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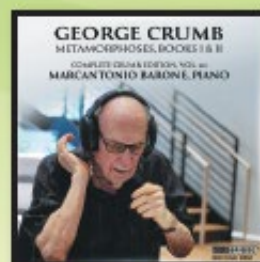
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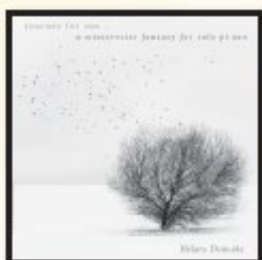
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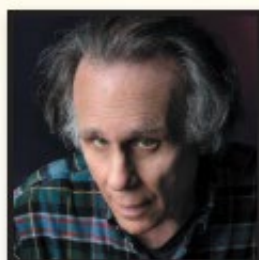
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Feature Article by Colin Clarke

Fernando Sor: A Soaring Saga! Author Lou Marinoff in Interview

In a spectacular sequence of three books, respected author, philosopher and guitarist Lou Marinoff takes us through the life and times of Fernando Sor, creating in the process a magnificent portrait not only of "Fernando," but offering us a panoramic vista of his times. It is a truly awe-inspiring achievement; the following interview goes into some detail about the books as well as examining Marinoff's own close links to Sor.

CC: First of all, congratulations on the completion of this three-volume homage to Fernando Sor! I guess the first question is, do you see this as your magnum opus?

LM: Thanks. If authors are permitted to nominate their own *magna opera*, then yes Fernando definitely represents that on my fiction list. My nomination for the non-fiction list is my book *On Human Conflict*. But Fernando gets the nod for creative inspiration over philosophical analysis.

Linked to that: this is a labor of love, for sure. Tell me about how you first encountered the music of Fernando Sor, and was it love at first note? (I know in our previous interview for Fanfare, you talked about an instant rapport with Sor).

Sor's guitar studies were introduced to me by the late Florence Brown, a classical guitarist, mezzo soprano, and beloved teacher. I studied with her for several years as a beginner. One week she assigned Sor Study #5 to me, and remained speechless when I played it for her the next week. Florence usually stopped me early on in a piece, to correct technique, discuss interpretation, or suggest fingering. But she let me play this study all the way through, and at the end she declared "You have an affinity for Sor!" So perhaps it was "love at first note" more for Florence than for me at that stage. But yes, in retrospect I always had a "rapport" with his music. At times I felt as though Sor were playing me rather than me playing Sor.

You also touched upon parallels between your life and Sor's in our previous interview: would you care to enlarge on that here?

Surely. There are several. They only became clear to me at around age 50, when I first met Brian Jeffery in London and read his definitive historical biography of Sor, from which these parallels emerged. Fernando was a musical child prodigy with linguistic abilities; I was a linguistically precocious child with musical abilities. We both sprang from the middle-class; we both had a younger brother; we both lost our fathers in boyhood; and we both saw prophetic words about us later ring true. We both attended storied schools during our boyhoods (Montserrat, and Lower Canada College, respectively). These schools honed our respective musical and linguistic skills, including Latin and French. We both left our homelands in our mid-30s, for political reasons. We both blossomed during our years in London. We both attained widespread popularity for our respective works (music and philosophy), which were and still are performed and published internationally. We both met political, religious, industrial, social, and cultural leaders of our times, befriended leading artists, and engaged with audiences on public and private stages. We both had retinues of devoted and talented students. It seemed as though our lives resembled magic carpet rides: his rug woven of music, mine of philosophy. Propelled by parallel muses, we were

transported into similar spheres. Does this seem as parallel to you as to me? Or have I merely imagined it?

It certainly does seem remarkably similar when you put it like that!

