography still remain unanswered.

² *Méthode pour La Guitare / par / Fernando Sor* Paris, 1830. Facsimile edition by Minkoff Reprint, Geneva 1981. It should be noted that the Minkoff edition is a hybrid of two different editions. The text is indeed that of the 1830 Paris edition; The illustrations and the music examples, though, are taken from the 1832 N. Simrock bi-lingual French/German edition.

³ All quotations from this book are taken from the French original. The English version translated by Arnold Merriek is much better known today. Unfortunately, it contains several mis-translations and distortions of Sor's original intentions.

Depuis Robert de Visée, peu d'artistes se distinguèrent dans ce genre de composition. Aussi lorsque Sor parut près de deux siècles plus tard, causa-t-il une vive sensation dans le monde musical. Il étonna et ravit par le charme et la nouveauté de ses créations qui resteront comme des modèles de science et du goût. Les succès de ce grand artiste ne le mirent point à l'abri de la critique envieuse. Les tracasseries qu'il eut à essuyer de la part d'ignorants confrères qui ne le comprenaient pas, lui aigrirent l'esprit et ce fut sous ces fâcheuses impressions qu'il écrivit le texte de sa Méthode dans lequel il paraissait bien plus préoccupé de repousser les attaques dont il croyait être l'objet et de rendre guerre pour guerre, que de développer ces préceptes et de les mettre à la portée de tous. Ce défaut grave au point de vue de l'enseignement a été senti par le judicieux éditeur qui remet au jour l'oeuvre de Sor.⁴

Since Robert de Visée, few artists distinguished themselves in this kind of composition. Also, when Sor appeared nearly two centuries later, he caused a lively commotion in the musical world. He astonished and enraptured by the charm and the novelty of his creations which will stay as models of science and taste. The successes of this great artist have not sheltered him from envious criticism. The bickering to which he was subjected by ignorant colleagues who did not understand him, soured his spirit. It was under these troublesome impressions that he wrote the text of his Method in which he seemed much more preoccupied in repelling the attacks of which he believed himself to be the object, than of returning war for war, than of developing his precepts and of putting them at the reach of all. This serious fault, from the point of view of teaching was felt by the discriminating editor [Coste] who brought back to the work of Sor (My translation - MO.)

This is the opinion of a distinguished friend and an admirer to whom Sor dedicated one of his major works, his opera *Le venir de Russie* for two guitars. His words are expressive of sympathy, sorrow and understanding. Even today they are dear to Sor and to his memory, even viewed in a different, in a better position to a more extreme position, which the Sor Method was written, and perhaps gave rise to some of the reasons for the criticisms contained therein:

Sor begins his preface with the purpose is to show to his persons, the reasons which brought him to write it. In the very beginning he uses a quasi-justificative explanation, which, in several important technical points, caused readers and scholars to assign ideas that may have tried to promote in his book, but which, on a closer examination of the original record, is liable to be distrusted as a true representation of Sor's performance practice.

One example of this premise is a statement by Sor that he prefers to use only three fingers of the right hand because the annular is too weak and, besides, it does not lie in the proper alignment with the other three. His argument is accompanied by a geometric drawing of the flat hand and the alignment of

its fingers in that position. The argument appears convincing, except that it is based on the faulty notion that the fingers remain in that alignment even when the hand is curved into a playing position above the strings. It may well have remained so in Sor's own hand, but human anatomy, a subject dear to his heart, allows for an infinite variety in hand construction between individuals. In any case, the comment is usually taken out of context to mean that Sor never used the annular. There are many pieces in Sor's vast output that can be played with only three fingers and indeed were meant to be so played. On the other hand, there are many pieces that could not be performed without the use of the annular. A chapter in the book is devoted to the use of the annular. In it, Sor describes the conditions that require the use of that finger and explains the difficulties of such situations, which he is forced to make a compromise to facilitate the annular. Another issue in which Sor is candid, is the matter of fingering for scales:

... j'ai vu qu'on se faisait des gammes avec une main, parce que j'ai cru que c'était une manière de rendre d'une manière satisfaisante le violon, tandis qu'en profitant de la facilité que présente pour lier les sons, je pourrais mieux en faire les traits de chant.

