

Ferroud's *Spiritual*

A 1926 piece for Segovia comes to light

Allan Clive Jones

[This article was published in *Classical Guitar*, October 2001, pp. 14-19. Not long after the article's publication, another manuscript copy of Ferroud's *Spiritual* came to light during Angelo Gilardino's exploration of manuscripts held in Segovia's library at Linares, in Spain. That manuscript was the basis for the edition of Ferroud's *Spiritual* published by Berben in 2002.]

On Wednesday 7 May 1924, one of Paris's most renowned music societies, the *Société Musicale Indépendante* (SMI), presented a concert at the Salle Gaveau.[1] On the bill was the new rising star on the Parisian music scene, Andres Segovia. It was exactly one month since his remarkable debut in Paris, and his appearance at the SMI indicates the high standing he had rapidly achieved.

One review of Segovia's appearance at this SMI concert is particularly interesting. It was written by Pierre-Octave Ferroud, a twenty-four year old composer and writer from Lyon who had moved to Paris the year before:

'Monsieur Andres Segovia does more for Spain with his guitar than General Primo de Rivera with his statutory orders. By himself, new Orpheus, he would pacify the Rif.[2] A more intimate collusion between the artist and the national instrument could not be imagined. His virtuosity is serene and without fuss. From one string to the other, the sonority is jewel like, here brilliant, there veiled and anguished. The arpeggios, the harmonics, the attack of the block chords, he possesses the secret of them all. The performance he gave of Turina's *Sevillana*, of F. Moreno-Torroba's pleasant *Sonatine*, of Manuel de Falla's admirable *Homage to Debussy*, and of some pieces by Albeniz, which an enchanted public demanded twice, were truly beyond all praise.'



SOCIÉTÉ
MUSICALE
INDÉPENDANTE

MAISON GAVEAU, 45, Rue La Boétie
SAISON 1923-1924 15^{me} ANNEE

103^{me} CONCERT

Le Mercredi 7 Mai 1924

à 9 heures très précises du soir

== PROGRAMME ==

1. Sonatine pour piano ELWELL
(1^{re} audition)
M. Daniel ERICOURT
2. Sonnet Ronsard (1) Jean HURÉ
Sonnet — Roland MANUEL
Ronsard à son ame Maurice RAVEL
(1^{re} auditions)
M^{me} Marcelle GERAR
Au piano Madeleine d'ALEMAN
3. Trois morceaux pour la Guitare
Sevillana (Dédiée à Andrés SEGOVIA) Joaquin TURINA
Hommage à Debussy. Manuel de FALLA
Sonatine (Dédiée à Andrés SEGOVIA) F. MORENO TORROBA
a) *Allegretto.*
b) *Andante.*
c) *Allegro.*
M. Andrés SEGOVIA
4. Trois Poèmes de R. Tagore.. Eyvind HESSELBERG
1. Dans les ombres profondes.
2. Je suis ici pour te chanter des chansons.
3. Si tu ne parles pas.
M^{me} Magdeleine GRESLÉ
Au piano : M. Melville SMITH
5. Huit petites pièces pour piano (1). ROHOZINSKI
M^{me} ARNOULT-ROELENS
6. Sonate pour violon et piano (1) Ch. KÆCHLIN
a) *Très calme.*
b) *Scherzo.*
c) *Adagio.*
d) *Final.*
M^{lle} Thérèse COMBARIEU et M^{me} J. HERSCHER-CLÉMENT

Piano GAVEAU

(1) Senart. Éditeur.

The SMI concert at which Segovia played on 7 May 1924

Two years after penning this eulogy, its author demonstrated his regard for Segovia musically by composing a piece for him. Entitled *Spiritual* and dedicated to Andres Segovia, this hitherto unknown work – 79 bars long and lasting about 2 minutes in performance – was in the prevailing modernist idiom, with clear influences of jazz and Stravinsky. Anything less likely to appeal to its conservatively minded dedicatee would have been hard to imagine. Segovia declined to play it. This piece, and the story behind it, have remained a closed book to guitarists until the present day.

