

LITHUANIAN ACADEMY OF MUSIC AND THEATRE  
KLAIPĖDA FACULTY  
Department of Music

**RHYTHMIC ELEMENTS OF MEXICAN AND SPANISH MUSICAL  
TRADITIONS IN MANUEL PONCE'S *CONCIERTO DEL SUR***

Master's thesis

Author

Music Performance (Strings instruments – Guitar)  
Master student Rovenā Šellija Palkavniece

Supervisor

Prof. dr Rytis Urniežius

Klaipėda, 2025

## DECLARATION

08.05.2025

I hereby declare that this thesis *Rhythmic Elements of Mexican and Spanish Musical Traditions in Manuel Ponce's Concierto del Sur* represents my own work which has been done after registration for the master degree at the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre and has not been previously included in a thesis or dissertation submitted to this or any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualifications.

I have read the current research ethics guidelines of the Academy and agree with them.

I have obtained the relevant ethical approval and acknowledged my obligations and the rights of the participants.

Rovena Šellija Palkavniece

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signature

## SANTRAUKA

Palkavnice, R. Š. *Rhythmic Elements of Mexican and Spanish Musical Traditions in Manuel Ponce's Concierto del Sur*. Muzikos atlikimo (gitaros) magistro studijų programos baigiamasis darbas. Darbo vadovas prof. dr. R. Urniežius; Lietuvos muzikos ir teatro akademijos Klaipėdos fakultetas: Klaipėda, 2025. – 41 p.

Raktažodžiai: klasikinė gitara, Manuelis Poncė, Meksikos ir Ispanijos ritmai, koncertas gitarai, atlikimo menas.

Šiame magistro darbe analizuojama Manuelio Poncės kūrinio *Concierto del Sur* gitarai ir orkestrui ritmikos bruožai. Tyrime nagrinėjami Meksikos ir Ispanijos liaudies bei populiariosios muzikos ritminiai elementai, integruoti į klasikinio koncerto raiškos priemonių visumą.

Darbo uždaviniai:

1. Apibūdinti pagrindinius Meksikos ir Ispanijos muzikos ritmikos elementus bei jų istorines ir kultūrines ištakas.
2. Išanalizuoti Manuelio Ponce biografiją ir jo indėlį į klasikinės gitaros repertuarą.
3. Išnagrinėti *Concierto del Sur* kompoziciją, identifikuojant ir analizuojant jame naudojamus Meksikos ir Ispanijos ritminius elementus.

Darbą sudaro trys skyriai. Pirmajame nagrinėjami Meksikos ir Ispanijos muzikos ritminiai elementai – poliritmiją, *sesquialtera*, *clave* ir kiti, atskleidžiant jų kilmę, funkciją bei muzikos stilių įvairovę. Antrajame apžvelgiama Manuelio Poncės biografija ir indėlis į klasikinės gitaros repertuarą. Trečiajame pateikiama *Concierto del Sur* analizė, identifikuojant Meksikos ir Ispanijos muzikos ritminius modelius klasikinio koncerto kontekste. Tyrime atlikta muzikologinė kūrinio analizė, taip pat taikyta lyginamoji analizė. Tyrimas atskleidė, kad kūrinyje identifikuoti specifiniai ritminiai modeliai – sinkopės, besikeičiantys metrai ir kiti – atspindi Meksikos ir Ispanijos muzikos tradicijas.

## SUMMARY

Palkavnice, R. Š. *Rhythmic Elements of Mexican and Spanish Musical Traditions in Manuel Ponce's Concierto del Sur* (Classical Guitar). Supervisor Prof. Dr R. Urniežius; Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre, Klaipėda Faculty: Klaipėda, 2025. – p. 46.

Keywords: Classical guitar, Manuel Ponce, Mexican and Spanish rhythms guitar concerto, performing arts.

This master's thesis is dedicated to the analysis of rhythmic elements in Manuel Ponce's work *Concierto del Sur* for guitar and orchestra. The research examines rhythmic elements from Mexican and Spanish folk and popular music traditions, which are integrated into the classical concerto form.

The objectives of this work:

1. To describe the primary rhythmic elements of Mexican and Spanish music and their historical and cultural origins.
2. To analyse Manuel Ponce's musical language, with particular focus on his compositional techniques and rhythmic structures.
3. To examine the *Concierto del Sur* composition, identify and analyse the Mexican and Spanish rhythmic elements employed.

The work consists of three chapters. The first examines the rhythmic elements of Mexican and Spanish music as polyrhythm, *sesquialtera*, *clave* and others, revealing their origins, functions, and the diversity of musical styles. The second provides an overview of Manuel Ponce's biography and his contribution to the classical guitar repertoire. The third presents an analysis of *Concierto del Sur*, identifying Mexican and Spanish rhythmic patterns within the context of a classical concerto. The research applies musicological literature analysis, listening to audio recordings, analysis of sheet music score and comparative research between, revealing that specific rhythmic models such as syncopations, changing metres, and others identified in the work reflect the musical traditions of Mexico, other Latin American countries, and Spain.

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## INTRODUCTION

**Relevance and novelty of the topic.** The master's thesis *Rhythmic Elements of Mexican and Spanish Musical Traditions in Manuel Ponce's Concierto del Sur* examines the presence and influence of Mexican and Spanish Music's rhythmic patterns in Manuel Ponce's (1882–1948) work *Concierto del Sur* (1941) for classical guitar and orchestra. Understanding these rhythmic foundations is meaningful for composers and musicologists but particularly essential for performers seeking to make informed interpretative decisions.

In art music, interpretation is the process by which a performer brings a musical score to life, transforming notation into an expressive auditory experience. During my preparation for my Master's degree recital, I studied Ponce's *Concierto del Sur* (1941). Throughout classes, masterclasses, and rehearsals, I observed that many professionals emphasised the importance of rhythmic elements in this piece, often suggesting dynamic changes that emphasised metre and proposing accentuation on particular melodic lines, even where no explicit indications of accents or dynamics appeared in the score. The specifics of this piece, and the received recommendations for interpretation from music professionals sparked my interest in investigating the Mexican and Spanish music rhythms and their integration of traditional rhythmic elements within the classical music form.

The exploration of rhythmic elements in classical guitar repertoire remains particularly relevant as both the technical peculiarities of the instrument and approaches to interpretation continue to evolve. Modern performance tendencies can be observed when comparing recordings of this concerto across generations and by reflecting on broader interpretive shifts in classical guitar performance as a whole. Different generations of guitarists approach rhythm, tempo, and articulation dynamics with distinct aesthetic goals and technical priorities. Contemporary performers like Jason Vieaux (b. 1973), Marcin Dylla (b. 1976), and Ana Vidović (b. 1980) generally favour faster tempos with more precise articulation compared to earlier generations of guitarists like Andrés Segovia (1893–1987), Narciso Yepes (1927–1997), Julian Bream (1933–2020), and John Williams (b. 1941), who often featured more distinctive tempo fluctuations, explored diverse timbres, and sometimes even created an aesthetically sharp and rough sound.

These evolving interpretive approaches highlight the ongoing search for authenticity in performance, particularly when addressing repertoire with strong cultural roots. For performers tackling Ponce's music, understanding the rhythmic foundations becomes not merely an academic exercise but an essential component of artistic integrity. This quest for rhythmic authenticity directs our attention to the fundamental role of rhythm in expressing cultural identity within Ponce's work.

The *Concierto del Sur* demonstrates a musical synthesis of Spanish and Mexican musical traditions, integrating rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic elements from diverse cultural sources. This

compositional approach represents a nuanced exploration of musical interrelationships, employing distinctive modal structures, rhythmic patterns, and harmonic progressions that reflect broader cultural musical exchanges.

The guitar has historically played a central role in Spanish and Mexican music. While today's classical guitar is recognised as a serious concert instrument, its transformation from a popular instrument to a respected concert instrument primarily occurred in the early 20th century. The influence of Andrés Segovia was particularly significant in this evolution of classical guitar, as he attracted non-guitarist composers to write serious repertoire for the instrument. Notably, Ponce's *Concierto del Sur* was written for Segovia, whose distinctive playing style, characterised by pronounced rubato, timbral variety, retained stronger links to traditional guitar playing techniques and aesthetics. This contrasts with modern tendencies that often prioritise technical precision and clarity, sometimes deliberately avoiding stylistic elements that resemble traditional guitar playing in favour of an approach that shares more similarities with pianistic ideals of sound production and articulation. This historical connection between the guitar as a traditional and folk instrument and the guitar as a concert instrument raises additional questions about the composer's intentions for the guitar's role and the aesthetic goals in the composition. This thesis seeks to bridge these interpretive approaches by analysing the rhythmic elements of Ponce's *Concierto del Sur* to identify what characteristics are essential to the composition's authentic expression, providing performers with insights about which elements must be emphasized regardless of technical approach or stylistic preference.

**The subject of the research** is the relationship between Manuel Ponce's *Concierto del Sur* and the Mexican and Spanish music rhythms.

This research systematically examines the musical compositional strategies employed in the *Concierto del Sur*, analysing the integration of traditional rhythmic patterns and musical structures from Mexican and Spanish musical traditions. Through detailed analysis of regional musical forms from these areas, the study identifies the specific rhythmic techniques that Ponce incorporates into his classical guitar concerto and explains how these elements contribute to the work's distinctive character.

This master thesis aims to recognize the Mexican and Spanish music rhythms in *Concierto del sur* by Manuel Ponce and describe interpretation possibilities through a prism of Mexican and Spanish popular music.

Based on the goals of the thesis the following **tasks** were outlined:

1. To describe the Mexican and Spanish music rhythms.
2. To describe means of musical expression in Manuels Ponce's *Concierto del sur*.
3. To discover Mexican and Spanish rhythms in Manuels Ponce's *Concierto del sur*.



Based on the outlined tasks, the work consists of three parts, each addressing the following questions:

1. What are the characteristics of the rhythms of Mexican and Spanish music?
2. What was Manuel Ponce's artistic inspiration and means of musical expression in *Concierto del Sur*?
3. What specific Mexican and Spanish music rhythmic elements are present in Manuel Ponce's *Concierto del Sur*, and how should performers address these characteristics to achieve an interpretation that accurately reflects the work's cultural foundations?

**The research methodology** included a literature analysis of sources about Mexican and Spanish traditional and popular music and Manuel Ponce's life and compositions. To recognize the elements of Latin music rhythms, methodical materials, audio recordings, musical scores and literature were studied. To understand Ponce's means of musical expression literature sources, score and audio recording were studied. In order to describe the interpretation solutions, the studied material was summarised and synthesised. Some of the solutions and observations are drawn from the author's personal experience as a classical guitar performer.

Based on the questions posed, this thesis consists of an introduction, three chapters, and a conclusion. In the first chapter, Latin music rhythms are described. The second chapter summarizes Manuel Ponce's biography and describes his compositional means and inspirations. In the third chapter, *Concierto del Sur* is analysed, paying special attention to the rhythmic aspects of the composition and possible interpretation solutions.

