

Sidney Pratten: Una mujer guitarrista en la Inglaterra del siglo XIX

por Artemio Milla Gutiérrez

Nota: Este artículo, sencillo y sin ninguna pretensión de ser exhaustivo o completo sobre la vida y obra de Sidney Pratten, es mi humilde y sincero homenaje a una mujer luchadora, amante de la guitarra, maestra y formadora, que ayudó a muchas persona a aprender a tocar la guitarra y que compuso obras intimistas y románticas, muy bonitas y agradables de tocar, allá por el siglo XIX, en la Inglaterra victoriana y que representa perfectamente a esa "rara avis" que es la mujer en el maravilloso mundo de la guitarra. Desde el mismo momento que supe de su existencia me cautivó esta mujer. No podía dejar de rendirle este tributo.



*Portrait of Catherina Josepha Pelzer
by Charles Bagniet, 1853*

Sidney Pratten (Madame Sidney Pratten), nacida como Catharina Josepha Pelzer, vino al mundo en 1821 en Mulheim (Alemania) y murió en Londres (Inglaterra), el 10 de octubre de 1895, dejando un enorme legado en forma de publicaciones didácticas, obras y el amor de todos sus alumnos.

Tenía dos hermanas, Giulia Pelzer (1837-1938) guitarrista y profesora de música, quien la acompañó durante toda su vida y continuó su obra tras la muerte de ésta y Anne W. Pelzer, quien tocaba el acordeón y el piano, además de componer. Todas ellas eran hijas de Ferdinand Pelzer (1801-1861), renombrado guitarrista alemán quién, acompañado por su esposa y sus hijas, emigró a Londres (Inglaterra) en el año 1.830.

Tomó artísticamente el nombre y apellido de su marido, Robert Sidney Pratten (1824-1868), con quien contrajo matrimonio el 27 de septiembre de 1854, tras el fallecimiento de éste, ya que sentía una gran admiración por él.

Robert Sidney Pratten fue un afamado flautista autodidacta (niño prodigio, pues su primer concierto lo dio con 12 años) y compositor inglés y es especialmente reconocido por haber incorporado notables avances en la técnica y construcción de la flauta para mejorar su sonido y sus prestaciones.

En muchas ocasiones ambos tocaron juntos, para deleite de los amantes de la música. Formaron un matrimonio muy feliz, querido y admirado por todos sus amigos, y estuvieron muy unidos toda su vida.



*Picture of Robert Sidney
Pratten*

Sidney Pratten fue una niña prodigio de la guitarra. Su primer concierto profesional lo dio en Londres, en 1828, a la edad de siete años, tras el cual, en 1830, y como ya hemos comentado, su familia emigró a Inglaterra. También se recuerda una actuación suya, junto a su padre, en 1833, en el King's Theatre.

Entre 1834 y 1836 actuó formando dúo junto a Giulio Regondi (1822-1872), otro niño prodigio de la guitarra. Sus conciertos y recitales inspiraron a muchas personas a aprender a tocar la guitarra, entre ellas, las princesas Louise y Beatrice, hijas de la Reina Victoria de Inglaterra, de las que fue maestra. También fue maestra de Frank Mott Harrison (escritor y editor), quien a la muerte de su profesora le dedicó un libro llamado "*Reminiscences of Madame Sidney Pratten: guitariste and Composer*" publicado en 1899 y de Ernest Shand (1868-1924), a quién comentó en una ocasión que nada tenía que enseñarle ya y que sus composiciones eran superiores a las suyas.

Durante su vida publicó varias obras de carácter didáctico. Una de ellas, en dos volúmenes, titulada "*The Guitar Tutor*" (Londres, 1881), contenía ejercicios y estudios técnicos de Fernando Sor (1778-1839), Mauro Giuliani (1781-1829) y otros compositores. Pero pronto se dio cuenta de que este libro era demasiado exigente para los principiantes.



