

Beyond Virtuosity: Reconsidering the Compositional Autonomy of Agustín Barrios Mangoré and the Performer-Composer Binary in Classical Guitar Scholarship - A Case Study of *La Catedral*

Lim Chien Hu ^{1*}

Herry Rizal Djahwasi ²

Zaharul Lailiddin bin Saidon ³

¹⁻³ Faculty of Music and Performing Arts, Sultan Idris Education University, Perak, Malaysia.

*email: chienhulim1996@gmail.com

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Abstract

Agustín Barrios Mangoré (1885–1944) is frequently described in classical guitar scholarship as a “performer-composer,” yet this category often remains undertheorized. This article argues that the label carries assumptions shaped by the Romantic work-concept, which privileges composition as authoritative and treats performance as secondary. Such a framework risks reducing Barrios’s compositional thought to virtuoso technique and judging his music through European canonical standards. Drawing on Lydia Goehr’s theory of the historically constructed work-concept and Nicholas Cook’s idea of performance-as-analysis, this study examines *La Catedral* (1921/1938). The analysis identifies structural decisions that exceed idiomatic guitar writing: the harmonic voice-leading of *Preludio Saudade*, the three-voice Baroque counterpoint of *Andante Religioso*, and the chromatically intensified formal design of *Allegro Solemne*. The article concludes that Barrios’s music demonstrates compositional intelligence grounded in performance but not subordinated to it, offering a broader model for evaluating non-European classical guitar repertoires.



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INTRODUCTION

The label ‘performer-composer’ seems balanced at first glance, recognizing both composition and performance identity. However, this seemingly fair label actually masks a subtle hierarchy, putting the performer in a less prominent position. Within classical music discourse, where Goehr’s (1992) regulative work-concept has shaped the relationship between composer and performer since the late eighteenth century, to be labeled a performer-composer is, in practice, to be positioned primarily as a performer who happened to write music. The conjunction exhibits asymmetry. The compositional output is considered contingent upon the performer’s virtuosity rather than being inherently legible on its own.

The case that renders this asymmetry most evident – and incurs the highest analytical cost – is that of Agustín Barrios Mangoré (1885–1944). Born in San Juan Bautista, Paraguay, Barrios was among the most technically formidable guitarists of the early twentieth century and, by any serious reckoning, a prolific composer whose output exceeded three hundred works. Yet the scholarship on him, from Stover’s (1992) biography to Summerfield’s (2003) encyclopedic surveys and Wade’s (2010) historical accounts, consistently frames his compositions through the lens of his performance career. The works are seen as milestones in a performer-virtuoso’s biography rather than as standalone compositional structural achievements.

Historically, it was not neutral. Andrés Segovia declined, on multiple documented occasions, to promote Barrios's works through his concert and recording activities, reportedly characterizing the music as insufficiently aligned with the classical tradition he was constructing (Marrington, 2021; Stover, 1992). Segovia's authority over the mid-twentieth-century guitar canon was effectively absolute: he determined recording contracts, conservatoire curricula, and international career trajectories. His marginalization of Barrios was not a private aesthetic preference. It was a significantly consequential act of field-level gatekeeping, consistent with Bourdieu's (1993) conceptualization, and the performer-composer designation subsequently attributed to Barrios bore the marks.

This article does not focus on Barrios's reception history. That subject has already been examined in detail, most notably by Bridge (Bridge, 2022). John Williams's recordings from the 1970s also played an important role in restoring Barrios's reputation. Instead, this article focuses on the analytical category through which Barrios's music continues to be interpreted. The central argument is that the label "performer-composer," when applied to Barrios, is problematic. It tends to reproduce the traditional hierarchy of the Western work-concept, in which the composer is treated as the primary creative authority and the performer as a secondary interpreter. This assumption has often been applied without sufficient critical examination. As a result, Barrios's compositional practice is frequently misread as if it were mainly shaped by the needs of virtuosic display. This article argues that such a view is too limited, because the structural logic of Barrios's music cannot be explained by virtuosity alone.

La Catedral composed 1921; *Preludio Saudade* added c. 1938 is the analytical case. Its three movements provide evidence across distinct compositional domains: retrospective structural revision (*Preludio Saudade*), Baroque-influenced contrapuntal voice-leading (*Andante Religioso*), and chromatically intensified sonata-form architecture (*Allegro Solemne*). Together, they make a convergent case that the binary cannot accommodate.