... with my right hand. I have not learned to play detached scales, nor with great speed, because I have seen that the guitar could offer me in a satisfactory manner the features of the violin, while in taking advantage of the facility that presents in tying the sounds, I could better imitate the features of singing. (My translation - MO.)

And then Sor provides a musical example (Ex. 29 - see page 156 in the present edition) which depicts a scale passage in legato. It is followed by a lengthy verbal rationalisation of his preference for legato scales against scales played *détaché*, a term used in reference to rapid R.H. alternation in *m.i.m.i.* and similar patterns. To close the discussion, Sor says:

Si le lecteur désire apprendre à détacher avec vitesse les notes d'un trait d'exécution, je ne puis mieux faire que de le renvoyer à la Méthode de M. Aguado, qui, excellent dans ce genre d'exécution, est dans le cas d'établir les règles les plus réfléchies et les mieux calculées là-dessus.

If the reader wishes to learn to pluck the notes of a passage with speed, I cannot do better than send him to the Method of Mr. Aguado, who excels in this manner of execution, and in which he established the most thought-out and the best calculated rules about it. (My translation - MO.)

An important observation must be made here: the only method by Aguado available in the French capital in 1830, must have been the 1826 *Méthode Complète* translated into French by François de Fossa. It is not likely that Sor would have directed his French readers to the Spanish versions of this book, even if they were available. In that book, Aguado expresses the notion that scale passages should be performed in an *i.a.i.a.* alternation. Can we then assume that Sor approved of *i.a.i.a.* fingering for scales? Probably not! In a simplified version of the *Escuela* published c. 1834, (op. 6) Aguado provides a

⁴ Napoleon Coste, *Méthode de Guitare par Ferdinand Sor*. Paris, Schonenberger, 1851 (Lesure), p.n. 1726. Copy in the Rischel & Birket-Smith Collection, Royal Library of Copenhagen. Reprinted by Lemoine c. 1880. Copy of the reprint in the collection of Matanya Ophee.

first-hand testimony on the matter. This testimony was perhaps based on observations and discussions with Sor himself, made while living and working in close proximity in Paris.

Pour exécuter les gammes je préférerais l'index et le médium à l'index et l'annulaire comme je le pratiquais jadis. Mon expérience m'a prouvé que les raisons de Mr. Sor pour cette préférence sont décisives.

To execute scales I prefer the index and medium fingers [i.m.i.m.] to the index and annular [i.a.i.a.] fingering I used to practise before. My experience proved to me that Mr. Sor's reasons for this preference are decisive.
(My translation - MO.)

This is a testimonial by his friend Aguado. It tells us how Sor actually played scales, in effect, repudiating Sor's own pronouncements as made in his Method. It has also long been assumed that most scale passages in Sor's music should be played as legato as possible. The legato-in-scales was one of the major aspects of the teachings of the Russian masters of the seven string guitar such as Andrei Sychra, Mikhail Vyssotsky and Semion Aksionov. As much as Sor speaks highly of this type of scale playing, and while he *might* have picked up the idea from the Russians, there is little evidence of it found in his published music. The apparent attempt to promote an idea must then be viewed with a certain degree of caution. Other aspects of Sor's technique such as the restriction of all fingers to *p.*, *i.* and *m.*, cannot be accepted as general rules but rather considered in the context of his own approach.

The rationale for the selection

Publishers and editors have long used various criteria in determining the composition of collections of pieces from the vast output of composers. Some clearly belong in an anthology, and some are clearly not. As a matter of definition, each and every piece published by Sor, whether or not it had a didactic purpose, or in any other sense, is so described in his titles, or in the prefaces which he attached. Of course, the nature of the entire output of Sor, the formation of guitarists by a practice book, and the encouragement, as a first undertaking, of entering the entire output in a usable format, the selection of a certain volume is limited to those collections to which reference has been made by Sor in his Method. We also include those collections that contain a reference to the didactic nature in their titles, or in the prefaces attached by the composer to their first editions.