Madame Sidney Pratten. National Portrait Gallery, London (by H. Herve)

Así, altamente preocupada por posibilitar a todos los aficionados a la guitarra el poder disfrutarla y consciente de que muchas personas o bien no tenían la habilidad suficiente para tocarla o, simplemente, no disponían del tiempo necesario para su práctica o no estaban dispuestas a realizar el esfuerzo necesario, realizó diversas publicaciones, entre las que se encuentra un manual llamado "*Learning the Guitar Simplified*" que tuvo bastante éxito en la época.

En el manual se incluían ejercicios sencillos, cada uno de los cuales iba seguido de una obra fácil de tocar, junto con diagramas y las anotaciones correspondientes de digitación y la posición de los dedos en el mástil y los trastes. Todo ello para facilitar el aprendizaje de los alumnos y animarles a continuar con el estudio de la guitarra.

En otra de sus publicaciones, llamada "*Colored Diagrams of the Notes of the Fingerboard of the Guitar*" utilizó colores para identificar cada nota en la escala diatónica, y permitir un aprendizaje mas agradable de las notas y sus posiciones al alumno. También, y como curiosidad, diremos que fue una gran defensora de la afinación de la guitarra en Mi mayor, como lo demuestra su publicación "*Instructions for the Guitar Tuned in E Major*".

Además de la guitarra, que evidentemente fue su instrumento musical fundamental, también se dedicó a la concertina y la gigelira, un tipo de xilófono.



Guitarra "Bambino"

Sydney Pratten solía, en sus interpretaciones como solista, con una ingenuidad encantadora, contar la historia de sus propias composiciones, lo que sin lugar a dudas era muy apreciado por el público asistente a sus conciertos, a quien tenía cautivado. También solía tocar frecuentemente con sus alumnos en la Escuela Guildhall de Música y Steinway Hall.

Entre Sidney Pratten y su hermana Giulia Pelzer, reunieron en vida un total de 45 guitarras, 13 de ellas del famoso luthier Panormo, y algunas pertenecientes a Giulio Regondi, Leonard Schulz, Malibrán, Napoleón y Fernando Sor (2 guitarras). Fueron subastadas en 1939, un año después de la muerte de Giulia, en la famosa casa de subastas Sotheby's.

La guitarra favorita de Sidney Pratten se llamaba "Bambino" y actualmente está depositada en el Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

Sydney Pratten dio su último concierto en público en 1893, a la edad de 72 años. Tal fue su fama en vida y su popularidad que destacados lutieres como Panormo y Lacote etiquetaron cientos de sus instrumentos con el nombre de esta mujer para promover las ventas.

FOTOGRAFIAS Y OTRO MATERIAL IMPRESO



Portrait of Catharina Josepha Pelzer at nine years of age
by Brown, Geo and Wagstaff, E.C.



Retrato de Madame Sidney Pratten

THE late Madame SIDNEY PRATTEN died October 10, 1895, and her Sister and Successor, Madame GIULIA PELZER (MRS. JAMES N. KING-CHURCH), continues her Profession as Teacher of the Guitar and Mandoline at 2 Southampton Street, Bloomsbury Square, London, and pupil's residence if possible.

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Photo: Lydell Sawyer

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Madame GIULIA PELZER.

MADAME GIULIA PELZER'S GUITAR AND MANDOLINE RECITAL, JUNE 11th, 1901.

From "THE TROUBADOUR," July 20th, 1901.