Taking into account the continuous evolution of classical guitar performance techniques and emerging interpretative approaches, this thesis provides valuable insights into the rhythmic foundations of Manuel Ponce's *Concierto del Sur*. By identifying and analysing specific rhythmic elements from Mexico, various Latin American regions, and Spain in this work, the research serves as a practical resource for performers seeking to develop culturally informed interpretations. Additionally, this research systematizes the specific rhythms of Mexican and Spanish music and provides examples of compositional possibilities and integration of styles for both composers and musicologists. Furthermore, this thesis aims to inspire young guitarists to explore the rich connections between classical compositions and their folk and traditional music influences, ultimately enhancing the depth and authenticity of their musical interpretations.

# 1. MEXICAN AND SPANISH MUSIC RHYTHMS

## 1.1. Origins and styles of Mexican and Spanish music

Manuel Ponce's *Concierto del Sur* represents a sophisticated synthesis of diverse musical traditions that reflects the cultural heritage of Mexico and Spain. To understand the rhythmic and melodic elements found in this composition, it is essential to examine the historical development of Mexican music and its relationship to Spanish and other Latin American musical forms. The concerto incorporates established Mexican musical patterns, formed through centuries of cultural interaction, and distinctive Spanish traditions from Andalusia, a region known for its flamenco rhythms and melodic structures. The title *Concierto del Sur*, meaning “Southern Concerto” reflects this synthesis, referencing both Mexico's geographic position and Andalusia's southern Iberian location.

The musical identity of Mexico derives from three primary influences: Indigenous, African, and Spanish musical traditions. This tripartite foundation has produced a rich variety of regional styles and genres that continue to evolve while maintaining connections to their historical origins.

To describe indigenous music elements of Mexico, it is relevant to explore the distant history of the region, because soon after the colonisation of South and Central America in the 16th century, the music of the indigenous people and the colonisers began to create new forms and influence each other. Historical evidence of pre-colonial cultures and music can be found among archaeological excavations and historical descriptions from post-colonial times that describe the characteristics of the various cultures in the territory of Mexico. Archaeological evidence indicates sophisticated civilizations existed in Mexico's territory before European arrival. Pre-Columbian cultures like the *Teotihuacan* and *Zapotec* established complex urban centres, social structures, religious practices, and art forms, including music. Various archaeological sites have yielded musical artifacts such as bone flutes, clay ocarinas, percussion instruments, and animal-shaped whistles that produced distinctive tonal qualities. Our understanding of pre-Columbian indigenous music comes primarily from these surviving instruments, which reveal modal structures and scales (predominantly pentatonic) that differed significantly from European musical systems. These instruments were likely used in ceremonial contexts and community gatherings, reflecting the important social and religious functions of music in these ancient societies. To understand these ancient musical traditions, researchers speculate by carefully examining contemporary indigenous and local communities, identifying sonic characteristics that differ from European or African musical paradigms. Contemporary indigenous communities in Mexico maintain significant aspects of these musical traditions, preserving performance practices through continuous cultural transmission. In regions such as Oaxaca, Chiapas, and Michoacán, local populations continue to utilize traditional instruments

in ceremonial contexts. The *teponaztli* (slit drum) and *huehuetl* (upright drum) remain important instruments among *Nahua* communities, while Mayan groups preserve distinctive wind instrument traditions. One of the significant aspects common in the indigenous music of Mexico is the employment of cyclic forms wherein musical phrases repeat continuously. Another significant characteristic of indigenous Mexican music is the use of simultaneous melodic lines, with multiple instruments performing different parts concurrently, creating textural complexity<sup>1</sup>. These pre-Columbian musical elements established fundamental characteristics that persist in Mexican musical identity and can be heard in the melodic contours and rhythmic patterns of *Ponce's Concierto del Sur*. While these indigenous traditions form one pillar of Mexican music, they would later interact with Spanish musical forms, creating a dynamic cultural exchange that continues to shape Mexican musical expression.

The Spanish musical traditions that would eventually blend with indigenous practices in Mexico were themselves the product of diverse cultural influences. Spanish music exhibits significant regional variation; for example, the north-western region of Galicia exhibits Celtic influences characterized by bagpipes, staves, and leather drums. Galician melodic and rhythmic structures correspond to Scottish traditional music, reflecting Celtic origins.<sup>2</sup> Conversely, the southern region of Andalusia, where flamenco originated, presents distinct musical characteristics that have most significantly influenced Mexican music, and that elements of Andalusian music are also directly integrated into Ponce's concerto.

Flamenco developed from the integration of Muslim, Jewish, Roman, and Byzantine elements that accumulated in southern Spain across centuries. This musical form holds particular importance for Spain's Romani population, serving as a component of cultural identity. Arab and Jewish influences on Spanish music date to the 7th century, when these communities established settlements throughout the Iberian Peninsula. Moorish musical practices introduced complex rhythmic structures and improvisational techniques that became characteristic elements of flamenco. The arrival of Romani populations in the 15th century contributed percussive techniques and dance elements that further influenced flamenco's development.<sup>3</sup>

The subsequent interaction between Eastern culture-influenced music forms of Andalusia and European classical forms facilitated the integration of Andalusian music rhythmic structures into formal compositions, extending Andalusian musical influence beyond Spain. This process allowed

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<sup>1</sup> Music in Latin America and the Caribbean: An Encyclopedic History. Volume 1: Performing Beliefs: Indigenous Peoples of South America, Central America, and Mexico. Edited by Malena Kuss. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004, pp. 1–6.

<sup>2</sup> Trend, J. B. Music in Spanish Galicia. *Music & Letters*, 5(1), 1924, pp. 15–25.

<sup>3</sup> Pohren, D. E. The Art of Flamenco. *Bold Strummer*, 2005, pp. 49–55.

the influence of Andalusian music to spread beyond the borders of Spain, infiltrating and enriching other musical genres and traditions, including those of colonial Mexico.

In *Concierto del Sur*, Ponce incorporates these Spanish influences, particularly in the rhythmic patterns, harmonic progressions, guitar playing elements and scales that evokes the characteristics found in flamenco music. The guitar's role in the concerto further emphasizes this Spanish connection, as the instrument holds central importance in both Spanish and Mexican musical traditions. When Spanish colonizers arrived in Mexico, they brought these musical traditions with them, setting the stage for a profound cultural exchange that would transform both European and indigenous musical practices.

The colonisation of Mexico, beginning with Hernán Cortés's arrival in 1519, initiated a complex process of cultural exchange that fundamentally transformed musical practices throughout the region. This exchange was not simply a one-way imposition of European forms; rather, it involved mutual adaptation and creative synthesis as indigenous and Spanish traditions interacted. According to Béhague's "Music in Latin America: An Introduction", the interaction between European colonisers and indigenous populations constituted a dynamic process of cultural exchange. Missionaries utilised music as a medium for cultural communication and religious instruction.

Indigenous populations learned to perform *villancicos* – brief, celebratory compositions with accessible melodic and rhythmic structures, performed in Spanish or indigenous languages during religious observances. These compositions frequently employed 6/8 metre with hemiola patterns, alternating between duple and triple rhythmic divisions. This cultural interaction produced hybrid musical forms. Certain *villancicos* incorporated elements such as syncopated rhythms reflecting African influences, and *negrilla*, which incorporated African linguistic patterns through melodic structures. These forms enabled indigenous musicians to integrate traditional vocal and percussion techniques within European musical frameworks. It should also be mentioned that this cultural exchange of music was multilateral because, as Béhague points out in his work, Indians sang in choirs and participated in church orchestras as early as the 17th century and received an education in Western European music, and were recognised as professional musicians.<sup>4</sup>

This integration significantly influenced the development of Mexican nationalist music, as subsequent composers utilized these combined traditions to express national identity. Traditional forms such as the *jarabe* and the *huapango*, with its alternating rhythmic structures, became fundamental components of a musical language reflecting Mexico's diverse cultural foundations. These rhythmic patterns are evident in Ponce's *Concierto del Sur*, particularly in the *sesquialtera* rhythms that alternate between duple and triple metres. While Spanish and indigenous musical

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<sup>4</sup> Béhague, G. Music in Latin America: An Introduction. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice–Hall, 1979, pp. 4–25; 97–135.

practices were merging, a third significant influence was simultaneously shaping Mexican music: the musical traditions brought by enslaved Africans.

The African musical contribution represents a critical third component in the development of Mexican musical forms, complementing indigenous and Spanish influences. African musical elements entered Mexico primarily through the colonial slave trade, which brought approximately 200,000 enslaved Africans to Mexico between the 16th and 18th centuries. This significant demographic presence had profound effects on the evolution of Mexican musical styles, particularly in coastal regions. These populations, concentrated initially in coastal areas such as Veracruz, Guerrero, and Oaxaca, introduced distinctive rhythmic patterns, percussion techniques, and call-and-response structures that fundamentally transformed Mexican musical expression.<sup>5</sup>

African polyrhythms, characterised by two or more rhythms that overlap and are heard simultaneously, became a defining feature of many Mexican musical forms. This call-and-response rhythm, demonstrated in music where a group of instruments or voices answer a soloist, is accompanied by rhythmic body movement and foot stomping. The synthesis of indigenous, Spanish, and African musical practices gave rise to distinctive regional musical forms that continue to characterise Mexican music today. These forms reflect local cultural characteristics while sharing certain fundamental elements derived from their diverse origins. Among the most significant of these forms is the *son*, a term that encompasses various regional styles united by common characteristics. As Stanford explains, “The word *son* is a venerable one in the history of Mexican song and dance. The use of the term dates at least from the sixteenth century in the Spanish-speaking world as a whole, although ample evidence of its currency is not to be found until the second half of the seventeenth”.<sup>6</sup> According to Stanford the *son* encompasses musical, literary, and choreographic aspects, featuring strophic forms with instrumental interludes, and *zapateado* dance performances on wooden platforms called *tarimas*. This tradition has evolved into distinct regional variants: *son jarocho* (Veracruz) with African-derived syncopation and improvised lyrics known as *decimas*, as the rhyme lasts for 10 lines, performed by declamation; *son huasteco* (Huasteca region) known for *false* singing and violin importance; *son jalisco* forming *mariachi*'s foundation; and others. These variants developed through geographic isolation, differing indigenous populations, varying African presence, and distinct colonial experiences while maintaining the fundamental structure that made the *son* central to Mexican musical identity.

Among the most significant musical traditions in Mexico, *mariachi* represents a distinctive musical ensemble with profound cultural significance. *Mariachi* is a traditional Mexican musical

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<sup>5</sup> Gutiérrez, Olivares; Vivian, Rebeca. Unveiling Mexican Folklore. Universidade de Corona, 2024, pp. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Stanford, E. Thomas. The Mexican Son. Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council, 4(25th Anniversary Issue), Cambridge University Press, 1972, pp. 66–86. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/76767>

ensemble originating in the state of Jalisco, characterized by a specific instrumental configuration and performance style. The standard mariachi ensemble typically includes violins, trumpets, *vihuela* (a small guitar-like instrument), *guitarrón* (a large acoustic bass guitar), and vocal performers. Historically, the ensemble emerged with a core instrumental group of *vihuela*, *guitarrón*, harp, and violins, later incorporating trumpets in modern iterations. The musical repertoire encompasses diverse genres including *sones*, *rancheras*, *huapangos*, and *boleros*, representing a comprehensive musical form that has evolved from regional folk music to a recognized national musical expression. The ensemble's development illustrates the transformation of localized musical traditions into a broader cultural representation, maintaining significant connections to its historical and regional origins<sup>7</sup>.

