Profesión
Sean Shibe

PROFESIÓN

Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1959)

1	**Prelude No. 3 in A Minor (Homage to Bach)** from 5 Preludes, W419, A419	3. 53

Agustín Barrios Mangoré (1885-1944)

	La catedral	
2	I. Preludio (Saudade)	1. 59
3	II. Andante religioso	2. 02
4	III. Allegro solemne	3. 19
5	**Julia Florida**	4. 32

Heitor Villa-Lobos

	12 Studies, W235, A235	
6	No. 1, Allegro non troppo	2. 02
7	No. 2, Allegro	1. 38
8	No. 3, Allegro moderato	2. 49
9	No. 4, Un peu modéré	4. 37
10	No. 5, Andantino	2. 21
11	No. 6, Poco allegro	1. 46
12	No. 7, Tres animé	3. 00
13	No. 8, Modéré - Lent	3. 04
14	No. 9, Très peu animé	3. 02
15	No. 10, Très animé [ME-1953]	2. 00
16	No. 11, Lent	3. 52
17	No. 12, Animé	2. 19

Alberto Ginastera (1916-1983)

	Sonata, Op. 47	
18	I. Esordio	4. 14
19	II. Scherzo	3. 20
20	III. Canto	3. 50
21	IV. Finale	2. 15

Total playing time: 62. 05

Sean Shibe, guitar

In 1928 Villa-Lobos completed the first draft of the work he began 4 years previously: *Douze Études*. This cycle of guitar studies, then unprecedented, is still unmatched in its scale, difficulty, and creativity.

Villa-Lobos entertainingly describes the meeting with Andrés Segovia that led to the first Etude:

"I met Segovia in 1923 or '24, I don't quite remember. The crème de la crème of society was there. I saw a boy with a lot of hair, surrounded by women. He seemed not very bright, presumptuous even, but also quite friendly. The Portuguese guitarist Costa asked Segovia if he knew Villa-Lobos, but without telling him that I was there. Segovia said that he thought my works were anti-guitar and that I had used resources that were not for the guitar. I immediately moved over and asked Segovia: "Why do you think my works are anti-guitar?" Segovia, a bit surprised, explained that, for example, my right pinky finger was not used in classical guitar. So I said to him: "Ah, so it is not used? Well then, just cut it off, cut it off." Segovia tried to make a rebuttal but I went straight ahead and said to him "Give me your guitar, come on, give it to me!". Segovia never lent it to anyone, anyone at all, and tried to resist. But to no avail. So I sat down, played and ruined the party. Segovia asked me where I had learnt to play. I told him that I was not a guitarist but had complete knowledge of the techniques of Carulli, Sor, Aguado, Carcassi etc. The next day, he arrived at my house. I told them that I could not ask him in because I had to go out to dinner and would not be back until late. He came back later and we played the guitar one after the other until four in the morning. He commissioned a Study for guitar and our friendship became so all-encompassing that instead of the one he had asked for, I composed twelve: Twelve Studies for the guitar."

Heitor Villa-Lobos in Paris

Despite the quick results of this encounter, according to Frédéric Zigante there is no evidence that Segovia concertised any work by Villa-Lobos until 1938. Segovia generally didn't allow much time to pass

between the first reading of a piece and its inclusion in programmes, so it is difficult to see why he didn't speedily prepare the first Etude - an idiomatic and sensational work suiting his needs - for concert. To understand more fully, it is worth considering Segovia's relationship with the work of Paraguayan guitarist-composer Agustín Barrios Mangoré.

