

The Folk Influences on the Piano Works of Manuel M. Ponce



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Motivation and Project Background

The compositions of musicians from underrepresented backgrounds have gone largely overlooked in the core literature for piano and in academic fields such as musicology and theoretical analysis. Inadvertently, the field of music has missed out on rich cultural inspiration by doing so. It is important to highlight music from people of color and help expand the scope of music as a studied form of art if the study of classical piano were to stay relevant in modern day.

For this project, I prepared four pieces for solo piano composed by Mexican composer, Manuel Maria Ponce, for performance. Research was done on the history of native folk music in Mexico and how it influenced Ponce's works for the piano.

The four works of focus throughout the project are Scherzino Mexicano, Romanza De Amor, Quatro Danzas Mexicanas, and Intermezzo No. 1. Latin folk genres of music and dance such as **Huapangos**, **Sons**, **Cuban Contradanzas**, **Jarabes**, and **Corridos** were discovered to have heavy influence in the rhythmic, melodic, sonic, and harmonic motifs found in Ponce's compositions for the piano.

Manuel M. Ponce (1882-1948)

- Born on December 8, 1882, in Fresnillo, Zacatecas
- Began studying the piano at age 6
- Made his first composition at age 9
- Attended the National Conservatory of Music in Mexico City in 1901 for one year
- Traveled to Europe in 1904 to study composition and piano in Italy and Germany
- Returned to Mexico City in 1908 and taught composition and music history at the National Conservatory
- In 1923, Ponce met Spanish guitarist, Andres Segovia, a lifelong friend who helped spread Ponce's influence as a composer around the world.
- Moved to Paris in 1925 for 7 years to work on his compositional technique.
- Moved back to Mexico in 1933 and spends the last 15 years of his life composing and teaching at the National Conservatory.
- Manuel Maria Ponce passed away in Mexico City on April 24, 1948

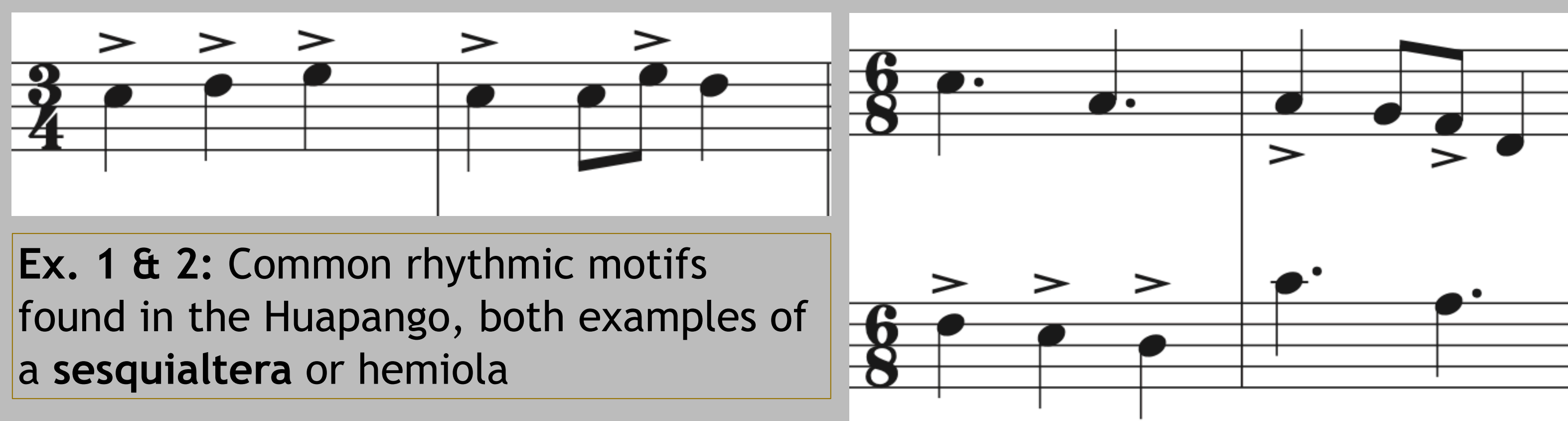


The Music of Mexico

The Mexican composer Carlos Chavez gives a definition to the term "Mexican Music" as "the native music of the ancient Mexicans, the music of Spanish or other origin implanted in Mexico, and the production in Mexico of a mixture of these elements."

Sons/Huapangos

- Mexican folk music and dance genre identifiable by the **sesquialtera** rhythmic motif and zapateado (tap dance) dancing
- Simultaneous 2 against 3 rhythmic motifs and alternating ternary and binary rhythms
- The **Huapango** is a regional sub-genre of the **Son**, known as the "Son Huasteco"
- The "Son Jalisciense" originating in the region of Jalisco evolved into what we know as modern **Mariachi** music
 - Call and response melodic motifs, originating from work songs sung by field workers, influenced the Son Jalisciense, and later, mariachi music.