In his Method, Fernando Sor defines the nature of his various didactic collections which were published prior to 1830. He says:

Exercices. *Morceaux de musique dont chacun a pour but de nous rendre familière l'application des règles. Les exercices sont la pratique des théories établies par la méthode (que je considère la partie spéculative), comme l'emploi*

de l'équerre pour élever une perpendiculaire n'est que le résultat de la démonstration de cette figure:

Exercices. Pieces of music, each having as an objective to make us familiar with the application of the rules. Exercises are the practice of theories established by the method (which I consider the speculative part), as the use of the square for raising a perpendicular is the result of a certain geometrical demonstration. (Translation by Arnold Merrick.)⁵

Leçons. *Morceaux de musique dont chacun doit avoir pour but l'exercice de la règle établie par la méthode employées dans les leçons précédentes, et même l'initiation de quelques exceptions.* (My translation - MO.)⁶

Lessons. Pieces of music, with each designed to have for its object the exercise of a single rule, and also [may deal with] the rules of the preceding, and even the initiating of the learner in some exceptions. (My translation - MO.)⁶

Leçons. *Morceaux de musique dont l'application des règles de la méthode doit être pour objet.*

Study exercises, and on rules offering difficulties to the student. (Translation by Arnold Merrick.)

In the preface to the 1830 edition of the *Exercices*, op. 35,⁷ Sor lists the reason for writing this collection was the observations made by others on the previous work, the *24 Leçons*, op. 31, were not presented in a gradual progressive fashion, an observation that is repeated in the Method itself. At the same time, he assures his prospective readers, the material is carefully graduated and deals with the same problems addressed in the *24 Leçons*. Moreover, it is designed to provide the facility needed for accompaniment and will better prepare the student to approach the *24 Leçons*. In the last paragraph of the preface, Sor makes a pre-publication pitch for his as published Method:

Ces exercices seront très utiles surtout aux personnes qui étudieront d'après la méthode que je suis sur le point de publier, car mon but principal a été de mettre en pratique la théorie qu'elle renferme.

⁵ The figure used by Sor is a simple geometric construction which proves that a line drawn from point M, the conjunction of two circles whose centres lie equidistant from point C (the point of equal division of the line AB) will form a right angle between lines MC and AB. The relevance of the drawing and its logic to the argument about the nature of exercises, seems obtuse on first reading. Its significance may lie in private or public arguments Sor may have had with his colleagues with which we are not conversant today. In his English translation, Arnold Merrick solved the dilemma by simply making an obscure reference to the drawing without duplicating it.

⁶ Arnold Merrick translates this passage thus: *Lessons, pieces of music, each having for its object not the exercise of a single rule, but also of the rules employed in the lessons preceding, and even the initiating of the learner in some exceptions.* While this rendition is in impeccable English, it does not precisely render the same sense of the original text.

⁷ This was one of the earliest compositions published by Sor himself and distributed by Pacini. It was listed in the *Bibliographie de la France*, according to Jeffery, in September 1828, almost a year and a half before the publication of the *Méthode* in 1830. See page 93 of the present publication.

These exercises will be very useful to persons who shall study according to the method which I am about to publish, as my principal purpose has been to put to practice the principles contained therein. (My translation - MO.)

This text tells us that Fernando Sor had formulated the principal theories expounded upon in the *Method*. For all we know, the book may have been written already by 1828 and in the process of being prepared for publication. It also tells us that by this time Sor was convinced of the wisdom of presenting the student with technical difficulties in a carefully graduated manner. If the exercises in fact are a practical rendition of a given theory or rule, Sor has not seen it fit to identify precisely in each exercise the theoretical rule to which it is relevant. Obviously, it would have been confusing to readers in 1828, since the theoretical text was not yet available. Conversely, the *Method* itself does not contain any direct reference to the practical application of any of its theories in these Exercises. While the *24 Studies* and *24 Lessons* are repeatedly mentioned in the *Method* right from its very beginning, the *24 Exercises* are mentioned then briefly at the end of the book, and repeat the assertion that they were meant to present a simpler, more graduated version of the *Lessons*. Hence, we cannot determine which theoretical principle is given to which practical illustration in each of the Exercises. The best we can make of Sor's definitions of the different character of exercises, lessons and studies is that he simply meant that each of the categories represent another degree in ascending scale of technical difficulty.