In 1921 they met for the first time, Barrios' performance of his composition *La catedral* impressing Segovia enough that the maestro requested a copy to play in recital. Barrios writes:

"I have had the good fortune of hearing Segovia in one of his celebrated concerts at the La Argentina hall. Elbio [Barrios' secretary] introduced me to him, and now we are the best of friends. He treated me very considerately and affectionately. I made him listen to some of my compositions on his very own guitar, which pleased him very much. Because of the sincere and frank treatment Segovia accorded me, I must tell you that I feel very close to him. I am enchanted by his manner of playing and try to imitate it, but without losing my own personality. He particularly liked La catedral *and asked me for a copy so he could play it in concert. So I beg you, Pagolita, please send me a copy of that composition as soon as possible since Segovia leaves for Europe on the 2nd of November. He encouraged me to make a journey to the Old World as soon as possible. He was not the least bit ill-humoured with me. On the contrary, he held me in high esteem (something he had done for few professionals). According to him, he saw in me much sincerity as an artist."*

Segovia corroborates this request for a copy of *La catedral:*

"In 1921 in Buenos Aires, I played at the hall La Argentina noted for its good acoustics for guitar, where Barrios had concertized just weeks before me. At my invitation

Barrios visited me at the hotel and played for me upon my very own guitar several of his compositions among which the one that really impressed me was a magnificent concert piece La catedral *whose first movement is an andante, like an introduction and prelude, and a second very virtuosic piece which is ideal for the repertory of any concert guitarist. Barrios had promised to send me immediately a copy of the work (I had ten days remaining before continuing my journey) but I never received a copy.*
Much later a few close friends of Barrios informed me of the existence of a letter that he had written to Borda y Pagola requesting that the copy be sent me as soon as possible, thus I know that Barrios was a sincere and serious artist. But given the vicissitudes of his life style and the hard journeys he had to make, he was unable to keep his archives at hand"

One can sense the esteem which Segovia formed of Barrios at this initial meeting, all the more notable for his subsequent neglect of the composer's work. Despite declaring his life's goal to be building a substantial repertoire for the instrument, Segovia disregarded the hugely significant body of Latin American guitar music which Barrios represented, never performing his compositions (even after John Williams brought him to popular attention), and even describing him as "not a good composer for the guitar." Far from a thorough critique, and perhaps an ill-thought-through or offhand remark, but this — in combination with florid praise following Barrios' death — is, at the very least, mixed messaging.

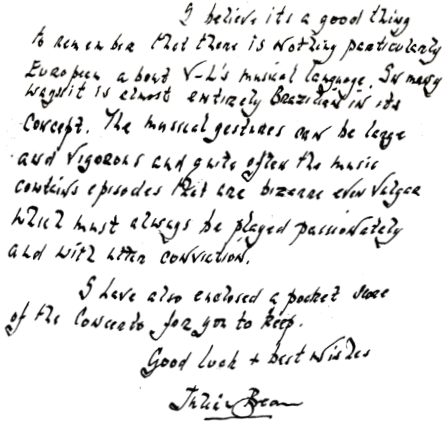
Perhaps Segovia's treatment of Villa-Lobos and Barrios stem from the same place. Segovia had taken enormous efforts to establish himself as the 'Apostle of the guitar' ("I found the guitar almost at a standstill... and raised it to the loftiest levels of the musical world", he writes in one of his autobiographies),

but in these encounters faced potential rivals. Both figures were not only highly capable guitarists; they were formidable composers with major works under their belts who continued the tradition — which Segovia respected and understood intimately — of the 19th-century virtuoso guitarist-composer. Consider how this might have confronted Segovia. Acknowledgement of Barrios would have required an adjustment of his raison d'être.

However surprising, this behaviour was consistent with the maestro's neglect of notable works for the guitar. Most infamously he never performed Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez* (written for Regino Sainz de la Maza), but he also held absurdly conservative reasons for not collaborating with Stravinsky ("*[Stravinsky] was always looking to see if I would ask him to write something. But I never did. "Why doesn't Andrés ask me to write for him?" he kept asking mutual friends. The reason for this is that he might have wanted me to play the guitar behind my back, or up in the air, or worse still, if I didn't like the work I didn't want to refuse him.*"), and Frank Martin's masterful *Quatre Pièces Brèves* — dedicated to Segovia, naturally — had to wait for the young Julian Bream to champion them, just like the full *Douze Études*.