Ex. 1 & 2: Common rhythmic motifs found in the Huapango, both examples of a **sesquialtera** or hemiola

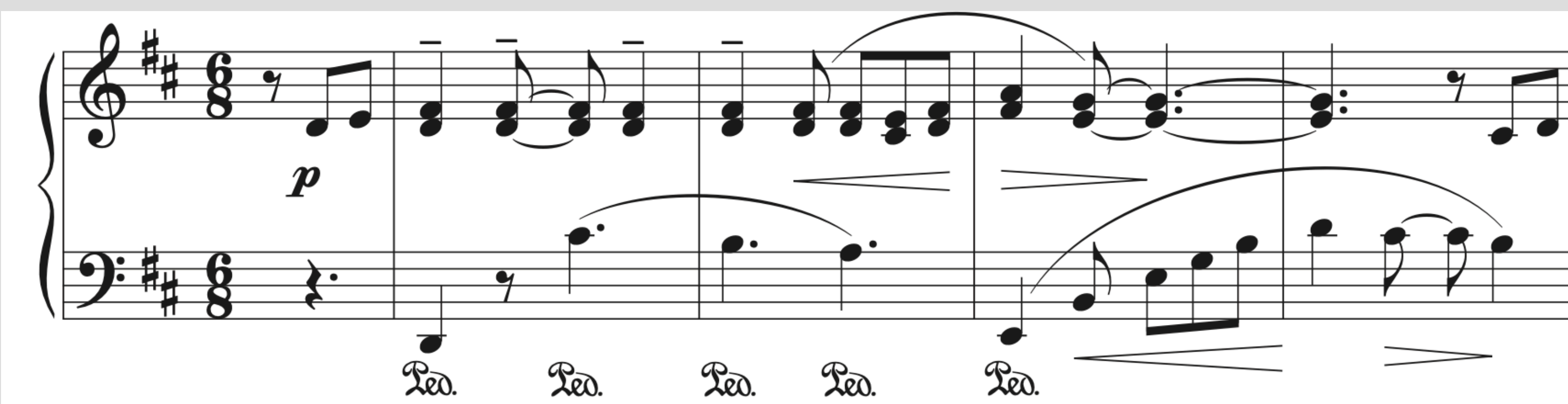
Corridos

- Mexican ballad genre identifiable by its narrative story telling
- Falsetto style vocals
- Melodies typically resolving in thirds
- Circle of fifths-based harmony
- Melodies voiced in thirds
- Chromaticism treated as ornamentation to melody,

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Scherzino Mexicano (1909)

- "Dominant-Tonic" or circle of fifths based harmony, familiar to late 1800s to early 1900s Mexican **salon** music
- A melody voiced in intervals of thirds, akin to Mexico's early **Corridos**
- Familiar ABA form Ponce frequently used in his works for solo piano
- **Huapango/Son** influenced alternating ternary and binary rhythms (sesquialtera)
- Mariachi-influenced call and response phrase structure



Ex. 3: Scherzino Mexicano - Measures 1-5

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Quatro Danzas Mexicanas (1941)

- Syncopated rhythms familiar to **corridos** in the A section
- Ambiguous chromatic harmony
- Two-part AAB form influenced by Cuban **Contradanzas**
 - A as a faster introductory theme
 - B as a slower and more contrastive theme
- Four and eight measure phrases
- Alternating groupings of duple and triple **Habanera**-based rhythms, familiar to the **sesquialtera**.



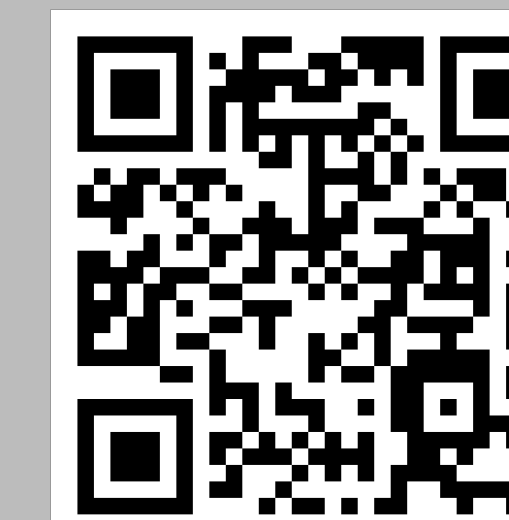
Ex. 4: Quatro Danzas Mexicanas - Danza I - Measures 28-31

Conclusions and Future Directions

A lecture recital will be held at the Lionel Hampton School of Music where I will present my research on the traditional folk music of Mexico, a biographical overview of Manuel Maria Ponce, and I will perform the four pieces of music that were of focus throughout this project, Intermezzo No. 1, Quatro Danzas Mexicanas, Scherzino Mexicano, and Romanza de Amor.

I will also plan on applying to present my research at poster sessions hosted at music pedagogy conferences around the country such as the MTNA National Conference.

Scan this QR Code for a list of musical references pertaining to this project:



References

1. Guerra, Dahlia Ann. "Manuel M. Ponce: A Study of His Solo Piano Works and His Relationship to Mexican Musical Nationalism". ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1997.
2. Herrera Arizmendi, Omar. "Manuel M. Ponce: Style and Aesthetics". ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2012.
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Acknowledgements

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