The analysis is based on two theoretical frameworks. Goehr's (1992) philosophy of the musical work chronicles how the work-concept established a hierarchy between composer and performer in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a hierarchy that the performer-composer dichotomy accepts without question. Cook's (2013) theory of performance-as-analysis provides the methodological logic for reading Barrios' scores that compositional decisions embedded in notation go beyond what technical demands or idiomatic conventions would require, those decisions constitute evidence of compositional autonomy, regardless of whether the composer was also a performer. The article covers the literature study, methodology, close analytical readings of each movement, theoretical interpretation, and conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Guitar Scholarship and the Performer-Composer Framing

Scholarship on Barrios has largely been dominated by biographical writing. Stover's *Six Silver Moonbeams* (1992), which remains the most authoritative study of Barrios's life and works, offers a detailed account of his tours, compositions, and reception. Its archival strength is significant. However, within this biographical framework, the musical works often appear mainly as events within the chronology of Barrios's career as a performer. In Stover's account, greater attention is given to how Barrios's music was received by audiences than to what the internal structure of the compositions reveals through close analysis. This approach is appropriate for a biography, because its primary aim is to reconstruct the life, career, and historical context of the artist. The problem arises when later scholarship adopts this same biographical framework without questioning its limitations. As a result, Barrios's works continue to be discussed more as documents of his life and reputation than as compositions requiring sustained analytical investigation.

Wade (2018) positions Barrios within a tradition of guitarist-composers — Tárrega, Llobet, Ponce — in which composition follows from performance practice. The guitar's technical constraints shape what is compositionally conceivable. The performer's physical knowledge of the instrument is the condition of possibility for writing. That account has genuine explanatory traction for a good deal of the repertoire it describes. But it conflates two claims that should be kept separate. Firstly, the claim that guitar composition is shaped by instrumental idiom (uncontroversial, and true of any instrument) and the claim that Barrios's compositional decisions are reducible to idiomatic solutions. The second claim is far stronger and considerably less defensible. Summerfield's (2003) encyclopedic entry on Barrios follows the same pattern. In this case, a biographical narrative, an inventory of significant works, and stylistic characterization in terms that foreground technical brilliance over structural compositional argument.

Some recent scholarship has begun to move beyond the biographical approach. Leech-Wilkinson's (2009) work on recorded performance, although not focused specifically on Barrios, provides useful methods

for examining how performances may differ from the written score. This is important because such differences can only be meaningfully studied if the score is understood as having its own structural logic, rather than being treated merely as a prompt for performance. Similarly, Clarke's (2005) ecological approach to musical perception offers another way of thinking about Barrios's music. It allows the analyst to consider how musical meaning emerges through perception, movement, and interaction, rather than reducing the music to a technical display. However, these approaches have not yet been applied systematically to Barrios's compositional output. Consequently, the category of "performer-composer" still remains the dominant critical vocabulary. It is usually applied as a ready-made label, rather than examined as a concept that may limit how Barrios's music is understood.

The Composer-Performer in Musicological Theory

Since the 1980s, the performer-composer has garnered sustained theoretical interest in musicology. Kerman (2009) argued for a critically engaged disciplinary approach and highlighted the division between analysis and performance studies as a fundamental limitation. This division is particularly evident in composer-performers like Barrios, whose compositional and performance practices are closely intertwined and thus difficult to separate. Taruskin's (1995) essays on authentic performance challenge the idea that scores are clear representations of a composer's intent. He argues that performance always involves interpretation influenced by historical and cultural contexts. While his focus is on European historical works, the implications are broader: if even canonical scores do not transparently encode compositional intent, then reading a guitarist-composer's score demands both precise analysis and critical awareness of the interpretive frameworks involved.

Goehr's (1992) *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* is the most philosophically rigorous treatment of the problem. Her argument is that the work-concept — the regulative idea that a musical composition is an autonomous, repeatable object with a determinate identity — is not a natural fact but a historical construction that emerged in European musical culture in the closing decades of the eighteenth century. The work-concept generates a hierarchy: the composer's intentional act is primary; the performer's execution is secondary and evaluated by its fidelity to that prior intention. The performer-composer complicates this hierarchy, but the complication is typically resolved by assigning priority, either to the composer who also performs or to the performer who also writes. Cook's (2013) *Beyond the Score* develops the critique by theorising performance as a mode of musical thinking in its own right, not the execution of compositional thought arrived at independently. Performance, in Cook's account, is analytical engagement with the score. This reframes what "compositional thinking" means in a performer-composer context. Decisions embedded in notation that exceed what technical demands or idiomatic convention would require represent a distinct and identifiable layer of musical intelligence — traceable in the score, and available to analysis.

Davies's (2001) *Philosophical examination of musical works and performances* provides complementary grounding, insisting that performance-oriented composition be evaluated on criteria adequate to its actual mode of existence. Abbate's (2004) *Essay on music as drastic or gnostic* names the tension at the heart of all this, Barrios's music is both a knowable structural object and a real-time performance event, and neither dimension exhausts the other. The performer-composer binary treats this tension as resolved. It is not.

