CHARLATANS, SALTIMBANQUES AND LUMPEN SONGS:
THE EMERGENCE OF THE GUITAR FROM THE
GHETTO OF WESTERN ART MUSIC

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Abstract

The guitar occupies a unique place in the history of music. Few other instruments have engendered such widespread popularity across such a vast swath of diverse ethnic cultures in both popular and artistic aesthetics. From the Middle Eastern 'ud — considered to be the ancient ancestor of the guitar and first depicted pictorially in drawings from Mesopotamia over 5,000 years ago — to the modern electric guitar of the age of arena-rock, the instrument has proven itself both culturally durable and adaptable, and has given rise to a staggeringly diverse repertoire of music over the course of millennia. Few other instruments, perhaps with the notable exception of the human voice itself, can claim such a deep legacy.

However, in spite of its popularity and versatility (or perhaps, at least in some part because of it), the guitar has only recently begun to assert itself as a “legitimate” concert instrument within the Western classical music establishment. The issue of “legitimacy” when dealing with a musical instrument is quite complex and problematic, partly because general, prevailing attitudes within specific subcultures are difficult to quantify objectively. Nonetheless, it is easy to glean from a multitude of different sources, both historical and contemporary, an attitude towards the guitar and its repertoire that suggests it is not held in the highest esteem, if not simply looked down upon.

This essay will look at the role of the guitar within the context of both contemporary and classical–period concert music, and will explore the reasons why it is, in many ways, an instrument that is still seeking “legitimacy.” There are numerous reasons for this, many of them cultural and social. Consequently, a historical background on the evolution of the instrument and its various roles in musical culture throughout
history should be assessed. This historical development raises a number of technical issues, including its sonic properties relative to its resulting musical and practical limitations. Quite naturally, this latter issue leads to the composers and the resulting music composed for it since its more modern debut as a concert instrument in the first part of the 19th century.

This section of the dissertation will feature a large analytical component, and will examine several works from the guitar repertoire in the context of more established “masterpieces” by other, more widely-respected composers from the same time period. From these analyses, I will attempt to draw concrete examples of how composers from the past and from more contemporary times have handled the guitar’s inherent strengths and deficiencies. I will also demonstrate how this evolution in treatment has led to a steady advance in terms of both quality and quantity of modern repertoire. Finally, I will address the emergence of the electric guitar, and discuss its relationship to the classical guitar as both an extension of, and perhaps even simultaneously a solution to, the issues considered above.

The compositional component of this dissertation is represented by my work Five Refractions of a Prelude by Bach (2004, 2008). An extended, multi-movement piece for solo guitar with a duration of about 23 minutes, it attempts to address some of the challenges of writing an extended-form solo work for the instrument, in addition to providing a framework in which I could conduct some of my own, personal explorations of form, harmony, and the area where they intersect.
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Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................ iii

Acknowledgements ...................................................................................................................... v

Chapter 1: Introduction

A Brief History of Controversy .................................................................................................... 1
The Guitar in the 19th Century ...................................................................................................... 8
The Technique/Creativity Cycle ................................................................................................. 14

Chapter 2: The “First Golden Age”

Meeting the Insatiable Demands of Romantic Tonality .......................................................... 20
A Case for Comparative Analyses ............................................................................................... 21
Beethoven, Sor, and Giuliani ........................................................................................................ 24
Mauro Giuliani: *Gran Sonata Eroica, Op. 150* ...................................................................... 34
Coste, Mertz, and Chopin: Basis for Comparison ................................................................. 39
  • Frédéric Chopin: *Prelude No. 15, Op. 28 (The Raindrop)* .............................................. 39
  • Napoléon Coste: *Le Départ — Le Retour, fantaisie dramatique, Op. 31* ......................... 43
  • Johann Kaspar Mertz: *Elegie* ......................................................................................... 47
Some Final Considerations ........................................................................................................ 50

Chapter 3: Emerging Into Maturity — The Guitar in the 20th Century

Emerging Into Maturity ............................................................................................................. 56
The Segovia Repertoire and Beyond ...................................................................................... 57
  • Benjamin Britten: *Nocturnal after John Dowland, Op. 70* ........................................... 62
• Alberto Ginastera: *Sonata for Guitar, Op. 47* ............................................................. 79

• Luciano Berio: *Sequenza XI* .......................................................................................... 92

