EMMANUEL SOWICZ
Etude No. 17 (Sor)

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“BRING OUT THE CONTRAST IN THE MUSIC SO IT CAN REACH ITS EXPRESSIVE POTENTIAL.”

LESSON DESCRIPTION

For this lesson, Emmanuel Sowicz breaks down a remarkable etude of Fernando Sor’s and provides deep insight into its’ interpretation and expression. To begin, Emmanuel explains the historical etymology of sonata form, and how sonatas are all about duality of character. Then, he establishes that the job of a classical musician is like a detective, in that the score only provides subtle clues for the true interpretation. With a big emphasis on delineating phrases, Emmanuel dives deep into various techniques and suggestions on how to convey these different characters. These techniques include balance of voices, dynamics, fingerings, and rhythmic elements like syncopation and articulation. Finally, many suggestions come from a recognition of the guitar’s unique qualities, as well as a detailed harmonic understanding of important sections. Hopefully this lesson is an informative look at the process of bringing a piece from a score into the real world with taste and technique.
Emmanuel Sowicz, born in 1992, is a British and Chilean guitarist who combines his passion for the guitar’s traditional repertoire with a keen interest in new music and the art of transcription.

In 2014 he won First Prize at the II SMBA International Guitar Competition in Buenos Aires, and in 2017 he was awarded First Prize and the Audience Award at the XLIV Dr. Luis Sigall International Music Competition in Viña del Mar. Emmanuel Sowicz is a Savarez Artist and performs on a 2001 Matthias Dammann guitar kindly loaned to him by David Russell.
OVERVIEW

In this video, Emmanuel Sowicz gives a tutorial on Sor’s Etude No. 17, Op. 29 in C Major. In Andres Segovia’s widely used edition ‘Twenty Studies for the Guitar’, this piece is known as Study No. 20. If these numbers are unfamiliar to you, it’s very likely that you’ll recognize the etude from it’s humorous beginning:

![Musical notation]

Even though this piece is just over three minutes long, it is noteworthy in that it’s the only etude Sor wrote in sonata form, and one of only six sonata-form pieces that he wrote for guitar. Unlike Sor’s other etudes, this piece isn’t written to strengthen any single technique, rather it touches on many.

SONATA FORM

Sonata form is all about duality; two opposing forces meet and establish contrasting characters. Sonatas usually present three essential sections- exposition, development, and recapitulation. The exposition usually introduces two themes of contrasting character and tonality. If the first theme is in a major tonality, the second theme is usually a fifth above that. If instead, the first theme is minor, the second theme is in the relative major key.
The exposition introduces an argument and a related counterargument, while the development confronts the two ideas with modulation and developed polyphony, with occasional new material introduced. Finally, the recapitulation presents both themes in the home key, representing a sort of resolution of conflict.

While the term “sonata form” can be a descriptor for any piece with this form, a *sonata* is a multi-movement piece where the first movement is in sonata form. These are not to be confused with the Baroque sonata, which follows a very different form.

**DETECTIVES**

Classical musicians are a lot like detectives, in Emmanuel's view. Clues for how to interpret the music are often hidden in the score, rather than blatantly stated. Throughout this piece and similar pieces, make the most of any marking the composer makes, no matter how small.

**FINGERINGS**

The first eight bars consist of two phrases. The staccatos and dotted rhythms both imply humor, so follow that direction across the piece. Stop the notes marked short with the right hand.
Stop a note by placing down the finger that will play the following note. This keeps the beginning crisp and punchy. For phrasing purposes, put a slight slur over the dotted rhythm at the end of the second measure, and again in the next measure. Finally, refrain from playing the last two notes of this phrase legato.

The second line contains a great example of how one can gather clues from subtle markings in the score. Measure five contains chromatic eighth notes, which usually imply legato. However, the dotted rhythm in the next measure again implies staccato. Emphasize this contrast to help convey the spirit of duality in a sonata. The more surprising the contrast can be, the more engaging the music becomes.

Sor himself likely played the trill in measure seven on one string. Since this was likely easier with Sor’s smaller and lower-tension guitar, Emmanuel recommends using two strings to have more control over the shape and phrasing of the line.
In measure nine, the previous phrases repeat exactly, only one octave higher and with a bass line underneath. This second voice gives the music a more serious character. Play the bass line the exact length it is written, and critical phrasing details will reveal themselves. For example, the second beat of measure nine is longer than the first beat, so it is presumed to be more important.