Postcolonial Critique and Canon Formation

The political aspects of how musical works are canonized are now well understood. Born and Hesmondhalgh (2000) demonstrated that the process of including or excluding works and composers from the classical tradition involves more than aesthetic judgment; it is influenced by racial, geographic, and institutional hierarchies that often operate through seemingly neutral evaluative language. Similarly, Citron (2000) and McClary (2016) showed how gender biases are embedded within aesthetic judgments, effectively preventing women composers from gaining canonical recognition. This analytical framework also applies to the exclusion of non-European composer-performers.

Radano and Bohlman (2000) in "Music and the Racial Imagination" introduce key concepts, notably racial imagination — the attribution of specific musical qualities to racial identities. This mechanism has been a lasting, often invisible force in Western musical evaluation throughout the modern era. It operates through coded evaluative language, a natural-seeming preference for certain tonalities, forms, and structures, and institutional gatekeeping that influences which music is recorded, taught, and studied. For example, Segovia's characterization of Barrios's music as too "popular" — a judgment made with the authority of the era's most revered guitar figure — illustrates this process clearly. The term "popular" isn't a technical musical term;

instead, it functions as an evaluative code that effectively marginalized Barrios's chromatic mediant progressions and three-voice counterpoint, dismissing them as insufficiently serious or worthy of formal musical recognition.

The Research Gap

An examination of these three areas of scholarship – guitar studies, musicological theory, and postcolonial critique – reveals a particular gap. There is no research has applied the theoretical frameworks of the second and third to address the analytical problem identified within the first. Guitar scholarship regards the performer-composer binary as a given. The literature in music theory and philosophy has developed the tools necessary to interrogate this binary but has not employed them in the context of Barrios.

Postcolonial critique has identified the mechanisms of canonical exclusion but has not focused on the score-level evidence that would substantiate the argument analytically. This article operates at the intersection of all three fields, utilizing close analysis of *La Catedral* to demonstrate the ways in which the binary is misrepresented and why this misrepresentation holds significance. The gap is theoretical rather than empirical. The works exist; the biographical facts are well established. What is missing is an analytically grounded argument that demonstrates, at the level of the score, how and why the performer-composer framing distorts the compositional logic of Barrios's most architecturally ambitious work

RESEARCH METHOD

Epistemological Positioning

This article works within the interpretive tradition of musical hermeneutics, following the critical models of Kramer (1993) and Taruskin (1995). The aim is not to generate findings that generalise across a large sample but to construct a theoretically grounded analytical argument through close reading. In Flyvbjerg's (2004) terms, this study treats *La Catedral* as a *paradigmatic case*. The work is not selected because it represents all of Barrios's output, which includes over three hundred compositions with diverse styles. Instead, *La Catedral* is chosen for close analysis because it exposes limitations in the typical critical view of Barrios. Studying this piece questions the idea that Barrios's music should mainly be seen as the work of a "performer-composer." Instead, *La Catedral* reveals a structural logic in his compositional practice that deserves independent analytical attention.

The study adopts an interpretive rather than a positivist epistemological position. It does not attempt to recover Barrios's original compositional intentions from the score. Such an attempt would be methodologically problematic, because the recovery of intention in musical composition is always uncertain and philosophically contested (Davidson, 2017; Lehmann et al., 2007).

Analytical Framework

The primary analytical framework is Cook's (2013) performance-as-analysis, operationalised through two specific procedures. The first is formal analysis: identification of structural units – binary form, rounded binary, thematic contrast, developmental section – and their articulation through cadential, motivic, and textural means, drawing on Caplin's (1998) theory of formal functions adapted for the monophonic-chordal texture of classical guitar writing. The second is voice-leading analysis: identification of independent melodic lines and their contrapuntal behaviour, following the principles described in Aldwell and Schachter's (2003) account of tonal counterpoint. Voice-leading analysis is analytically decisive for the present argument. Genuine contrapuntal independence – bass, inner voice, and soprano moving according to their own melodic logic – constitutes the clearest available evidence for compositional thinking that exceeds what idiomatic guitar textures would normally generate.

The secondary framework is reception-historical, following Dahlhaus's (1991) hermeneutic approach and Taruskin's (1995) insistence on the historical situatedness of musical meaning. This framework serves a specific argumentative function: demonstrating that the performer-composer binary has not merely described Barrios's practice but actively shaped how that practice has been perceived – generating a self-confirming critical framework that the score analysis is designed to interrupt.

