An introduction to the piano music of Manuel M. Ponce

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AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PIANO MUSIC OF
MANUEL M. PONCE

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts

in

The School of Music

by
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ABSTRACT

Manuel María Ponce Cuéllar (1882-1948) was a Mexican pianist, composer and educator. A prolific composer, Manuel Ponce wrote orchestral suites and symphonic poems; three concertos, one each for piano, guitar and violin; chamber works; over 400 works for piano, both solo and in ensemble; a large collection of works for the guitar long considered the foundation of the modern guitar repertoire; over 200 songs; choral works and music for the stage. His constant search for and assimilation of new musical materials and compositional techniques lead him to write a large and eclectic catalogue of works.

A brilliant pianist in his own right, Manuel Ponce left behind a wealth of works for his most beloved instrument that range from salonesque dances to the most learned of fugues. In these works he combined his affinity for Musical Romanticism with French impressionism, Neoclassic models, and Mexican folk songs, while still projecting his own compositional voice.

Today however, Ponce’s reputation rests solely on his works for the guitar. Indeed, the unfair neglect his piano music has suffered is the main motivation behind this paper. First, a brief review of the events surrounding the age of Porfiriato and the Mexican Revolution will demonstrate how these events shaped Ponce’s life and work. Second, an overview of important biographical information will shed light on Ponce’s background and illustrate how his work changed Mexico’s musical panorama. Finally, building on Pablo Castellanos’ landmark research on Ponce’s work, and through musical examples drawn from the Mazurkas, the Balada Mexicana, The Quatre Pièces pour
*Piano*, and the *Cuatro Danzas Mexicanas*, this document displays how Ponce’s compositional style changed through the years. This monograph reflects on Ponce’s work as he undoubtedly saw it himself: first and foremost as a composer for the piano.
INTRODUCTION

“To sum up, your work is what has the most value for me and for all the musicians who hear it.”
Andrés Segovia, letter to Ponce, Dec. 1929

The existence of a body of works that has stood the test of time and has become accepted into the canon has the benefit of providing the novice with a starting point, as well as helping him avoid spending time and energies on lesser works. On the other hand, the existence of a canon in itself implies the rejection of a number of works that perhaps deserve to be better known. Although it is uncommon for a composer whose works have been found unworthy to find his way into the canon, that doesn’t always have to be the case. Among the composers whose music should be given a second chance is Manuel M. Ponce.

Andrés Segovia regarded Manuel Ponce’s music for guitar as the most influential of the entire guitar repertory. Since its composition in 1941, the Concierto del Sur for guitar and orchestra has had many champions, among them Segovia, John Williams and Sharon Isbin. Ponce’s sonatas, preludes and suites for guitar solo have been recorded numerous times and have become the essential core of the guitar repertory, prompting Segovia to credit Ponce with “having saved the guitar.” In contrast, Ponce’s abundant

2. Grove Music Online, s.v. “Ponce, Manuel.”
piano works remain practically unknown, out of a catalog of over one hundred piano
works only eight (seven minor works and the Second Sonata) are mentioned in Hinson’s
Guide to the Pianist’s Repertoire.⁴

This neglect becomes all the more puzzling when we consider the immediate
appeal of Ponce’s melodic gift, the reach of his musical imagination that allowed him to
compose in a variety of styles (from Late Romantic to Neo-Classical, from
Impressionistic to Baroque pastiches) while still projecting his very own personal voice,⁵
his novel use of Mexican folkloric elements and Latin rhythms, his masterful
understanding of the possibilities of the piano and the sheer size of his output.

This monograph will follow the scheme proposed by renowned Ponce scholar
Pablo Castellanos to understand the evolution of Ponce’s compositional style.⁶
Castellanos conceives of Ponce’s creative life as consisting of two main periods, each
divided in two stages:

Romantic period (1891-1924)

Stage 1: from 1891 to 1904. During this time Ponce wrote a large number of
works exclusively for the piano, most of the works from this stage show
the influence of the salon music popular in Mexico at the time, while some
of them also show the influence of Mexican folk elements.

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Stage 2: from 1905 to 1924, during the composer’s first period of study in Europe.

During this time Ponce collected and harmonized over 200 Mexican canciones, and used folk themes within sonata, suite and variation forms.

In addition, Ponce begun to create works within a Romantic style but with an unmistakable Mexican sound without resorting to quotations of actual folk tunes. Ponce met Spanish guitarist Andrés Segovia during this time, and their friendship led him to write several works for the guitar.

Modern period (1925-1948)

Stage 3: from 1925 to 1932, during Ponce’s second period of study in Europe.

During this time Ponce familiarized himself with the resources of French Impressionism, became interested in polytonality and wrote works in Neoclassical style.

Stage 4: from 1933 to 1948, after the second trip to Europe. Back in Mexico,

Ponce returned to the use of Mexican folk materials within large musical structures and wrote completely original works with a Mexican sound now in a modern and colorful Impressionistic style.  

7. Pablo Castellanos, Manuel M. Ponce, (Mexico City, MX: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México: 1982) 18-19
CHAPTER I.
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Art is not created in a vacuum, the specific historical moment in which a work of art is created both influences and can be influenced by the work. Therefore, understanding the historical moment between the *Porfiriato*\(^8\) and the Mexican Revolution, as well as the transformation they brought about that resulted in modern Mexico, can shed light on the musical work of Manuel M. Ponce. In addition, Ponce’s work can enlighten us with regard to the social changes Mexico experienced as a result of the Revolution.

In August 1521, the Aztec Empire was defeated by the Spanish army and was formally declared a territory of the Spanish Crown. Subsequently Mexico faced numerous foreign invasions and attempts against its sovereignty. As a result, over the years Mexican society developed a complex and ambivalent view towards foreign influence.

Art historian Jorge Alberto Manrique Castañeda writes:

> In some respects, Mexican culture has been defined by the alternation of two contrasting attitudes towards Europe, on the one hand openness and acceptance of everything European, followed by a need to reassert national identity through the complete rejection of foreign influence. Thus,

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8. A thirty-five-year period (1876-1911) of dictatorial rule in Mexico under President Porfirio Díaz. During this time, Mexico experienced unprecedented economic growth while half of the country sank even deeper in poverty. The Díaz regime would come to an end with the Mexican Revolution.
Mexican society goes from delighting in the expression of the self to the fear of falling behind [other nations].

During the *Porfiriato*, Mexican society opened itself to foreign influence and manifested the desire to become “a civilized country” “on par with the educated nations of the world.” In order to become a more “civilized” country, the Díaz Regime decided, Mexico had to cultivate the arts. To do so, Porfirian Mexico followed European fashion and adopted Romanticism as its own means of expression.

Romantic opera quickly won the public’s favor, consequently Mexican composers soon adopted the style of the European Romantics. The quick adoption of Romantic opera by the public opened the door to the acceptance of everything European. In this environment, the increased cultural exchange brought about by the increase in foreign investment found particularly fertile ground.

However, due to political instability and inadequate musical education, the European musical styles brought to the country didn’t evolve. In fact, almost all the musical production in the country was the labor of amateur musicians belonging to the wealthier class, since only they could afford such activities. As the elites adopted European (especially French) fashions and customs, they regarded themselves as the Example the masses should follow to become more civilized. Indeed, during the *Porfiriato*, the idea that a modern and strong Mexico could come only from the imitation of foreign models became the guiding principle of the Díaz Regime and the ruling class.


Before the *Porfiriato*, the lack of safe roads and other reliable means of communication meant that folk musicians from the smaller towns remained isolated from the bigger cities; therefore Mexican folk music remained confined to the rural areas of the country. The expansion of the railroads, brought about by the increased foreign investment during the *Porfiriato*, connected the more isolated parts of the country. By making travel to distant regions of the country possible, the railroads radically changed the way people lived. In time, this new mobility would also make it possible for small guerilla factions disseminated through the rural parts of the country to communicate and coordinate their movements, bringing about the Revolution.\(^{11}\)

The increased commercial activity, aided by the new possibility of safe travel by railroad, made it possible for large groups of farmers, potters and other small businessmen to congregate in regional fairs. *La Feria de San Marcos*,\(^{12}\) held in Aguascalientes, quickly became the biggest and most important of these fairs. All these developments gave rise to the “*rapsodas,*” traveling folk musicians that would make a living by bringing the songs of their region from town to town and fair to fair. *La Feria de San Marcos* being the biggest of them all also meant better money earning possibilities for the *rapsodas*, and they would flock to San Marcos in large numbers.\(^{13}\)

As years went by, the economic development brought about by the policies of Diaz continued to radically change Mexico and a new middle class started to take shape. With time, as members of the middle class adopted the habits and tastes of the wealthy,  

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12. Saint Mark’s Fair.
13. Carlos Gómez, 32.
music making became a middle class endeavor and the elites became spectators and patrons. While the wealthy amateur musician of the past saw music making as a fashionable pastime, the new middle class musician saw it as both an art and a profession; while the former wouldn’t stray from the more fashionable formulae of Romantic salon music, the latter would eventually venture past the prescribed boundaries of “good taste.”