But there's more. These parallels continued more uncannily, unfolding with a kind of Jungian synchronicity during the writing of the trilogy itself. Here are two quick examples. In Book One, while in the throes of narrating Fernando's relocation from Madrid to Cordoba, I was actually travelling from Madrid to Cordoba. That trip had been scheduled months ahead of time, without any connection to the place or pace of the Fernando narrative. So we both went from Madrid to Cordoba for the first time, and also (as it were) at exactly the same time! In Book II, while writing about Fernando's invitation to Russia, that very same morning and out of the blue I received an email invitation to Russia. At times these parallels seem to merge into one and the same straight line.

It certainly sounds like someone somewhere was trying to tell you something! What determined the book's form? You opted to tell this in the shape of "a romantic historical novel," and very compelling it was too. Just to clarify how this works for the reader, the facts of Sor's life are all there but the periods where not so much is known, you have created what might be called a "bridge". If I can quote you, "We can demarcate between these two genres as follows: history strives for perfect accuracy but never tells a complete story; historical fiction strives to tell a complete story but never claims perfect accuracy".

The book's form largely determined itself. From the initial inspiration to write it, back in 2009, my unwavering vision was a romantic historical novel. Quire early on, certain scenes painted themselves in my mind, and it became a matter of finding the right narrative voice in which to describe them, and of researching sufficient details to furnish suitable backdrops. The dry facts of Sor's life are so sparse in so many places that they served as a skeletal structure on which to flesh out his remarkable trajectory, his noteworthy contemporaries, and his earth-shaking epoch. It was necessary work and great fun not only building "bridges" (as you call them) between periods, but also "furnishing" the metropolises in which Sor resided between bridges: Madrid, Paris, London, Moscow, Saint Petersburg. For example, we have in his own words that his talent was "appreciated" by Russian nobility—but that left a lot of scope for describing his daily life, his frequenting of palaces, and his interactions with the Romanovs, the Golitsyins, and so forth. We have more detailed accounts of the concerts Sor played in London during Napoleon's "Hundred Days" that culminated at Waterloo, but once again that left ample scope for fleshing out the fascinating society and politics of Regency London, in which he was a musical fixture and celebrity. Based on endorsements by a field of international experts, yourself included, it appears that I succeeded in animating Sor's life and times in an entertaining fashion, using history as a springboard to tell a story that has never been told. If you'd like a comparison that has not yet been made, nor yet properly credited, it would lie in T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*. While no-one supposes this to be an accurate account of Arthur, Guinevere and Lancelot (indeed, that triumvirate comes pre-packaged in fable), it is nonetheless an enchanting tale of a Camelot that possibly never existed outside of dreams—yet adorned by many faithful trappings of knighthood, chivalry, wizardry, and history. It tells of places and times that the reader would wish to have existed; a story that need not be entirely true to be worth telling and enjoying. So *The Once and Future King* provided a kind of model for *Fernando*. Does that make sense to you?

Absolutely it does! And to follow to from that, you also say “two rather oddly-conjoined propositions: first, that truth is stranger than fiction; and second, that fiction is nothing but truth in disguise”.

Exactly. While post-modern fashion pooh-poohs the concept of truth, and calls everything a "narrative", it remains to be observed that all fiction contains nuggets, elaborations or embellishments of truth. From Dickens to Dostoevsky, the memorable characters they "created" must have been based on people they knew, or knew of.

Incidentally, I notice you reference Irvin Yalom’s historical novels on Nietzsche, Schopenhauer and Spinoza; were these laying the groundwork for your trilogy? [Also in terms of factual elements for Sor, Brian Jeffery’s biography of Sor was significant, right?]

Yalom's works of historical fiction about these great philosophers were inspirations to be sure. Since a psychiatrist could invent such delightful novelizations of important philosophers, it loaned credence to the far-fetched notion that a philosopher could follow suit with an important composer. [And yes, as mentioned, Jeffery's biography is the definitive chronology of known facts about Sor.] Yet so much remains unknown that we inherit more than ample opportunity for literary invention.

You also mention that there’s an element of thanks to the Spanish people in writing this book, for their enthusiastic reception of your philosophy books?

Yes, I owe Spanish and Latin American peoples an immense debt of thanks. Spanish-language editions of my popular philosophy books have more readers than any other language group, including English! Of some twenty-seven languages into which my philosophy books are translated, Spanish is number one in terms of popularity.

