

# FORGOTTEN

## SPANISH GUITARIST ROBERTO MORONN PÉREZ BRINGS THE ANDRÉS SEGOVIA ARCHIVE TO LIFE

BY BLAIR JACKSON



The winter of 2017 saw the arrival of a wonderful new album called *¡Viva Segovia!*, which is the third volume in Spanish guitarist Roberto Moronn Pérez's striking and significant "Andrés Segovia Archive" compilations on San Francisco-based Reference Recordings. It joins his previous Segovia Archive releases devoted to *Spanish Composers* (2013) and *French Composers* (2014); the latest includes works by two Englishmen, an Italian, and three Swiss composers.

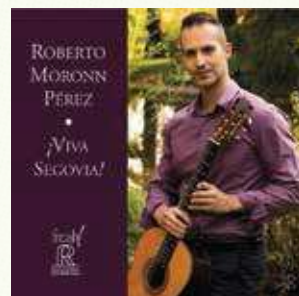
It is well known, of course, that from nearly the beginning of his storied career, Maestro Segovia actively encouraged composers to write new pieces for the guitar (at the same time he was arranging many existing compositions, old and recent, for the instrument). Segovia's clarion call yielded an incredible flood of new pieces that came to him beginning around 1920 and never completely subsided until his death in the 1986. Segovia debuted a staggering number of works by a wide range of composers from around the world, includ-

ing now-famous pieces by Federico Moreno Torroba, Manuel Ponce, Alexandre Tansman, Heitor Villa-Lobos, Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Federico Mompou, Joaquín Rodrigo, and others.

Yet Segovia was also the recipient of numerous compositions that for a variety of reasons he elected *not* to play or record. The story of how these "rejected" music manuscripts—many of them uncopied, irreplaceable originals sent by eager authors—survived through the decades of Segovia's peripatetic life, is a topic worthy of a book in itself. But the point is, most of them did survive, and as we've learned since Segovia's passing, many of the pieces are very high-quality works. Thanks to the efforts of Italian guitarist/composer/musicologist Angelo Gilardino, who became the artistic director of the Andrés Segovia Foundation in 1997 (and remained in that post through 2005), many of those forgotten works were published for the first time in a collection called *The Andrés Segovia Archive* by Edizioni Musicali Berben, of Ancona, Italy.

Subsequently, some of the pieces have been recorded here and there, but the Pérez series represents the most concentrated and far-reaching attempt to capture the scope of the Archive. Masterfully recorded by the great engineer John Taylor at Holy Trinity Church in Weston, Hertfordshire, England, in 2010, 2013, and 2015, the three albums are replete with beautiful and memorable pieces by composers likely unfamiliar to most fans of guitar music, along with a few by names many will recognize, such as Mompou, Lennox Berkeley, Henri Martelli, and Ida Presti. All three CDs are widely available and can also be heard on various streaming services. I strongly recommend you track them down.

Pérez has turned out to be a masterful guardian and interpreter of these works. Since studying guitar in Spain, Italy, and the UK, he has gone on to play all over the world, win a number of competitions, and debut several pieces by prominent composers himself. We caught up with Pérez for this email interview about his work with the Segovia Archive.



**CLASSICAL GUITAR:** How and when did you first become aware of the great Segovia Archive?

**ROBERTO MORONN PÉREZ:** My introduction to the Segovia Archive took place when I was studying for a master's degree in Italy with Angelo Gilardino, who was the general editor of the full collection. He first showed me the manuscripts and then the publications. In fact, I collaborated on the work of some of the Spanish composers.

**CG:** When you were developing your skills as a guitarist, did you ever study and/or try to imitate Segovia's style?

**PÉREZ:** No, I've never tried to imitate Segovia's style. Obviously, when I was a student, and over the years, I listened to his recordings and watched his videos, and I also had teachers who were former students of Segovia, or who continued his line, but I was always looking for my own way. All of my performances come from my own personality. Each musician must follow his own way and that is really what is interesting

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and beautiful in music. For these CDs, my only guide was always the musical text.