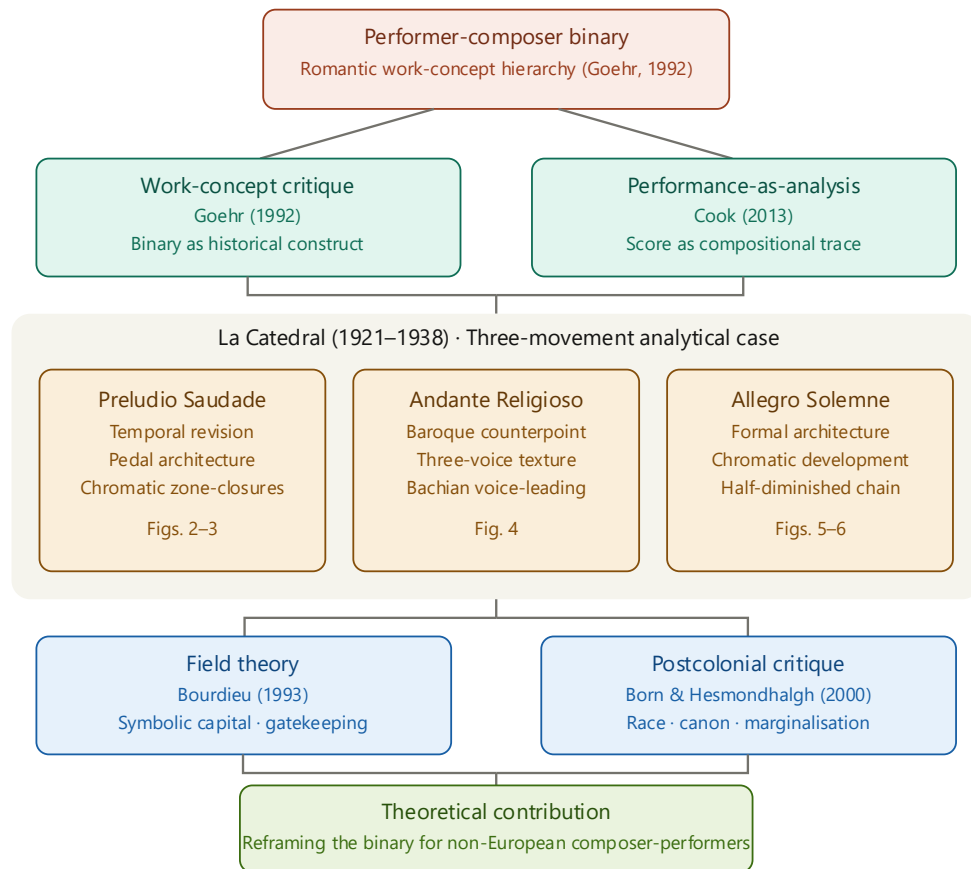


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

La Catedral (1921/1938): Retrospective Structural Revision as Compositional Act

La Catedral poses an immediate chronological challenge to the performer-composer reading. In the form most performers now play, the work comprises three movements: *Preludio Saudade*, *Andante Religioso*, and *Allegro Solemne*. But the *Andante Religioso* predates the *Preludio* by approximately seventeen years. Barrios composed the *Andante* in 1921, following his attendance at a service at the Metropolitan Cathedral of Montevideo where he heard Bach's music played on the organ. The *Preludio Saudade* was added around 1938.

In the received three-movement form, the *Preludio* functions as a tonal and affective gateway; its absence, as any performer who has played the work without it will recognise, changes what the *Andante* means in the listener's experience. That is precisely the point. A performer might leave a programme note until the day of the concert. A composer retrospectively redesigns the structural entry point to a movement seventeen years after the movement was written. Barrios did the second thing. The decision is compositional in Goehr's (1992) sense which it leaves a trace in notation, it determines the work's identity, and it could not have been arrived at by accident.

The Preludio Saudade: Pedal Architecture and Chromatic Voice-Leading

The *Preludio Saudade* consists of 49 bars in binary form, with Section A in bars 1–20 and Section B in bars 21–49. The opening ten bars are organized around two successive pedal points, each anchored to an open string: the second string (B open-string) in bars one to six, and the fifth string (A close-string) in bars eight to ten. The designation of these pitches as pedal points is not figurative; they function structurally in the precise sense Aldwell and Schachter (2003) define as a single pitch sustained or repeatedly re-stated in the bass while upper-voice harmonies change independently above it.

Figure 2. Chord movement and arpeggio patterns, Preludio Saudade, bars 1-11

As Figure 2 demonstrates, the harmonic sequence above the B pedal (bars 1 to 6) reads: Bm, C#m7b5/B, Bm, G/B, G#/B. Each chord keeps B in the bass — as root, as the bass of a first-inversion half-diminished seventh, as the third of a first-inversion major chord, or as the bass of the chromatically altered G#/B at the zone's close. What matters analytically is not that the bass stays on B; it is what happens above it. The progression constitutes a directed voice-leading argument in the upper register, one in which harmonic stasis in the bass becomes the compositional condition that makes upper-voice chromaticism audible as directed motion rather than colouristic surface decoration. The most consequential moment is the transition from G/B to G#/B. The upper-bass voice here ascends by half-step from G natural to G sharp within the continuing B pedal. That chromatic inflection demands greater left-hand effort than the diatonic alternatives readily available at adjacent fret positions. The composer chose the more difficult route because the voice-leading required it: the G sharp generates directed chromatic motion that makes the subsequent release of the pedal feel structurally earned rather than arbitrary.