Hellmer describes the *malagueña* and *petenera* as “still played and sung substantially as it was sung and played a hundred and fifty or two hundred and fifty years ago” in coastal regions, particularly in Guerrero's Costa Chica.<sup>8</sup> These forms, brought from Spain during the colonial period, have been preserved in remote areas with limited access to modern communications. Their persistence demonstrates how geographical isolation can contribute to the preservation of traditional musical forms, allowing them to maintain connections to their historical origins.

These traditional Mexican musical forms have provided a rich source of material for composers like Manuel Ponce, who sought to incorporate national musical elements into classical compositions. In *Concierto del Sur* Ponce draws from these diverse traditions, integrating rhythmic patterns, melodic structures, and instrumental techniques derived from centuries of cultural exchange and synthesis.

## 1.2. Rhythmic elements of Mexican and Spanish music

Rhythm serves as a defining structural element in both Mexican and Spanish musical traditions. This section examines the principal rhythmic patterns that characterize these musical systems. The strong connection between music and dance in both cultures has fundamentally shaped their rhythmic vocabulary, establishing distinctive patterns of accentuation and metric organization. While this analysis initially focuses on Mexican and Spanish rhythmic traditions, it is crucial to recognize that Latin American musical forms are deeply interconnected, with rhythmic patterns

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<sup>7</sup> Sheehy, Daniel. *The Music of Multicultural America, Mexican Mariachi Music Made in the USA*, eds. Kip Lornell and Anne K. Rasmussen. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016, pp. 137–145.

<sup>8</sup> Hellmer, Joseph R. *Lost Music Treasures of Guerrero*. *Western Folklore*, Western States Folklore Society, 1947, 6(3), pp. 249–256. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1497199>, pp. 256

traveling across regions and countries. Different Latin American musical traditions have continuously mixed, influenced, and transformed each other.<sup>9</sup>

The following analysis will focus specifically on key rhythmic elements such as *clave* patterns, polyrhythms, *sesquialtera*, rhythmic alternation, and the *huapango* rhythm, demonstrating how these traditional components function within their original cultural contexts. The exploration will intentionally broaden the scope to include rhythmic traditions from Andean countries as Peru and Bolivia as the music styles have overlapped and influenced each other, and the migrations of peoples within the continent have created a diverse cultural layer in Mexico. Understanding these foundational rhythmic structures is essential for later analysis of their implementation in Manuel Ponce's *Concierto del Sur*.

Rhythmic oscillation is a musical technique characterised by dynamic metric interactions within a single musical context. Primarily found in Latin American and Spanish musical traditions, it involves the simultaneous or alternating use of contrasting metric subdivisions, most notably between duple and triple metres. The uncertainty and change of metre in both Spanish and Mexican music is created by the different accentuation of rhythmic patterns, or rhythms that sound simultaneously with different divisions, which are called polyrhythms. One of the most common polyrhythms found in many Spanish, Mexican, and other Latin American styles is the three against two polyrhythm, or as it is called in these regions, the *sesquialtera*. *Sesquialtera* is a term used for a rhythm that simultaneously is felt in 3/4 and 6/8 metre or has a linear change from 3/4 to 6/8, which is achieved by grouping quaver notes in groups of 3 in two or groups of 2 in three. The term comes from Spanish, meaning “six—that alters”, meaning that the six beats are regrouped from two groups into three groups or vice versa. This signature rhythm can be found in folk dance music throughout Latin America from Mexico till Chile. *Sesquialtera* is a significant characteristic of Hispanic-derived Latin American traditional music. The Chilean Cueca exemplifies a rich polyrhythmic texture created by the interplay of its traditional instruments, often including guitar, *guitarrón chileno*, accordion or harp, and tambourine. While the *guitarrón chileno* provides a resonant bass foundation and the accordion or harp offers melodic embellishments, the rhythmic complexity arises from the contrasting patterns played by the guitar and the melodic instruments, further punctuated by the tambourine and *pandereta*. Typically, the guitar establishes a rhythmic pattern emphasizing a 3/4 feel by strumming primarily on the second and third beats of the measure. However, guitarists sometimes introduce a more complex strumming pattern that alternates or blends 3/4 and 6/8. Simultaneously, the harp or accordion frequently emphasizes a 6/8 metre through melodic runs and ornamentation. The singers' melodies also often reinforce 6/8, with accents typically falling on the first and fourth quaver notes

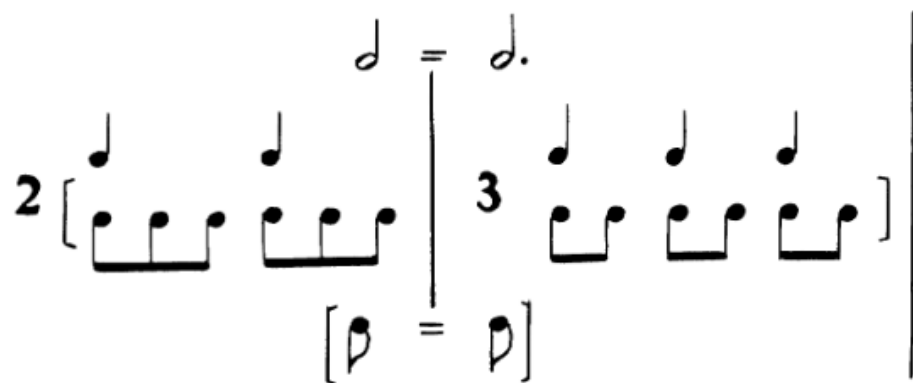
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<sup>9</sup> Béhague, G. *Music in Latin America: An Introduction*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1979, pp.4–25.

of the measure, contributing to the overall polyrhythmic sensation. This constant musical role for each instrument, where distinct rhythms and metric feels are maintained, results in a vibrant and accessible polyrhythmic tapestry. Similar polyrhythmic characteristics can be observed in other Latin American musical forms such as the Ecuadorian *Albazo*, the Argentine *Chacarera*, the Peruvian *Marinera*, and the Colombian *Bambuco*.<sup>10</sup>

Similar execution of *sesquialtera* can be found in traditional Mexican music and its various regional styles of *Son Mexicano*. For instance, the *Son Jarocho* from Veracruz often features instruments like the *jarana* (a small guitar) strumming a rhythmic pattern emphasizing a duple subdivision within a 3/4 framework, while the harp simultaneously articulates melodic lines and rhythmic figures that strongly imply a triple subdivision characteristic of 6/8. This interplay, where one rhythmic layer emphasises groups of two and another emphasises groups of three within the same underlying tempo, generates a vibrant and syncopated polyrhythmic texture that is a hallmark of many *Sones*.<sup>11</sup>

A *sesquialtera* is a key element in the foundation of Latin American music that is rooted in Iberian music, as Spanish conquerors brought their musical traditions to South and Central America. Particularly, Spanish music is very rich in passionate rhythmical dance music. The characteristic 3/4 and 6/8 metre changes can be heard in early Spanish dance styles as Fandango and Seguidilla. Fandango and seguidilla have gained popularity both in traditional and stage music; for example, composers like Luigi Boccherini, J.P. Rameau and Mozart have composed pieces in the form of Fandango.



**Fig. 1** Example of *Sesquialtera*

<sup>10</sup> Claro, Samuel, *Chilena o cueca tradicional*. Santiago: Universidad Católica de Chile, 1994, pp. 54–64.

<sup>11</sup> Sheehy, Daniel E. *Mexico, Mariachi and Son*. The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music, Volume 2: South America, Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. New York: Garland Publishing, 1998, pp. 657–673.



Another type of polyrhythms can be found in Mexican and other Latin American music. Music that originated in the Andean region in Bolivia and Peru is not only rich in its musical expression but also in its instruments. The traditions of this region's music expanded through Latin American countries as the native populations migrated. The Andean region significantly utilizes musical instruments such as pan flutes *Siku*, wind flutes *Quena*, low-tuned leather drums *Bambo*, and string instruments like the *Charango* and *Bandola Andina*. Polyrhythms are prevalent in Bolivian and Peruvian ensemble music, where multiple performers execute different rhythms, creating complex and multi-layered textures. One example of rhythmic complexity can be found in Aymara dance music known as *Ch'uta*. *Ch'uta* is performed by ensembles that include *Siku* flutes, *Bambo* drum, and other rhythmic instruments. The timbre diversity of these instruments united in one ensemble creates a sophisticated and rich sound. Polyrhythms and different metric feels can be found between the drummers' steady pulsation, which often unfolds in a 9/4 metre, against the pentatonic melodies played by pan flutes in a more regular 6/4 or 4/4 metric feel (where quarter notes are often felt as quaver notes). Another polyrhythmic technique that creates a signature sound of *Ch'uta* is rhythmic layering known as *hocketing*. Through *hocketing*, *Siku* players divide a melody between two flutes, with the melody being fragmented into short and irregular motifs passed between the instruments. The differing accentuation and timbre play of the two flutes interact with the metric feel of the performed melody.<sup>12</sup>



**Fig. 2** *Ch'uta* example

While the Andean region provides clear examples of complex polyrhythms beyond simple 3:2 relationships, it's also important to note that certain genres within Mexican folk music exhibit intricate rhythmic interplay. For instance, some indigenous musical traditions in Mexico feature the simultaneous sounding of percussion instruments playing distinct and contrasting rhythmic cycles

<sup>12</sup> Romero, Raúl R. *Música, danzas y máscaras en los Andes*. Pontificia: Universidad Católica del Perú; Instituto Riva-Aguero, Proyecto de Preservación de la Música Tradicional Andina, 1998, pp. 139–150.

that do not always align with a simple duple or triple subdivision of the beat. These can involve additive rhythms and complex syncopation, creating polyrhythmic textures that contribute significantly to the unique character of these musical forms.

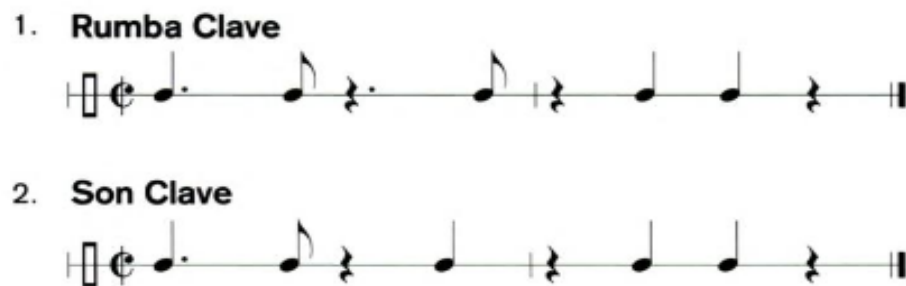
Beyond the broader rhythmic structures, Latin American music employs distinctive rhythmic patterns that function as identifying signatures for specific musical genres and traditions. These patterns, often repeated cyclically, serve as both organizational frameworks and cultural identifiers, connecting contemporary performances to historical traditions.