Julian Bream's opinions on Villa-Lobos potentially hold a clue to a second reason for Segovia's lack of action. In one of the final letters that Bream sent to me he wrote: "*I believe it's a good thing to remember that there is nothing particularly European about V-L's musical language. In many ways it is almost entirely Brazilian in its concept. The musical gestures can be large and vigorous, and quite often the music contains episodes that are bizarre - even vulgar - which must always be played passionately, and with utter conviction.*" With Stravinsky rejected for being too

avant-garde, and Segovia's favoured composers (like Manuel Maria Ponce, for example) erring towards genteel, it is possible that — to an extent — the earthy and occasionally chaotic *Douze Études* might have gone against his tastes. When accepting an honorary Doctorate from Florida State University in 1969, Segovia



I believe it's a good thing
to remember that there is nothing particularly
European about V-L's musical language. So much
of it is almost entirely Brazilian in its
concept. The musical gestures can be large
and vigorous and quite often the music
contains episodes that are bizarre even vulgar
which must always be played passionately
and with utter conviction.

I have also enclosed a pocket score
of the Concerto for you to keep.

Good luck + best wishes

Julian Bream

Letter from Julian Bream to Sean Shibe

described his prime effort: "*to extract the guitar from the noisy and disreputable folkloric amusements.*"

Bream also held strong feelings towards Ginastera's challenging *Sonata*, towards the end of his life regretting not having learned and performed it, though one imagines Segovia would have held little or no regret at all — when surveying the mind-boggling technical spectrum of techniques present in the 14-minute work, his comments on Stravinsky comes to mind. Ginastera's approach, however, is not indulgent or superficial novelty but the result of a lifetime of rigorous research: the chord which opens the piece, formed by the open strings of the guitar (E-A-D-G-B-E), was used in his compositions for decades before writing the Sonata, and the fantastical sonic approach which follows is an encyclopaedia of extended effects. Ginastera was well aware that this was fundamental to the success of the *Sonata*: "*When the critics at its premiere received this work as one of the most important ever written for the guitar, as much for its conception as for its modernism and its unprecedented imaginative use of sound, I thought that I had not waited in vain for several decades to make the attempt...*"

From the outset, the instrument is assaulted with relentless physicality, the initial dynamic of the first movement triple forte, along with "*sempre tutta forza!*" for good measure. A jarring counterpoint to the pianistic writing found elsewhere in the programme, perhaps, but not philosophically inconsistent with it either. All of these composers, with very different methods and results, use the guitar as a shamanic conduit to the heritage and destiny of South America.

Sean Shibe

Alberto Ginastera

Profesión de Fe

(Agustín Barrios Mangoré)

Tupá, el Espíritu Supremo y protector de mi raza,
encontróme un día en medio del bosque florecido.
Y me dijo: "Toma esta caja misteriosa y descubre sus secretos".
Y encerrando en ella todas las avecillas canoras de la floresta
y el alma resignadade los vegetales, la abandonó en mis manos.
Toméla, obedeciendo el mandato de Tupá
y poniéndola bien junto al corazón,
abrazado a ella pasé muchas lunas al borde de una fuente.
Y una noche, Jasy retratada en el líquido cristal,
sintiendo la tristeza de mi alma india,
dióme seis rayos de plata para
con ellos descubrir sus árcanos secretos.
Y el milagro se operó:
desde el fondo de la caja misteriosa,
brotó la sinfonía maravillosa
de todas las voces vírgenes de la naturaleza de América.

Profession of Faith

Tupá, the supreme spirit and protector of my people,
Found me one day in the middle of a greening forest.
And he told me: "Take this mysterious box and reveal its secrets."
And enclosing within it all the songs of the birds of the jungle
And the mournful signs of the plants, he abandoned it in my hands.
I took it and obeying Tupa's command
I held it close to my heart.
Embracing it I passed many moons on the edge of a spring fountain.
And one night, Yacy reflected in the crystal liquid,
Feeling the sadness of my Indian soul,
She gave me six silver moonbeams
With which to discover its secrets.
And the miracle took place:
From the bottom of the mysterious box
Came forth a marvellous symphony
Of all the virgin voices of America.