The classical guitar cannot sustain a single bass note the way a piano or organ can. The string decays. Barrios's solution to this acoustic limitation operates, as the arpeggio figuration in Figure 2 demonstrates, on three compositional levels simultaneously. At the rhythmic level, the right-hand pattern — *thumb (p), middle (m), index (i), thumb, index, middle, middle* — returns the thumb to the bass string within each beat's arpeggio, refreshing the pedal before its resonance fails. At the acoustic level, open strings vibrate at full speaking length and project more generously than stopped equivalents: the selection of B and A as pedal pitches is thus partly governed by acoustic physics. At the harmonic level, every chord within each pedal zone retains that zone's pitch as its functional bass, so the pedal persists as a harmonic argument even in the acoustic gaps between strikes. This is a triple-level compositional solution. It is embedded in the notation and must therefore have been worked out before the hands touched the strings.

The compound cadential passage at bars 19 to 22, shown in Figure 3, marks the transition from Section A to Section B with a layered harmonic formula rather than a straightforward V-I resolution. The chord annotated C#7/B at position IX is the secondary dominant in first inversion — V7/V — retaining the bass B from the preceding pedal zone while simultaneously recontextualizing it as the seventh of the chord. The bass B thus carries two harmonic identities at once: tonic root and first-inversion secondary dominant bass. This tension is what the subsequent dominant resolves. The structural dominant, F# at position XI, is reached by ascending position shift to the highest fret position in the excerpt, and Barrios marks its approach with a rit. that suspends temporal momentum at the point of maximum harmonic pressure. The a tempo at Section B's entry then aligns harmonic resolution with temporal resolution in a two-parameter convergence that requires pre-planning. Harmony, register, and tempo peak and resolve simultaneously at the structural boundary. Assembling this from guitar-idiomatic figuration during performance is not a plausible account of how it came to exist in the score.

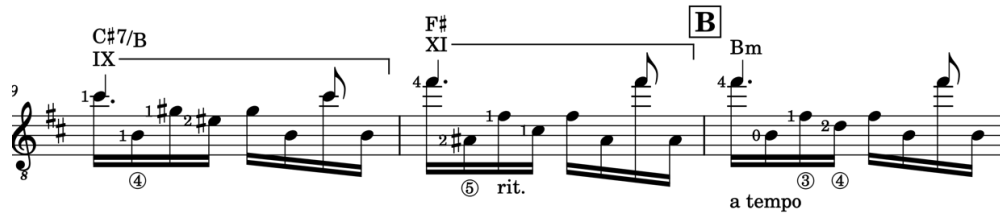


Figure 3. Cadential passage, *Preludio Saudade*, bars 19–22

The Andante Religioso: Three-Voice Counterpoint and Baroque Engagement

The *Andante Religioso* deploys three independent voices across the guitar's register: soprano melody in sixteenth and eighth note values (strings one, two, and three), inner voice in half notes (strings three and four), and bass in half and whole note values (strings five and six). The three-tier rhythmic hierarchy requires prior compositional specification of each voice's temporal identity. It cannot be generated through performance intuition, because the distribution of three distinct note values across three simultaneously sounding voices must exist in the compositional plan before it can be physically realised.