Harmonic Threads and “Little Worlds” ............................................................................. 103

**Chapter 4: Epilogue**

Revolution, Take 2 ............................................................................................................. 107

A Reflection on the Present ............................................................................................... 109

**Bibliography** .................................................................................................................. 112
1. Introduction

A Brief History of Controversy

From an historical perspective, it is somewhat difficult to follow a clearly defined lineage from antiquity to the modern guitar. While its ancestry can be traced to the ‘ud, an Arabic instrument first introduced to Europe when the Moors and Saracens invaded Spain and Italy in the early 8th century, it quickly fanned out and developed in several different directions. In France, Germany, and England, it eventually evolved into the lute, which became one of the predominant contrapuntal instruments in elite musical circles throughout Europe for centuries. In Spain and Italy, however, the ‘ud developed into the vihuela, and ultimately, the first four-course guitar.¹ This divergent path of evolution is in itself an interesting cultural subject. It is largely assumed that in the cultures of southern Europe, especially in Spain, a deep resentment towards centuries of Moorish rule on the Iberian Peninsula fostered the development of a new instrument that attempted to distance itself from its Arabic ancestry. This explanation goes a long way toward explaining the geographically specific differences in popularity between the lute and guitar throughout different parts of Europe in the ensuing centuries, and is a perfectly logical explanation as to why the modern-day classical guitar is still widely considered a “Spanish” instrument in spite of its global ubiquity. Nonetheless, these historically documented patterns of cultural influence in Europe — coinciding with the similarities between the ‘ud, the lute, the vihuela, and the guitar — are quite compelling and impossible to dismiss when attempting to create a full historical record of the instrument.

¹ A “course” is a pair of strings, typically tuned in unison or in octaves, running in very close, adjacent proximity to one another. This facilitates their being played as a single unit, which increases volume and effects timbre. The lute is easily distinguishable from the guitar-shaped vihuela in that its top is somewhat teardrop shaped, and it has a deep, rounded back called a “belly.” In this sense, the lute more closely resembles the ancient ‘ud.
Given this information, the story of the guitar could easily begin with the 8th century, or even before. However, since we do not encounter any type of substantial, established repertoire for it until the Renaissance, the logical conclusion is to fast-forward and begin with musical life in the 16th century. Additionally, since a thorough accounting of the guitar’s history has been dutifully recorded by numerous other sources, it should be noted that the ensuing brief history of the instrument is in no way intended to be exhaustive. Instead, the information presented is intended to illustrate a divergent attitude concerning the guitar and its popularity, at least within the context of western classical concert music over the course of the past 400 years.

It is perhaps appropriate to take a look at how the guitar was perceived in this early time period from the perspective of both learned musicians and the larger population in general, as it provides insight into the origins of the dichotomy concerning the instrument and its legitimacy still very much in existence today. From the middle of the 16th through the 17th centuries, the guitar went through a rather rapid transformation in reputation. Early music for the four-course guitar enjoyed immense popularity in Spain, Italy, and even France: in this latter country, it would even temporarily replace the lute as the preferred instrument of royal courts. Also at this time, numerous publications of music for the instrument were released to the public in the forms of chansons, allemandes, galliards, and pavanes. These publications were further amended by the development of unique tablature systems, which clearly outlined chord fingerings and thus facilitated the learning of new works.

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Even during this time period, however, attitudes about the instrument were divergent, as the guitar had always held close associations with popular music. In his book *The Art and Times of the Guitar*, Frederic Grunfeld quotes the German composer Michael Praetorius’s scathing criticism of the guitar and guitarists as “charlatans and saltimbanques who use it for strumming, to which they sing villanelles and other foolish lumpen-songs.” Alan Kozinn, in his essay on the classical guitar, quotes the 17th century lexicographer Sebastian de Covarrubias Oroco as having proclaimed, “The guitar is no more than a cowbell, so easy to play, especially rasgueado [i.e. strumming], that there is not a stable lad who is not a guitarist.”