One of the most significant and recognizable rhythm elements of Latin American music traditions is the concept of *Clave*. A clave is a rhythmic pattern that serves as a foundational guide for performers, dictating the structure and feel of a piece of music. Originating from African musical traditions and thriving in Afro-Caribbean genres, the *clave* is more than just a rhythm; it is a framework that underpins the entire musical piece. The term *clave*, which means “key” in Spanish, refers to rhythmic patterns that function as the structural key of Afro-Cuban music. While there are various forms of *clave*, such as the *son clave* and *rumba clave*, their common purpose is to create a syncopated and cyclical pulse that anchors the music. The *clave* is a rhythmic pattern that is treated similarly to “time” in Western music. By explaining *clave* from a Western music theory viewpoint, it is a rhythmic pattern duration is two 4/4 measures, a rhythmic ostinato. The clave rhythm is often played on a pair of wooden sticks, also called *claves*, which produce a sharp, penetrating sound essential for cutting through other instruments. Traditionally, the player maintains a steady tempo, as the clave is the rhythmic “backbone” for all musicians. In ensemble settings, other instruments – like congas, bongos, timbales, and the bass – interlock with the clave rhythm, creating complex layers of syncopation and counter-rhythms. The role of the clave performer is crucial, as deviations from the established rhythm can disrupt the ensemble's coherence. Musicians must align with the clave while also contributing to the overall polyrhythmic texture. In more contemporary music, such as salsa, mambo, and Latin jazz, the clave rhythm may be implicit, followed by all musicians without a dedicated clave player.<sup>13</sup> This rhythm is found in Mexican *Son* style and for this reason is called as *Son Clave*. In Mexican music it is typically played in “3 and 2”, meaning that the rhythm emphasizes three beats in the first bar and two in the second, or opposite in “2 and 3”, if rhythm emphasizes two beats in the first bar and tree in the second. The son clave's “call and response” nature supports the interaction between various instrumental parts and vocal lines, making it an essential framework for performers. The “call and response” comes from the music religious and social importance, as the originally people of various African cultures would make a collective dialogue through music. The

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<sup>13</sup> Hernandez, Horacio. *Conversations in clave: the ultimate technical study of four-way independence in Afro-Cuban rhythms*. Miami: Warner Bros, Alfred publishing Co, 2000, pp. 14–18.

rumba clave which originates in Cuban music is similar but introduces a more syncopated feel. The differences are subtle but significant in performance. The rumba clave is most commonly associated with rumba music, adding a raw, driving force to the music that suits the genre's lively dance forms.<sup>14</sup>



**Fig. 3** Clave examples

In addition to abstract rhythmic structures, Mexican and Spanish music features distinctive performance techniques that produce characteristic rhythmic effects. These culture-specific approaches to rhythm generation are often tied to particular instruments and performance practices, creating sonic signatures that identify regional and cultural traditions.

Notable examples of rhythmic expression and complexity can be found in Mexican *Son*. One of the regional variants, *Son Jarocho*, particularly structures the music around the rhythm, as the dancer becomes an instrument by participating with footwork. The instrumental bands of *Son Jaroncho* include instruments as one or two violins, different types of guitars, *vihuela*, harp that accompanies male singers. As *Son* became an integral part of the Mariachi ensembles in the 30's and till the present day. Dance *Zapateado* takes an integral part in *Son*. *Zapateado* is a Spanish dance that also plays an important role as one of the flamenco dance styles. This dance is performed by dancers actively tapping their feet on a wooden platform and making a counter rhythm to the music. *Son* repertoire includes different songs, but the lyrics are not strictly fixed to one melody, as the same text can be attributed to different tunes. The structural form and metre of the piece of *Son* do not change, as it is accompanied by a traditional dance.

Another regional variant of *Son* from northern Mexico is *Huapango*, and it can be found in music in different parts of Latin American. The rhythm of it is performed on guitar family instruments, and by its means it is a strumming pattern. The first beat of each measure is accented and played by downward stroke but immediately muted by palm, giving the first beat percussive effect. And the next stroke followed on second quarter note of the measure is ringing till the next

<sup>14</sup> Lehmann, Bertram, *The syntax of Clave- Perception and analysis on Meter in Cuban and African music*, Tufts University, 2002, pp. 16–25

measures first beat, then in an improvised way, the guitar player adds more *rasgueados* by altering from 3/4 to 6/8.



**Fig. 4** Example of *huapango*

The systematisation of distinctive rhythmic elements in Mexican and Spanish music identifies structural patterns that form these traditions' sonic foundation. Key rhythmic features *sesquialtera*, polyrhythms, *clave* patterns- that create sophisticated music forms characterised by metric ambiguity, syncopation, and complex accentuation that challenge conventional Western meter. The integration of indigenous, African, and European rhythmic concepts has produced distinctive musical signatures that have influenced developments throughout Latin America and permeated popular music and classical compositions globally. The significance of these rhythmic frameworks is evident in Manuel Ponce's *Concierto del Sur*, as will be examined in the subsequent analytical chapter of this thesis.

## 2. MANUEL PONCE. PERSONALITY AND LEGACY

### 2.1. Biography and compositional style of Manuel Ponce

This chapter provides a general overview of the musical influences that shaped Manuel Ponce's creative output. These influences stemmed both from his European studies and his engagement with Mexican and Spanish musical traditions. The exploration of Ponce's compositional style is crucial to understanding his significant contributions to the classical guitar repertoire. This chapter draws primarily upon the book by Corazón Otero, "Manuel M. Ponce and the Guitar," as it represents one of the most referenced and consistent biographical work about the composer, which compiles letters, articles and other important historical evidence about the composer's life and work.

Manuel Maria Ponce was born on December 8, 1882, in Fresnillo, Mexico. He came from a wealthy family that could provide their kids with a good education. By the age of four, Ponce started to learn piano. At the age of ten, he joined the Children's Choir of the San Diego Temple in Aguascalientes where he later, became an organ assistant and at the age of 15 the main organist, but because of a new order that was made by the state governor all music that was not Gregorian was prohibited to perform in churches, he was convinced to leave the position. In 1900, he travelled to Mexico City to study piano with Spanish pianist Vicente Mañas and harmony with Italian conductor Eduardo Gabrieli. After of year of preparation, he entered the National Conservatory of Music although after of year of studies Ponce left it. Ponce decided to return to his hometown Aguascalientes, where he devoted himself to composition and worked as a piano teacher. The young composer drew inspiration from the surrounding environment, he went to the main square, where the city's life unfolded. In the square, there were often travelling musicians who sang and played popular Mexican music. Ponce was not shy and talked to these people, listened to their music, and carefully learned the melodies. The young composer was dedicated, and he felt that to express more of his musical ideas, he needed to obtain more knowledge. He decided to go to study in Europe. In 1904, Ponce travelled to Italy to study at the Conservatory of Bologna under Enrico Bossi and later Dall'Olio who was a pupil of Rossini. During their time in Italy, he composed his first piano sonata, and Trio for violin, viola, and piano.

After successful studies in Italy, Ponce went to study in Berlin. He wanted to study under a strict discipline to become better at performing of the piano. He managed to obtain a level that was very high among the Berlins Conservatories students. In the final moments of his stay in Berlin, Ponce had various successful concerts.

In 1908 Ponce returned to Mexico. With the obtained knowledge and experience, young composers were devoted to composing music that is inspired by Mexican traditional music. He found

inspiration in J.S. Bach's (1685–1750) chorales, L. Van Beethoven's (1770–1827) and J. Haydn's (1732–1809) symphonic works and Isaacs Albeniz (1860–1909) music who integrated popular folk music in his compositions. Another inspiration he obtained during his studies in Europa, was the exposure to new styles such as impressionism and nationalism, which were uprising in different countries. As a pianist, Ponce admired young composer as Maurice Ravel (1875–1937), Claude Debussy (1862–1918) and Manuel de Falla (1876–1946) that at that point were still unrecognized in Mexico. He brought their compositions to Mexico and began teaching them to his piano students at the National Conservatory.<sup>15</sup>

Motivated to compose “National” music Ponce kept exploring traditional diversity of Mexican music, he went to different social events in his hometown Aguscaliente. He went to rural areas to meet local community musicians. He's colleagues were sceptical and even cynical about Ponces efforts to create music that uses traditional music as inspiration, as at that time “indigenous” and “popular” culture was looked –over among professionals. The denial of the cultural heritage made Ponce work even harder, as he was fighting also against segregation. Ponce since early age were fascinated by diversity, tembres, rhytms and melodies that he heard from locals of different ethnicities, and he were willing to make musical revolution by bringing this music identity to concert halls. At that time that was controversial, because as Ponce were trying to bring “nationalism” he was also targeting the topic of national identity. At that time Mexico was still socially segregated, as the political spheres of Mexico were ruled by Mexicans of European descent, mentioning that most of the academic music staff in conservatorios and art critiques were Europeans “Popular” and “Indigenous” music was evaluated with a contemptuous attitude and, according to academics, definitely did not fit in concert halls. But there were also similarly thinking artists in other fields, that Ponce collaborated with such literate and educator Justo Sierra, with who he could develop his nationalism perspective. During the years he stayed, he stayed true to his ideas, despite intellectuals. In the following years, he opened a Piano academy, where he could freely use his musical ideas and repertoire in his pedagogical work. To preserve and raise to a professional level the folk melodies of Mexico, he wrote down, compiled and harmonised them. To educate conservative musicians, he held seminars about Mexican folk music and nationalism. As in result of his active work, other composers started to recognize and use Mexican folk music materials in their own compositions. Ponce composed various compositions that where inspired by Mexican melodies, he wrote arrangement for piano and voice of songs popular songs as *La cucaracha* (1914), *La pajarera* (1917), *La Valentina* (1914), *Yo te quiero* (1913) and many more. He composed piano pieces based on Mexican songs as

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<sup>15</sup> Chase, Gilbert. Creative Trends in Latin American Music–II. Tempo No. 50 (Winter, 1959), pp. 25–28. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/944015>.

*Blada Mexicana* (~1918), *Arulladora Mexicana La rancherita*, and *Barcarola Mexicana Xochimilco*, and his most recognized song *Estrellita* (1912).

In 1915 Ponce went to Cuba, cause of the Mexican revolution (1910–1920). During this period, he obtained new inspiration, this time from Cuban traditional music. He absorbed the syncopated rhythms of Cuban music and transferred them into his original pieces, such as a *sonata for Piano and Cello* (1922), and piano pieces as *Sunset*, *Suite Cubana*, and *Cuban Rhapsody*. In Cuba Ponce once again started to perform, soon he got recognized by the public that came to visit Cuba as at the time country was a musical centrum. He went to perform in New York, and after his successful performances, he came back to Mexico, where the country had regained more stability. After the comeback, he became the musical director of the state symphonic orchestra. This position leads him to larger-scale compositions. But he did not stay in this position for long as again by seeking independence, and different political opinions, he decided to work as a private music teacher. He started an independent music magazine, *Revista Musical de México*. In the final years, he especially focused of song composing that became well-recognised by the general public. Ponce died in 1948. In Mexico City<sup>16</sup>.