In late 1997 I contacted Ferroud's descendants to enquire about this piece, and was delighted to discover that it had survived in the family archives. I was even more delighted, when I saw the manuscript, to discover that it was an unusual and highly original work. The family of Pierre-Octave Ferroud have graciously agreed to allow the *Spiritual* to be published.

Pierre-Octave Ferroud

Pierre-Octave Ferroud was born 6 January 1900, near Lyon. As a child he was taught the piano by his mother, a brilliant pianist. At university in Lyon he studied science, but continued his music studies. Military service in 1920 took him to Strasbourg, where he studied counterpoint with Joseph-Marie Erb and composition with Guy Ropartz. From this period date some of Ferroud's earliest published compositions, mostly piano pieces. On his return to Lyon in 1922, Ferroud studied with Florent Schmitt, a leading French composer, who had just been appointed to the Lyon Conservatory. In 1923 Ferroud moved to Paris, where he took up music journalism, writing for several journals and newspapers.



Ferroud and his wife Jolaine. (Archives of Jean-Paul Ferroud)

According to Ferroud scholar Ruth Melkis-Bihler, Ferroud and Segovia met in 1926, during some concerts that Segovia was giving in Paris.[4] Ferroud would no doubt have been impressed by the amount of new music Segovia was including in his Paris concerts at this time. In addition to the Turina, Torroba and Falla pieces already mentioned in Ferroud's 1924 review, other new pieces played by Segovia in those early concerts included Roussel's short *Segovia* (which Ferroud was to praise in print a few years later), Ponce's *Sonata Mexicana*, Turina's *Fandanguillo*, Raymond Petit's *Andantino*, Samazeuilh's *Serenade*, and Tansman's *Mazurka*. All these were performed in Paris in 1925 and 1926.[5]

Manuscript

The manuscript of Ferroud's *Spiritual* is dated 1 September 1926. It is well preserved and poses few legibility problems. However, it presents a number of problems of playability. A couple of bars, for example, contain seven-note chords. These should not be assumed to be a sign of incompetence on the composer's part. Like many other virtuosos, Segovia advised composers to write what they wanted to hear, on the understanding that problems and difficulties would be resolved later. According to letters held by the Ferroud family, a meeting between Segovia and Ferroud to discuss the piece was indeed planned, but it appears not to have taken place.

There is no further record of Segovia's involvement with the *Spiritual* except for a note in a letter he wrote to Ponce in 1932. Segovia tells Ponce that Ferroud (misspelled 'Ferrond') is one of a handful of composers based in France who have submitted pieces to him that he has not played. His neglect of these composers is cited as the reason for some unfavourable reviews in the French press.[6]

The features of the *Spiritual* that would have made it unappealing to Segovia are, in my view, the very ones that now make it particularly interesting. It represents a kind of music that hardly exists in the guitar's repertoire, and yet which could have appeared in greater quantity if Segovia had been better disposed to the music of his French (or French-based) contemporaries in the 1920s. Even Stravinsky, hardly a young radical by the time Segovia arrived in Paris, was not encouraged to write for Segovia, despite his wish to do so.[7]

Ferroud's *Spiritual*, though short, is full of incident. The first impression is one of cascading musical ideas that fly past almost too quickly to grasp. This high level of activity and the rapid

switching from idea to idea make the piece seem longer than it actually is. With greater familiarity its apparently disparate elements become remarkably coherent, and indeed several ideas tend to lodge themselves obstinately in the brain.

Spiritual

Ferroud may have intended the title *Spiritual* as a pun. Although the word ‘spiritual’ does not appear in the French language, the word *spirituel* does, meaning ‘witty, piquant’, as well as ‘non-material’. Certainly the piece gets off to a spirited start, as Example 1 shows. (The symbol that looks like an incomplete letter b is a crotchet rest.)



Example 1 *Spiritual*, opening bars, composer's manuscript

A few bars later an apparently new idea appears (Example 2), in a new metre, although its contour is clearly derived from the opening.