IT was a fashionable audience which assembled on Tuesday evening, June 11th, at the Steinway Hall, to appreciate a most successful Concert given by Madame Giulia Pelzer, assisted by her pupils. The Hall was well filled, and although the day had been excessively tropical, a cool atmosphere was maintained throughout the evening by means of ice artistically arranged among the palms and flowers which embellished the platform. Madame Pelzer is sister and successor to the late Madame Sidney Pratten, and the major portion of the items on the programme were compositions by that late distinguished guitariste. The proceedings opened with E. German's "Shepherd's Dance," executed by a mandoline trio consisting of Miss Brandon, Miss Beard, and Miss Swinyard. During the evening these talented ladies again appeared, Miss Brandon rendering a mandoline solo, Etudes No. 13 and 14 (De Beriot), and a duet with Miss Beard, while Miss Nellie Swinyard came forward with a mandoline solo, "Salut d'Amour" (Elgar). The Misses Griffith supplied two vocal duets, "Come with thy Lute" (Pratten) and "Comme moi posse vivre" (Pratten), to their own guitar and mandoline accompaniment. Col. Temple gave two guitar solos, 1.—"Andante Pastorale" (F. Sor), 2.—"Farewell to the Old Year" (Pratten), for which he received well-merited applause, while Mr. Henry D. Truscott was accorded an encore for his guitar songs, "An Old Ballad" (by desire) and "Polish Volkslied" ("Tell me now"). An excellent Spanish vocalization was given by Miss Pitt, Miss Yarrow, and Miss Lily Eckstein, who has a credit balance of intelligence in her favour, although barely 12 years of age. In addition, Miss Eckstein played a charming mandoline solo, which earned for her a distinguished service reward. Mrs. E. J. W. Gibb possesses a voice of unique range, and the delightful manière in which she interpreted, in the national tongue, Bizet's

"Habanera" (Carmen) gave satisfaction to a high degree. Mrs. Gibb furnished her own guitar accompaniment. A guitar duet was also contributed by Miss Atkinson and Miss Hetty Hamilton. The *bonne bouche* was of course the playing of Madame Pelzer, and at the conclusion of several guitar duets, of which "Andante Expressivo," No. 1, was certainly la *première*, there was a tremendous outburst of applause. A keen sense of pleasure was felt when two magnificent bouquets were presented to Madame, who at first did not notice the gift, thereby causing a little mirth.

E. H. B.

Extract from "THE LADY," June 20th, 1901.

Madame Giulia Pelzer, sister of the late Madame Sidney Pratten, and her pupils were responsible for a most enjoyable guitar and mandoline recital at the Steinway Hall on the 11th inst. Both the solo and ensemble playing were very finished and pleasing, the mandoline solos by Miss Brandon—who gave two of De Beriot's études—Miss Lily Eckstein, and Miss Nellie Swinyard being especially noticeable. Colonel Temple played as guitar solos Madame Pratten's "Farewell to the Old Year" and Sor's "Andante Pastorale," and Madame Pelzer won much applause for her performance of her sister's composition, "Twilight." Mr. Henry D. Truscott's traditional guitar songs were welcome contributions, and a Spanish song by the Misses Pitt, Yarrow, and Eckstein was another effective work from Madame Pratten's pen. Some guitar duets by Miss Atkinson and Miss Hetty Hamilton included Garibaldi, Indian, and military marches, and amongst the performers were the Misses Beard, Griffith, Pitt, and Mrs. E. J. W. Gibb, who sang the "Habanera" from "Carmen," and Messrs. Arthur Dipstale and F. Black.

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AN EMINENT GUITARISTE.

MME. SIDNEY PRATTEN, *née* Catherina Josepha Pelzer, was a native of Mulheim on the Rhine. Her father was an excellent guitar player and a clever musician. His one ambition was, however, to place his little daughter before the world as an infant prodigy, and in this endeavour he was so kindly assisted by Nature that, at a very tender age, little Fraulein Pelzer appeared as a "star" of an exceptional brilliancy—a brilliancy, we need hardly state, that has never been eclipsed. She was first presented in public before a London audience at the King's Theatre (now Her Majesty's). A most enthusiastic reception awaited her, and the press was unanimous in its praises of her extraordinary performances. The little artiste created a great *furor*. When but seven years of age, Miss Pelzer played at a concert in which Mme. Grisi and other eminent singers took part. About the year 1836 she achieved great successes at concerts given in the Hanover Square Rooms, and we quote the following criticism from *The Mark Lane Express*:—"The interesting little *beneficiaire* astonished her hearers by her wonderful performances on the guitar. . . . this young lady produced effects from the guitar of which we had no previous conception it was capable." On another occasion, a critique says: "She played three brilliant pieces, accompanied by her father, to the general admiration of the company assembled. Her touch is powerful, and her execution is wonderful; we were surprised how such tiny fingers could draw forth such perfect sounds from an instrument requiring some strength to make it 'discourse eloquent music.' In a very few years we doubt not to see this interesting child at the head of her profession."