The gestation period was over a decade, right? I guess the level of detail comes into play with this. I actually felt I got to know not only Fernando but the people around him, notably his mother (Isabella) and his close family.

It's great to hear that Fernando and his family “came alive” for you. Several readers have reported this. It's unclear to me whether this intimate sense of presence is a feature of lengthy gestation, or of other factors. I first conceived of this project in 2009, and by stages became immersed in background readings and research. I began writing Book One in January 2018, and completed Book Three in August 2020. It then went through intensive copy-editing—with a huge credit to Alexandra Davidson, an Oxford music graduate, literata, and symphonic bassoonist—before going to press in 2021.

It’s lovely you managed to split the work into three books of pretty much equal length ... each divided into three parts ... there’s a real structured feel to it. You also contextualised Sor, both musically (Sarti, Domenico Scarlatti for example) and historically. And one feels a real immersion in wherever he is, from the school at Montserrat (“The Magic Mountain”) and in his own life (his voice breaking, for example) through to the various capitals. I was particularly interested in the relationship between Sor and Goya and very glad you investigated that in detail. It’s perhaps a connection that might interest the reader of this interview, so would you like to expand on that connection between two great men?

Surely. As you well know, structure is a key element of music and literature alike. The trilogy's structure was actually fortuitous. I had originally planned one book only, which grew into two, and then into three. They cover early Sor, middle Sor, and late Sor, as it were. I felt immersed in his life at every stage of the writing, and it's really gratifying that you (and other readers) feel this immersion too. From a literary standpoint, that signifies a "mission accomplished." The connection between Goya and Sor is historically undeniable, since they

were simultaneously in residence at the Duchess of Alba's Liria Palace, in Madrid, at the turn of the 19th century, both sponsored by this historically fascinating woman. It is inconceivable that Goya and Sor could not have known and liked one another. This was all I needed to develop their friendship and "brotherhood" in the novel. Goya was a colossus astride two epochs: he has been called the last Old Master, and the first Modernist. He was also a witness to the abundant follies of his times, and was commissioned to paint portraits of many nobles who also commissioned Fernando to compose. Goya's art and Sor's music continue to be appreciated to this day. Yet reams have been written about Goya's life, compared with precious little about Fernando's. So I seized the opportunity not only to help remedy the Sor deficit, but also to flesh out their plausible and endearing connection.

Talking of great men, both Sor and Beethoven were divided in themselves about Napoleon, would that be fair to say? Beethoven with his scrubbing out of the dedication of the "Eroica" for instance, and Sor torn about Napoleon—yes in principle, no in the way he won his victories. Would that be a fair comparison to make?

Absolutely fair. Beethoven and Sor were both advocates of political and social reform, and were both enamoured of the Enlightenment and the humanistic ideals of the French Revolution. But when Napoleon promoted himself from First Consul to Emperor, and thus from reformer to autocrat, he infuriated not only Beethoven, but also a host of liberal intellectuals and artists. When Napoleon invaded Iberia, and sought to impose a liberal constitution at gunpoint, the inherent contradiction tore Fernando and the Spanish people alike. For Fernando accepted the Spanish Bourbon monarchy and the Church: he merely wanted them to implement reforms, for the sake of a progressive Spain. He did not want to see the Spanish ruling class guillotined by Jacobins, nor deposed by an invading secular tyrant. The ensuing Peninsular War, and the immense sufferings and rancorous divisions it visited on the Spanish people, broke Fernando's heart and left him no political middle ground on which to stand. He had to support either an entrenched reactionary system, or an invading revolutionary one. Anyone who wanted Spain to modernize gradually but steadily on her own terms was branded an "*afrancesado*"—a Francophile in the most pejorative sense—and deemed a traitor to Spain herself. That is why tens of thousands of Spanish patriots, including Fernando, were ultimately exiled by the monstrous King Ferdinand VII. As Santiago del Rey remarked in his elegant Introduction to the trilogy, "they rather were patriots of a different Spain", a Spain that did not yet exist, and would not exist until 1975.