## 2.2. Manuel Ponce's creations for classical guitar

Manuel Ponce made significant contributions to the classical guitar repertoire, establishing himself as one of the most important composers for the instrument in the 20th century. His guitar compositions represent a substantial portion of his creative output and span various forms and styles, from baroque-inspired works to pieces with distinct Mexican and Spanish influences. Through his collaboration with the eminent Spanish guitarist Andrés Segovia, Ponce developed a profound understanding of the guitar's technical and expressive possibilities.

Manuel Ponce's dedication for classical guitar began in the early 1920s and evolved significantly throughout his career. Before this period, Ponce had established himself primarily as a pianist and composer of piano works and songs, with little involvement in guitar composition. Ponce's engagement with guitar composition formally commenced in 1923 following his encounter with Spanish guitarist Andrés Segovia in Mexico City, establishing a professional collaboration that would prove highly influential in the development of twentieth-century guitar repertoire. Following their initial meeting, Ponce began writing for the instrument almost immediately. His earliest guitar compositions from 1923–1925 include the *Preludio in E major* and an arrangement of his previously

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<sup>16</sup> Otero, Corazón. Manuel M. Ponce and the Guitar. United States: Bold Strummer Limited, 1994, pp. 13–14.

composed song *Estrellita*. These early works reflected Ponce's romantic sensibilities while demonstrating his initial exploration of the guitar's technical and expressive possibilities.<sup>17</sup>

By 1926, Ponce's guitar compositions gained more structural complexity as evidenced by his *Sonata Clásica Homenaje a Fernando Sor*. This work, created during his residence in Paris, demonstrates Ponce's growing interest in neoclassical aesthetics while paying homage to one of the guitar's classical masters. During this same period, he composed *Tres Canciones Populares Mexicanas* (1926), arrangements that transformed simple folk melodies into sophisticated concert pieces while preserving their essential Mexican character.<sup>18</sup>

The period between 1927 and 1932 represents Ponce's most prolific phase of guitar composition. During these years, he produced several major works including *Theme varié et Finale* (1926), *Sonata Mexicana* (1923–1929), and the *Variations on La Folía de España' and Fugue* (1929). This latter work, with its twenty variations and complex fugue, demonstrates Ponce's growing command of contrapuntal writing for the guitar. Perhaps the most fascinating development in Ponce's guitar output during this period was his creation of pastiches in the style of historical composers. At Segovia's suggestion, Ponce composed his *Suite in A minor* (1929) in the style of Sylvius Leopold Weiss and *Suite in D major* (1931) imitating Bach's lute works. Segovia initially presented these compositions as “discoveries” of historical manuscripts before eventually revealing Ponce as their true author. By the early 1930s, Ponce's guitar compositions began to incorporate more modern harmonic language. The *Sonatina Meridional* (1932) displays impressionistic elements alongside Spanish influences, while maintaining classical formal structures. This work represented a bridge between his neoclassical tendencies and more contemporary expression.<sup>19</sup>

The apex of Ponce's guitar composition came with the *Concierto del Sur* for guitar and orchestra, completed in 1941. The concerto's lengthy gestation period resulted in a work that synthesized the various stylistic elements Ponce had explored throughout his career – Spanish influences, Mexican folk elements, classical structures, and modern harmonies – into a cohesive composition. The compositional history of the *Concierto del Sur* and Ponce's collaborative relationship with Segovia regarding this seminal work will be examined in detail in the subsequent chapter.

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<sup>17</sup> Otero Corazón, Manuel M. Ponce and the Guitar, Bold Strummer, U.K., 1994, pp. 25–26.

<sup>18</sup> Chase, Gilbert. Creative Trends in Latin American Music–II. Tempo No. 50 (Winter, 1959), pp. 26. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/944015>.

<sup>19</sup> Barron Corvera, Jorge. Manuel M. Ponce en Sudamérica (1941), Revista Musical Chilena, 2012, no. 218, pp. 68–69.



### 3. RHYTHMIC AND TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF THE INTERPRETATION OF MANUEL PONCES *CONCIERTO DEL SUR*

#### 3.1. Historical Context and Collaboration with Andrés Segovia

The creation of Manuel Ponce's *Concierto del Sur* represents a significant collaborative relationship between the composer and guitarist Andrés Segovia. Their work on this composition spans approximately twelve years, from its initial conception in 1929 until its completion in 1941, as documented in the extensive correspondence between both musicians compiled by Miguel Alcázar in book “The Segovia–Ponce Letters” and through Corazon Otero's comprehensive research on Ponce's guitar compositions.

The genesis of this *concierto* began when Segovia, seeking to establish the guitar as a serious concert instrument, encouraged Ponce to compose a substantial work for guitar and orchestra. This request aligned with Segovia's broader strategy of commissioning works from established composers to enhance the guitar's status in classical music. For Ponce, who had already created numerous guitar compositions, this project offered an opportunity to explore orchestral writing while incorporating elements from his Mexican musical heritage.

Their working method was systematic and collaborative. Ponce would compose sections of the work and send them to Segovia, who would then analyse the material and provide feedback based on his expertise as a performer. This exchange continued throughout the composition process, with Segovia offering suggestions to improve the guitar's effectiveness within the orchestral context. In a letter from November 1940, Segovia described one of his technical recommendations: “I have replaced them (repeated notes) naturally using the same chords, but a light *rasgueado* that adds rhythmic grace and gives this accompaniment by the guitar a certain harmonic halo exclusive to the instrument.”<sup>20</sup> This collaborative approach ensured that the concerto would be both musically substantial and technically suitable for the guitar.

By December 1940, Ponce had completed the first movement and began work on the Andante. Segovia's reaction to receiving the completed first movement reveals his admiration: “The first movement of the Concerto is magnificent. It has great variety, passionate thrust, and a perfect equilibrium in form.”<sup>21</sup> The entire concerto, consisting of three movements (*Allegro Moderato*, *Andante*, and *Allegro Moderato e Festivo*) was finished by January 1941. To address the inherent balance issues between guitar and orchestra, Ponce employed a reduced orchestration for string quintet, woodwind instruments including flute, clarinet, oboe, fagot, horn, and percussion. This

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<sup>20</sup> Otero, Corazón. Manuel M. Ponce and the Guitar. United States: Bold Strummer Limited, 1994, pp. 62.

<sup>21</sup> Alcázar, Miguel. *The Segovia–Ponce Letters*, Ohio: Editions Orphée, 1989, pp. 198.

orchestration decision was influenced by Segovia's concerns about balance, as he noted in correspondence: "The problem with guitar concertos is always the same—making the guitar audible without forcing it to play beyond its natural voice."<sup>22</sup>

The premiere of *Concierto del Sur* occurred on October 4, 1941, in Montevideo, Uruguay, with Segovia as soloist. Following this success, Ponce and Segovia presented the *Concierto* in Argentina and Chile. The composition was performed in Mexico in 1944 and received its New York debut in 1946. The American critical response was also favourable, a review in the Herald Tribune described the *Concierto* as "a true musical experience, a work so perfectly conceived for guitar and orchestra that it recreated the Andalusian ambience with variety and subtlety."<sup>23</sup>

The successful collaboration between Ponce and Segovia on *Concierto del Sur* established an important model for composer–performer relationships in creating new works for the classical guitar. Their correspondence and working process demonstrate how effective communication between composer and performer can produce musically substantial works that address the technical requirements of the instrument.

### 3.2 Structural and harmonic analysis of the means of musical expression used in *Concierto del Sur*

This chapter presents a comprehensive analysis of the orchestral score of *Concierto del Sur*, examining its overall structural architecture and formal organisation. While subsequent chapters will focus specifically on rhythmic elements, this analysis explores the work's harmonic language, melodic development, orchestration techniques, and the distinctive relationship between soloist and ensemble.

Ponce's **first movement** of *Concierto del Sur* is the most expansive and technically sophisticated section of the work, representing a high point of guitar concerto composition. The movement integrates distinctive elements from Mexican *son jarocho* and Spanish flamenco traditions, particularly evident in its use of characteristic syncopated rhythms, modal scales reminiscent of Andalusian musical forms, and melodic structures that echo the improvisation like passages of traditional guitar styles. These musical references are seamlessly woven into a classical framework, creating a rich dialogue between folk traditions and art music.

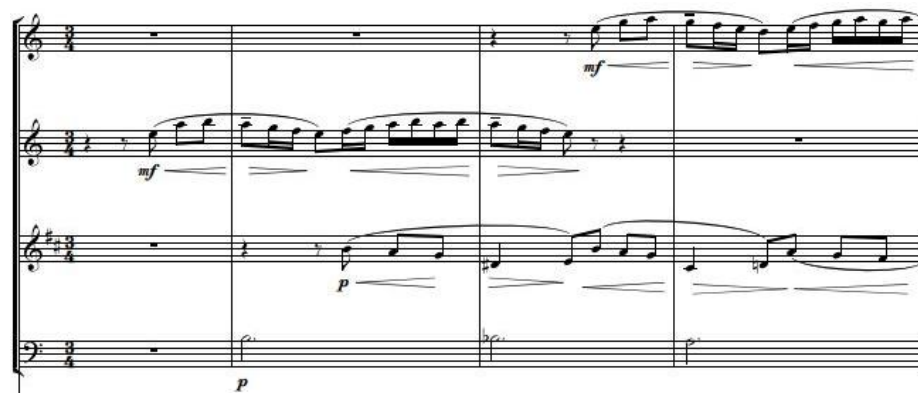
The first movement of Manuel Ponce's *Concierto del Sur* is written in a modified sonata allegro form (containing exposition, development, recapitulation, and coda). The modifications include significant variation rather than literal restatement in the recapitulation and the incorporation

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<sup>22</sup> Alcázar, Miguel. *The Segovia–Ponce Letters*, Ohio: Editions Orphée, 1989, pp. 180.

<sup>23</sup> Otero, Corazón. Manuel M. Ponce and the Guitar. United States: Bold Strummer Limited, 1994, pp. 72.

of an extensive guitar cadenza as a structural element before the coda. The movement explores diverse modal and tonal possibilities while fundamentally grounding in A minor. Though the piece is ultimately cantered in A minor as its principal key, it opens with a brief orchestral introduction (mm. 1–8 (see fig. 5) that deliberately establishes the dominant key (E minor). This introduction begins with a melodic line that centres around the note E, using stepwise motions to create a modal ambiguity that builds harmonic tension as it does not strongly emphasise the main key.



**Fig. 5.** Ponce, *Concierto del Sur* Movement 1, mm. 1–8.

The guitar enters presenting the main theme (mm. 13–21) (see fig. 6). The main theme centres on E, creating tension through its resistance to harmonic resolution. Its structure consists of an initial melismatic flourish (a quick, ornamental group of notes), followed by a sustained note on the second beat of the measure. During these phrases, the guitar's accompaniment voice alternates between E major and E minor chords from one measure to the next, creating a subtle but significant tonal instability. This pattern repeats, another melismatic figure leads to another emphasized long note, before concluding with a characteristic descending scale passage. When the guitar reaches the A note (which would suggest resolution to the tonic), the orchestra intervenes, preventing complete closure. This thematic construction conveys feelings of forward momentum.



