



# American Record Guide

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## PONCE: *Guitar Sonatas*

Jason Vieaux—Azica 71212—79 minutes  
(888-349-3310 or [www.azica.com](http://www.azica.com))

Andres Segovia and Mexican composer Manuel Ponce struck up an enduring and fruitful friendship in 1923 after the latter wrote a glowing review of Segovia's Mexico City debut the same year. Ponce wrote scores of works for Segovia, and many became staples of his programs for the next 65 years. Later generations of guitarists have also availed themselves of the Ponce oeuvre, and general enthusiasm for the composer only seems to be growing (witness the many Ponce discs that I have reviewed over the last year).

Ponce's sonatas represent the core of his guitar output. The maestro was eager for substantial, extended works in the early years of his career, and Ponce obliged. In fact, the first work he wrote for Segovia in 1924 was the *Sonata Mexicana*. Segovia often performed and recorded the sonatas, but it is surprising how rarely some are still played today (at least by major performers). The *Sonatina Meridional* and *Sonata III* are presented with some regularity, to be sure, but the other three extant works are mostly neglected. Jason Vieaux's wonderful recital here of the five sonatas goes a considerable way to remedying the situation.

In the notes Vieaux indicates that he had access to original manuscripts of two of the sonatas, though he does not specify which. I am guessing that they were the *Sonata Mexicana* and *Sonata III*, as both have several passages that are different from the familiar, Segovia-edited versions.

Vieaux is a strong, expressive player with a gift for lyricism and an easy virtuosity. His playing here is especially affecting in the sonatas' slow movements. The Andantino affetuoso of the *Sonata Mexicana* is an unheralded gem,

with a Mexican exoticism and folkloric mystery that is no doubt quirky but has always sounded to me like Ponce at his most authentic. Vieaux gives it a stunning reading, lingering over phrases and creating a magical stillness in certain passages. He also delivers beautifully restrained performances of the Andantes of the *Sonata Romantica*, long a favorite of guitarists, and the *Sonata Clasica*, less familiar but just as lovely. His playing in the outer movements is dynamic and lively. He favors deliberate tempos and rhythmic clarity—characteristics sometimes lacking in Segovia's otherwise superlative recordings of these works (MCA 42072).

This approach often works to great effect, especially in the more overtly Mexican *Sonatina Meridional* and *Sonata Mexicana*. I find Vieaux's approach somewhat lacking in nuance in the more neo-classical sonatas. Here, his dogged adherence to his initial tempo has a tendency to downplay formal boundaries and dramatic contrasts. In the first endings of the expositions in the minor-key *Sonata Clasica* and *Sonata III*, for example, his unflagging tempo makes for a rather perfunctory effect. These moments are always of great dramatic import in a minor-key sonata (think of the first endings in Schubert's late sonatas) and Vieaux's playing here, and at other moments of structural articulation, would benefit from a more flexible tempo and greater rhetorical extroversion.

Azica's sound is a bit heavy on the reverb but is otherwise a model of clarity, and the notes by Richard Long are excellent. Interpretive quibbles aside, this is a marvelous release.

RINGS

PONCE: *Violin Concerto*; see KORNGOLD