

Fernando
SOR

24 Progressive Lessons, Op. 31
6 Little Pieces, Op. 32

Norbert Kraft • Jeffrey McFadden



Fernando Sor (1778–1839)

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Fernando Sor, one of the great guitarists of his era, was a prolific composer. He wrote many progressive exercises (or Lessons) for his pupils but is mainly remembered for his concert works, including sonatas, sets of variations, fantasias, études, minuets, waltzes, divertimentos, songs, etc. Sor was the author of *Méthode pour la guitare* (1830), an indispensable text towards understanding the technique and compositional concepts of the early nineteenth-century guitar. He also composed orchestral works, ballets, an opera, and some choral pieces, all now lost to posterity.

Sor, born in Barcelona, was educated at the school of Monserrat monastery and the Barcelona military academy. From 1799 he moved to Madrid and held administrative sinecures which took him to many parts of Spain including the south. When in 1808 the French invaded Spain, he fought against them for a while, but around 1810 he took on an administrative post with the French, a move which compelled him to become an exile from his native country when Napoleon was ejected from the peninsular.

Sor then lived in Paris and London and built up an esteemed reputation as a guitarist in both cities. His ballet *Cendrillon* (Cinderella) was performed in London, Paris, and Moscow. In 1823 Sor travelled to Russia in company with the ballerina Félicité Hullin, who danced the rôle of *Cendrillon* for the opening of the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow. Returning to Paris in 1826, Sor continued with his recitals and publishing compositions, while teaching the guitar to a number of pupils including some of high social standing.

Sor was described by the critic, François-Joseph Fétis (1784–1871), as ‘the Beethoven of the guitar’. It seems in retrospect, however, that Sor’s compositions were more influenced by Haydn and Mozart. Certainly, as he explained in his *Guitar Method*, Sor wanted the guitar to represent a miniature orchestra capable of many varieties of timbre, often imitating instruments such as trumpet, oboe, or even the harp.

Following the death of his daughter Caroline, on 8th June, 1837, Sor went into physical and mental decline, and became ill in the summer of 1838 with an ulcerated chest and throat. The guitarist was buried in the Cimetière

Montmartre on 12th July, 1839. His tomb was rediscovered in the 1930s and the gravestone restored by *Les amis de la guitare de Paris*.

Around 1828 Sor’s *Op. 31* and *Op. 32* were published in Paris by Meissonier of 25 Boulevard Montmartre. Both books of *Op. 31* (published in separate volumes of twelve pieces in each), have on their title pages (in French), *Twenty-Four Progressive Lessons For the Guitar, Fingered with care, Dedicated to Pupils Beginning, by Ferdinand Sor*.

On occasion, Sor adds a small written comment over a particular Lesson. For example Lesson 1 is described as ‘*requiring only the knowledge of the notes, its principal aim being to get the pupil used to good placing of the left hand*’. Lesson 1 in C major is a simple waltz with straightforward harmonic accompaniment. But Lesson 2, in A minor, marked *Andante*, involves a number of rapid scale runs across the strings. Lesson 3, in D major, accustoms the pupil to six/eight time, slurs being included. Lesson 4, in B minor, brings in complex harmonic effects and poignant passing notes in the middle voice.

Lesson 5 is a minuet with a contrasting middle section. Lesson 6 brings in the first arpeggio study and a note instructs the pupil that the exercise is ‘*to get the thumb accustomed to searching for the strings to be played without displacing the hand using the thumb to mark the four beats of the bar*’. Lesson 7 intensifies the arpeggio with a melody in the treble performed over a lively accompaniment, a familiar guitar device. Lesson 8 could be characterized as a study in thirds and sixths, much of the work being in three parts.

Lesson 9 provides the pupil with a more complex tune and accompaniment exercise, while Lesson 10 is headed by the comment that ‘*the object of this Lesson is to facilitate the relationship of thirds and sixths*’. Lesson 11 is the first piece in F major, one of the more tricky keys for beginners. Finally Lesson 12 presents arpeggiated demi-semi quavers interspersed with thirds and other intervals.

The second book begins with Lesson 13, a study in three-part chords giving way to a number of figurations of such chords as well as interplay between treble melody and bass arpeggios. Lesson 14, *Andantino* in G major,

combines notes of various time-values including demi-semi quavers in between phrases. Lesson 15 introduces slurred thirds in patterns supported by open strings. However, in the second part more difficult left hand chord patterns provide sequences of thirds against a treble melody. Lesson 16 is a thumb exercise, though holding down thirds above the moving thumb offers quite difficult exercise for left hand fingers.