In measure eleven, accent the chromatic upbeats to give the music more forward motion. This is also called “crossbar articulation”. Remember again to play the chromatic lines legato and the dotted rhythms staccato. To get a clearer definition, use your right hand to stop the last three notes of this phrase in measure fifteen.

Beginning in measure sixteen, a pedal reaffirms the home key, as if the piece begins there. Carefully map your dynamic level to the motion of the line- ascending lines are a bit louder and descending lines a bit softer. The last note of this phrase, the G in measure twenty, can be cut slightly with the right hand.

**KEY TAKEAWAY**

Every detail in this score is meaningful! Follow them precisely and extract as much meaning from them as you can. Observe the beginnings and endings of every phrase.
In measure twenty-two, bring out the F-sharp to better signal the change in harmony. Emmanuel likes to play a slight roll on the first chord in twenty-four. He accents it a bit, as well, to help the following phrase start strong.

Immediately after this chord, Emmanuel jumps down to a softer dynamic so he can play a crescendo over the next few measures.

Also in measure twenty-four is the beginning of a new sequence. The first three times it repeats, it descends by step while traversing new harmonic territory. Any repeated notes should be detached slightly, as is the common practice for music from this period. This also helps the ear follow any moving lines.
Across the three repetitions, Emmanuel also plays a gradual decrescendo, and slightly sweetens his sound. These are stylistic decisions that are up to the individual player’s taste. Play a strong crescendo in measure thirty-one so that the arrival on the D Major chord is powerful. Sor does not write many accents in his music, so the occurrence of one in measure 32 should be especially powerful! Try to get a full and pleasing tone, rather than a pinched and nasally one that often results from pushing too hard.

Emmanuel recommends using the open strings as often as you can for the ascending D Major scale in measure 31. This will prevent unnecessary shifting. Just be careful that the open E doesn’t sound too different than the other notes in the scale. In this piece, the key of D Major is a secondary dominant, that is, it’s the dominant to a key other than our tonic, C Major.
In this case, D Major is the dominant of G, and G is the dominant of C. Recall the standard sonata form, where the second theme is usually in the key a fifth above the first key. We would expect the second theme in this etude to be in G Major, and this is exactly what Sor is doing. However, he’s approaching it with the dominant of G Major, D Major. For this reason, the transition into D Major is a particularly bright moment.

Make sure the chromaticism is played as legato as possible in measure thirty-three. Slide the second and third fingers here, minimizing unnecessary leaps. As an extension to our general rule, short intervals are played legato, and wider intervals are staccato. For this reason, it is alright for there to be a bit of a gap in between wide leaps.

Emmanuel uses the above fingering to start descending in measure 38 so that his third finger is prepared for the next measure. Watch the video lesson to see all the fingerings he uses in this section.
REPETITION AND RHYTHM

While this theme is often played highly articulated, this isn’t necessarily a bad thing. In fact, the music is complemented very well by an interpretation that already comes very naturally to the guitar. However, this doesn’t mean you should be sloppy with the right hand. Instead, define the starts and ends of each note with the right hand to establish clarity.

It’s always helpful to play a note differently if it’s repeated multiple times. Playing a crescendo toward the final note often makes a lot of sense, especially in measure 42, where the G is a dissonance over a D major chord. The repetition in measure 45 may be more effective if played very legato, since it’s immediately followed by the returning dotted rhythm, which is always played short. Strong contrast is always musical!

“Whatever helps you bring out the sparkle!”
Syncopation is another important element that can change the length of notes. In measure 47, Emmanuel plays the first E short, to draw attention to the attack of the D on an unbeat. Avoid playing the next two measures the same when they repeat immediately afterward. Emmanuel prefers to play them softer, since the following section is a good place to generate a long build in dynamics.

![Musical notation](image)

Emmanuel doesn’t finish loud at the double barline. Rather, he leaves the phrase a bit understated, with only a short crescendo in the final measure. This concludes the exposition. Most sonata-form movements have a repeat sign here, but for some reason, Sor chose not to write one in this piece.

**DEVELOPMENT**

The development section begins in measure 65. Sor combines both the A and B themes in polyphony, with only slight variation. The A theme has been transposed into G Major. The key center changes rapidly for several lines, ending up in F Major by measure 75.

It’s very important that these changing bass notes have space between them. This is done by using the thumb to cut the bass notes in between harmonies. Without taking this extra care, the result sounds like a pianist left their sustain pedal down too long.
KEY TAKEAWAY

Play notes only as long as they are written, no longer. Syncopation, changing harmony, and repetition can all suggest shortening of notes.