All the aforementioned events: the importation of European Romantic music and culture, the expansion of the railroad and the cultural exchange it facilitated, the labor of the traveling rapsodas bringing their regional folk music out of its local surroundings and into a shared national psyche, and the social changes that made music making a middle class affair, coalesced into the social and cultural context of the childhood and early formative years of Manuel M. Ponce.

Change threatens the powerful. If change threatens the status quo, then immobility strengthens it. As the powerful elites of the Porfiriato felt the threat of a burgeoning Revolution, they reacted by holding onto their imported ideal of civility. This immobility extended to all aspects of life, and so Musical Romanticism had to be preserved. In this way the development of Mexican music became inextricably linked to the politic future of the country, as a result true musical evolution could only start once the Regime started to crumble. 14

Although the Mexican Revolution had officially ended successfully with the fall of the Diaz Empire on June 1911, infighting between the different Rebel factions continued for years. Francisco I. Madero was widely seen as the people’s favorite to replace Diaz. Madero, however, worried about the perceived lack of legitimacy this

theoretical presidency would face, and he was especially worried that the still powerful elites would refuse to support a President from La Bola.\textsuperscript{15} Madero pushed for Francisco León de la Barra to become interim President with the sole purpose of organizing elections.\textsuperscript{16} Madero hoped this would make for a smoother political transition, but it also meant the beginning of the end of his alliance with several rebel leaders, Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa among them. Madero would go on to win the Presidential elections on November 1911, only to be overthrown on February 1913 in a coup d’état led by General Victoriano Huerta.

Foreign interests, the old elites and artists and intellectuals that hoped for a return to Porfirian civility openly supported Huerta’s regime.\textsuperscript{17} This hope was short lived however, because in the summer of 1914 Huerta would be overthrown by a new rebel coalition.\textsuperscript{18} The coalition would name Venustiano Carranza as the new President.

Through all the years of social upheaval, and despite the constant danger, the humble rapsodas continued their travels around the country collecting and bringing with

\textsuperscript{15} Literally: The Mob, a contemptuous label used by the elite to refer to the “uncivilized” rebels.

\textsuperscript{16} León de la Barra was a Diaz supporter and member of his cabinet. Carlos Gómez, 30.

\textsuperscript{17} Chief among them the Taft Administration. US President William Howard Taft was openly worried about Madero’s left leaning policies, while US Ambassador to Mexico Henry Lane Wilson actively participated in the conspiracy to overthrow Madero. Carlos Gómez, 32.

\textsuperscript{18} The new coalition was formed by the troops of Emiliano Zapata, Francisco Villa, Álvaro Obregón and Venustiano Carranza. Carlos Gómez, 35.
them the songs born in the war zone. Ponce would later collect and arrange several of these songs, among them: *La Valentina, Cuiden su vida* and *La Adelita.*

Although the vast majority of the country’s intellectuals and artists had not publicly sided with Huerta, several did. After the fall of Huerta’s government, the new authorities persecuted them all the same, *huertistas* or not. Ponce himself was no *huertista,* he had in fact remained as distant from the political turmoil as possible. However, some in his circle of friends were open supporters of Huerta and as a result Ponce grew increasingly worried he may be found “guilty by association.”

With the end of the *Porfiriato,* folk songs became increasingly popular. The fight for one’s land provokes a strong sense of regional pride. The Revolution mobilized large groups of people all over the country. And with them they carried their local customs and traditions, their food and their culture. Indeed, where *La Bola* went, music followed.

19. Of these songs, *La Valentina* originated among Villa’s troops; *Cuiden su vida* originated from Zapata’s troops; and *La Adelita* exists in two contemporary versions, one from Obregón’s troops and one from Villa’s. Carlos Gómez, 55.

CHAPTER II.
BIOGRAPHY

In 1867, at the fall of the Second Mexican Empire with the execution of Maximilian I, Emperor of Mexico, Don Felipe de Jesús Ponce de León, who had served the Empire, sought to escape reprisals by abandoning his home in the city of Aguascalientes for the small mining town of Fresnillo, Zacatecas. His wife, Doña María de Jesús Cuéllar de Haro, and their children followed Don Felipe in this rather sudden relocation. And it was there in Fresnillo where their twelfth child, Manuel, was born.

Manuel María Ponce Cuéllar was born on 8 December 1882, in Fresnillo, Zacatecas. Shortly after his birth however, the Ponce Cuéllar household would move back to their old home, near St. Joseph Church, in downtown Aguascalientes. Don Felipe was a bookkeeper and Doña Jesusita a housewife. And so it fell to her to look after the children’s education. Although she herself was not musically inclined, she insisted on a musical education for all of her children, and in time three of them became professional musicians: María del Refugio, José and Manuel.

By all accounts, Manuel was a quiet, reserved child, and a brilliant student. At the age of five, having fallen ill due to smallpox, Manuel decided to use his illness as a


22. Ibid, 5.

23. José and María del Refugio were piano teachers and composers of several waltzes, mazurkas, preludes, ballads and songs, most of which remain unpublished. López Alonso, 6.
source of inspiration by writing his *Danza del sarampión* (Smallpox Dance), the first of many musical compositions to come.\(^{24}\)

Not far from the Ponce Cuéllar home there stood a colorful garden consecrated to San Marcos. This garden was to become little Manuel’s playground and grown up Manuel’s initial motivation for the pursuit of a nationalist Mexican Music, for it was here in San Marcos where an ever-growing yearly fair took place. *La Feria de San Marcos* with its bullfighters and artists, its beautiful flowers and colorful songbirds, and its traveling *rapsodas* from all over the *Bajío*, became Ponce’s door into a treasure trove of folk music that had remained mostly unnoticed by the more “serious” musicians.\(^{25}\)

Little Manuel received his first piano lessons from his sister Josefina, but more sophisticated teaching was soon needed and he started lessons in harmony and counterpoint with Cipriano Ávila. Manuel was a quick study and by age 12 was named organist of San Diego’s Church in 1895, a position he held for five years. In 1900, seeking to enroll in the National Conservatory, he left Aguascalientes for Mexico City. However, on his arrival to the city he learned that registration at the Conservatory wouldn’t start for six months. Under advisement from Ávila, Ponce sought private instruction from Vicente Mañas.\(^{26}\) Once enrolled at the Conservatory, Ponce continued working privately with Mañas.


\(^{25}\) The *Bajío* or lowlands is a region of Central Mexico that comprises broad sections of the states of Guanajato, Querétaro, Aguascalientes, Jalisco y Michoacán.

\(^{26}\) Spanish pianist and composer, chair and owner of a prestigious private music school in Mexico City.
In 1901, as a first year Conservatory student, Ponce wrote what became his first successful work: the Gavota in D-flat Major for piano solo (Example 2.1).

Example 2.1 Manuel Ponce, Gavota mm. 1-16b

Of this work, Pablo Castellanos says:

the melody has the flavor of the Romantic Mexican song, the harmonic richness and the movement of the inner voices reveal that Ponce had analyzed the pianistic writing of Mexican composers of the previous generation, such as Villanueva.  

27. Felipe de Jesús Villanueva Gutiérrez (1862-1893) was a Mexican pianist and composer and one of the most celebrated figures of the Porfiriato. Pablo Castellanos, 29, trans. by author.
In early 1901, Ponce went back to the Conservatory with the intention of enrolling. However, he decided against it when he realized that the Conservatory’s mandatory curricula for the first four years would force him to cover rudimentary music skills well below his current knowledge and abilities. Disappointed, Ponce contemplated going back home to Aguascalientes. His family convinced him to stay in Mexico City and give the Conservatory a try, but at the end of his first year, Ponce felt that the pace was far too slow, and he requested to be tested for placement at a higher level. When his request was denied, Ponce, already deeply unhappy with the inflexible Conservatory rules, decided to quit.

Back home in Aguascalientes, Ponce opened his own music school and took a job as organist for Saint Francis Church with the goal of saving enough money for a trip to Europe to study. In October 1904, Ponce left Mexico for New York with the intention to continue to Europe. On his way to New York however, Ponce decided to stop at the Saint Louis World’s Fair to attend a performance of Miguel Lerdo de Tejada’s Orquesta Típica Mexicana. There, Lerdo de Tejada arranged for Ponce to meet with members of the Hispano-American Club. Through them, Ponce was able to secure well-received performances in several locations through the Midwest. After that, Ponce continued to New York where he boarded the Hohenzollern en route to Naples. From there he traveled to Rome and finally to Bologna.

28. Miguel Lerdo de Tejada (1869-1941) was a Mexican conductor and composer of salon music, popular songs and zarzuelas. His Orquesta Típica Mexicana (Mexican Folk Orchestra) toured extensively through the United States, South America and Cuba performing his original music as well as his arrangements of Mexican Folk Songs.
Upon his arrival in Bologna, Ponce sought instruction from Enrico Bossi, director of the *Liceo Musical di Bologna*. Unfortunately, Bossi’s multiple engagements made it impossible for him to take any students at the time. Following Bossi’s advice, Ponce decided to stay at the Liceo and study counterpoint, composition and orchestration with Cesare Dall’Olio and Luigi Torchi.