For this reason, although the present book of teaching material by Sor is arranged in chronological sequence, the numbers or dates of publication of the exercises in the list may be consulted to form an idea of a general exposition of the technical level of each piece, the order and the individual piece within it. It is clear from several statements made by Sor in the material to be studied in the sequence in which it was prepared by the composer and that the *24 Exercises* (op. 6 & op. 29) at least, is based on the *24 Lessons* and on the *24 Studies*. This is the view of the passionate teacher, the student who finds in the sequences of studies a way to work better, particularly in the beginning.

On the Edition

The new Urtext edition of Sor's didactic pieces takes with it an approach to that taken by other, even quite recent, editions. In preparing the material for publication, we strove to maintain a close adherence to the composer's own statements regarding the pieces as they appear in his various writings. At the same time, each individual reference was evaluated against other available historical evidence to determine the extent to which it truly represents Sor's *applied* technique, the way he actually performed these pieces himself. Another important issue we had to consider was that as much as historically informed performance practice has been of great benefit to performing musicians, we must be aware that the *purpose* of

these pieces is to help in the formation of *today's* beginner, intermediate and advanced guitarists. Whatever their impact may have been on Sor's students in the early nineteenth century, we must consider the impact they have today, on *our* students. The general formative preparation they offer is not only applicable to playing the concert level larger works by the same composer, but also to the entire repertoire of the classical guitar as it is practised today, and as it will be practised in the future. Hence, their usefulness must not be handicapped by an imperceptive attachment to a false understanding of the composer's intentions.

The Coste Connection

As stated before, the new edition preparing this edition consulted the original edition of the *24 Exercises* with statements made by the composer and with a point-by-point evaluation of the quality of the statements. Besides the various testimonies by Andrés Segovia regarding the work of Sor, we have a powerful direct testimony from one of Sor's hand and most important students, the French guitarist N. Coste (1805-1883). Coste added a supplement to the first edition of the Sor method, containing the *24 Exercises* arranged in four volumes. Coste's title to the supplement is as follows:

24 études pour la guitare par Ferdinand Sor; Revisées, corrigées, et doigtées d'après les traditions de l'auteur par N. Coste.

26 studies for the guitar by Ferdinand Sor, revised, ordered and fingered according to the traditions of the author by N. Coste.

In clear and this particular wording, Coste is telling us in fact that every change made by him to these pieces was based on information he received directly from his teacher, the composer, Fernando Sor. This is a first hand testimony directly relating to Sor's activity as a teacher and his use, in the privacy of his teacher's studio, of printed material of his own compositions. As pointed out by Erik Stenstadvoll,⁸ the Coste compilation must have been the major source for the variant readings of Sor's original text as they appear in the famous edition of *20 Sor Studies* by Andrés Segovia. In his article, Mr. Stenstadvoll takes the view that these changes were made by Coste, as indeed they were. Even though he quotes the same wording to the Coste text as printed above, Mr. Stenstadvoll does not allow for the evident likelihood that these changes were made by Coste, because his teacher might have changed his own view of the works. In our view, it is unwise to always take first editions as a final authority for musical texts, particularly when such editions did not enjoy the full participation of the composer in the publishing process, as must have been the case at least with opp. 6, 29 and 31. The intimate relationship between teacher and student, working throughout a series of studies, is a perfect environ-

⁸ Erik Stenstadvoll, *Coste's Contributions to the '20 Studies by Sor'*, Soundboard XI/2, 1984, p. 136.