**Fig. 6.** Ponce, *Concierto del Sur* Movement 1, mm. 13–21.

Throughout the exposition, this sense of harmonic suspension persists, maintaining forward momentum and expressive tension. In measure 22, Ponce introduces B-flat, incorporating A Phrygian mode which adds Spanish colour. Through measure 64, the composition develops this material using syncopated rhythms and *sesquialtera* patterns while maintaining careful orchestration that balances

the guitar against the orchestra. The section builds tension as it approaches the second theme at (m 64). The second theme provides lyrical contrast with a more song-like melody characterized by longer phrases and smoother, stepwise melodic movement. This section is in E major, anchored by an ostinato on B in the strings and guitar that creates harmonic stability while maintaining tension. The persistent use of B, functioning as the dominant tone of E major, creates a sustained tension that naturally seeks resolution to the tonic E, yet this resolution is deliberately delayed, giving the section a suspended, expectant quality.

The guitar initially presents the lyrical theme (see fig. 7) while the strings maintain this pulsating ostinato figure. After the guitar completes the thematic statement, there is a notable shift in orchestration: the guitar transitions to rhythmic strumming patterns that provide harmonic support while the woodwinds take over the melodic material. This orchestration exchange creates textural variety, allowing both soloist and orchestra to share thematic responsibilities. Harmonically, while centred in E major, this section maintains modal inflections that prevent straightforward diatonic resolution, creating a distinctive tonal characteristic.

The image displays a musical score for guitar and piano. The top system shows the guitar part with a melodic line in the treble clef, including fingerings (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) and a 'ben cantando' marking. The piano part in the bottom system features a pulsating ostinato figure in the bass register, marked 'pp' and 'sempre pp'. The second system continues the guitar melody with more complex fingerings and a '1' marking, while the piano accompaniment remains consistent.

**Fig. 7** Ponce, *Concierto del Sur* Movement 1, mm. 65–71

Following exposition, a transitional section gradually intensifies both harmonically and texturally, leading to the development section at mm. 127. The development begins with the guitar presenting a darker, more dramatic version of the introduction theme. This transformation gives new emotional weight to material first heard in the orchestra's opening statements. This section unfolds as an ongoing musical dialogue between contrasting elements: the guitar's darker presentation of the introduction theme is answered by the orchestra responding with the lighter second theme (originally presented in E major during the exposition). This creates a purposeful contrast between the more assertive, shadowy material and the more lyrical, flowing material. The guitar connects these thematic

statements with virtuosic scale passages, creating a sophisticated conversation between different musical ideas established earlier in the movement. Ponce's organization of this development reveals his careful attention to thematic relationships, using the contrast between soloist and orchestra to highlight the distinct character of each theme. The recapitulation commences at mm. 183, returning to A minor. Ponce begins this section by restating the introduction theme that opened the movement, maintaining structural coherence. However, he chooses to omit the opening melismatic figure that characterized the guitar's first entrance, moving instead to other thematic material. This selective approach to recapitulation represents a thoughtful modification of traditional sonata form. Rather than literal restatement, Ponce employs significant variation throughout this section, notably expanding the treatment of the second theme through multiple variations. This approach creates a structural balance that emphasizes development over mere repetition. The cadenza (mm. 303) is unusually extensive and represents a significant departure from the movement's primary character. While elaborating on previously established motifs, it also explores new emotional territories, offering brief glimpses of the atmosphere that will characterize the following movements. This forward-looking quality creates a sense of unity across the Concerto while allowing the guitar to showcase its technical capabilities in a context that feels both connected to and liberated from the movement's main material. The substantial length of this cadenza elevates it from a mere virtuosic display to an essential structural component of the movement.

The movement concludes with a coda (mm. 392) that shifts to a major tonality, creating a brighter, more uplifting conclusion. This tonal shift transforms the previously established themes into more positive expressions, providing emotional resolution to the tensions developed throughout the movement.

**The second movement** of Manuel Ponce's *Concierto del Sur* stands in stark contrast to the vibrant, rhythmically assertive first movement. Marked "Andante" and composed in 3/4 metre, this movement offers a lyrical counterbalance to the surrounding movements. While the first movement established the Concerto's cultural foundations through rhythmic complexity and thematic diversity, the second movement explores the melodic aspects of Mexican and Spanish music. However, despite its melodic and harmonic importance in the lyrical movement, Ponce maintains rhythm as a principal expressive element throughout it. The second movement is written in ternary (A–B–A') form. The movement is orchestrated for an ensemble of strings, woodwinds, and minimal percussion, with consideration of the guitar's acoustic properties. Ponce maintains thin orchestral textures throughout most of the movement, ensuring the guitar remains the focal point. The orchestra performs two main functions: providing background accompaniment to support the guitar and presenting brief responsive passages that develop material introduced by the soloist. The orchestration demonstrates technical

effectiveness through its integration with the guitar part—woodwind lines complement the guitar’s melodic material, pizzicato strings establish rhythmic foundations without overwhelming the soloist, and register placement gives each instrument its own frequency space. The second movement centres on key of D minor while employing modal constructions that create its distinctive character. The main theme is outlined by the D Phrygian Dominant mode, which introduces tension through its augmented second interval. This tension is further developed through the C-flat Phrygian tetrachord. These modal elements establish the movement’s oriental, mystical atmosphere from the outset. The first section encompasses (mm 1–24) with the guitar’s primary thematic material appearing in (mm 2–13) (see fig.8). During this section, the woodwinds contribute melodic passages that feature melismatic (ornamental) flourishes and rhythmically diverse lines, creating a dialogue with the guitar.

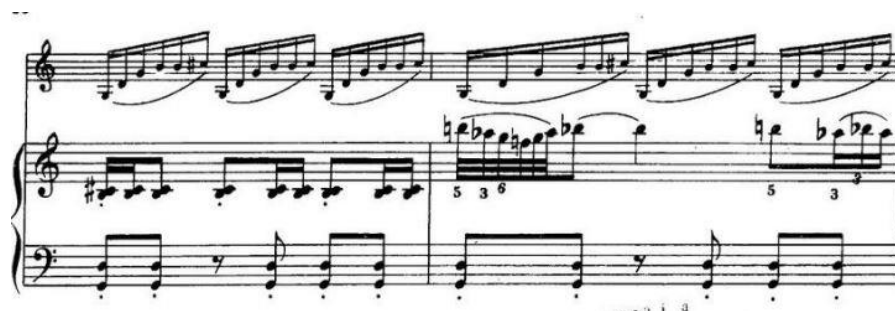


**Fig. 8** Ponce, *Concierto del Sur* Movement 2, mm 1–7

Rhythm plays a crucial role in defining the movement’s character, beginning with a pizzicato pattern in 3/4 metre: two quaver notes followed by a pause on the second beat, then three quaver notes that lead to and conclude on the downbeat of the next measure, creating a sense of forward motion and rhythmic completion. When the main theme appears, the guitar employs both strumming patterns for harmonic support and a melodic line enriched with characteristic embellishments and syncopations that displace accents from their expected positions. This rhythmic approach, combined with the modal harmonies, firmly establishes the movement’s contemplative, otherworldly quality while maintaining connection to traditional Spanish musical expressions.

The B section begins at measure 25 (see fig. 9), introducing a notable shift in both texture and tonality. Here, the guitar and strings establish complementary but independent accompaniment patterns, each maintaining distinct rhythmic figurations that create a subtle polyrhythmic texture. While these instruments provide a harmonic foundation, the flute emerges with a solo line featuring

elaborate ornamental melodies that draw on oriental modal characteristics. This section distinctly moves away from the minor tonality of the opening section exploring instead the bright sonorities of the Lydian mode with its characteristic raised fourth degree.



**Fig. 9** Ponce, *Concierto del Sur* Movement 2, mm 27–28

The development section maintains the rhythmic structure initially established in the piece's introduction. The accompanying voices in the violin and cello parts recreate the original rhythmic pulsation, providing a consistent foundational layer. At measure 43, the guitar introduces new melodic material, with the musical line moving through a sequence of phrases that progressively extend higher in pitch. While the accompaniment preserves the rhythmic framework, the primary musical development focuses on the guitar's exploration of the melodic content, with each phrase incrementally expanding the initial musical ideas. The orchestration demonstrates a structured approach to musical composition. Instrumental lines interact through a carefully constructed dialogue, with each voice maintaining its individual characteristics while contributing to the overall musical structure (see fig. 10).



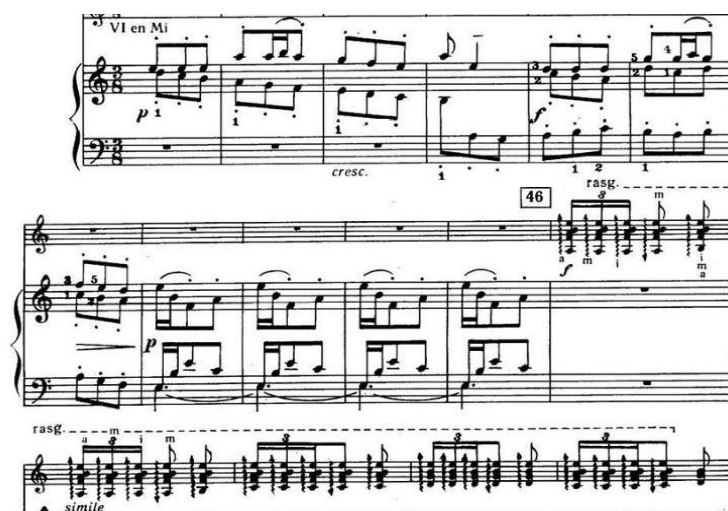
**Fig. 10** Ponce, *Concierto del Sur* Movement 2, mm 48–53

The instruments exchange and develop thematic material, creating a complex musical texture. In measures 68–70, the guitar references a theme from the first movement. The section includes a conclusive coda. At measure 98, the primary musical section returns with notable variations. These modifications prevent a simple repetition, instead presenting the original material through a lens

shaped by the preceding musical development. The recapitulation maintains the fundamental structural integrity while introducing subtle changes that reflect the musical exploration of the development section.

In conclusion, the movement demonstrates a modal approach characteristic of Andalusian musical traditions. Melismatic elements are subjected to precise and varied rhythmic treatments, transforming musical phrases through rhythmic variations. The guitar part reveals similarities to southern Spanish playing styles in its improvisational, melodic, and modal characteristics. The ostinato rhythm maintains an ongoing pulsation throughout the movement, providing a structural foundation for musical development.

**The third movement** of *Concierto del Sur*, marked *Allegro moderato e festivo*, presents a vibrant conclusion to Ponce's concerto. Written in 3/8 metre with a dance-like character, this movement exhibits a clear sonata-rondo form. The movement is in A minor key, but during the piece, the main thematic material is varied in different tonalities and it concludes in A major. The structure of the piece follows the scheme A, B, A1, C, A2, D, A3. The movement opens with the theme introduced by the orchestra (mm. 1–11) (see Fig. 11), which is followed by the guitar entrance of chord sequence played *rasgueado* techniques and a rhythmically energetic motif that establishes the festive atmosphere suggested by the tempo marking.



**Fig. 11** Ponce, *Concierto del Sur* Movement 3, mm 1–16

At measure 90, following the exposition of the first theme, Ponce introduces a contrasting section with a lighter, more playful character in key of major B major (see Fig. 12). This section is developed and varied with harmonic changes. The guitar's role shifts between melodic presentation and virtuosic embellishment.