I brought in the Napoleon aspect not only because it's a vital part of the book (your understanding, and explanation of, history in terms of Wellington and Napoleon is a vital part of the book's exegesis) but also to point out that in the telling of it you reference Voltaire and Rousseau, just to highlight the wide remit of the book(s). Did you feel this was necessary as a 360-degree appreciation of Sor and his circumstances? Also it points further to your researches – did you extend them to this area of say, Voltaire or Rousseau, or was some of that already there through your philosophy work? (A further example is when you introduce Goethe, Spinoza and the New Humanism. There's a real 360-degree sense of experiencing Sor's world.)

If we think in terms of the figure and ground of a painting, or of a literary work, then the figure of Fernando's life occupies a momentous stage whose backdrop is the Napoleonic era. Fernando witnessed and supported the emergence of the human rights revolutions that followed on the heels of the democratic political revolutions in America and France. These events did not come out of the blue; they were direct consequences of the Enlightenment on

the one hand, of intransigent monarchies on the other, and of populist movements forged in that conflicted crucible. Consider this: anyone who wants to grasp the “big picture” of our contemporary Western world needs to compass at least the preceding century, and thus be mindful of World Wars I and II, the Korean War, the Cold War, Vietnam, 9/11, and so forth—along with the Civil Rights movement, the 1960s, the hippie counter-culture, the infusion of Asian wisdom traditions, the digital revolution, and so on. Similarly, anyone who wants to understand Sor's world, and the emergence of modernity, needs to compass the century that preceded him, and be mindful of the leading figures of the Enlightenment, among whom Voltaire and Rousseau played prominent roles.

Parenthetically and as perhaps a point of interest, you also mention other aspects of Goethe which delighted me—his work in the natural sciences, some of which formed part of a course I did on practical esoteric herbalism here in London!

It's wonderful that you encountered Goethe's botanical work in contemporary London! As you are aware, he wanted to be remembered for his multidisciplinary scientific research as much as for his multifaceted literary works. Most people today know of Goethe in the latter capacity, although he was a true polymath.

What inspired me to seek out new music as a result of reading this was reading about Sor's connections. For example, Cherubini and Méhul, two composers who like Sor perhaps, are not today given the acknowledgement of their talents that is their due?

It may be the case that Sor fell between the cracks of history for different reasons. His compositions obviously remain of paramount importance to classical guitarists, are applauded by audiences to this day, and are admired by aficionados. It is my impression that Cherubini and Méhul are still well-known to connoisseurs of opera—but since I am not very knowledgeable about that genre, it would be better to inquire of opera buffs.

That links us nicely to the French part of Sor's story, when he arrived in Paris and was introduced to Méhul by Cherubini. And it was Cherubini and Clementi who paved the way for Sor in London ... he seemed to have a good sense for cultivating contacts ...

Yes, both Cherubini and Clementi played pivotal roles in Sor's meteoric rise to celebrity in London. And recall how yet another famous Italian of the day, namely Crescentini, was also an indirect influence: it was Sor's backstage imitation of Crescentini's singing style that so amused and impressed Prince Augustus Frederick (then Duke of Sussex), and led to Sor becoming Princess Charlotte's teacher. It seems that Sor's musical genius and ebullient personality exerted compelling effects on royal and noble patrons (ill-advised Bourbons excepted) in every country in which he performed. There were also strong musical attractions between Spanish and Italian composers and audiences: for example, Italians loved the Spanish guitar, while Spaniards loved the Italian opera.

Worthwhile at this point doing some myth-busting, I think. You say that Sor did not introduce the guitar to England, as is often claimed, but rather consolidated its position?