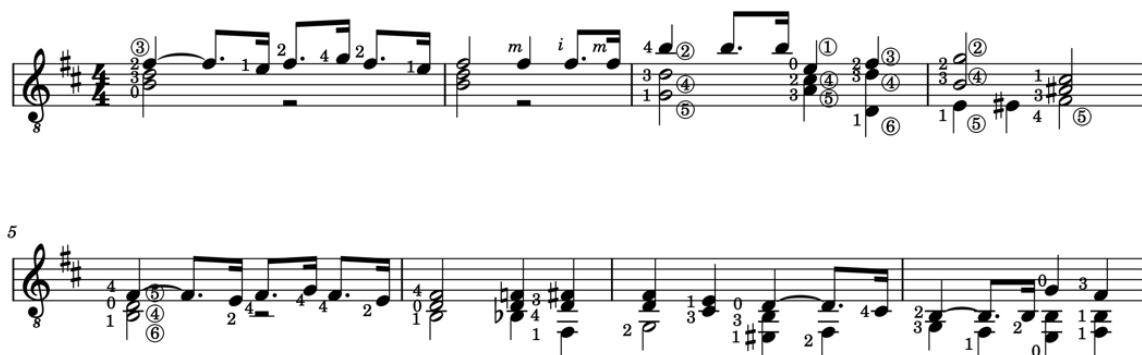


Figure 4. Contrapuntal voice-leading, *Andante Religioso*, bars 1–8

As Figure 4 demonstrates, the right-hand fingering *m, i, m* in bar three confirms that the inner voice is articulated by the middle and index fingers acting independently from the thumb-driven bass. Three separate right-hand digits are independently deployed. The physical realisation is premised on a prior compositional decision about which note belongs to which voice and which finger – a decision inscribed in the score. The contrary motion between soprano and bass in the opening bars is similarly instructive. As the soprano ascends, the bass descends; as the soprano later contracts toward the inner voice, the bass settles. Alternative voicings that would have been idiomatic and less demanding are readily identifiable. Contrary motion here is a compositional choice. Its effect – the expansion and subsequent contraction of registral space in the first eight bars – is a structural gesture whose origin lies in compositional reasoning, not physical keyboard instinct translated to fretboard.

The chromatic passing tones in the inner voice from bar five onwards are not atmospheric gestures toward a cathedral interior. They are specific contrapuntal devices drawn from Baroque practice – most precisely from the solo string writing of J.S. Bach. Barrios composed the *Andante Religioso* in direct response to hearing Bach's music in the Metropolitan Cathedral of Montevideo in 1921 (1992). The chromatic inner-voice passing tones are his compositional engagement with what he had heard: a technical dialogue with Baroque voice-leading technique. An inner voice that introduces a chromatically foreign pitch and resolves it by step is doing structural work. It is there because the counterpoint requires it. The performer-composer binary has no vocabulary for that kind of decision.

The Allegro Solemne: Formal Architecture and Chromatic Development

The *Allegro Solemne* is notated in B minor, 6/8, at a metronome marking of crotchet equals 110. Figure 5 presents Section A in a dual-staff edition separating the melodic line from the harmonic underpinning. That the score requires two staves to render both layers legible confirms what the performer-composer binary tends to obscure: Barrios composed a two-layer argument simultaneously in a texture that, on the guitar, must emerge from a single instrument. The harmonic sequence shown in the lower staff – Bm, GM7/B, AM7/C#,

D, C#Halfdim, Bm, E, F#m – reveals a composed bass line. Two successive first-inversion chords (GM7/B and AM7/C#) generate a stepwise bass ascent from B to C# that the root-position alternatives would interrupt. First-inversion voicings frequently demand more complex left-hand configurations than root positions. The smoother bass motion was chosen because the compositional logic of the bass line required it, not because the guitar fingering invited it.

Figure 5. *Allegro Solemne*, Section A, bars 1-12 (dual-staff edition)

The supertonic half-diminished seventh – C#Halfdim at bar seven – is the most theoretically significant harmonic event in Section A. In B minor, this is the $ii^{\circ 7}$, the characteristic pre-dominant chord of the tonal area. Its construction uses G natural rather than G sharp, placing the passage momentarily in the natural minor rather than the harmonic minor scale. Moving from the supertonic half-diminished seventh to the tonic is a Baroque voice-leading pattern, specifically the cadential formula Bach employs throughout his solo string suites and partitas. Given that the *Andante Religioso* was explicitly composed in dialogue with Barrios's experience of Bach in the Cathedral of Montevideo, the reappearance of this Bachian voice-leading formula in the *Allegro Solemne* is not coincidental. The contrapuntal reference is structural to the entire three-movement design; it is not decorative to a single movement.

The formal structure of Section A is a rounded ternary with typical endings. The first ending closes on F#m (minor dominant), providing a harmonically open boundary that invites the repeat; the second closes on F# major (major dominant with leading tone), providing a directed boundary that demands continuation. This differentiation requires that both formal functions be designed before either is executed. It is formal planning embedded in notation, not a performance variant discovered at the instrument.

Section B, shown in Figure 6, constitutes the development section, and its harmonic language is the most radical in the entire *La Catedral* score. The section opens with a descending 5-6 first-inversion sequence across bars 23 to 28: Bm, A/C#, G/B, A, Em/B. The chord roots descend by step while the bass alternates between root and first-inversion positions to produce the 5-6 intervallic pattern that Aldwell and Schachter (2003) identify as among the most structurally generative sequential procedures in tonal composition – one used systematically in Bach's instrumental writing. The presence of A/C# at bar 25 is worth examining closely. A major in first inversion with C# in the bass creates a chromatic half-step ascent (B to C#) within the sequence, more demanding left-hand work than the root-position alternative would have required. The chromatic inflection was chosen because the sequence's momentum required it.