Lesson 17, a fully-fledged melody with an Alberti bass, requires ample dexterity in the right hand. The same emphasis on arpeggiation recurs in Lesson 18, this time the arpeggios being played on the top three strings.

The aim of Lesson 19 is to ‘*accustom the pupil to give the appropriate direction to the right hand thumb while alternating the index fingers*.’ Repeated notes are performed against chordal patterns, and later transferred to the bass strings. Lesson 20, *Andante allegro*, a work played and recorded by Segovia, is a study in staccato chords. The lesson ‘*should perhaps be played less quickly than indicated but having for its aim taking control of the chords...*’

Lesson 21, *Andantino cantabile*, works away, with three part chords, thirds, sixths, and so on, as well as single melodic passages. Once more the key of F major is given to the pupil. Lesson 22, in the tempo of a march, is a descriptive piece in the key of B flat major. Starting straightforwardly with single notes, it develops into a more testing lesson with difficult four note chords along the way.

Lesson 23 is presented as ‘the movement of a religious prayer’. In the key of E major, the pupil has organ-like chords to master while following the contours of an expressive melodic line. Lesson 24, in six-eight in E major, marked *Allegretto moderato*, is a perpetual motion piece using many elements encountered in the Lessons so far.

Op. 32 is titled *Six Little Pieces, Easy and Fingered with Care, for Solo Guitar, Composed and Respectfully Dedicated to his Pupil Mademoiselle Wainwright* (sic) by Ferdinand Sor. Miss Wainwright was praised in the *Méthode*.

By following Sor’s ‘precepts’, ‘*Miss Wainwright, a young*

English lady ... produced a result so flattering to me, that in twenty-five lessons she played perfectly the six little pieces that I have dedicated to her, and understood all my twenty-four lessons so well as no longer to require any person to enable her to discover the best fingering of all imaginable positions: her figure and her hands are so placed as to serve as a model. It is true that she likes to find reasons for everything she does, and that I have never had a pupil possessing so good a way of studying or so analytical a mind.’

The ‘six little pieces’ imply the standard Sor would hope his pupils to achieve after a course of instruction. They are attractive pieces that could be played with pleasure to a family gathering. The first two are elegant waltzes on a miniature scale, No. 2 requiring more dexterity in the handling of notes of varying values.

No. 3, *Andante pastorale*, would be a worthy recital item for a young player, involving here the *scordatura*, where the bass E string is tuned down to D. This altered tuning is carried through with No. 4, reminiscent of the slurred thirds in Lesson 15 but more intricate.

No. 5 requires control of chords under treble melodic lines. The final section demands an awareness of ornamentation, never easy for a beginner. Finally No. 6, *Galop*, is a recreational concept but has its challenging moments with slurred descending passages of melody and changes of accompaniment styles in the bass.

Ferdinand Sor was a dedicated and committed teacher. In the early nineteenth century when musical standards were clearly very high, Sor, as we have seen, wrote progressive pieces for his students which developed both technical efficiency and musical expressiveness.

Graham Wade

Grateful acknowledgments are due in the writing of these notes to Dr Brian Jeffery for his biography, *Fernando Sor, Composer and Guitarist* (Tecla Editions, 1977), and his facsimile edition, *Fernando Sor, Complete Works* (Shattinger International Music Corp, 1977).

Photo: Cameron Ogilvie



Norbert Kraft

Norbert Kraft enjoys a well-deserved reputation as one of the most outstanding classical guitarists of his generation. He was the first North American to win the 1985 Segovia International Competition, held in Mallorca. He is a best-selling recording artist whose many award-winning recordings have received accolades in such publications as *The New York Times*, *The Times*, *CD Review*, *Hi-Fidelity*, *Gramophone* ('Critic's Choice'), and *Classic CD* ('Favourite CD of the Year'). His Naxos recording of Joaquín Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez* has been listed as the definitive recording of that work by *Gramophone* and Classic FM in '111 Greatest Works'. Norbert Kraft has toured extensively as soloist and chamber musician, and has performed concertos with dozens of major orchestras, including the Boston Pops and Montreal Symphony. His concerts and recordings have won him widespread acclaim and he has given a number of Command Performances for dignitaries and heads of state, including two of Canada's Prime Ministers. He was chosen to represent Canada at World Expos in Osaka, and in Seville. An award-winning recording producer, Norbert Kraft has engineered and produced over 350 recordings, including orchestral, solo, operatic, choral, and chamber music, and serves as the artistic director of the Naxos Guitar Collection, the most extensive recording project of guitar repertoire ever undertaken. His productions have received four GRAMMY® nominations, and one GRAMMY® award. He has served as Professor at the University of Toronto and the Manhattan School of Music (New York), as well as conducting master-classes throughout the world. He has compiled and edited many musical publications, including the extensively used *Royal Conservatory Guitar Series*.