Measure 75 is, in fact, a compressed version of the descending sequence from the exposition (measure 24). Sor writes this as an elegant reminder, rather than a complete replay of the whole phrase. Prepare carefully for the dissonance at the beginning of measure 77. Use your fourth finger as an anchor and stretch your hand to reach the F with the first finger.

Remember to shorten the first eighth note in 79, since it’s the beginning of a syncopation. The pedal point, beginning in measure 81, is a long lead into the Recapitulation. It may be tempting, but try to shy away from barres here, since they can cause a lot of unwanted accents and shifts. Instead, try to play around the open G. This also ensures a consistent timbre.
Emmanuel suggests a slightly unusual fingering in measure 83-fourth finger for the G, third finger for B, and second finger for D. While this isn’t the strongest-sounding position, it avoids the accent that results if one were to play a barre instead.

When this phrase repeats in measure 85, give the high points even more emphasis and more volume! You may even consider rolling the first chord in measure 86.

**RETURN TO C MAJOR**

In measure 89, the recapitulation officially begins, with a return to the home key, and an “end to conflict”. Rather than start with the first theme, as normally is the case, this recapitulation starts with a variation on the second theme.
While the recapitulation is full of connections to earlier parts in the piece, Sor doesn’t write exactly the same notes. This being the case, don’t focus too hard on playing with exactly the same character if it would serve the music to do otherwise.

In measure 94, play the first chord with a bit of a roll to help relieve the tension built up by the previous augmented chord. To play the rest of the measure with confidence, press very lightly with the fourth finger and anchor it on the string while sliding the hand up to play the C and G-sharp.

Then, Emmanuel recommends shifting down one fret down to play the B and A. Finally, position your first finger for a barre over the last eighth note of the measure. Don’t worry about playing the low F perfectly legato, since this would require a rapid shift of the hand and cause a bit too much stress. Keep the first note of measure 95 short, since it’s the first note of a syncopation. This is easiest to do by stopping the note in the right hand. Watch the video lesson for all the fingerings Emmanuel uses in this section.
Since measures 96-97 are the same as measure 98-99, be sure to play them a bit differently. The slur from C to B in measures 97 and 99 often causes accidental noise to sound in the first string. To prevent this, rest your ring finger on the string so that it won’t vibrate.

**NOTE LENGTHS**

Sor writes a beautiful chromatic line in the next three measures. Notice how, in measure 100, the downbeat is a dotted quarter note, but in the next measure it’s an eight note. Sor left this space to indicate that these phrases should each be two measures long.

“Especially for guitar, anything that creates longer phrases improves the music!”

Rest your middle finger on the second string in measure 101 to stop the D from sounding. Similarly, be sure to play the lower voice in measure 103 as eighth notes. Stop the first chord with your thumb, and using the index to help stop the second one. Remember that your ring finger is really helpful for stopping the first string while slurring from C to B in measure 103.
Change your interpretation slightly in measure 104, either with a different tone color or a different dynamic.

**ENDING**

The ending, beginning in 108, functions a bit like a coda. Since the guitar naturally has a limited dynamic range when compared to other instruments, a common technique for ending pieces is to play two separate crescendos. For a long ending such as measure 108, choose a spot where you can drop down in dynamics a bit. Then you can give the sense that energy is continuing to develop by growing in volume a second time. Emmanuel likes to come down in the fourth measure from the end and build into the final note.

This ending is typical of Sor’s writing style. The fact that Sor only wrote three notes on the final note is another clue as to what he was intending to communicate. His endings are not about being grandiose, but just about being elegant and gentle.
Just as good speech requires eloquence to be effective, always bring a variety of characters and moods to classical music. Whenever helpful, try to associate a note or phrase with an idea that can help you communicate the composer’s intent accurately.

Hopefully these elements will all feed into your performance and more effectively bring this etude to life!
Lesson On Musical Grammar by Emmanuel Sowicz
Hear more from Emmanuel Sowicz in his video on the building blocks of Western Classical Music interpretation, also known as Musical Grammar. Dissect all the most common issues in phrasing, articulation, and more.

Lesson on Grand Solo Part I by Andrea Gonzalez
If you’re ready for another pass at Fernando Sor, check out Andrea Gonzalez’s series of lessons on his Grand Solo. Explore hand preparation, color, tempo, and more!