Miss Pelzer afterwards appeared, with immense success, on the Continent, the newspapers of the time eulogising her abilities in the most extravagant terms. Among her numerous excerpts were the concertos for the guitar by Giuliani—works demanding a perfect technique and considerable powers of endurance to interpret. The Third Concerto alone consists of twenty-seven pages of closely printed music! The "little heroine"—as one critic so aptly styled her—had to compete with the greatest guitar players the world has ever heard: Giuliani, Sor, Schulz, Neuland, Horetzky, and the youthful Regondi were all before the public. The resources of the instrument were then exhibited as they had never been exhibited before, and, probably, as they never will be again. However, in spite of innumerable draw-

Miss Pelzer afterwards resided at Exeter, in which city she became the fashionable teacher. Lady John Somerset, the illustrious sister-in-law of the brave Lord Fitzroy Somerset, took a fancy to the young artiste and brought her to London, and most generously allowed her to reside at her mansion, and her ladyship introduced Miss Pelzer into the highest circles. Lady Somerset's *protégée* became the guitar instructress to many of the daughters of nobility, and she soon rose into eminence as a teacher. It was in honour of Lord Fitzroy Somerset being created Lord Raglan that Miss Pelzer composed one of her *chef d'œuvres*—the celebrated "Lord Raglan March."

So passed the younger days of this eminent artiste. A few years later Miss Pelzer became the object of the admiration of the distinguished musician, Robert Sidney Pratten, the great flautist and well-known composer. They became inseparably devoted to one another, and were married on September 24, 1854, and lived a most happy life—until death intervened. Mr. Pratten passed away in 1868. "My married life," said Madame Pratten, "was a heaven upon earth."

During these bright years of her life Madame Sidney Pratten assiduously devoted herself to the art she so dearly loved. She gave recitals, and produced a great many of the charming compositions for which she was so justly famed. Most of her exquisite "Songs without Words," "Impromptus," "Sketches," &c., derived their inspiration from episodes in her daily life, which, together with her poetic and romantic imagination, depict such fascinating little "tone pictures" that are worthy of the highest commendation. Her natural instinct in the choice of harmony, and her refined conception of melody, render her music genuine works of art—works for which she will be known for ages yet to come. The details attending the composition of some of her choicest *morceaux* are very touching. "Forgotten," "Evening Song," and many others each tell a pathetic story.

For some time after her husband's death Madame Pratten, overcome by grief, laid aside her pen. "At this time," she said, "I thought that I should never write another note." The "soul of music" seemed to have fled from her, but only for a while. Her undaunted spirit soon arose, and bade her realise that

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GUITAR.

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MADAME R. SIDNEY PRATTEN.

- | | | |
|-------|--|--------------------|
| NO 1. | THE POWER OF LOVE. | |
| 2. | OH WOULD SHE BUT NAME THE DAY. | } SATANELLA BALFE. |
| 3. | ROVERS, RULERS OF THE SEA. | |
| 4. | OUR HEARTS ARE NOT OUR OWN TO GIVE | |
| 5. | PHOEBE, DEAREST. | |
| 6. | TOO LATE. | J. L. HATTON |
| 7. | 'TIS THE LAST ROSE OF SUMMER. | R. S. PRATTEN |
| 8. | BELIEVE ME IF ALL THOSE ENDEARING YOUNG CHARMS | } T. MOORE. |
| 9. | THE HARP THAT ONCE THROUGH TARAS HALLS. | |
| 10. | SILENT O MOYLE. | |
| 11. | THE MEETING OF THE WATERS. | |
| 12. | O LUCE DI QUEST' ANIMA. | DONIZETTI |

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Portrait by Herbert Watkins.