Photo: Michael Culpepper



Jeffrey McFadden

Over the course of a twenty-five year career, Jeffrey McFadden has established a place among the most admired guitarists of his generation. Concert engagements have taken him throughout Canada, the United States and Europe. He has been a featured performer at many international music festivals, including Guitar '87, the Guitar Foundation of America Convention, Gitarren-Symposium Iserlohn, the National Flute Association Convention (USA), the Festival Mediterraneo della Chitarra, GuitarFest Sevilla and many others. In 1992, he was awarded a Silver Medal at the prestigious Guitar Foundation of America Competition and was a prize-winner in the 1993 Great Lakes Guitar Competition. His debut recording was the first in the Laureate Series on Naxos. He has recorded eight highly acclaimed albums since then, featuring the works of Fernando Sor, Napoléon Coste, Agustin Mangoré Barrios, J.S. Bach and others. Jeffrey McFadden is the first ever graduate of the Doctor of Musical Arts degree programme at the University of Toronto, studying under Norbert Kraft. An Eaton Fellow, he completed his dissertation in 2010. It forms the basis of his book, *Fretboard Harmony: Common-Practice Harmony on the Guitar*, published in 2010 by Les Productions d'Oz. McFadden was the recipient of the 2012 *City of Hamilton Arts Award for Music*. He is the founder and artistic director of the Sauble Beach Guitar Festival, and Head of Guitar Studies and Associate Professor in the Faculty of Music, University of Toronto.

Fernando Sor was not only one of the great guitarists of his era but a major composer for the instrument, described by a contemporary critic as ‘the Beethoven of the guitar’. His desire for the guitar to represent a miniature orchestra in timbre is a distinctive feature of his many compositions. The *24 Progressive Lessons, Op. 31* offer a panoramic lexicon for the student, moving from a simple waltz to perpetual motion, whilst the charming *Six Little Pieces, Op. 32* further explore technical efficiency and musical expressiveness.

Fernando SOR (1778–1839)

24 Progressive Lessons, Op. 31

Book I

1	No. 1 in C major: Andante	1:07
2	No. 2 in A minor: Andante	1:32
3	No. 3 in D major: Allegretto moderato	0:41
4	No. 4 in B minor: Andante	2:18
5	No. 5 in G major: Andantino	2:01
6	No. 6 in E minor	0:49
7	No. 7 in E major	0:50
8	No. 8 in A major: Andante	1:58
9	No. 9 in C major: Allegretto	0:48
10	No. 10 in D major: Cantabile	1:39
11	No. 11 in F major: Moderato	1:04
12	No. 12 in D minor: Andante	2:54

Book II

13	No. 13 in C major: Andante	1:41
14	No. 14 in G major: Andantino	1:51
15	No. 15 in B minor	1:21

38:50

16	No. 16 in D minor: Moderato	2:02
17	No. 17 in C major	1:07
18	No. 18 in B minor: Moderato	2:20
19	No. 19 in A major: Andante	1:33
20	No. 20 in A minor: Andante allegro	1:10
21	No. 21 in F major: Andantino cantabile	1:21
22	No. 22 in B flat major: Tempo di Marcia – Moderato	1:58
23	No. 23 in E major: ‘Mouvement de prière religieuse’	2:09
24	No. 24 in E major: Allegretto moderato	1:51

6 Little Pieces, Op. 32 12:35

25	No. 1 Andantino	1:24
26	No. 2 Walzer	1:56
27	No. 3 Andante pastorale	3:06
28	No. 4 Mazurka	1:49
29	No. 5 Andante	2:46
30	No. 6 Galop	1:21

Norbert Kraft, Guitar ^{1–15, 17–19} • **Jeffrey McFadden, Guitar** ^{16, 20–30}

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Guitars: Paulino Bernabe, Madrid (tracks 1–15, 17–19); Roberto DeMiranda, Milan (16, 20–30)
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Playing Time
51:33



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