Figure 6. Allegro Solemne, Section B, bars 23–36 (dual-staff edition)

The sequence breaks at bar 32, pivoting toward a chain of three consecutive half-diminished seventh chords: Bbm7-5, C#m7-5, and Fm7-5, resolving to F#7 at bar 35. That chain is the passage that most decisively closes off the performer-composer reading. Bbm7-5 is the most harmonically remote chord in the entire *La Catedral* score, introducing a pitch entirely foreign to B minor's diatonic collection. No idiomatic property of the guitar connects Bbm7-5 to C#m7-5 to Fm7-5 as a natural sequential progression, which positions the logic. Nevertheless, this connection is theoretical and demonstrates the symmetrical properties of the half-diminished seventh chord, which allow chromatic voice-leading between remote roots through enharmonic equivalence.

F#7 at bar 35 brings the chromatic development to its harmonic destination. The repeat sign that follows confirms F#7 as the structural dominant preparation for the tonic return. Comparing the two dominant approaches across the two sections, as Table 1 summarises, confirms that the formal proportioning is deliberate: Section A's dominant approach is diatonically contained; Section B's is amplified through the half-diminished chain. Assigning greater harmonic weight to the development section's dominant requires evaluating two structurally analogous moments and differentiating them according to a planned formal hierarchy. That is compositional thinking, not performance adaptation.

Table 1. Harmonic scheme: comparative dominant approaches in the Allegro Solemne

Section	Dominant approach	Character
Section A (Fig. 5)	F#m → F# (minor to major dominant)	Diatonic, moderately directed
Section B (Fig. 6)	Bbm7-5 → C#m7-5 → Fm7-5 → F#7	Chromatic chain, maximally directed

DISCUSSION

What the Analyses Reveal

The four analyses produce a convergent picture, and the convergence is the point. It is not that any single analytical observation proves the binary inadequate; it is that the inadequacy shows up across three distinct compositional domains – temporal, contrapuntal, and formal-harmonic – in ways that cannot all be explained by the same alternative account. The seventeen-year retrospective revision of *La Catedral* is a compositional act without a plausible performance-oriented explanation. The structurally parallel chromatic

zone-closures in the *Preludio Saudade* are embedded in notation as a designed formal strategy; the parallelism cannot have emerged from improvisation, because improvisation does not produce the same harmonic gesture at two structurally analogous moments across different sections. The three-voice rhythmic stratification of the *Andante Religioso* requires compositional pre-specification of voice identities that performance intuition cannot independently generate. The half-diminished chain of the *Allegro Solemne* accesses theoretical knowledge of enharmonic equivalence that the physical guitar affords no particular incentive to discover. Each instance independently damages the binary. Collectively, they are decisive.

This convergence matters for the theoretical debate in a specific way. As Goehr (1992) shows, the work-concept generates a hierarchy in which compositional thinking is primary and performative thinking is secondary. The performer-composer binary applies that hierarchy by assigning priority to one position or the other; for Barrios, the assignment has consistently gone to the performance identity. The four analyses demonstrate that this assignment cannot be sustained for *La Catedral*. The compositional thinking is not a by-product of the performance identity. It is a distinct layer of musical intelligence with its own structural logic, traceable in the notation, and irreducible to technical solutions.

Cook's (2013) theory clarifies what is at stake in the retrospective addition of the *Preludio Saudade*. If performance is analytical thinking made physical, compositional thinking leaves traces in notation. The *Preludio* exists in a score. It determines the work's formal identity. It was added seventeen years after the *Andante*. These are compositional facts, and in Cook's framework they are analytically decisive: the process by which the *Preludio* was arrived at is irrelevant; the mode of inscription and the structural function of the result are what count.

The Ideological Dimension of the Binary

The analytical findings do not stand alone. The performer-composer binary's application to Barrios was not merely an analytical error; it was an ideologically inflected critical practice, shaped by the racial and cultural politics of early-twentieth-century guitar canonization. Bourdieu's (1993) field theory clarifies the mechanism. The classical music field of the 1920s and 1930s was a hierarchically organized social space in which Segovia's symbolic capital was sufficient to consecrate or marginalize almost any figure within the guitar's orbit. Barrios's position in that field was disadvantaged from multiple directions simultaneously: South American in a field centered on European and North American institutions, self-taught at a conservatoire level in a field that was increasingly credentialing through institutional pathways, and actively performing an indigenous Paraguayan identity at a moment when such identities were routinely coded as exotic and peripheral. These disadvantages did not operate transparently. They were sublimated into aesthetic language.