**Fig. 12** Ponce, *Concierto del Sur* Movement 3, mm 87–98

At measure 150, the movement enters an extended A1 section (mm. 150–272) where the main theme reappears prominently in the orchestral part, now presented in E Phrygian mode—the dominant of A minor (see Fig. 13). Throughout this extended section, Ponce explores variations of the main theme, distributing material across different instruments of the orchestra while interspersing virtuosic passages for the guitar. The thematic material undergoes substantial development while maintaining sufficient continuity to be recognized as derived from the opening theme.



**Fig. 13** Ponce, *Concierto del Sur* Movement 3, mm 147–158

The C section (mm. 272–305) introduces distinctly new material that shares notable similarities with both the cadenza from the first movement and the lyrical B section of the second

movement (see Fig. 9). This passage features flowing guitar arpeggios supporting sustained, melismatic melodic material that creates an almost improvisatory character (see Fig. 14)



**Fig. 14** Ponce, *Concierto del Sur* Movement 3, mm 292–297

At measure 306, the movement continues with another varied return of the main theme (A<sup>2</sup> section, mm. 306–362). This section features progressive intensification as the main thematic material appears in different orchestral voices while the guitar part presents further variations and elaborations. The dialogue between soloist and orchestra becomes increasingly animated, building tension and forward momentum. This development leads to a brief but significant "Più lento" section (D section, mm. 363–384) that creates a moment of repose before the final drive toward the conclusion. This reflective passage echoes elements of the C section while providing necessary contrast through its reduced tempo and more introspective character.

The final section A3, mm. 385–459 presents a concluding statement of the main thematic material and builds toward a festive conclusion (see Fig. 15). The orchestration reaches its fullest density here, with increased instrumental participation and dynamic intensity. The guitar writing becomes more dynamic, featuring extended rasgueado passages. This exuberant conclusion affirms the festive character established at the movement's outset while bringing the entire concerto to a joyful resolution.

This musical score snippet shows two staves. The top staff is for the guitar, featuring a 'rasg.' (rasgueado) section starting at measure 65, marked with a box. The bottom staff is for the piano, with various melodic and harmonic lines. A 'simile' marking is present above the piano staff. The score ends at measure 61, which is also marked with a box. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#).

**Fig. 15** Ponce, *Concierto del Sur* Movement 3, mm 384–389

The formal structure of this final movement balances traditional frameworks with innovation through varied repetitions of the main theme and multiple contrasting sections. Thematic connections across all three movements create unity throughout the concerto.

### 3.3. The peculiarities of rhythm in *Concierto del Sur*

In the *Concierto del Sur*, rhythm emerges as the primary compositional element, reflecting the fundamental role of rhythmic complexity in Latin American and Andalusian musical traditions. Unlike compositions that prioritise melodic development, this work emphasises rhythmic structures, where musical passages often serve a rhythmic function over melodic expression. Drawing from traditional guitar practices, the composition prioritises rhythmic intricacy, with modal harmonic and melodic elements serving primarily to support sophisticated rhythmic interactions. The *Concierto del Sur* presents a complex rhythmic structure that deviates from traditional compositional methods. The composition employs metric variations that challenge standard rhythmic conventions. Ponce uses rhythmic layering, unconventional accent patterns, and metric shifts that require careful performer interpretation. In many instances, these rhythmic complexities are not immediately apparent from the musical score and may be overlooked without detailed analysis, making the work's rhythmic nuances challenging to recognize and execute precisely. The metrical and rhythmical particularities are intended to be subtly felt rather than dramatically demonstrated, existing as a nuanced underlying musical conversation.

In the following analysis, the rhythmic landscape of *Concierto del Sur* will be examined, identifying the specific rhythmic elements present in the composition. This analysis will systematically identify, group, and locate the rhythmic elements, including:

1. **Rhythmic Oscillation:** changing metres, metric shifts between different time signatures, *sesquialtera*, and polyrhythm.
2. **Rhythmic Patterns:** *Clave* rhythms, syncopated accent patterns, rhythmic groupings
3. **Cultural Rhythmic Techniques:** percussive strumming techniques, flamenco melismatic and guitar playing influences.

**Rhythmic oscillation** encompasses various elements of metric complexity, including implied metric shifts, *sesquialtera*, and polyrhythm structures. Throughout *Concierto del Sur*, Ponce masterfully employs these techniques without explicitly changing the notated time signatures, creating a subtle rhythmic tension that characterizes much of Latin American traditional music. This compositional approach reflects the cultural synthesis at the heart of Latin American musical identity, where indigenous rhythmic concepts merge with Spanish and African influences. The composition prominently features *sesquialtera* patterns (as described in Chapter 1), where rhythmic groupings

alternate between duple and triple subdivisions within the same metre, creating the characteristic tension between 6/8 and 3/4 feels that defines many Latin American musical forms. Ponce's integration of polyrhythm elements—where multiple rhythmic groupings, alternates the metric organizations occur simultaneously—draws from traditions like the Mexican *son* and *huapango* rhythms, allowing different instrumental voices to suggest contrasting metric interpretations while maintaining the overall formal structure. While the score provides a framework for interpretation, Ponce's rhythmic writing offers performers considerable expressive freedom, with the primary requirement being a steadfast commitment to the underlying pulse that unifies these metric complexities.

The first movement's rhythmic structure integrates key Latin musical elements, particularly *sesquialtera* and syncopation. The primary thematic material is characterised by a nervous, unstable rhythmic quality, with melodic lines primarily expressing rhythmic complexity. Strumming techniques and polyrhythmic layering create a dynamic musical texture where rhythm dominates musical expression. The movement alternates between two distinct rhythmic characters: an initial anxious, fragmented theme with intricate rhythmic subdivisions and a second theme with a more stable, dance-like character reminiscent of Latin American traditional folk music. This approach reflects the movement's roots in Mexican *Son* and flamenco traditions, where rhythmic patterns provide the fundamental musical narrative. Syncopated accents and metric transformations between 3/4 and 6/8 metres generate continuous musical tension, with melodic and harmonic elements functioning as supporting structures to the underlying rhythmic framework.

In the first movement, measures 1–5 (see fig. 5) introduce the *sesquialtera* concept that permeates the composition. The opening theme implies *sesquialtera*, as the main theme starts the motive on the 4th quaver note of the measure (the second offbeat in 3/4 time). The melodic line and motives propose a melodic grouping as if the melody were in 6/8, in contrast to the accompaniment notated in 3/4. In this opening section, the accompaniment is very thin and light, allowing the melody to move with a wider, legato manner that naturally groups in 6/8 patterns. Segovia's edition of the score indicates that the dynamic leads the melody on the first beat of the measure and then gradually fades out, reinforcing the rhythmic emphasis that contributes to the *sesquialtera* feel.

From bar 5 (see fig. 16), the music transitions to an exaggerated strict 3/4 feeling as the guitar begins a strumming pattern that emphasizes strong beats and orchestra response on the offbeat. The theme follows 3/4 but exaggerates the second beat of each bar, creating a rhythmic emphasis that continues to suggest metric ambiguity.



**Fig. 16** Ponce, *Concierto del Sur* Movement 1, mm 5–9

A particularly prominent example of sesquialtera occurs in measures 28–29 (see fig. 17), where the guitar's bass notes and chord placements divide each bar into two groups of three quaver notes, creating a distinct 6/8 feel against the notated 3/4 metre.



**Fig. 17** Ponce, *Concierto del Sur* Movement 1, mm 28–29

An interesting melodic and rhythmic relationship emerges in measures 94–100 (see fig. 18). Although the bass line adheres to the notated 3/4 metre, the melodic grouping in the guitar part naturally falls into groups of two. Based on the interval patterns and melodic contour, a 6/8 interpretation (with groups of three quaver notes) can be applied to the melody, creating a subtle *sesquialtera* effect where the melodic organization contradicts the underlying metric structure.



**Fig. 18** Ponce, *Concierto del Sur* Movement 1, mm 94–98

In measures 155–159 (see fig. 19), the passage features a distinctive grouping pattern organized in units of two. The melodic line ascends progressively, with each grouping deliberately leading to and emphasizing the first beat of the measure. This creates a forward momentum that reinforces the metric structure while simultaneously introducing rhythmic interest through the binary grouping within the ternary framework.



**Fig. 19** Ponce, *Concierto del Sur* Movement 1, mm 155–159

In measures 335–352 of the *Più mosso* section within the cadenza, a polyrhythm appears, as the higher melodic notes, arranged in fourths, suggest a 6/8 metre, while the bass line functions as an ostinato that defines the notated 3/4 metre (see fig 20). This creates a simple but effective layering of two different metric feels, another example of the *sesquialtera* principle found throughout the *Concierto*.



**Fig. 20** Ponce, *Concierto del Sur* Movement 1, mm 337–341

In the final section of the first movement measures 392–400 (see fig 21.), Ponce employs two contrasting rhythmic approaches in sequence. First, he establishes a 3/4 ostinato pattern that varies the dramatic chords from the beginning, creating a dialogue between guitar and orchestra through alternating downbeats and upbeats. Following this, the guitar presents a contrasting passage consisting of four groups of sixteenth notes whose organization suggests a four-against-three feel relative to the established metre. The melodic contour of these sixteenth-note groups does not emphasize the strong beats of the 3/4 measure, creating metric ambiguity.



**Fig. 21** Ponce, *Concierto del Sur* Movement 1, mm 392–395

The third movement of Ponce’s “*Concierto del Sur*,” marked “*Allegro moderato e festivo*”. Composed in 3/8 metre, the movement exhibits a consistently energetic pulse throughout. Despite the relatively straightforward metrical notation, Ponce introduces significant rhythmic complexity through varied phrase structures, accent patterns, and metric groupings. An example is measures 70–85 (see fig. 22). In this section, the guitar introduces melodic phrases that create a 4:3 polyrhythm against the prevailing 3/8 metre established by the orchestra. The guitar consistently begins its phrases on off-beats, employing groupings of two eighth notes that cross bar lines and disrupt the triple-metre framework. This creates a recurring pattern that only resolves every twelve quaver notes (four measures of 3/8), when the two conflicting metric organizations finally realign. The resulting metric tension generates a persistent forward momentum while maintaining the underlying triple pulse.



**Fig. 22** Ponce, *Concierto del Sur* Movement 3, mm 71–78

Measures 90–103 present another significant example. In this passage, the guitar introduces a melodic line structured in quaver notes with intervallic relationships that establish a distinctive grouping pattern and which gives and possibly to interpreter to exaggerate it or lead the melodic lines following grouping of two notes. The melodic contour and articulation create an implied grouping of two quaver notes each, forming the classic *sesquialtera* pattern often described as “12 12 12 123” and is supported by the accompaniment voices rhythm (see fig. 12)

Ponce’s metric complexity in *Concierto del Sur* functions primarily through melody and phrase structure rather than explicit notation. The natural patterns of intervals and melodic shapes create *sesquialtera* patterns and polyrhythms throughout the work. The score contains few specific rhythmic directions, yet the musical material itself guides proper metric interpretation, allowing rhythmic complexity to enhance the composition without overpowering it. This approach shows Ponce’s use of rhythm as a fundamental building block within classical form.