OBRAS:

A lo largo de su vida Sydney Pratten compuso mas de doscientas obras, tanto para guitarra sola como para canto y guitarra. En general se trata de pequeñas y encantadoras piezas de carácter romántico y elaboración sencilla que fueron muy apreciadas e interpretadas en su tiempo.

A continuación se presenta una lista no exhaustiva ni completa de sus obras.

De la colección "*Songs without words and sketches*":

- Eventide (1)
- Forgotten (1) (3)
- Impromptu (1)
- Sadness (1) (3)
- A Lost Love (1)
- A Lament (1)
- Sehnsucht (1)
- Weary (1)

- Four italian songs, for the guitar. London 1861.
- Pianoforte and guitar accompaniments to various pieces for the gigelira, etc. London 1882.
- 12 easy songs with accompaniments for the guitar. Boosey, London 1888.
- First set of easy and progressive pieces, composed, arranged and selected from various composers, to illustrate the various styles of guitar playing. Boosey, London 1889 (2).
- Allegro Marciale (2).
- Bolero, arranged for five guitars expressly for The Lady Mary Hervey and Miss Augusta Hervey's Guitar Band (2).
- Zapateado arranged for 3 guitars (2).
- Daisy (esta obra está publicada en "Forever 30 Romantic Guitar Miniatures" por Jonathan Richards).
- Selections from the compositions of celebrated masters of the guitar (Sor, Legnani, Giuliani & Carulli).
- Pieza N° 7 (publicada en Ten English Pieces for the Guitar, por Antony Dodds, en Edit. Capriol).
- Arrangement of Song of the Stranger, Leid [sic] des Fremdling, a german song, translated by the Right Honble Lord Hobart.
- Six favourite songs with accompaniment for the guitar. N° 1- Bonnie Dundee.
- Twelve songs for guitar (arrangements) (ver en Fotografias y Otro Material Impreso).
- Treue Liebe.
- Kelpies' Dance.
- Easy Pieces.
- Fairy Sketches: Queen Mab and Puck.
- Evening Song.
- Dreaming of Thee.
- Coquette.
- Danse Fantastique.
- Elfin's Revels.
- Dance of the Marionettes.
- Dance of the Witches.
- Spanish Romance.
- Twilight.
- Quick Step.
- Duet.
- Moonlight.
- Alice
- Spanish Dance.
- Wayward.
- Addio, del Passato.

(1) Estas obras pueden encontrarse en www.boije.com.

(2) Hay referencia de estas obras en www.digitalguitararchive.com.

(3) Estas obras están publicadas en "Guitar Music by Women Composers" por Annette Kruisbrink en 2009. Edit. Les Productions d'Oz.

PUBLICACIONES DIDACTICAS:

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- Learning the Guitar Simplified. London 1891 (2).
- Colored Diagrams of the Notes of the Fingerboard of the Guitar .

- Instructions for the Guitar Tuned in E Major.

* * * * *

Sidney Pratten (Catharina Josepha Pelzer) murió el 10 de octubre de 1895. Su cuerpo descansa en el Cementerio de Brompton (Londres).



The grave of Catharina Pratten at Brompton Cemetery, London.
Picture by Androom (13 May 2011)

DESCANSE EN PAZ ESTA MARAVILLOSA MUJER QUE CONSAGRÓ SU VIDA A LA
GUITARRA Y A SU ENSEÑANZA.

CON TODA MI ADMIRACIÓN.

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