Agustín Barrios as Chief Nitsuga Mangoré

In August 1930, the guitarist Agustín Barrios was reborn. Wearing a headdress and dressed in traditional Paraguayan Guaraní clothing, Chief Nitsuga Mangoré would assume his position on a stage decorated with bamboo and palm leaves. Barrios was transformed into a timeless prophet: his guitar was his lyre, its strings "six silver moonbeams" designed to convey the oldest truths, and his spoken poem *Profesión de Fe* ("Profession of Faith") became both an artistic declaration of faith and an explainer to potentially bemused audience members.

This persona would last around four years, before he retired — in performance, at least — the second half of his marketing slogan, "The Paganini of the guitar from the jungles of Paraguay." Yet in that short time-period, Barrios' work asked many questions pertinent to revivals today: namely, through what means were Barrios and his South American contemporaries articulating their particular cultural identities? And what part did the Old World play in those constructions?

Though Barrios, a guitarist born in Paraguay in 1885, would only meet the legendary Spanish guitarist Andrés Segovia a handful of times, their artistic visions had a large amount in common. Both were guitar virtuosos, both wished to underline the guitar's suitability as a solo instrument, and both sought new repertoire for the instrument, albeit in contrasting ways. (Segovia enlisted Federico Moreno Torroba, Joaquín Rodrigo, Manuel Ponce, and Heitor Villa-Lobos to write for the instrument, while Barrios wrote reams of compositions, transcriptions and arrangements himself.) The relationship between the two guitarists was uneven, however. In spite of Barrios' enthusiasm for the Spanish master, Segovia ultimately ignored Barrios' music for the guitar, even going as far as publicly pronouncing Barrios "not a good composer for the guitar" in 1982.

A similarly strained relationship characterised Segovia's relationship with another South American, Heitor Villa-Lobos. Writing in 1928, Villa-Lobos wrote of the first time he met Segovia in 1923, that "he said he thought my works were anti-guitar, and that I had used resources that were not for the guitar." Compare that with Segovia's words in an edition of the *Études* eventually published in January 1953: "Villa-Lobos has donated to the history of guitar the fruits of his talent," he wrote in the preface: "Just as vigorous and full of flavour as those of Scarlatti and Chopin."

Segovia's relationships with Barrios and Villa-Lobos highlight not only the power dynamics between composer and performer, but also between historic geographies. In Shibe's view, Barrios' relationship to the Spaniard exemplifies "the Latin American deference to Europe": the particular mode of postcolonial subordination, which retained some of the power dynamics previously assumed between the Old World colonisers and Latin American citizens. And though Villa-Lobos and Segovia's relationship became more collaborative and ended more fruitfully, in both cases, it's clear where the majority of power lay.

Barrios' artistic trajectory contributes the most to the conceptual framework

of *Profesión*, which wonders what Barrios might have found had he set free "all the virgin voices of America," as was the stated aim of Chief Nitsuga.

Shibe's album is a collection of arcs large and small, each curving smoothly towards the next. The longest span follows a gradual change to compositional aesthetic as it relates to identity, moving from adulation of the Old World, through Barrios' conservative compositional style, "into something both that's more 'new' or 'authentic' in terms of South American cultural expression on the guitar," Shibe says: "Away from Chopin-esque homage to something much more deliberately magical realist."

The first of these is something Segovia described as "deathly boring." "He tries to imitate Bach," Segovia wrote, "and the third part of a descending sequence — in other words, a regression — at the beginning is truly ridiculous." Despite Segovia's hostility, the *Homenagem a Bach* has gone on to become one of Barrios' most celebrated guitar works. Calling to mind the compound melodies of a Bach invention or solo instrument suite, it is the third of *Five Preludes* (1940), each carrying a descriptive subtitle: it's followed by homages to the *Indio Brasileiro* and the social life of Rio de Janeiro, and preceded by contrasting portraits of the rural Brazilian and the Rio hustler. Villa-Lobos settled on this picture-postcard scheme as a brochure for Brazilian music, showing that it could incorporate multiple styles while still holding true to something of its own.