**Rhythmic Patterns** in Ponce’s *Concierto del Sur* exhibits distinctive rhythmic organization that, while not employing exact *clave* patterns, operates on similar principles of non-regular rhythmic structures that create momentum and coherence. Rather than directly incorporating traditional *clave* patterns, Ponce draws from song and dance music styles found across various Latin American genres, particularly those from Spanish and Mexican traditions. The composition features sophisticated syncopated accent patterns where strong beats are frequently displaced, creating tension between the notated metre and perceived accents. These irregular rhythmic groupings—often dividing measures into asymmetrical units—function as structural devices rather than merely ornamental elements. The guitar frequently introduces these patterns against contrasting orchestral rhythms, establishing recognizable yet irregular accent structures that drive the musical narrative.

The opening thematic motif of Ponce’s *Concierto del Sur* (measures 1–3) (see. Fig 5) establishes a distinctive rhythmic pattern characterized by irregular accent groupings within the 3/4 metre. When this material returns in measures 30–33 (see fig. 23), Ponce maintains the same fundamental length of rhythmic groupings but introduces subtle variations in the internal rhythm.



**Fig. 23** Ponce, *Concierto del Sur* Movement 1, mm 30–33

In the first movement, another significant rhythmic pattern emerges through the guitarist's strumming technique, characterized by an alternation between quaver-note triplets and duplets. This distinctive pattern first appears in measure 134 (see fig. 24) and continues while the orchestra presents the lyrical theme. The orchestral lyrical theme itself constitutes another important rhythmic pattern, distinguished primarily by its syncopated notes. The strategic placement of these syncopations disrupts the metrical regularity, creating tension against the established pulse. This juxtaposition of the guitar's strumming pattern against the orchestra's syncopated melodic line generates a sophisticated rhythmic counterpoint.



**Fig. 24** Ponce, *Concierto del Sur* Movement 1, mm 134–137

In measure 246, the guitar presents a pattern showing relative syncopation. While notes occur on downbeats, emphasis shifts to weak beats through duration, articulation, and melodic shape, creating forward motion while maintaining harmonic stability.

This rhythmic figure returns throughout the movement, notably in the cadenza's closing section where the syncopated line leads into *rasgueado* patterns. These recurrences connect different sections of the movement through recognizable rhythmic motifs.

The combination of syncopated lines with *rasgueado* techniques creates a dialogue between different guitar playing styles, referencing traditional Spanish and Mexican practices. Each reappearance presents these elements in new harmonic contexts, developing rather than merely repeating the material.

The second movement begins with a distinctive rhythmic phrase that establishes the character of the entire section. This opening rhythmic figure serves as a foundational element, immediately setting the contemplative atmosphere that defines this movement. The pattern, presented at the outset, becomes a rhythmic signature that recurs throughout the movement, providing structural coherence



and thematic unity (see fig. 25). This initial rhythmic statement functions as more than mere accompaniment; it establishes the pulse and flow that governs the movement's pacing and expression. The guitar's entrance in the second movement presents a variation of the first movement's strumming pattern, replacing quaver-note triplets with two sixteenth notes on the second and fourth quaver notes of the measure. This distinctive rhythmic motif repeats throughout the piece, serving as a unifying element that defines the movement's character while maintaining connections to previously established rhythmic material. The movement's slow tempo affords exceptional precision and clarity to this rhythmic figure, allowing each sixteenth note to be articulated with distinct emphasis.



**Fig. 25** Ponce, *Concierto del Sur* Movement 2, mm 1–7

Ponce's *Concierto del Sur* uses rhythmic patterns as core structural elements. The composition frequently maintains recognizable rhythmic structures while changing melodic and harmonic content. These consistent rhythmic phrases form the foundation of the work's architecture. The third movement's main theme demonstrates this approach, recurring with different harmonies and slight melodic modifications while preserving its essential rhythmic identity. This technique creates unity throughout the Concerto while incorporating Spanish and Mexican musical influences.

**Cultural rhythmic techniques** refer to the distinctive rhythmic patterns and practices that originate from specific cultural traditions. In Latin American and Spanish music, the guitar occupies a central position as a traditional instrument, particularly in Mexican folk music and Spanish flamenco. Various guitar family instruments also feature prominently throughout Latin American countries, including the *vihuela*, *jarana*, *charango*, and *cuatro*, each contributing to regional musical

identities. As discussed in the first chapter, these traditions developed distinctive rhythmic approaches that Ponce incorporates throughout *Concierto del Sur*. The Concerto establishes direct connections to traditional performance practices through strumming patterns featuring *rasgueados* (multi-finger strumming techniques), melodic content based on scales similar to those used in flamenco music, and melismatic ornamentation with characteristic triplet figures reminiscent of Eastern musical influences that permeate both vocal and instrumental Latin music. These elements do not appear as superficial references but function as integral components of the *Concierto*'s musical language.

The first movement of Ponce's *Concierto del Sur* begins with *rasgueado* strumming (see fig. 16), establishing an immediate connection to traditional Spanish guitar techniques. Following this introduction, the main theme appears and concludes with an extended passage that begins on an offbeat and resolves on the third beat of the measure, incorporating melismatic elements that create a characteristic flowing contour. The subsequent section presents a variation of the opening theme with asymmetrical phrasing, again culminating in melismatic passages in measures 21–29 (see fig. 26). This section integrates a combination of strumming and plucking techniques that directly reference traditional performance practices found in Mexican folk music and Spanish flamenco.



**Fig. 26** Ponce, *Concierto del Sur* Movement 1, mm 20–24

From measure 74 and 134 of first movement (see fig 24), a distinctive rhythmic strumming pattern emerges that recurs throughout the *Concierto*, with variations appearing in the second movement. This pattern bears strong similarities to those found in Fandangos de Huelva, traditional fandango and bolero forms in Spanish music, as well as Mexican son traditions such as *son jarocho*, characterized by quick triplets on upbeats that accentuate the following strong beat.

In Latin American and Spanish musical traditions, a rhythmic technique commonly employed involves emphasizing the third beat in triple metres. This emphasis creates forward momentum that resolves on the subsequent downbeat. This pattern appears across several Spanish derived genres including fandango, where guitar patterns accent beats preceding the downbeat; bulería flamenco forms, where the final portion of beat three receives emphasis; and Mexican *son jarocho*, which features similar anticipatory accents. This technique serves functional purposes in traditional Spanish jota and Mexican *huapango*, providing dancers with rhythmic cues for steps and turns. Measure 138 of Ponce's *Concierto del Sur* demonstrates this device clearly, with the third beat receiving marked emphasis that propels the phrase forward to its resolution.

In the cadenza of *Concierto del Sur*, Spanish and flamenco influences are prominently displayed through specific techniques and harmonic structures. The cadenza begins with extended *rasgueado* passages, directly referencing traditional Spanish guitar techniques. These are followed by triplet arpeggios that harmonically underline the Andalusian cadence chord progression from measure 307. This progression, consisting of a descending pattern (E–Am–G–F–E in A minor) (see fig. 27), represents one of the most characteristic harmonic sequences in Spanish music and flamenco. The combination of these technical and harmonic elements establishes a clear connection to Spanish musical traditions, particularly those of Andalusia, where flamenco originated.



**Fig. 27** Ponce, *Concierto del Sur* Movement 1, mm 306–317

The rhythmic analysis of *Concierto del Sur* presented in this chapter offers significant implications for performance interpretation, suggesting several approaches that can enhance artistic authenticity. Performers may benefit from exploring traditional Spanish musical forms such as flamenco, fandango, and jota, as well as Mexican genres including *son jarocho*, *huapango*, and *son huasteco* to develop a nuanced understanding of the rhythmic devices that inform Ponce's composition. Such exploration might involve studying recordings of traditional musicians, examining characteristic performance practices like *rasgueado* techniques, and understanding the cultural contexts in which these rhythmic patterns originated. When interpreting passages with implied *sesquialtera* patterns, performers should consider subtle emphasis that acknowledges both the notated metre and the implied rhythmic groupings, creating the characteristic tension between 3/4 and 6/8 feels without exaggerating these elements. The execution of syncopated patterns and melismatic passages might be enhanced by recognizing their connection to Spanish and Mexican vocal traditions, where subtle rhythmic flexibility serves expressive purposes while maintaining the underlying pulse. Ultimately, informed performance of *Concierto del Sur* requires technical facility, cultural understanding, and artistic sensitivity to balance the composition's classical structure with its rich rhythmic heritage derived from Spanish and Mexican musical traditions.

## CONCLUSION

The study of Latin American rhythmic elements in Manuel Ponce's *Concierto del Sur* contributes significantly to our understanding of this important work in the classical guitar repertoire. This research has demonstrated through detailed score analysis and comparison with traditional musical styles that rhythm functions as a fundamental compositional element in Ponce's concerto.

The comparative analysis of Mexican and Spanish rhythmic traditions alongside Ponce's score reveals the composer's profound understanding of these cultural musical expressions. By examining the historical development of these traditions and identifying their characteristic features, this study establishes a framework for recognizing their presence in *Concierto del Sur*. This approach confirms that a thorough understanding of traditional rhythmic patterns is essential for interpreting Ponce's music with cultural authenticity.

The biographical context presented in this research illuminates how Ponce's artistic development prepared him to successfully integrate these diverse musical influences. His early exposure to Mexican folk music, combined with his formal European training and later collaboration with Andrés Segovia, created the perfect conditions for synthesising traditional and classical elements into a coherent artistic statement. This historical background proves crucial for appreciating the significance of *Concierto del Sur* within both Ponce's oeuvre and the broader development of Latin American art music.

The detailed analysis of *Concierto del Sur* demonstrates that rhythm serves not only as an expressive device but as a structural principle that builds and develops the composition. This finding confirms the hypothesis that understanding the rhythmic foundations of this work is essential for performers seeking to develop informed interpretations. The score analysis reveals that many significant rhythmic elements are implied rather than explicitly notated, underscoring the importance of cultural knowledge for effective performance.

This research makes a valuable contribution to guitar performance practice by highlighting interpretive possibilities grounded in the work's cultural foundations. By establishing connections between traditional rhythmic patterns and specific examples in the concerto, this study provides performers with concrete insights that can inform technical and interpretive decisions. These findings will help guitarists develop more authentic and compelling interpretations of this cornerstone of the guitar repertoire.

The significance of this research extends beyond *Concierto del Sur* to the broader understanding of Mexican, other Latin American composers and Spanish art music. By demonstrating how traditional rhythmic elements can be successfully integrated into classical forms, this study provides a model for analyzing similar works. This approach recognizes the distinctive contribution

of Latin American composers to the classical tradition, acknowledging their success in creating music that maintains cultural authenticity while functioning effectively within established classical forms.

In conclusion, this study confirms that rhythmic elements drawn from Mexican and Spanish traditions form the essential foundation of Ponce's *Concierto del Sur*. Through detailed score analysis and comparison with traditional musical styles, this research enhances our understanding of the work's structure, expression, and cultural significance. These findings will contribute to more informed performances and a deeper appreciation of this important composition, ultimately strengthening its position within the classical guitar repertoire.

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