Exactly right. The guitar was originally brought to England by Italians in the 1780s or 1790s. They had learned to play it either in Spain, or in the emergent Italian tradition spearheaded by Mauro Giuliani. One of London's first guitarists was Antonio Zaniboni. In 1806 he composed *Six Italian canzonets and eight divertimentos: principally for the Spanish guitar and bass accompaniments, dedicated with permission to the Right Honorable Lady Emily Stratford*. Then came the publication of Bartolomeo Botolazzi's *Periodical Amusement for Spanish Guitar*, a series of twenty-four arrangements, for voice and guitar, of popular Italian operatic arias. In 1813, Pablo Rosquellas—a Madrileño, singer, violinist, guitarist, composer, and theatrical entrepreneur—published *A Complete Tutor for the Spanish Guitar*,

dedicated to Princess Charlotte. In 1814, Mariano Rodriguez de Ledesma—a pianist, tenor, and composer originally from Zaragoza—published *Three Italian ariettes, with an accompaniment for the Spanish guitar and piano forte, composed and humbly dedicated to HRH the Princess Charlotte of Wales*. Francesco Vaccari—a virtuoso Italian violinist and professor of music originally from Modena—had settled in Madrid. There he took a Spanish wife, learned to play guitar, and rose to first violin in the Royal Chapel orchestra, before being expelled by Ferdinand VII. Like Fernando, Vaccari attained swift acclaim in London, and it was he who gave Princess Charlotte her first guitar lessons. Vaccari published a *Miscellaneous selection for the Spanish guitar humbly dedicated to HRH the Princess Charlotte*. This triumvirate was affectionately known as "Princess Charlotte's guitarists." There was also a burgeoning guitar school in Bristol. But it was Sor's vibrant personality and scintillating virtuosity that truly ignited the "guitar craze" in England.

I have to say that, from an Englishman's point of view, your description of the anally-retentive British through Sor's eyes is hilarious—and has a goodly dollop of truth. I think that humor is another aspect of the book, that weighs out the more tragic elements of Sor's story.

I'm really glad that you enjoyed the humor. We know that Fernando himself loved wit and witticism, and particularly enjoyed poking fun at those who took themselves too seriously. I myself am a lifelong fan of British humor, which I find deeply funny, and—having lived in London as well—also find the British themselves to be wonderfully humorous at times, if often quite unintentionally. So it was great fun playing on the many differences between hot-blooded Latin and stiff upper lip British temperaments, and on the morals and mores of Regency society, in which Sor found himself immersed during his London years. And as you say, these infusions of humor help balance the inevitable tragedies of Sor's life.

Also I love the way you highlight Sor's ability to be in the right (or wrong, whichever way you look at it) place at the right/wrong time: "No-one can deny that he had a knack, as it were, of finding himself in capital cities at times of historically momentous events: from heroic Madrid during the Dos de Mayo, to chaotic Paris during the Hundred Days, to nail-biting London during Waterloo, Fernando had been caught up in his fair share of crises. Now, in Saint Petersburg on December 26, 1825, he would witness another from the Winter Palace itself" (i.e. the Decembrist Revolt, which was to alter the course of Nicholas I's reign). This is certainly part of the dramatic edge to the story but it also enables you to give a pretty comprehensive picture of Europe at that time?

Yes, exactly. It's a direct way of illustrating that Fernando found himself in the thick of historical pivot-points, and indirectly of highlighting upheavals that swept Europe during his lifetime. To add to this inventory, recall that Sor had just begun a concert in Paris on the evening of July 27, 1830, when the insurrection of the Three Glorious Days (*les Trois Glorieuses*) erupted, signalling the end of French Bourbon rule. These anecdotes serve to characterize the turbulence of the times, as well as to remind us that even artists of the highest calibre could not avoid being caught up in their maelstrom.

I'd like to link the book to your own recording, in that the Fantasy op. 7 was his farewell to Spain.

It's a very moving piece, is it not? Thanks for reminding readers that my recording is included in the CD *Classical Journey*, on which we did an interview a few years ago. That recording also forms the sound track of an impromptu dance by former prima ballerina

Kasumi Sanada, filmed in Paris in 2020, during the pandemic. Her dance itself is embodied in my full-length video on Book II of the Fernando trilogy, available on my *YouTube* channel.