Born and Hesmondhalgh (2000) and Radano and Bohlman (2000) have theorised how peripheral cultural positioning translates into aesthetic evaluation: the distance from a European norm gets naturalised as a quality assessment, appearing as a judgement about the music rather than about the figure who produced it. Segovia's characterisation of Barrios's music as too "popular" is this process in operation. "Popular" is not a technical description of anything Barrios wrote – it is an evaluative code positioning the work below the threshold where serious compositional analysis becomes warranted. The performer-composer binary then absorbs that coded judgement and gives it analytical legitimacy: classifying Barrios as primarily a performer renders his compositional sophistication invisible without requiring the original ideological rationale to be restated.

Implications for the Field

The argument has reach beyond Barrios. Classical guitar studies is not the only field in which the performer-composer binary operates as an unexamined default; it functions similarly wherever the European work-concept structures musical evaluation, systematically disadvantaging composer-performers who worked outside the institutional and cultural networks that conferred compositional authority in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Extending the analytical approach developed here – score-based demonstration that compositional logic exceeds performative requirements, combined with reception-historical examination of how the binary has been deployed – to other non-European cases, including Latin American, African, Asian, and Southeast Asian composer-performers, would constitute a research programme with genuine theoretical scope. The methodological implication for guitar scholarship specifically is also worth stating directly.

The field has been reluctant to apply formal analytical tools – voice-leading analysis, formal function theory, harmonic reduction – to guitar repertoire, on the grounds that such tools were developed for keyboard and orchestral music and may impose inappropriate frameworks on idiom-specific composition. That reluctance is understandable, but it has had an unintended consequence: guitar scholarship is analytically less equipped than other fields to distinguish the compositional from the performative in a composer-performer's work. Developing methodologies adequate to both the idiomatic specificity of guitar writing and the compositional autonomy that can coexist with it is a genuine disciplinary need. *La Catedral* is an unusually strong starting point for that work.

CONCLUSION

What *La Catedral* demonstrates, across all three of its movements, is that compositional intelligence and performance virtuosity are not the same thing – and that treating them as if they were, in the critical category of the performer-composer, produces systematic analytical distortion. The seventeen-year retrospective revision is a compositional act beyond the explanatory reach of any performance-centred account. The structurally parallel chromatic zone-closures in the *Preludio Saudade* are planned formal strategies, not performance discoveries. The three-voice rhythmic stratification of the *Andante Religioso* constitutes compositional engagement with Baroque counterpoint that precedes performance. The half-diminished chain and formal proportioning of the *Allegro Solemne* demand theoretical knowledge that no amount of idiomatic guitar exploration would independently generate. In each instance, the binary misreads the music by assigning compositional intelligence to the performance category. The score cannot sustain that assignment.

By applying Goehr's (1992) critique of the work-concept and Cook's (2013) idea of performance-as-analysis to *La Catedral*, this article argues that the "performer-composer" category is not a neutral description. When used uncritically in guitar scholarship, it transfers the composer-interpreter hierarchy of the Western work-concept into the study of Barrios's music. This is problematic because that hierarchy was developed largely within European art-music institutions and may not adequately explain the work of non-European composer-performers who operated outside the conservatoire system.

The consequence is significant. Barrios's compositional sophistication becomes less visible because it is subordinated to his identity as a performer. In other words, his music is too often interpreted as the product of performance skill rather than as evidence of independent compositional thought. This scholarly language therefore repeats, at the level of analysis, a form of marginalisation that was originally produced through broader ideological assumptions about centre and periphery, composer and performer, and European and non-European musical authority.

This does not mean that the "performer-composer" category should be rejected entirely. The term remains useful for many of Barrios's works, especially where compositional decisions are clearly shaped by practical performance demands. However, the category must be applied with greater analytical discipline. Before a work is described through this label, there should be evidence that its compositional logic can genuinely be explained by performative necessity. Where such evidence is absent, as in *La Catedral*, the category becomes restrictive. Rather than clarifying the work, it conceals the structural and compositional logic that close analysis can reveal.

The analytical direction proposed in this article remains open for further development. A more systematic study of voice-leading and formal design across Barrios's entire corpus would make it possible to more carefully distinguish between works shaped mainly by performance demands and those that show a greater degree of compositional autonomy. Such a study would also help develop a more precise vocabulary for discussing the diversity of Barrios's music, rather than relying on the single, often overgeneralized label of "performer-composer."

The implications of *La Catedral* also extend beyond Barrios and beyond guitar scholarship. The work raises a broader question: how have the hierarchies embedded in the Western work concept influenced the evaluation of non-European musical intelligence within global classical traditions? This question matters because it suggests that the problem is not only that Barrios has been historically underrated. More fundamentally, it suggests that the evaluative tools used to judge his music may themselves be culturally specific and historically contingent. The case of *La Catedral* therefore challenges the field to reconsider not only Barrios's status, but also the assumptions through which musical value has been recognized, classified, and legitimized.

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