After nine months in Bologna, Ponce decided to move to Berlin and enroll at the Stern Conservatory, where he studied with Martin Krause. While there, Ponce performed in several venues, and his music was so well received by the German public that he was approached by publishers interested in publishing his works. In Berlin, Ponce was able to further refine his compositional craft.

Upon his return to Aguascalientes in early 1907, Ponce found that the musical life of his home state wasn’t as active as he wished. He took it upon himself to organize concerts and bring together local performers and his own students in order to form duos, trios and quartets.

In June 1908, Ponce was invited to join the faculty of the National Conservatory of Music in Mexico City as Professor of Piano and Music History. Relocating to Mexico City, Ponce decided to take on a few private students, among them the 10-year-old Carlos Chávez.

Although Ponce had shown interest in collecting and harmonizing Mexican *Canciones* long before his first European trip, acquaintance with the nationalistic work of

29. Marco Enrico Bossi (1861-1925) was an Italian composer, organist and pianist.
30. Víctor Manuel Carlos Gómez, 38.
composers such as Grieg and Dvorak opened his eyes to the possibilities of using folk materials within classical forms. Ponce writes:

The work of international folklorism has had many intelligent apostles who had taken popular melodies as precious material, building with it sumptuous palaces of novel harmonies which have enriched music literature and have shown the world the soul of their people, crystallized in their songs and adorned with the most brilliant fancies of their high and noble inspiration. Could such a thing be attempted using Mexican folk songs?³¹

Composers of previous generations such as Julio Ituarte, Ricardo Castro, Aniceto Ortega, Felipe Villanueva, and Ernesto Elorduy “shared a vision of Mexican [music] as the conjunction of the melodic and expressive possibilities [of Mexican folk song] within a bourgeois sensibility.”³² Upon his return from Europe, Ponce immersed himself in the study of these composers’ work. Among the conclusions drawn from this study, Ponce found the music of Julio Ituarte to be closely related to the European salon music of his time; the music of Ricardo Castro showed strong French and German influence; Aniceto Ortega’s work showed a strong Italian influence.³³

Back in Mexico City, Ponce found that resentment towards the Diaz regime among the middle class had grown exponentially. This was especially true among the new generation of musicians and artists from the middle class, to which he himself belonged. Their talent and the quality of their work brought them to the attention of the wealthy and the powerful, for whom arts patronage had become fashionable. This arrangement gave middle class musicians and artists the opportunity to witness at first-

³¹ Víctor Manuel Carlos Gómez, 42, trans. by author.


³³ Carlos Gómez, 50.
hand the extreme disparities between the haves and the have-nots. The accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few, the lack of social mobility and the limited employment opportunities were among the challenges faced by this new generation of young artists.\textsuperscript{34}

From the time of his return to Mexico, Ponce had concentrated his creative efforts on the research of folk sources, on the development of an ideology and method for the creation of nationalistic Mexican music, and on the development of his own compositional voice. His labor however was to be disrupted abruptly; in February 1911 the Revolution finally exploded.

With the fall of the Dictatorship came the end of the Mexican obsession with everything European. During the \textit{Porfiriato}, works with nationalistic tendencies were well received by the public, yet often seen as exotic. Composers, writers and artists would now turn to the creative force of the people.

In the middle of all this change, Ponce continued composing, lecturing and organizing concerts in Mexico City. He organized an all-Debussy piano recital with his students on June 24 1912, introducing the music to Mexico.\textsuperscript{35}

On 7 July 1912, Ponce premiered his Piano Concerto and the \textit{Rapsodia Mexicana No I} with great success. Among the audience was President Francisco I. Madero who personally congratulated Ponce and thanked him “in the name of the Nation.”

On December 13, 1913 Ponce presented a lecture at the \textit{Librería “General”} in Mexico City, in which he spoke about the music of the Mexican people. Ponce opened his lecture by talking about the folk music of Europe, its origin and development. He

\textsuperscript{34} Carlos Gómez, 52.

\textsuperscript{35} Carlos Gómez, 58.
proceeded to compare it with the origin and development of Mexican folk music. Then, in the middle of the political and social unrest of a Mexico under Huerta, before an audience of well-to-dos and intellectuals still obsessed with imitating foreign models, Ponce proposed for the first time that the future of Mexican art music resided within the music of the lower class. The audience was shocked; they “held their breath as they heard the composer talk about the have-nots.”

In order to achieve his vision of a truly Mexican art music, Ponce designed a work plan with three specific goals in mind:

- to research, collect and classify folk songs from all regions of the country.
- to chose the most appropriate musical materials from the music collected for the creation of suites, sonatas, etc.
- finally, to write completely original works without including quotations of folk material but reflecting a deep understanding of the Mexican soul.

As a result of this work, in early 1914 Ponce published his first collection of folk songs titled simply Canciones Mexicanas. In this collection Ponce included three songs from La Bola as well as three original songs in the style of the Mexican Canción Romántica. One of the latter would achieve great international success: Estrellita.

On October 31 1914, Ponce premiered his Balada Mexicana at a concert attended by over six hundred people. On 15 March 1915, and due to the growing instability in Mexico City, Ponce decided to leave Mexico for Cuba. Upon his arrival, Ponce immersed

36. Ibid, 61.

37. The songs are: Cuiden su vida and La Valentina, set for voice and piano; and La Cucaracha, set for choir and piano. Víctor Manuel Carlos Gómez, 62.
himself in Cuba’s musical life, writing, performing and composing works influenced by Cuban music. Among these works were *Suite Cubana, Elegía de la ausencia, Preludio Cubano, Guateque* and three *Rapsodias Cubanas*.\(^{38}\)

On his return to Mexico City in June 1917, Ponce was appointed conductor of the *Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional* and resumed teaching at the National Conservatory. During this time, Ponce also became an ever more prolific writer and lecturer. Consequently, Ponce’s compositional output during this time was considerably lower than at any other time. Nevertheless, he continued his musical production with works such as *Chapultepec* for orchestra, *Evocaciones* for piano solo, and the Sonata for cello and piano. It was also during this time that Ponce would meet Spanish guitarist Andrés Segovia, their friendship and collaboration would produce the most important body of works written for the guitar.\(^{39}\)

In October 1925, looking to acquaint himself with contemporary compositional techniques, Ponce enrolled at the *École Normale de Musique* in Paris to study composition under Paul Dukas.\(^{40}\) During his stay in Paris, Ponce became founder and director of the music magazine *Gaceta Musical* and immersed himself in the musical life of the city.

In a letter to his wife Clema, Ponce writes:

> Yesterday I was working at the office and Edgar Varese came looking for me. He had been there twice already without finding me. He invited me to his house, and naturally, I accepted. Roussel, Florent Schmitt, the pianist Teran, Hector Villa-

\(^{38}\) Jorge Barrón Corvera, 9.

\(^{39}\) Jorge Barrón Corvera, 12.

\(^{40}\) Among Ponce’s classmates in Dukas’ lectures were Tudor Ciortea, José Rolón and Joaquín Rodrigo. Ibid, 13.
Lobos and Cotapos, the Chilean composer, were there, along with writers, painters, sculptors, etc… The whole world knew me by name, either through Segovia or the Gaceta.\textsuperscript{41}

During this time, Ponce’s compositional production increased dramatically. Among the works written in Paris were Trio for violin, viola and piano; Sonata for guitar and harpsichord; Sonata breve for violin and piano; Préludes for cello and piano; and Preludios encadenados, Quatre pièces and Sonatine for piano solo.\textsuperscript{42}

Upon his return to Mexico City in 1933, Ponce became Chair of the National Conservatory and the Escuela Universitaria de Música; lectured on piano, music history, musical aesthetics, pedagogy, musical analysis and folk music; created the first class on musical folklore at the Escuela Universitaria; wrote numerous articles for newspapers and magazines; performed and conducted his music and the music of others in Mexico and South America; and continued to compose. From this time date works such as Ferial for orchestra; Concierto del Sur for guitar and orchestra; Violin Concerto; and Instantáneas Mexicanas for orchestra.\textsuperscript{43}

Ponce suffered from poor health through much of his life. During his last years, he was critically ill in several occasions. On 26 February 1948, Ponce became the first composer to be awarded the Premio Nacional de Artes y Ciencias\textsuperscript{44} by President Miguel Alemán. Ponce’s health deteriorated quickly and he would die of kidney disease on 24 April 1948.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid, 15, trans. by author.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid, 16.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid, 18.
\textsuperscript{44} National Art and Sciences Award.
CHAPTER III.
FIRST STAGE (1891-1904)

In his first compositional stage, Ponce wrote several piano works that already show the influence of the Mexican canción romántica.\(^{45}\) However, most of these works are written in the Romantic salon music style so favored by 19th Century Mexican society. Following the Example of Mexican composers from previous generations such as Ricardo Castro, Felipe Villanueva and Tomás León, Ponce took his first steps as a composer writing dances and short piano pieces. Among the dances, Ponce favored the mazurka, eventually writing a collection of over 20 of them.