It is notable, if not strange, how a comment from 1611 could resound so strongly today, when legions of adolescents invade music stores after school and on weekends to play and buy guitars! It should also be noted that both commentators above were referring to the rasgueado style — a method of playing the instrument that involves strumming the strings as opposed to plucking them. This technical distinction is important, as the rasgueado style was much more closely associated with popular music (and still is today), as it provided the simple rhythmic and harmonic accompaniment that such songs required. Plucking the strings, on the other hand, opened the door to many greater contrapuntal possibilities for the instrument, as seen in the lute music of the time. An examination of John Dowland’s famous *Forlorn Hope Fancy* attests to the knotty, chromatically contrapuntal textures composers were drawing forth from the lute in the late Renaissance.

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5 Kozinn, 21.
This capability seems to have been largely ignored by guitar composers during the early Baroque, however, most likely because of the greater technical demands it imposed on the performer. Alternatively, a new trend towards a more “vertical,” (i.e. chordal) approach to music was perhaps a sign of musical advancement. In his essay “Radical Innovations, social revolution, and the baroque guitar,” author Craig H. Russell asserts:

Guitar chords with a flurry of strummed strings… revolutionized the sound of music at the end of the 1500s and opened up a new universe of musical thought in Western culture. Melody and counterpoint had reigned supreme throughout the Renaissance as the principal musical aspects of composition, but around 1600 their role was challenged by a startling new concept – harmony… No instrument better represents this radical transformation than the guitar, which was at the forefront of this aesthetic revolution from the horizontal to the vertical. This shift is born out in the
guitar’s early notational systems, performance techniques, musical repertoire, and functional roles in society. 6

The aforementioned use of tablature served to further enhance the harmonic possibilities that were evolving at the time. Several tablature books published in the early 17th century by guitarists like Foriano Pico, Pietro Millioni, and Lodovico Monte, contain wildly inventive chromatic alterations of common chords, created simply by altering the position of one finger to accommodate a different fret within a given fingering. As Russell goes on to say, “Even Berlioz, Wagner, or Liszt would be hard pressed to match their harmonic daring.” 7

Example 1.2: Pietro Milloni and Ludovico Monte, Vero e facile modo d’imparare, (1678), p.6, “Alfabeto straodinario nuovamente inventato”

The use of these chords, however, while perhaps foreshadowing the complex rules of harmonic voice leading that would eventually follow, in this context seem to be one primarily of local ornamentation.

Nonetheless, these inventive embellishments — chained together in what would later be codified as passing tones, appoggiaturas, neighbor notes, and all the other non-harmonic tones now considered part of the working vocabulary of common-practice period harmony — would be the harbinger of melody and counterpoint reasserting itself

6 Russell, 153.
7 Russell, 155. The musical example is an excerpt of “newly invented, extraordinary, alphabet chords” from Milloni and Monte’s book that has been translated into standard notation from the original tablature. The term “alfabeto” refers to the specific type of tablature system used, in which letters were used to suggest chord fingerings to the performer.
over an ever-evolving harmonic accompaniment. It was during this time, with the Italian composer and guitar virtuoso Francesco Corbetta, that a new style emerged — one in which plucked counterpoint was elegantly reintegrated into a strummed chordal texture.

**Example 1.3:** Francesco Corbetta, *Passacaglia*

![Musical notation]

Refined even further by proceeding generations that included such luminaries as Robert de Viseé and Gaspar Sanz, guitarists had, by the end of the 17th century, elevated the guitar to the status of an instrument worthy of consideration for refined musical

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composition. It was during this time that the guitar enjoyed great popularity as an accompanying instrument in various concert, stage, and dance productions. Russell states, “Whereas the modern guitarist has to scramble to find first-rate ensemble literature, the baroque guitar was as much a part of mainstream ensemble playing as the harpsichord or organ,” and any serious guitarist was well-trained in the art of rendering figured bass.⁹

In addition to highlighting the harmonic aspect of music, the guitar further enhanced and contributed to aspects of musical form by acting as a vessel of importation. No doubt due to its portability, the guitar was one of the most prominent European instruments to be introduced to the Americas and the “New World.” Musics of indigenous American cultures were picked up by the early Spanish explorers, and then exported back to Spain via the guitar, where many of them became indefatigably trendy dances, first among the proletariat, and then ultimately among the aristocracy. Among these “new world” musical discoveries were the chaconne, from South America, and the sarabande, originating in Mexico. Many of these dances were considered pedestrian, low brow, and even salaciously provocative — even to the extent of prompting the Spanish Council of Castile to outlaw the sarabande and the chaconne in 1586 and 1615 respectively.¹⁰ Given this somewhat dubious history, once again initiated by the guitar, it is interesting to note how these two forms would later become “standardized as courtly Baroque ballet, at which point they were blanched of the ethnicity that the guitarists had