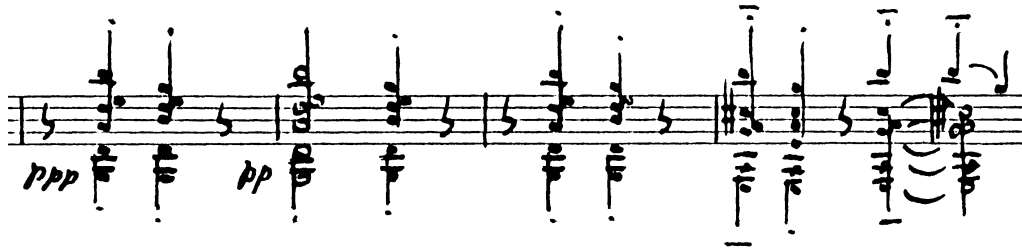
Example 2 *Spiritual*, bars 6–8, composer's manuscript

What turns out to be a new main theme appears at bar 24 as the middle voice of a bitonal three-part texture (Example 3). This theme undergoes several transformations in the ensuing bars, and dominates much of the rest of the piece. In particular, the opening descending third, diminished in Example 3, is stretched to minor and major variants, and in these forms becomes an almost obsessive motif.



Example 3 *Spiritual*, bars 24–27, ‘Légalement plus calme’, composer’s manuscript

Very characteristic of the last half of the piece are bars of irregularly placed staccato chords, having a somewhat tense or nervous effect. These are the where the jazz influence is most strongly felt. Example 4 gives a sample, and incidentally shows the characteristic dropping third in the top voice. Example 4 also, of course, illustrates some of the playability problems posed by this piece.



Example 4 *Spiritual*, bars 47–51, composer’s manuscript

And after...

Segovia’s lack of interest in Ferroud’s *Spiritual* did not signal the end of the road for the piece. Ferroud clearly thought it too good to waste, and adapted it as a piano duet (one piano, four hands). In this version it forms the final movement of his three-movement *Serenade* for piano duet, which was premiered by Ferroud himself and Fanny d’Aleman in May 1927 and published the same year. The piano version of the *Spiritual* follows the guitar version closely, and retains its dedication to Segovia.

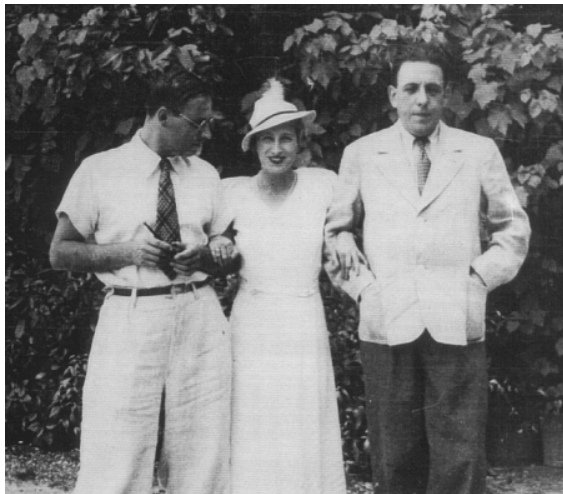
On the suggestion of conductor Serge Koussevitsky, Ferroud orchestrated his *Serenade*, and the orchestral score was published in 1928 – its third movement now shorn of its dedication to Segovia. Devotees of William Walton’s music will find this version strangely reminiscent of *Façade* in places.

Triton

Ferroud composed nothing further for guitar. From the period after the *Spiritual* came several of his larger scale works: a comic opera *Chirurgie* in 1927, a ballet *Jeunesse* in 1929–33, and a symphony in 1930.

In 1932 his musical activities took a new turn when he established Triton, a society for the promotion of new music founded to a considerable degree in opposition the SMI. Through Triton Ferroud he was able to promote not only the music of his own generation of French composers, but also that of several east European composers in whom he was particularly interested, such as Bartok, Martinu, Prokofiev and Tansman.