Most of Ponce’s mazurkas are set in minor keys and are constructed following a Rondo structure (ABACA).\(^{46}\) The most common harmonic scheme is shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1. Most common harmonic scheme in Ponce’s mazurkas.

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</tbody>
</table>

The refrain is most commonly made up of two sections of equal length, with the first section ending on a half cadence and the second on an authentic cadence. Changes in tempo and character further differentiate between the sections of each mazurka, with section B often being often a shorter section and marked at a faster tempo, and section C often marked either espressivo or cantando and having a more lyrical nature.

\(^{45}\) For instance the Gavota in D-flat Major. See Chapter 2, page 13.

\(^{46}\) Among the 20 numbered mazurkas, three are set in Major keys: No. 3, in Ab Major; No. 14 and No. 19, both in Db Major. See Appendix.
In his “Estudios de la música y la canción Mexicana,” Ponce collected, catalogued and arranged popular Mexican songs from different regions of the country. He concentrated his efforts on the two types of song that he considered to be most representative of Mexico, a slow song with long phrases and soaring, deeply moving melodies set to poetic texts, which he called Canción del Bajío (Example 3.1); and a fast song with shorter phrases and “malicious” melodies set to “ironic” texts, which he called Canción del Norte (Example 3.2).

Example 3.1 Manuel Ponce, Cuiden su vida mm. 1-11

47. Carlos Gómez, 60.
This dichotomy proposed by Ponce in his *Study of the Mexican Song* soon became part of Ponce’s compositional style and eventually found its way into works other than songs. Indeed the use of aspects of these two types of songs to create contrast between sections of the same work can be seen in works as early as the Mazurkas. For instance, in the Mazurka No. 6 in D Minor section A is marked *Tristemente*, contains longer melodic lines and avoids making a clear cadence until the end of the section in m. 16, creating the sense of a longer unit (Example 3.3).
On the other hand, the B section is marked *Vivo*, the melodic material is broken in shorter two-bar fragments and clear cadences do occur (albeit in the “wrong” keys), adding to the fragmented feeling of the material (Example 3.4).

Interestingly, this Mazurka also shows Ponce’s fondness for motivic transformation. For instance, from the pickup to the 1st bar, motive a moves through the upper and lower neighbors of F (Example 3.3); then at the beginning of section B, this
melodic fragment is transposed up a major third and the last note is displaced down by an octave and into the left hand (Example 3.4). And from bar 2 of section A, the ascending arpeggio on D Minor (motive b) is later transformed into a descending D Minor Seventh arpeggio in m. 18.

In the Mazurka No. 5, a simple descending half step becomes the generating cell for the material of the rest of the piece (Example 3.5). This idea is first heard in the alto line in the right hand. It is later doubled by the soprano and imitated by the bass (m. 3). In bar 5, the motive is inverted and extended into a short ascending line, which is then answered by the descending half step in the next bar. This extended melodic fragment is then imitated by the bass (mm. 7-8). In bar 9, the motive is heard as an ascending half step in the soprano, and later in bar 10 as a descending whole step.

Interestingly, the relevance of this motive becomes more evident in section B, here the whole section is built upon the idea of the chromatic neighbor (Example 3.6).
Throughout the 20 Mazurkas, we can find evidence of Ponce’s affinity for contrapuntal techniques. For instance, the Trio of the Mazurka No. 18 in E Minor (Example 3.7) is built entirely on the device of canonic imitation at the octave.
Perhaps less prominent is the use of canonic imitation in diminution in the Mazurka No 4, mm. 4-8 (Example 3.8). Here the melody in the bass (F-sharp-E-sharp-F-sharp-A-G-sharp-C-sharp) is imitated by the soprano starting on the last beat of m. 6.

This same idea is later transformed into the main theme of section B, where it appears in the second eighth-note of m. 17, the fourth eighth-note of m. 18 in the second eighth-note of m. 21, and in the fourth eighth-note of m. 22 (Example 3.9).
The Mazurkas of Manuel Ponce plainly display his affinity for the Great Romantics, especially Chopin. From early on, Ponce’s preference for motivic transformation and for the contrapuntal treatment of his material is evident. Although not overtly Mexican, Ponce’s Mazurkas show some characteristics that resemble what he considered to be the salient aspects of Mexican folk song. Above all, through his gift for the immediately appealing melody and his refreshing use of harmony, Ponce succeeds in assimilating all these influences into his own compositional voice without losing individuality.
CHAPTER IV.
SECOND STAGE (1905-1924)

This stage comprehends the time during and immediately after Ponce’s first trip of studies to Europe. During this time Ponce collected and harmonized over 200 Mexican canciones, and used folk themes within sonata, suite and variation forms. In addition, Ponce begun to create works within a Romantic style but with an unmistakable Mexican sound without resorting to quotations of actual folk tunes.

While Ponce’s mazurkas proudly illustrate the intimacy of the salon, itself a defining characteristic of Mexican piano music of the late 19th century, they lack any explicitly Mexican features. On the other hand, the Balada Mexicana is representative of Ponce’s earlier nationalistic efforts, while still working in a style closely associated with European Romanticism. The Balada is one of the better-known piano works of the composer. It was written towards the end of a particularly fruitful compositional period started at the beginning of the century that included works such as the Concierto Romántico for piano and orchestra, the Piano Trio, and the two Rapsodias Mexicanas.

In his Balada, Ponce at once aligns himself with Romantic tradition while exploring the possibilities of Mexican folk melody within a Sonata-allegro framework. Table 4.1 illustrates the salient aspects of the Balada’s structure.

Table 4.1. Structure of Manuel Ponce’s Balada Mexicana.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exposition</th>
<th>Transition</th>
<th>Development</th>
<th>Recapitulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 - 95</td>
<td>96 - 103</td>
<td>104 - 130</td>
<td>131 - 156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Major</td>
<td>Db Major</td>
<td></td>
<td>A Major</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The melodic material for section A is taken from the folk song *El Durazno* (Example 4.1), a *Canción del Norte*.

![Example 4.1. El Durazno, fragment.](image)

Ponce presents this melody in the key of A Major, in a polyphonic setting, and introduces an element of metric variety by changing the time signature from 3/4 to 2/4 in the third bar and in similar places thereafter (Example 4.2). In addition, this meter change also adds to the Mexican quality of the piece by suggesting the meter changes typical of Mexican dances such as the *huapango*.

![Example 4.2 Manuel Ponce, Balada Mexicana mm. 1-8](image)

The opening statement of the melody ends with an imperfect authentic cadence in A Major (m. 16), and it is followed by a group of episodes based on variations of this material (Table 4.2). The first episode (A1, mm. 17-33) opens with a variation of the

48. Of unknown authorship, *El Durazno* dates from the Mexican Revolution when it proved very popular among Pancho Villa’s troops, from whom it may have originated.
theme in F-sharp Minor, followed by a sudden move to what briefly seems like F Lydian but is quickly brought to A Minor (Example 4.3).

Table 4.2. Structure of Balada Mexicana, mm. 17-95

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A1</th>
<th>A2</th>
<th>A3</th>
<th>A4</th>
<th>A5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 17-33</td>
<td>mm. 33-43</td>
<td>mm. 44-59</td>
<td>mm. 60-77</td>
<td>mm. 78-95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-sharp Minor</td>
<td>A Minor</td>
<td>A Major</td>
<td>A Major</td>
<td>(A Major)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- A Minor</td>
<td>A Major</td>
<td></td>
<td>C-Whole Tone</td>
<td>C-Whole Tone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example 4.3 Manuel Ponce, Balada Mexicana, mm 25-34.

The next episode (A2, mm. 33-43) is based on the 4-note descending motive (A-G-F-E) in the bass in bar 33. This motive is the inversion of the melodic fragment first heard in the soprano line in bar 2, C-sharp-D-E-F-sharp (Example 4.2). The episode is set in high contrast with the previous material by the increase in dynamics from piano, in the sections before, up to fortissimo, as well as the greater distance between the hands, and the sudden gestural outbursts in the left hand (Example 4.4). The section starts in A Minor, followed by brief suggestions of F Major and D Minor, to come to an imperfect authentic cadence in A major.
The third episode (A3, mm. 44-59) suggests another exotic scale, but it is quickly brought to imperfect authentic cadence in D Major (m. 47). This is followed by a more traditional sequence through the circle of fifths based on the original motive (Example 4.5) and finally to an imperfect authentic cadence in A Major.

The fourth episode (A4) adds a sense of tonal instability by the recurrence of the F natural; this time, however, the music doesn't come back to traditional tonality at the end of the episode, instead it ends in the C-whole tone collection. Contrast is enhanced by lower dynamic levels (first pp, later ppp) and the inclusion of light filigree passage work in the right hand.