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⁹ Russell, 161-163. Russell states that the guitar’s important role in ensemble literature stemmed primarily from its capacity as an outstanding accompanimental instrument, and goes on to reference Corbetta’s and Robert de Visée’s (among many others’) participation in many of the most important theater productions of the time, including Lully’s Ballet de la galanterie du temps.

been able to preserve of the dances’ origins.”11 Furthermore, it is worthwhile to note that these forms made it far beyond the borders of Spain, and eventually permeated musical culture in all of Europe for centuries to come. One needs only to recall the marvelous Chaconne from J. S. Bach’s Second Violin Partita in D Minor, BWV 1004, as proof of the evolving and enduring popularity of the form.

At least in some part initiated by the guitar, this stage of evolution in musical thinking — harmony — was arguably to become the primary syntactical obsession of composers of Western concert music for the following three centuries. Its greatest impact was perhaps felt in the ever-expanding formal architecture that permeated the growth of music through the late Romantic period, and it is arguably not until Schoenberg and the Second Viennese School that this more vertical focus finally starts to unravel. As I will discuss later, it is ironic — given the guitar’s prominent role in initiating this harmonic trend — that it should then fail to advance it significantly in the 19th century.

The Guitar in the 19th Century

Unfortunately for the guitar, the end of the Baroque era in the middle of the 18th century saw the instrument fall from distinguished musical circles, as it was stripped of the elegant contrapuntal writing of the high baroque and relegated to the task of simple, strummed, chordal song accompaniments. The lute continued to fare somewhat better than the guitar for a time, but it too began to dwindle in popularity by the middle of the 18th century. While it remained prominent throughout Bach’s time — indeed, several of his Lute Suites were composed with at least the sound of the lute in mind, and several of

his keyboard works were written for the “lute harpsichord,” an instrument of his own
devising meant to imitate the sound of the lute — the instrument would eventually
experience a kind of cultural implosion, largely due to the weight of its own complexity.
The constant addition of strings and courses (sometimes instruments contained up to 19
courses of strings!) made the lute cumbersome and difficult even to tune, not to mention
learn and play, and the difficulty this imposed on prospective students caused it to lose
some of its discipleship to the keyboard instruments that had already been taking over in
popularity for some time. This, in addition to its sonic impasse in terms of volume and
resonance, were likely the two biggest contributing factors in its demise.

Ironically, the death of the lute in the middle of the 18th century was perhaps the
greatest thing that could have happened to the modern guitar. It is speculative, but worth
asserting, that it was the lute’s ever evolving complexity that led to the guitar’s exalted
status in popular music. Since it was largely out of reach to the general population (due to
its formidable technical considerations), the people of the time, still eager to exploit the
lute’s intimate sonic character and portability, reached for the guitar. With only four or
five courses of strings, it was exponentially more manageable than its predecessor while
still being able to provide a similar quality of sound. Consequently, it continued to thrive
as an instrument in popular music, with the reported publication of several more books
dedicated to teaching the basics of playing simple chord progressions — something
perhaps similar to the modern-day Mel Bay Guitar Method books.12

It was not until roughly 1800 that the guitar would resurface again in a more
ambitious musical context. This time, unencumbered by its associations with the lute, it

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12 Mel Bay Publications has published several different Guitar Method books since the 1950s. In addition
to the popular Complete Book of Guitar Chords, Scales, and Arpeggios, the books address various musical
styles and experience levels, and frequently form the foundation of any guitar student’s primary education.
would forge a more substantial — if still somewhat tenuous — root in higher musical circles. This may at first seem paradoxical, but at the time, there were several opposing forces that limited the instrument’s acceptance. Its reemergence was most likely due to the rising popularity of salon music culture, in which virtuoso musicians would perform for small gatherings of people in private residences. The guitar, with its relatively quiet and intimate sound quality, thrived perfectly in such environments, where it was not drowned out by other instruments, nor simply lost within the ever-increasing cavernous space of the concert hall. Consequently, the first concert works for the modern classical guitar can be attributed to a handful of rather minor composer/guitarists in the first part of the 19th century: Fernando Sor, Mauro Giuliani, Ferdinando Carulli and Matteo Carcassi all toured Europe extensively at this time, playing concerts and giving recitals of guitar works that they largely composed themselves.