Bach is also the primary reference point for "La Catedral," Barrios' most famous composition from 1921, but his reverence is put on an equal footing as his own experience, as Barrios captures something of the awe upon hearing Bach being played on the organ of Montevideo's Cathedral of San José de Mayo. That moment of solemn respect helps

construct the quietly magisterial second movement, while the final movement captures the rush of the city streets around the Cathedral. The piece begins with a movement added much later, the "Preludio saudade" from 1939. Its title derives from a Portuguese word meaning melancholy or longing, a slightly meta moment where Barrios documents for posterity the act of looking back on a memory. "Julia Florida," an accomplished barcarola written in Cuba around the same time as the "Preludio", adds a painful context to the melancholic sounds. By this point, Barrios' poor health, stretched finances, and diminishing work opportunities suggest a figure longing for more prosperous times.

Shibe's search for a truly individual means of expression really begins with Heitor Villa-Lobos's *Douze Études*, but getting there requires a degree of musical problem-solving before a note has been played. With multiple manuscripts and authors over a long gestation period complicating the picture, Villa-Lobos' collection has been a constant source of intrigue for publishers and scholars of the 20th Century guitar repertoire.

The pieces were written in Paris, during the second of Villa-Lobos' visits to the city. Completed in 1928, Villa-Lobos delivered a first draft to his Parisian publisher Éditions Max Eschig. Then, things unravelled: a *coup d'etat* in Brazil in 1930 and the horrors the Second World War in Europe meant a return to Paris wasn't possible for Villa-Lobos until 1948; his publishers failed to publish the *Études* immediately, possibly owing to the financial risk of publishing this technically challenging work for this particular instrument; and due to copying errors, intense workshops of movements with Segovia, later rewrites by Villa-Lobos, and recently unearthed manuscripts, the collection has ultimately become "an enigma," Frédéric Zigante writes in his critical edition from 2008. (It's interesting to compare outcomes between Villa-Lobos

and Barrios. "From his swollen number of compositions, I do not exaggerate in telling you that the only one that is of any use is the study in E Major (no. 7)," Segovia wrote to Manuel Ponce regarding Villa-Lobos' *Études*. Having initially dismissed his knowledge of guitar technique, and then, privately, his compositions, Villa-Lobos' tenacity and increasing social status as a composer allowed him to revisit the work later on, organising for it to be published, and thus forcing his way into the guitar canon. It was a set of circumstances that didn't befall Barrios.)

In spite of the tangled history, "the "Douze Études" sums up his compositional journey relatively pithily," Shibe says. The first is a very direct homage to Chopin, and after similar nods to the musical styles Paganini and Shostakovich, at the midpoint, we start to witness the development of his musical style." There's an evocation of *choro* groups in the fourth movement, and wistful folk melodies emerge in the fifth, before a distinctly Rachmaninoff-ian sixth. But gradually, something more unnerving, and more magical engulfs the piece: hallucinatory rainforest experiences, rain, distant drums, and altogether more violent musical and guitaristic effects come to the fore as the piece enters its later movements.

There are still traces of homage in Alberto Ginastera's *Sonata for Guitar* (1976), but viewed entirely through what Shibe describes as magic realism, a faint arc at the beginning of *Profesiòn* that becomes particularly pronounced in the final two pieces. It's "not an overt reference to Gabriel García Márquez or anything," Shibe says, but "a slightly unbelievable aspect to what's going on."

By Ginastera's sonata, we're on the other side of the glass, not paying homage to the Old World, but still feeling its presence as one ghost among many. Inbetween the stark, quadruple forte chords, swooping glissandos, hurtling chromatic figures, and barline-less sublimity of the middle 'Canto' section, Ginastera inserts a few ghostly figures; some from folk music, heard on the wind; some from the Old World — at the end of the 'Scherzo', Ginastera writes an asterisk, with "Sixtus Beckmesser is coming!" — and some from an ancient ether, with deadened drums transmogrified by the body of the guitar. All of this was lurking at the bottom of Nitsuga's mystery box. It's down to the possessor of the "six silver moonbeams" to piece these identities together.

Hugh Morris

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