49. In this case, A harmonic major.
Example 4.6 Manuel Ponce, *Balada Mexicana*, mm 44-51.

The last episode (A5, mm. 78-95) begins with a Dominant Seventh chord on E suggesting a return to A Major, however this doesn't happen instead the music moves back to C-whole tone (Example 4.7). The G-sharp from the C-whole tone scale is reinterpreted as A-flat and used as a pedal tone through the transition (mm. 96-103). The melodic material used in the transition is derived from the second theme group, in effect foreshadowing it.

Example 4.7 Manuel Ponce, *Balada Mexicana*, mm 72-81.
The second theme group (B) is taken from the song *Acuérdate de mí* (Example 4.8), which Ponce had previously arranged in a setting for voice and piano.

A meter change to 4/4 and a tempo change to *Andante* provide the B section with the steady metric feeling and lyrical quality more closely associated with the *Canción del Bajío* (Example 4.9). The first statement of B ends with a perfect authentic cadence in D-flat Major and it is then treated in a similar fashion as A, that is, it is followed by a small series of episodes in which B is treated with variation technique.
The first episode (B1, mm. 112-119) can be divided in two four-bar sections. In the first four-bar section the left hand is varied by the addition of a quick ascending scale followed by a trill. In the second four-bar section the accompaniment is presented in sixteenth-note arpeggios.

The second episode (B2, mm. 120-130) can also be divided in two sections: in the first section (mm. 120-123, Example 4.10), the accompaniment forms a descending chromatic scale in sixteenth-note triplets; in the second section (mm. 124-127) a restatement of mm. 116-119 is followed by an extended cadential passage ending on a half cadence (V of D-flat).

![Example 4.10 Manuel Ponce, Balada Mexicana, mm. 119-121.](image)

The development consists of two sections: D1 (mm. 131-140) is based on A, complete with a return to the 3/4-2/4 metric alternation; while D2 (mm. 141-156) presents a new theme back in a steady 3/4 accompanied by arpeggios in the right hand
and chords in the bass (Example 4.11). The development ends with a transition back to A Major by way of a brief mention of C-whole tone over an E pedal tone.

The recapitulation starts with a verbatim restatement of the first 30 bars of A (mm. 157-187). This time however, the passage in F-Lydian leads to an extended transition based on material from A. This transitional passage (mm. 191-208), with double-notes in the right hand and octaves in the bass, grows in dynamics from ppp to ff leading to a large E pedal tone harmonized with C-whole tone. This is resolved into a grandiose statement of B in A major (mm. 209-241). Here B’s melody is doubled in octaves and full chords and ornamented with chromatic scale fragments, also in octaves (Example 4.12).
In the bass, repeated chords and low bell-like octaves played fortissimo add to the Lisztian quality of the passage. The piece ends with a cadenza-like passage in triumphal descending octaves covering the entire register of the piano (Example 4.13).

Example 4.13 Manuel Ponce, Balada Mexicana, mm. 242-262.
Ponce's childhood and early formative years coincided with an age of openness towards European influence during the Porfiriato. Indeed Porfirian Mexico would be defined by its tendency to imitate Europe as a way to legitimize the so-called civilidad porfiriana.\(^{50}\) In this way, European Romanticism became the musical style per excellence and therefore the basis and ideology of Ponce's musical life.

The musical styles brought from Europe didn't evolve however, in part because of the chaos of a country headed for a Revolution and in part due to a lack of quality music education. Consequently, only a handful of rather amateurish musicians, all belonging to the wealthier elites, could dedicate themselves to musical composition.\(^{51}\) As a result the vast majority of the musical works produced in this time were mere imitations of the fashionable European imports.

On the other hand, the openness towards Europe also meant increased foreign investment and the diversification of commercial activity. Which in turn made for the expansion of the railroad, connecting parts of the country that had up to this point remained isolated from one another. The ensuing cultural exchange aided in the spreading of folk songs through the work of the rapsodas,\(^{52}\) which ultimately made it possible for young Ponce to become acquainted with the music of far distant parts of the country.\(^{53}\)

\(^{50}\) Literally: Porfírian civility, a term used by the privileged to distance themselves from the “uncivilized” lower class.

\(^{51}\) Víctor Manuel Carlos Gómez, Manuel M. Ponce: el nacionalismo romántico, (Aguascalientes, MX: Instituto Cultural de Aguascalientes, 2010), 15.

\(^{52}\) Traveling folk musicians.

\(^{53}\) Carlos Gómez, 16.
It is in this context that the music of Manuel Ponce takes on such an influential role in the life of Mexico, through his labor folk music became "palatable" to the "educated" elites in turn increasing the interest in and acceptance of Mexican music. He achieved this by taking Mexican folk songs and dressing them up in concert garb, as with the Balada, and by appealing to the taste of the elite through his salon pieces, as with the Mazurkas, while sneaking in here and there a nod or two to the music of the people. More importantly, Ponce played a defining role in the life, history and culture of Mexico through his work by opening the eyes of a whole generation of Mexican musicians to the creation of a truly Mexican music.

54. In fact most of the Mazurkas were dedicated or written for wealthy society ladies. Pablo Castellanos, 22.
CHAPTER V.  
THIRD STAGE (1925-1932)

“The compositions of Manuel M. Ponce possess the hallmark of the most distinguished talent… I feel hesitant to grant him even the highest grade, [for it would fall short] to express my pleasure on having worked with such an outstanding and individual disciple.”
Paul Dukas, on Ponce as a student.55

In the early 1920’s, Ponce decided he needed to familiarize himself with the new developments in music taking place in Europe. In 1925, he traveled to Paris with the intention to study with Dukas. There he experimented with polytonality, Impressionistic and Neoclassical techniques. Overall, this period in Ponce’s output may be thought of as a transitional period.56

While in the past Ponce had often annexed the adjective *Mexicano* to a large number of his works, he chooses to use more abstract titles to the works from this period, even though the new works still display some of the melodic and rhythmic gestures identified as Mexican in earlier works. While Ponce had favored large forms in many of his earlier works, during his time in Paris he favors smaller structures avoiding long developments.57

The *Quatre Pièces pour Piano* (1929) is among the most successful of Ponce’s experiments with 20th-century Neoclassicism. In this work, Ponce experiments

55. Castellanos, 43, trans. by author.
56. Castellanos, 37.
57. Ibid.
with the idea of having one hand play only on the black keys while the other hand plays only white keys, all within the framework of a Baroque suite. The work is in four movements: Preludio Scherzoso, Arietta, Sarabande and Gigue. And further reflecting an interest in Baroque style and techniques, the melodic lines in each hand move independently of one another resulting in “a modern harmonic style of unresolved dissonances, with a prevalence of clashing half-steps.”

58

I. Preludio Scherzoso

The first movement is in 6/8 time and it is marked Allegro. The left hand plays on black keys throughout, while the right hand plays on white keys only. Table 5.1 illustrates the structure of Preludio Scherzoso.

Table 5.1 Formal structure of Preludio Scherzoso.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section A</th>
<th>Section B</th>
<th>Section C</th>
<th>Section A'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 1-26</td>
<td>mm. 27-50</td>
<td>mm. 51-94</td>
<td>mm. 95-121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Section A (mm. 1-26) has a toccata-like design in which the hands play very close together and at times over each other. “The dynamics are very soft and the articulation is non-legato, creating a light, fleeting, and fluttering movement.”

59

It starts in the higher half of the piano’s register, with both hands written in treble register. The music moves slowly towards the lower register and the section ends with both hands in the bass register.

The main melodic material of this section (motive a) grows out of the widening of the opening interval on the left hand, from the interval of a second in the opening bar (G-

58. Dahlia Guerra, 110.

59. Dahlia Guerra, 111.
flat–A-flat), to a minor third in the second bar (E-flat–G-flat), to a perfect fourth in measure five (D-flat–G-flat, Example 5.1). Through this section, the right hand plays a tremolo-based accompaniment to which a short melodic fragment based on the interval of a minor third is soon added. This melodic fragment at once echoes the melodic line in the left hand and foreshadows the hemiola pattern to come in section B.

Example 5.1 Ponce, *Quatre Pièces pour Piano*: Preludio Scherzosso, mm. 1-5

Measure 17 introduces motive a in its “assembled” version; here the intervals explored earlier (Major Second- Minor Third- Perfect Fourth) are now organized into a short melodic fragment (Example 5.2). This fragment is later used to connect all the sections of the movement.

Example 5.2 Ponce, *Quatre Pièces pour Piano*: Preludio Scherzosso, m. 17

Section B (mm. 27-50) is characterized by the introduction of a hemiola pattern that gives this section of the movement a strong dance-like character. In measure 30, the right hand introduces a melodic fragment taken from the Spanish song *La Paloma*
(Example 5.3), harmonized here by second-inversion non-functional chords (Example 5.4).  

Example 5.3 Sebastián Yradier, *La Paloma*, fragment.