Also can you tell a guitar ignoramus such as myself about the Russian seven-stringed guitar that was gifted to Fernando in Moscow?

In this case, it might be one ignoramus misinforming another. While reasonably well-versed in the lore of the six-stringed guitar, I claim no significant expertise when it comes to the seven-stringed Russian instrument. Since Sor encountered and probably befriended Mikhail Vigotsky in Saint Petersburg, it behoved me to research Vigotsky's elevation of the Russian guitar from taverns to concert halls—reminiscent of Sor's feat with the Spanish guitar. But the similarity ends there. Unlike the universal standard tuning of the Spanish instrument (E-A-D-G-B-E), which lends itself to the music of every period (Renaissance, Baroque, Classical, Romantic, Modern, as well as folk, rock, and jazz), the Russian guitar is tuned to an open chord: D-G-B-D-G-B-D. This makes it much easier to play, but also tends to restrict its repertoire, primarily to accompanying songs in the gypsy genre. Vigotsky transformed that role by composing for the instrument in its own right, an example of which is embedded in my full-length YouTube video on Book III. A seventh string is sometimes added to the Spanish guitar as well, expanding the range of the bass, and of course Narciso Yepes was famous for his ten-string model. There are also twelve-string acoustic guitars, with the three treble strings paired and the three bass strings paired in octaves. But it's clear that the six-string Spanish guitar is by far the most versatile and popular type, worldwide, while the seven-string Russian version is more of a curiosity.

I learned much about Fernando, but I learned much about history of events around his life that shaped him, too. Was that a decision right from the off, to go into so much detail about, say, the Napoleonic Wars? (we are after all in the era of the French Revolution, Napoleon Bonaparte and the aftermath).

In order to make sense of Fernando's life, it was necessary to situate his figure with historical accuracy on the very large canvas of his tumultuous times. This required considerable research, not only concerning Napoleon's escapades and eventual downfall, but also on evolving social, cultural, and political conditions in the countries where Fernando resided: Spain, France, England, and Russia. From the mountains of literature on Napoleon alone, I mined those veins of events in which Fernando was most significantly implicated. I had to keep on researching and note-taking until the background of each major episode of Fernando's life could be painted with sufficient accuracy—not to pass itself off as scholarly history, but as historically credible and literarily entertaining context. This partly explains why the trilogy gestated for nine years before the writing began.

You bring your own guitar expertise to the mix, too: I particularly enjoyed (and learnt from) your description of famous guitarists' techniques in Book III (fingernails etc).

Glad you enjoyed all that. Anyone who spends time with classical guitarists is guaranteed to become embroiled in conversations about fingernails. Unlike the quills that pluck harpsichord strings, or the hammers that strike piano strings, or the bows that caress violin, cello, or bass strings, human fingernails are constantly growing (and breaking) and thus need constant attention and adjustment if used to play guitar. A guitarist's sound changes daily, if not hourly, in terms of volume, tonality, and color. So guitarists are likely to become rather obsessed with their nails.

You liken Sor's Studies to Bach's Inventions. I wonder if Chopin's Etudes offer another valid comparison?

One can hear Bach's Inventions and Sor's Studies played by students and masters alike. Their works have the rare quality of combining relative simplicity with transcendent profundity. Not every composer can accomplish such a feat, and perhaps many composers don't aspire to do so. Not being a pianist myself, I never had the pleasure (or challenge) of playing (or trying to play) Chopin. My sense is that most of his pieces are too difficult for beginners, and demand a sparkling technique. The same can be said of Scarlatti's sonatas, some of which are also very guitaristic, hence were transcribed by Tárrega and Segovia among many subsequent virtuosi. But as Segovia wrote in his definitive 1945 edition of Sor studies:

Not many Masters have succeeded with their studies in the gradual development of the instrument's technique by achieving the right balance between pedagogical purpose and natural musical beauty. Among the most sublime, there comes to mind the names of Domenico Scarlatti, whose luminous sonatas were destined to exercise already skillful fingers, and Frederic Chopin, whose genius displays the great vigor and profound poetry of his magnificent etudes . . . The studies of Sor that are published here can be used not only for the development of the technique of the student, but also for its preservation at its heights for the masters.