**CG:** Was there a particular piece, or pieces, in the Archive that you heard or studied that really attracted you and made you want to take on this enormous project seriously?

**PÉREZ:** Not really. I think all of them are very interesting. Having so many composers with their own different musical languages allows you to always find something captivating and fascinating in each piece.

**CG:** How many of the pieces were completely new to you?

**PÉREZ:** All of the pieces I have recorded in my three CDs have been new discoveries for me. My incentive has been to bring into the guitar repertoire music of high quality that is little known, and in some cases, almost totally neglected; pieces that deserve to be played and heard.

**CG:** What piece was the most pleasant surprise to you?

**PÉREZ:** It is very difficult to choose only one. As I said before, these pieces are full of sur-

prises and you can find something charming in each of them. I couldn't select only one.

**CG:** You said in the notes to one of the discs that you did not want to speculate why Segovia chose not to play or perform a particular piece. However, in the course of working with all these pieces and getting inside of them, so to speak, and knowing what you must know about Segovia's likes and dislikes, you must have formed opinions of why he chose what he chose and ignored what he ignored.

**PÉREZ:** Why Segovia did not include these pieces in his repertoire is something we cannot know. For sure, there must be a variety of reasons. As a performer, I don't think I need to speculate about what these reasons might be, and honestly, I don't consider it important. I can only thank Andrés Segovia for his legacy: the legacy he left during his lifetime with his performances, recordings, and inspiration, and for the legacy he treasured in the shadow, and which we can now appreciate. My only responsibility is to live up to what it represents and to try my best in my performance to play with the conviction that this music requires.

**CG:** Related to that last question: Do you have a sense of how the repertoire Segovia played shaped or affected his style, or whether he chose pieces that fit into his already developed style?

**PÉREZ:** I think that Segovia chose the repertoire that best fit into his style and that he felt the most affinity with. For this reason, we talk about the "Segovian repertoire."

But it is the same case with other musicians, whatever instrument they play. We talk about Julian Bream and his repertoire, very close to his musical skills. And the same, for example, with the piano: Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli with Debussy or Ravel, or Sviatoslav Richter with Prokofiev. It would be a long list.

**CG:** In your head, have you tried to picture Segovia playing all these pieces?

**PÉREZ:** I can imagine how Segovia might have played some of the pieces, especially some phrasings and rubatos, in his very distinctive style, but I have not really tried to visualize it.

**CG:** If you had to pick, say, two less-known composers on each of the three discs that surprised you with the high quality of their compositions, who would you choose?

**PÉREZ:** On the Spanish CD, I'd pick Jaime Pahissa, with his very elegant style, and Vincente Arregui, who continues in the Romantic line. On the French CD, I would name Pierre de Breville, whose *Fantaisie* is a major piece—a completely idiomatic work—and Raymond Moulaert, with his monumental *Suite*. Finally, on *Viva*, I'd choose Cyril Scott, whose *Sonatina* requires of the performer a spiritual engagement in order to fully bring out all its fragrances, and Ettore Desderi with his *Sonata in mi*, a real masterwork.

**CG:** How many of these pieces do you play when you perform concerts these days?

**PÉREZ:** Most of them are now in my repertoire. I always try to include some of the pieces, if not a full program. And I must say, they are always very well-received by the audience. These pieces fit very well into my style, and, as important, I like them a lot.

**CG:** Did working on *Viva* feel any different because the composers came from so many different countries?

**PÉREZ:** Actually, no—in the sense that each composer has his individual musical language, as was the case with the French composers. Maybe the Spanish composers have more in common with each other.

**CG:** What do you think the Maestro would think of your project?

**PÉREZ:** I hope he would like it. He left this legacy for future generations, so what I am doing is what I feel he would have wanted: to play this music, and to play it with all my heart and soul.

**CG**