Ferroud would doubtless have become a more significant figure in twentieth-century French music had his life not been cut tragically short at the age of 36. In 1936, while travelling through Hungary, he was killed in a ghastly car accident. His shockingly early death had a profound effect on at least one of his musical contemporaries, Francis Poulenc, who was so distressed that he felt a compulsion to revive his lapsed Catholic faith. The musical result was his *Litanies à la vierge noire*, composed in 1936 and the first of a series of sacred masterpieces.



Ferroud (left), with soprano Suzanne Peignot and composer Francis Poulenc. (Archives of Jean-Paul Ferroud)

Another musician affected by Ferroud's death was the composer Claude Delvincourt. He wrote:

'Si on voulait camper Ferroud en deux mots, il faudrait dire: lucidité, dynamisme. On aurait défini à la fois l'homme et la musique.'

[If you wanted to depict Ferroud in two words, you would have to say lucidity and dynamism. You would have defined at the same time both the man and the music.]

A new edition

Creating a performing edition of the *Spiritual* several decades after it was written, and with Ferroud no longer available for consultation, clearly calls for very particular skills, which I do not possess. The job requires someone with a composer's mind and a virtuoso's technical knowledge. I am pleased to report that Angelo Gilardino has kindly undertaken the task, and his version will be published in the April–June issue of the Italian guitar magazine *Seicorde*. The publishers of *Seicorde* have agreed to let *Classical Guitar* reprint Angelo Gilardino's version, and it will appear here later this year. I hope readers will share my enthusiasm for it.

Anyone wishing to investigate the music of Ferroud could usefully begin with a pair of CDs by the Orchestre National de Lyon conducted by Emmanuel Krivine. The first, on Auvidis Valois V4810, has the orchestral version of the *Sérénade* (of which the final movement is the orchestral version of the *Spiritual*), as well as the Symphony in A, and two short pieces, *Types*, and *Foules*. The second disc, Auvidis Valois V4850, includes an orchestral suite from the opera *Chirurgie*, and the ballet *Jeunesse*.

Acknowledgements

All photographs and music extracts are reproduced by kind permission of Jean-Paul Ferroud, without whose permission they may not be further reproduced. I should also like to express my thanks to Madame Karin Ferroud for her generosity and encouragement. Much of the information concerning Ferroud's life and work is based on the writings of Ruth Melkis-Bihler (see note 4). Finally, my thanks are due to Angelo Gilardino for undertaking to create an edition of the *Spiritual*.

Notes

1 The *Société Musicale Indépendante* (SMI) was founded in 1909, largely at the instigation of Ravel. Its organising committee included, besides Ravel, Fauré, Koechlin, Caplet, Schmitt and Roger-Ducasse, among others. Later members included Falla and Turina.

2 Presumably a reference to the political situation in Morocco, where the Riffs were in revolt. In 1925 Primo de Rivera led a joint Spanish and French force to quell the uprising.

3 *Le Courier Musical*, 1 June 1924, p. 325. My translation.

4 Ruth Melkis-Bihler, *Pierre-Octave Ferroud (1900-1936), Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Musik in Frankreich*, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 1995, p.270. The meeting between Ferroud and Segovia presumably happened early in 1926, around the time when Segovia was performing in the following concerts: 28 December 1925, 16 January 1926 and 23 January 1926 (the latter a mixed-bill concert presented by the *Société Nationale de Musique*). His next performances in Paris were on 2 June 1926 and 18 November 1926.

5 My series of articles 'The Judgement of Paris', *Classical Guitar*, August to December 1998, gives fuller details of these concerts. Ferroud's glowing review of Roussel's *Segovia* appears in *La Revue Musicale*, April 1929, p. 60, as part of a survey of Roussel's chamber music

6 Alcázar, M. (ed.) *The Segovia-Ponce Letters*, Editions Orphée, 1989, p. 117.

7 Interestingly, Segovia and Stravinsky travelled together on a cross-channel ferry from Calais to Dover in May 1928, an event recorded by Stravinsky in a photograph (Stravinsky, V. and Craft, R. *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents*, Hutchinson, 1979, p. 281). One wonders what sort of conversation they had. Segovia was travelling to London to perform and record, and Stravinsky to conduct his *Appollon Musagète*, a work of such charm that surely even Segovia could not have objected to it.