You tell us two symphonies are lost, amongst other works. How much of Sor's output do you think is unavailable to us? And are discoveries of manuscripts being made?

The "catalogue" of Sor's lost works is partly factual and partly conjectural. After all, if we're not sure of exactly what has been lost, it's mostly guesswork. Anyone who composed as prolifically as Sor is bound to have had works lost, or indefinitely misplaced. Who had any inkling of the existence of Bach's Brandenburg Concertos, dedicated in 1721, until they were "found" in the Brandenburg archives in 1849? There are now regarded as perhaps the best orchestral works of the entire Baroque era, yet they took 128 years to surface! So, if we're seeking lost musical works, mightn't we be better off consulting a psychic or an oracle?

The average person in the street knows Sor, if at all, through his guitar music. But there are other jewels among the vocal music, and I wonder why that is pretty much ignored? Sor's arrangements of arias from Mozart for voice and guitar are simply lovely, but it is in his own songs that he really comes into his own (I listened to the Naxos recording with Eva Beneke on guitar, incidentally).

I'm really glad you liked Sor's arias. Who can say why some works remain perennially popular, while others fade from public memory? Goethe wanted to be remembered more as a scientist than a literary figure. Yet his contributions to optics, geology, and botany are all-but-forgotten today, while he is revered as a poet, playwright, and novelist. As you know, in addition to his voluminous compositions for guitar, many of which are staples of the repertoire, Sor wrote devotional music, orchestral works, an Italian opera, a dozen ballets (which made him famous all over Europe), patriotic songs, seguidillas, boleros, and arias. His Italian ariettes were wildly popular in London, drawing comparisons with novels by the author of *Waverley* (Sir Walter Scott). While today's general public may not be aware of the full spectrum of his compositions, virtuosi have indeed recorded a good many works beyond those for guitar solo and guitar duet. You mentioned Eva Beneke accompanying Nera Berraondo singing Sor's arrangements from Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, which are exquisite. One could also note Montserrat Figueras singing Sor's moving Italian arias, accompanied by José Miguel Moreno. Likewise, Jessica Bachica sings Sor's charming seguidillas, accompanied by Hermann Hudde. Josep Maria Roger recorded a CD of Sor's piano pieces. Enchanting

recordings of overtures to Sor's ballets were made of Sir Neville Marriner conducting the Orquestra de Cadaqués. As you know, samples of all the above works are embodied in my trilogy of YouTube videos, likewise titled *Fernando: Beethoven of the Guitar*. I created a one-hour documentary on each of the three books. This series of videos highlights the full range of Sor's oeuvre, by world-class performers. The documentaries offer ideal audio-visual complements to the books themselves.

There was the odd moment that sent a real shiver down my spine: "Will the horrid conflicts of men never cease?" she wondered aloud. "Perhaps," he replied, "but only when men cease walking the face of the earth." Book 3 – this seems terribly relevant. But let's end on a happier note: if you had to zoom this down into a small(-ish) paragraph, what would you say is the importance of Sor's music? What do you feel it offers to the curious listener?