Example 5.4 Ponce, *Quatre Pièces pour Piano*: Preludio Scherzoso, mm. 27-31

This melodic fragment is soon imitated in octaves in the left hand, modifying the *La Paloma* motive so that it more closely resembles motive a (m. 17, Example 5.2), therefore creating further thematic coherence across the different sections of the first movement (Example 5.5)

Example 5.5 Ponce, *Quatre Pièces pour Piano*: Preludio Scherzoso, mm. 34-39

In m. 36 (Example 5.5), a new transformation of the *La Paloma* motive begins a progressive widening of the musical space which is produced as the hands slowly

60. First published by Yradier in Cuba as part of a collection of habaneras, *La Paloma* became wildly popular in Mexico since at least 1850. By the time of the Mexican Revolution *La Paloma* had become so ingrained in local tradition that the rebels, the same rebels that shunned everything foreign, embraced it as part of their local folklore.
separate to explore the extreme registers, both high and low, of the piano. A similar process can be observed in the right hand chords: in mm. 36-37 the right hand plays second-inversion chords, in mm. 38-41 it plays seventh chords, and in mm. 42-47 it plays ninth chords (Example 5.5). Both these processes, the separation of the hands and the growing distance between the bottom and top voices in the right hand chords, recall the widening of the melodic space heard at opening of the movement, furthering thematic coherence. Both these processes, in addition to the cresc. sempre ed animando instruction (m. 37), increase the musical intensity leading up to the climax of the piece. This section ends with a sudden pp return to a narrow space in the lower register, both hands back in the bass register.

Section C (mm. 51-94) starts in the lower register of the piano and slowly begins an ascent towards the higher register while keeping both hands in close proximity to each other. Written in a toccata-like style, section C presents a new melodic fragment (mm. 53-56, Example 5.6) Castellanos believes is taken from a Posadas chant.\textsuperscript{61}

An ornamented version of the Posadas motive is presented in the right hand in mm. 79-82 (Example 5.7) and leads to the next section.

\textsuperscript{61} Posadas is a Mexican Catholic celebration that takes place over the nine days leading up to Christmas (Dec 16-24) and celebrates the nine months that Mary carried Jesus in her womb. A posadas chant may be thought of as akin to a Christmas Carol.

\textsuperscript{62} Pablo Castellanos, 40.
Section A' (mm. 95-121) recaps A with a thicker texture, and louder dynamics, and adds a short coda where a sudden forte trill in both hands in the high register diminuendos to pp. The movement ends pp in the middle register with a Minor Second (C-D-flat, Example 5.8).

II. Arietta

Rather than present a clear melodic line with an accompaniment, the Arietta presents a texture where the boundaries between foreground and background are blurred. Within this texture, melodic fragments appear and disappear creating the impression of a
conversation heard from afar, a conversation one is just barely capable of hearing, but whose theme and participants remain veiled in a mist of sound.

This movement is in 2/4 time and is marked Allegretto espressivo. It is in a fairly typical ABA’ coda song form. Once again the left hand plays black keys only, while the right hand plays white keys only. Table 5.2 shows the structure of Arietta.

Table 5.2 Formal structure of Arietta.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section A</th>
<th>Section B</th>
<th>Section A’</th>
<th>Coda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 1-21</td>
<td>mm. 22-45</td>
<td>mm. 46-61</td>
<td>mm. 61-82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Section A can be further divided into two phrases: a1 (mm. 1-12) and a2 (mm. 13-21). The left hand opens the movement with a simple melody (G-sharp–F-sharp–C-sharp) clearly related to the main motive of the previous movement. This melody is commented upon by soft dyads in the right hand. The design of the material in the first few bars of the right hand follows the opening and closing gestures observed in the Prelude (Example 5.9).

Example 5.9 Ponce, Quatre Pièces pour Piano: Arietta, mm. 1-4

In the second phrase, the right hand takes over the melodic material from the opening, and a middle voice with a contrapuntal line is added. While marked pp, the repetition of the same melodic gesture in the soprano and the repetition of F-sharp in the bass give this phrase at once a sense of repose and urgency. The F-sharp in the bass is particularly important as it suggests F-sharp as a potential tonal center for the phrase.
(Example 5.10). This suggestion of traditional tonality will be enhanced by the use of a long C-sharp pedal at the beginning of the next section.

![Example 5.10 Ponce, *Quatre Pièces pour Piano*: Arietta, mm. 13-19]

The design of the left hand figure at the opening of section B (mm. 22-45) and the long pedal indicated by Ponce create an atmosphere reminiscent of a nocturne (Example 5.11). The brief interjections of the right hand recall aspects of the Prelude such as the second-inversion chords accompanying *La Paloma* (Example 5.4) and the rising thirds filigree in mm. 69-74.

![Example 5.11 Ponce, *Quatre Pièces pour Piano*: Arietta, mm. 22-29]

Section A' (mm. 46-61) presents the material from A, doubling both melody and accompaniment at the octave, in a pretty straightforward recapitulation. In the Coda (mm. 62-82), the hands alternate playing chords with F-sharp major in the left hand and with C, G and F major in the right hand. The chords progressively accelerate from eighth-notes to sixteenth-notes becoming a quasi tremolo, and the movement ends with quick arpeggios in contrary motion in both hands while the left hand sustains a lone F-sharp (Example 5.12).
III. Sarabande

Like a traditional Baroque sarabande, this movement is a slow dance in $\frac{3}{4}$ time, without an upbeat and with light emphasis on the second beat of the bar. Unlike both the previous movements, the Sarabande reverses the role of the hands so that now the right hand is on the black keys while the left hand is on the white keys. The structure of Sarabande is shown in Table 5.3 below.

Table 5.3 Formal structure of Sarabande.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section A</th>
<th>Section B</th>
<th>Section A'</th>
<th>Section B'</th>
<th>Coda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 1-11</td>
<td>mm. 12-23</td>
<td>mm. 24-36</td>
<td>mm. 37-49</td>
<td>mm. 50-59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The melody in the right hand is doubled in octaves throughout and an inner voice adds a contrapuntal line to it. The left hand plays non-functional chords or open octaves throughout (Example 5.13).

Chords with open fourths and fifths are played throughout mm. 1-7, as well as through much of the piece, creating a particular color akin to “chant-like organum.”

When chords with thirds and sixths appear (Example 5.14), they create a completely

63. Dahlia Guerra, 119.
different atmosphere. In addition, a new theme reminiscent of a Mexican sound is introduced in mm. 8-11.  

![Example 5.14 Ponce, *Quatre Pièces pour Piano*: Sarabande, mm. 6-11](image)

Section B (mm. 12-23) consists of two short phrases, the left hand has a long descending line into the lowest register of the piano through both of these phrases. The descend starts with a *forte* dynamic and slowly progresses towards a *piano* as it descends (Example 5.15). Through most of the movement, indeed through most of the suite, the hands play independent lines that rarely align. On the few occasions in which the hands do align, the sudden appearance of a “traditional” consonant chord creates a very special effect: a sound at once familiar and strange.  

![Example 5.15 Ponce, *Quatre Pièces pour Piano*: Sarabande, mm. 12-17](image)

One such instance occurs in mm. 16-17 (Example 5.15), where the right hand comes to rest on a G-sharp/A-flat while the left hand holds down F and C, creating an F Minor chord. Two more similar instances occur in the *Sarabande*, the most interesting of which occurs at the end (Example 5.16). Here, the right hand comes to rest on a D-sharp-

64. Dahlia Guerra, 120.
F-sharp minor third while the left hand holds a long deep B in the lowest register of the piano.

Example 5.16 Ponce, *Quatre Pièces pour Piano*: Sarabande, mm. 55-59

IV. Gigue

The Gigue alternates the traditional 6/8 time signature with a 2/4 time signature, creating the 2 vs. 3 rhythmic patterns typical of some Mexican dances. It is given a Vivace tempo indication and, like the first two movements, the right hand is position on the white keys while the left hand plays the black keys exclusively. The *Gigue* is written as a modern toccata in a brilliant and pianistic style, presenting glissandi, fast octaves and overlapping of the hands making it the most technically challenging movement of the suite.\(^{65}\) The structure of *Gigue* is presented in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4 Structure of *Gigue*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section A</th>
<th>Section B</th>
<th>Section A’</th>
<th>Section B’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 1-37</td>
<td>mm. 37-62</td>
<td>mm. 63-97</td>
<td>mm. 97-122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following the model of the Baroque gigue, Ponce divides his Gigue in two sections of similar length with the use of a repeat sign. However, only the first half is to be repeated. Each half is itself divided into two sections (A and B above), the first of which is larger than the second one.

\(^{65}\) Pablo Castellanos, 43.
Section A (mm. 1-37) again following Baroque models, is written in a light, playful manner. The intervals of the fourth and the fifth (first perfect, later augmented and diminished) recur in both hands, in vertical and horizontal events, through this section (Example 5.17).

