



## SEGOVIA IN THE RECORDING STUDIO

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For the better part of the 20th century, Andrés Segovia defined the sound of the classical guitar. His incomparable sonority, his warmly expressive vibrato and the unique plasticity of his phrasing blended into an unmistakable voice, which in time brought him the kind of universal recognition attained by only a handful of artists in any generation.

Segovia made his first recordings in 1927, and in spite of the medium's early limitations, the enormous passion and virtuosity of his playing is immediately apparent in those performances. By 1949, the advent of magnetic tape and the long-playing record had taken the medium to a new level of fidelity, and Segovia's interpretive concept had matured, finding an ideal balance with powers of execution that were still at their peak. He embarked on a series of recordings that continued until he was well into his 80s, and it is from that series that this collection is drawn.

He approached recording not as a modern performer versed in all its resources, but as an artist in the 19th century mould, with a certain aristocratic, old-world disdain for the details of the process. "We were hesitant to say something to him like 'Maestro, let's hear something; we need

to check the balance and level,” says Israel Horowitz, producer of all Segovia’s recordings from 1957 on. “He was there to record and had very little patience with the actual process. He was already performing from the first take, and sometimes the best performances were missed because we weren’t ready yet.”

He knew what he wanted to hear – and what he didn’t want to hear. “He had great confidence in his playing musically,” says Horowitz, “and he was always well prepared. In general, he would listen to the playback of an early take, but primarily for sound, not so much for the performance – he knew what he had done. “It would annoy him no end if a particular note didn’t ‘speak’ well in the musical context. He could get furious if the instrument failed to respond as he wanted it to, if something was wrong with the strings, or if for some reason he wasn’t able to bring off something he’d managed before. From the control room, I’ve seen him smack the back of the guitar, get up and kick the piano bench he sat on halfway across the studio. But he was always calm with the people working around him; he never got angry with me or the engineers.”

Segovia’s displeasure could emerge at a later stage. “He couldn’t stand what he called an ‘acid’ sound, usually certain high notes that weren’t well rounded. Sometimes he wasn’t aware of this in the studio, but he’d hear it later on the acetate that he was sent for approval. Then he’d send me messages from all around the world: ‘We’ve got to get rid of it – please!’ So we would soften up the sound with a little reverberation, which he accepted. Then there was the opening of the Boccherini concerto, where he comes in with three declarative chords. ‘They’re too weak!’ he told me. ‘Can you give them more strength?’ So we boosted them a couple of decibels in the mastering.”

Although there was some editing of the tapes, it was quite limited. “Segovia would rarely do more than three takes of a piece,” explains Horowitz, “and the first take was often a good one. He would choose which basic take we’d use, and, after a time, he trusted my judgment to change certain things.” He was not particularly concerned with the squeak of fingers shifting along the strings,

unlike some contemporary guitarists who go to considerable lengths to purge it digitally from their recordings. "Before my time at Decca," says Horowitz, "they spent a lot of time trying to minimize that with editing, by excising a little bit of the attack. But it never really bothered Segovia, and it never bothered me, either; it went with the playing."

Over the years Horowitz came to know Segovia's signature musical gestures well. Speaking of the hauntingly melancholy Andantino from Castelnuovo-Tedesco's *Sonata "Omaggio a Boccherini"*, he cites the Maestro's use of *portamento*: "It's what the old string players used to do, a certain way of coming onto a note, or off it." And for all his poetry, Segovia could dazzle as well. Of the exuberant *Danza española* no.10 by Granados, Horowitz observes, "It's sensational."

And then there is Bach. Over the years, Segovia has been criticized for what some consider an anachronistically Romantic approach to the Baroque master's music. "Frankly, I relished that," says Horowitz. "It always moved me deeply, authentic or not. He's also been accused by some of stretching the tempo for technical reasons, but it's perfectly convincing to me. There's always a musical reason for his doing it, and maybe it absorbs a technical concern, too – it's all one."

In Segovia's music-making, one finds a powerful affirmation of beauty and order, an expression he himself experienced as a force of destiny. "To whoever asks me 'from what age do you play the guitar?', the Maestro once remarked, I usually answer, 'from long before I was born'." The strength of Segovia's playing never failed to reach Horowitz in over two decades of close collaboration. "To hear that process was one of my greatest experiences over the years," he says. "His sound was so much a part of his whole concept; I don't know of anyone who plays quite that way on any instrument. Whatever he did, however he did it, it worked – and in a unique way."

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