Unfortunately, there is no end in sight to human conflict. Even if and when we colonize other planets, that bellicose facet of human nature will follow us like a shadow. But to end, as you suggest, on a happier note, let's allow Sor himself to answer your question on the importance of his music. He was invited to contribute his "biography"—an autobiography written in the third person—to Ledhuy's *Encyclopedia of Music*, published in Paris in 1835. Sor wrote as follows, somewhat immodestly but not inaccurately:

. . . we should hasten to say that it was he who brought the guitar out of the rut where it had been plunged by the genre of music adopted before him. Sor is the only one who created a language to express the most learned and graceful musical ideas about this instrument. All guitarists who would like to compose should follow the route he mapped out, even if at the risk of doing so poorly. His studies will live on like those of Cramer. When one would like to rediscover the tradition of true Spanish music, one should look to Sor since he is the only one who preserves these types of national melodies, already corrupted, even in Spain, by blending with foreign music. The catalogue of Sor's works is rather numerous, especially for guitar and voice. This artist's talent manifests itself in all of them with great superiority. His guitar method is a conscientious treatise that rests on incontestable principles: it is a sure guide for teachers and students who wish to benefit from the resources of the instrument.

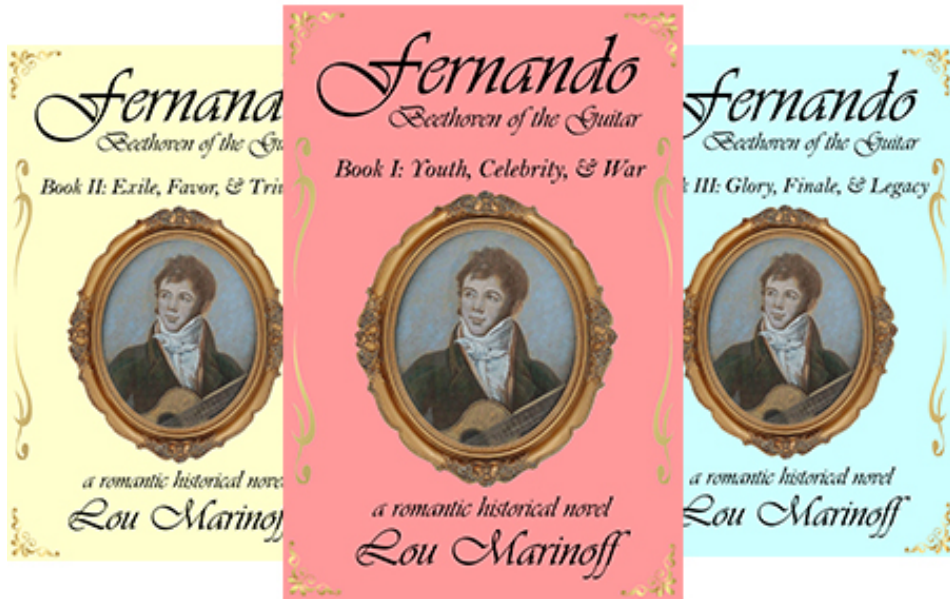
And if you'd like to entertain a more general thought about the importance of Sor's music, it would be this: like all immortal artists, Sor transcends time and place. His music teaches us that the most noble and creative expressions of the human soul enrich all fortunate enough to be exposed to them—well beyond our differences in language, culture, politics and religion. Like his great contemporaries Goya, Goethe, and Beethoven (among many others he encountered), Sor brought lasting beauty into this world, to counteract the horrors and tragedies that he experienced. His music remains a soothing remedy against perennial afflictions of the human condition.

Just to reiterate: there are three YouTube videos associated with this trilogy, and you also have a full and vibrant YouTube presence through your work with philosophy. Are there any other offshoots you'd like to bring to our attention?

Many thanks for asking. Anyone who wishes to explore other dimensions of my philosophical and literary works can easily find them via my website (loumarinoff.com), or the usual search engines. But I'd like to conclude our interview with a cordial invitation to watch my three *YouTube* videos on Fernando, which offer salient episodes of his incredible life journey, and feature abundant highlights of his brilliant oeuvre. Anyone who likes these documentary videos will surely love the Fernando trilogy itself, which paints a far richer and deeper picture. To quote once more from Santiago del Rey's Introduction: "If the author's

ultimate goal was to rescue Fernando Sor from oblivion, that is the greatest compliment that can be paid to this magnificent book."

FERNANDO BEETHOVEN OF THE GUITAR



A ROMANTIC HISTORICAL TRILOGY BY LOU MARINOFF