Example 5.17 Ponce, *Quatre Pièces pour Piano: Gigue, mm. 1-13*

The recurrence of G-flat in the bass at the beginning of section A, as well as through much of the first half of the movement (Example 5.17, G-flat in rectangles), suggests G-flat as a possible “tonic.” The *Guige* makes constant use of the contrast between piano and forte, perhaps a nod to the terraced dynamics characteristic of Baroque music. Section A ends with a chord played with both hands *forte*, in the higher register of the keyboard (m. 37). Section B starts with a sudden, violent *ff* E-natural in the right hand in the low register, immediately followed by a clashing E-flat seventh chord with the left hand in the same register. A glissando quickly takes the music back to the high register and into a passage full of technically challenging fast octaves in the right hand (Example 5.18). These fast octaves lead into a “cadential” section where D-flat is
established as a “new tonic” the result of a modulation from G-flat to its dominant, such as would be expected in a Baroque dance.

Example 5.18 Ponce, *Quatre Pièces pour Piano*: Gigue, mm. 37-42

This is accomplished through the sheer repetition of a D-flat chord in the left hand over 16 measures. It is reinforced by exploring the full range of the keyboard in a swift downward motion, from the high register to the lowest one. In addition, the loud dynamics, the *accel.* and later *rall.* indications, the aggressive accents and the final upward arpeggio flourish in the right hand all combine to create a very convincing and extravagant D-flat cadence (Example 5.19).

Example 5.19 Ponce, *Quatre Pièces pour Piano*: Gigue, mm. 47-62

The second half of the *Gigue* is based on the recapitulation of material heard on the exposition. The most important change is the transposition of the musical materials
heard earlier so as to continue the illusion of a traditional tonal plan. Figure 5.1 below shows a reduction of the *Gigue*’s bass line, illustrating how Ponce used a perfectly conventional bass line underneath an at times quite dissonant bitonal texture.

![Figure 5.1 Ponce, Gigue, bass line reduction](image)

Throughout the *Quatre Pièces* as a whole the use of hemiolas, syncopations, duple versus triple meter, contribute to the rhythmic complexity of the music and represent the tradition of Mexican folk rhythms. Immersed in a highly dissonant language, Ponce’s predilection for the use of folk-influenced melodic lines, developing variation and contrapuntal techniques is evident in this suite. As is his penchant to accentuate contrast between sections by means of changes in texture, and his mastery of the resources of the piano both as pianist and a composer.
“From what place in Heaven above did you receive such overflowing inspiration?”
Erich Kleiber to Ponce, after conducting Ponce’s Concierto del Sur.66

After spending seven years in Paris, Ponce decided it was time to move back home. Back in Mexico, Ponce concentrated his efforts on creating new nationalistic works using the knowledge and experience gained in his Paris years. Indeed, the number of nationalistic compositions in Ponce’s output was larger in this period than ever before.

Writing about this period, Castellanos once again classifies Ponce’s work in three types:

- Works that offer an artistic stylization of folk tunes, such as Instantánes Mexicanas for orchestra, and the short piano pieces from the didactic collection Para los pequeños pianistas mexicanos.

- Works where folk tunes are the basis for large elaborate structures, such as in the symphonic poems Chapultepec and Ferial.

- Fully original works in a nationalistic style but without folk tunes, such as the Violin Concerto, Poema elegíaco for orchestra and the Cuatro Danzas Mexicanas for piano.67

67. Pablo Castellanos, 45-47.
The works of this last period exhibit the three main elements of Mexican culture that is, the Native Mexican, the Spanish/Foreign and the synthesis of both so characteristic of modern Mexico. As for the indigenous element we find pentatonic melodies from Mayan, Yaqui and Huichol origin, as well as asymmetric rhythms, instrumental combinations evocative of prehispanic ensembles and harmonies removed from Classical tonality. The Spanish/foreign element can be heard in the traditional Catholic chants and the mestizo songs and dances. Modern Mexican elements can be found in the jarabes, huapangos and corridos used by Ponce.68

The Cuatro Danzas Mexicanas for piano solo were written as homage to Felipe Villanueva69 and dedicated to Paquita Segovia, Andrés Segovia’s wife.70 The dances are written in the dance form favored by Mexican composers of the 19th century such as Ernesto Elorduy, Aniceto Ortega, Melesio Morales, Tomás León, and of course Felipe Villanueva himself. These danzas mexicanas are all in binary form (AB), each part of equal proportions and contrasting character. Each part was to be repeated, and they were all written in four- or eight-bar phrases. The Danzas are characterized by hemiolas, syncopations, rhythmic groupings of two against three, and other latin rhythms, all within a salonesque atmosphere.

For instance, the first Danza from the suite Seis Danzas Humorísticas by Felipe Villanueva (Example 6.1) clearly exemplifies the typical Danza Mexicana of the 19th Century: two contrasting phrases of sixteen bars each, both full of playful rhythmic

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68. Ibid, 48.
69. Ibid, 50.
variety such as the interplay between rhythmic groupings of two and three, and four and three.

Example 6.1 Felipe Villanueva, *Seis Danzas Humorísticas*, I.

In Ponce's work, every dance is divided into two contrasting sections. The first section is faster and more energetic, while the next section is slower and lyrical.

The dances are written in a firmly tonal language but ornamented with many passing tones, chromatic inflections, borrowed chords, quartal constructions and novel sonorities.
“that disguise and intellectualize the simplicity of the melodic ideas.” All four dances are in 2/4 meter, and display the duple versus triple rhythms characteristic of some Mexican dances. Interestingly, Ponce later orchestrated the first and second dances and used them as the last two movements of his orchestral suite *Instantáneas Mexicanas*.

I. Vivo. Meno mosso, espressivo.

Table 6.1 presents the structure of the first dance.

Table 6.1 Structure of *Cuatro Danzas Mexicanas*: I.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section A</th>
<th>Section B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vivo</td>
<td>Meno mosso, espressivo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 1-16</td>
<td>mm. 17-39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D Major</td>
<td>D Major</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first section of the dance (Vivo, mm. 1-16) is in D Major. This section is composed of two eight-bar periods, each period consisting of two four-bar phrases. The interval of the fourth (first as a perfect fourth, later as a diminished or augmented fourth) is the dominating element through the section. It is presented both as a vertical event and as a horizontal one. The first four bars of the dance (Example 6.2) also illustrate Ponce’s clever use of contrapuntal devices within these dances: the descending melodic line in the soprano (D- C-sharp- C- B- B-flat- A) is imitated in the alto and the bass.

Example 6.2 Ponce, *Cuatro Danzas Mexicanas*: I. Vivace, mm. 1-4

The second section of the dance (Meno mosso, mm. 17-39) is also in D Major. It is composed of two periods of thirteen and ten bars each. The second period briefly recaps the first before ending with a loud (ff) PAC on D Major. The main motive of this section is based on the interval of the second (Example 6.3), major and minor seconds are used to create delightful inflections through this charming dance.

Example 6.3 Ponce, *Cuatro Danzas Mexicanas*: I. Meno mosso, mm. 17-20

II. Vivo. Piú lento.

The second dance consists of two contrasting sections. Table 6.2 shows the structure of the second dance.

Table 6.2 Structure of *Cuatro Danzas Mexicanas*: II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section A</th>
<th>Section B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vivo</td>
<td>Piú lento</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 1-22</td>
<td>mm. 23-39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D Minor</td>
<td>F Major</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first section (Vivo, mm. 1-22) is in D Minor and consists of two periods of
twelve and ten bars each. A melodic fragment containing a neighbor note followed by a
perfect fifth (Example 6.4, motive a) and a rhythmic gesture consisting of a dotted
quarter-note followed by an eighth-note are (Example 3, motive b) the main motives of
this section.

![Example 6.4 Ponce, Cuatro Danzas Mexicanas: II. Vivo, mm. 1-6](image)

Although the music remains firmly in D Minor through most of section A,
unexpected chromatic inflections create unusual scale patterns which give an exotic color
to the right hand’s *fortspinnung* of motive a. Section A ends with an unexpected change
of texture (mm. 17-22) when the scale-based material previously heard on the right hand
is replaced by non-functional chords with open fourths and fifths, while the left hand
plays a diminution of motive b. This six-bar phrase is based on motive a, Ponce takes the
minor second-perfect fifth fragment and through retrograde, inversion, and chromatic
alterations, uses it to construct this six-bar phrase. A brief flirtation with the C whole-tone
collection, based on the interval of the second from motive a (m. 20), leads into a half
cadence on D Minor which prepares the repetition of section A (Example 6.5).

The development of motive a produces the main melodic material of section B
(mm. 23-39). This section is characterized by rich colorful harmonies that support a long,
lush melody reminiscent of the *Canción Romántica Mexicana* while hemiolas and polyrhythms evoke a tropical dance (Example 6.6).

Example 6.5 Ponce, *Cuatro Danzas Mexicanas*: II. Vivo, mm. 17-22

Example 6.6 Ponce, *Cuatro Danzas Mexicanas*: II. Piú lento, mm. 23-26

III. Vivo. Meno mosso

The structure of the third dance is presented in Table 6.3.

**Table 6.3 Structure of Cuatro Danzas Mexicanas*:III**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section A</th>
<th>Section B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vivo</td>
<td>Piú lento</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 1-28</td>
<td>mm. 28-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-flat Minor</td>
<td>E-flat Minor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

59
Marked con fuoco, the third danza starts forcefully with loud, bare octaves in the left hand. The right hand enters in the second bar with a running étude-like figuration. There are two main motives in this section (Example 6.7):

Motive a consists of a perfect fourth followed by a major second, it appears first in m. 1 in the left hand octaves, and it is then imitated in diminution in the right hand’s running sixteenth-notes.

Motive b consists of a neighbor note figure heard in eighth-notes in the left hand in m. 2, and also in diminution in the right hand’s sixteenth-notes.

Example 6.7 Ponce, Cuatro Danzas Mexicanas: III. Vivo, mm. 1-4

This first phrase ends in a loud, bombastic half cadence and is followed by a gentler phrase that quickly transforms into a more aggressive music with the addition of thick seventh-chords in the left hand against which the right hand plays fast, loud octaves in a descending scale pattern (example 6.8). The phrase ends with a half cadence that leads into the second phrase. The second phrase is based on the transposition a half step higher of the first one that is then developed further through fortspinnung.

Section B is set in a completely contrasting character from the dramatic and powerful previous section. This section is set in E-flat Major and it is given a tempo
marking of *Meno mosso*. The character is now relaxed and leisurely, and the suave rocking of the steady rhythmic ostinato in the left hand lends it a Caribbean flavor (Example 6.9).

Example 6.8 Ponce, *Cuatro Danzas Mexicanas*: III. Vivo, mm. 5-13

The music of section B is closely related to the motives heard in section A, for instance, the right hand melody in measure 29 is clearly a variation on motive b (neighbor note, m. 2); the right hand melody in measure 30 “completes” a variation on motive a (perfect fourth-major second, m.1); and an inner voice in the right hand echoes motive a (D-G-F-sharp, mm. 29-31).

Example 6.9 Ponce, *Cuatro Danzas Mexicanas*: III. Meno mosso, mm. 29-32
In the last phrase of the third Danza the rocking rhythmic ostinato in the left hand is partially replaced by a playful 3+2 pattern characteristic of the *huapango*. The movement ends with a crescendo and an unexpected cadence in E-flat Minor (Example 6.10).

Example 6.10 Ponce, *Cuatro Danzas Mexicanas*: III. Meno mosso, mm. 51-54

IV. Vivo. Poco meno.

The structure of the fourth dance is shown in Table 6.4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section A</th>
<th>Section B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vivo</td>
<td>Poco meno</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 1-22</td>
<td>mm. 23-45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-sharp Minor</td>
<td>F-sharp Major</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Section A of the last Danza is written in the style of a brilliant toccata, with loud and fast running sixteenth-notes and occasional thirds and fifths interspersed in both hands. The first four bars of section A present an ornamentation of a long suspended F-sharp minor seventh chord, arranged as to sounds as if part of a pentatonic collection, briefly lending a sense of stasis to the opening (Example 6.11).
Two running scales with both hands in contrary motion lead into a graceful dance-like moment that is suddenly interrupted by loud open-fifth C-sharp chords (Example 6.12). A return to a toccata-like texture leads to a half cadence on bare C-sharp-G-sharp octaves that end the section.

Section B is marked Poco meno and offers a refreshing contrast with the previous section. It is in the parallel major and is full of rich harmonies that support a beautifully lyrical melody. Light, quick sixteenth-note triplets in the right hand flutter about creating a playful atmosphere (Example 6.13).
A gradual crescendo, from pianissimo to fortissimo, and a return to a toccata-like texture with fast chords alternating between the hands create an exciting buildup (Example 6.14) that leads into the final cadence.

Example 6.14 Ponce, Cuatro Danzas Mexicanas: IV. Poco meno, mm. 34-40

In typical Poncian fashion, the final cadence is undertaken in an unusual manner: an unexpected chord is introduced in between dominant and tonic (Example 6.15). Specifically, the dominant (C-sharp seventh, m. 42) is deceptively resolved to a minor sixth degree, but this process is suddenly interrupted by the appearance of B-sharp (m. 43b) that forces a reinterpretation of the chord into a half-diminished seventh. A fermata that lengthens a lone B-sharp only accentuates the “wrongness” of this sound (m. 44). A soft, delicate F-sharp Major chord unsuccessfully tries to resolve the issue while the B-sharp is still sounding high above it. Finally, after a brief rest, a low F-sharp is struck fortissimo ends the suite in an irreverent, lighthearted gesture (m. 45).
Example 6.15 Ponce, *Cuatro Danzas Mexicanas*: IV. Poco meno, mm. 42-45

The *Cuatro Danzas Mexicanas* exemplify Ponce’s later period and illustrate his remarkable ability to synthesize all his previous musical knowledge and expertise into his own compositional style: from the salon music of his earlier years; to his encyclopedic knowledge of Mexican folk music; to his years of study abroad first in Italy and Germany, later in France; to his experiments with modern musical techniques; and finally full circle back home to Mexico.
CONCLUSION

As the mazurkas demonstrate, Ponce’s early works are heavily influenced by the Romantic salon music style fashionable in 19th century Mexico, and they show the composer’s considerable melodic gift and his burgeoning affinity for folk sources. After his first trip of studies Ponce developed a stronger compositional technique that gave him the impulse to move away from the smaller salon pieces and into the larger forms and rekindled his interest on the folk music of Mexico, which led to works such as the Piano Concerto and the Balada Mexicana.

Through his studies with Dukas, Ponce assimilated into his vocabulary modern techniques and materials that resulted on the creation of works such as the Miniatures for strings and the Quatre pièces pour piano. As illustrated by the Cuatro Danzas Mexicanas, Ponce’s return to Mexico after his stay in Paris also meant a full circle return to the music that inspired him in his youth and led him to combine all these influences and create distinct and personal works.

As Ponce developed his compositional craft, several musical gestures and stylistic choices became part of his vocabulary: a rhythmic vitality based on the use of Mexican and Latin rhythms, hemiolas, syncopations, abrupt meter changes and different rhythms between the hands; a Romantic sensitivity that informed his handling of melody; and affinity for counterpoint and fugal techniques; a predilection for motivic transformation; and the use of texture to create contrast between sections. In addition, Ponce as a composer possessed a gift for the immediately appealing melody influenced by the Mexican folk song, a masterful understanding of the possibilities of the piano, and an
eagerness to explore, study and assimilate new styles, techniques and materials that lead to the creation of a large and eclectic catalogue.

Great men leave an indelible mark not only in their medium, but also in the social context in which they live. Manuel M. Ponce’s work as a performer, composer, writer, music critic, researcher, lecturer, conductor and editor permanently changed the musical life of Mexico. His work is indeed a watershed in the history of Mexican music.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


**APPENDIX**

Harmonic scheme for Manuel Ponce’s 20 numbered Mazurkas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mazurka No 4, in F# Minor</td>
<td>A  (1-16) F# Minor</td>
<td>B  (17-32) C# Major</td>
<td>A  (33-48) F# Minor</td>
<td>C  (49-66) D Major</td>
<td>A  (67-82) F# Minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mazurka No 5, in C# Minor</td>
<td>A  (1-32) C# Minor</td>
<td>B  (33-48) Ab Major</td>
<td>A  (49-64) C Major</td>
<td>C  (65-81) A Major</td>
<td>DC A C# Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mazurka No 7, in F# Minor</td>
<td>A  (1-16) F# Minor</td>
<td>B  (17-25) A Major</td>
<td>A  (26-41) F# Minor</td>
<td>C  (42-56) D Major</td>
<td>A  (57-72) F# Minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mazurka No 8, in C# Minor</td>
<td>A  (1-16) C# Minor</td>
<td>B  (17-32) Ab Major</td>
<td>A  (33-48) C# Minor</td>
<td>C  (49-70) A Major</td>
<td>DC A C# Minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mazurka No 13, in F Minor</td>
<td>A  (1-16) F Minor</td>
<td>B  (17-33) Ab Major</td>
<td>A  (34-49) F Minor</td>
<td>C  (50-71) Db Major</td>
<td>A  (72-87) F Minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Mazurka No 14, in Db Major</td>
<td>A  (1-17) Db Major</td>
<td>B  (18-33) Bb Minor</td>
<td>A  (34-50) Db Major</td>
<td>C  (51-74) A Major</td>
<td>A  (75-91) Db Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mazurka No 16, in Bb Minor</td>
<td>A  (1-25) Bb Minor</td>
<td>B  (26-56) Db Major</td>
<td>A  (57-81) Bb Minor</td>
<td>C  (82-95) Gb Major</td>
<td>A  (96-110) Bb Minor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VITA

Luis Gaytán, a native of Monterrey, Mexico, received his bachelor’s degree at Missouri Western State University in 2007. He completed his master’s degree at Louisiana State University in 2009. He expects to finish his doctorate in May 2014.