In spite of their advocacy, however, it seems that a lack of an established technical foundation, practical and physical peculiarities, and a prevailing stylistic preference among composers for larger masses of sound and complex harmonic forms all served to shield the guitar from more ambitious musical exploration by the leading composers of the day. Indeed, this reemergence — largely referred to posthumously as “The First Golden Age of the Guitar” — propagated the longstanding dichotomy of attitudes towards the instrument. Concerning the actual physical characteristics of the guitar that render it technically awkward to work with from a composer’s perspective, Hector Berlioz, in his Treatise on Orchestration, perhaps says it best:

I must emphasize again that one cannot write guitar pieces in several parts, full of passagework and using all the instrument’s capabilities without playing it oneself… Composers scarcely call for it at all, neither in church music nor in the theatre nor in the concert hall. The reason for this is
doubtless its weak sonority, which prevents it combining with other instruments or groups of voices of normal strength… Unlike most instruments the guitar loses by being used in a group; the sound of a dozen guitars in unison is really absurd.”

Berlioz, being a guitarist himself, is perhaps more qualified than anybody to offer his opinions and insights on this instrument, one whose limitations of which he was certainly keenly aware. In another article published by the composer on his experience in teaching guitar, he recalls, “I have always been attracted to terrible instruments…” It is somewhat humorous to see even a man who loved the instrument denigrate it to an extent, but in fairness to Berlioz and the guitar, he does go on in his Treatise to extol its “charm” and “dreamy, melancholy” characteristics.

The points Berlioz makes about the instrument are considerable nonetheless, as they continue (in theory, anyway) to be a problem for contemporary composers. It is worth mentioning that the guitar in Berlioz’s time was significantly different from the modern instrument of today, or even that of the late 19th century. While even the modern guitar can be said to suffer from some form of volume deficiency — at least in the context of playing with other instruments — the same could be said even more emphatically about the guitar at the beginning of the 19th century. Its much smaller size, and consequential quieter volume, certainly contributed to its relatively small representation in the body of chamber music produced at the time, and even with today’s more powerful instruments, the guitar still has the tendency to be “swallowed up” in ensemble settings if not treated carefully. From a technical perspective, the guitar

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14 MacDonald, 86.
15 MacDonald, 86.
continues to be somewhat enigmatic with regards to its capabilities. Most people would agree (and as Berlioz suggests) that the instrument is capable of complex music, but only if one knows how to coax it appropriately. With regards to the guitar being used in guitar ensembles, duos were quite popular at the beginning of Sor and Giuliani’s time, but the expansion of guitar ensemble literature did not happen until the 20th century. This latter development is in no small way related the expansion, standardization, and ultimate overall improvement of technique for the instrument in preceding years.

Still, these reasons don’t sufficiently account for the continuing low esteem in which the guitar is often still held. As I will discuss later, although Berlioz’s litany of issues is certainly legitimate, these problems have all been — to certain varying degrees — overcome in more modern times. In his essay “Picking through guitar cultures: a guitarist’s music history,” Victor Anand Coelho gives several distinct reasons for the guitar’s relative absence from the more formal accounts to western music history. He states:

This undervaluing, within the classical tradition, of possibly the most widely played instrument in the world is the result of several factors. Prior to the eighteenth century, guitar music was written in tablature, an immensely practical type of notation but one that continues to obscure the repertory from most non-players… Another has to do with the emphasis that historians have placed on the contributions of “great” composers — that is, those whose works can be arranged as links in a long chain of influence, from the Renaissance to Stravinsky, which effectively pushed guitar composers, even those baroque guitarists who were central figures during their time, to the periphery of musical developments… Then, there is the artistic concept of musical “evolution” and compositional “worth,” in which works achieve their standing and posterity through validation by musical analysis. Through this model, which has had enormous influence in the establishment
of “masterpieces,” the guitar works of De Visée, Guérâu, and Sor, for example, are “quantifiably” rendered “inferior” to the works of their respective contemporaries, Lully, Bach, and Schubert. As Coelho suggests, it is perhaps all too easy to dismiss the works of Sor, Giuliani, and their contemporaries as somewhat banal and superfluous, especially when compared to works by the first-tier composers of their day. This is, however, an assessment that must be considered in the larger context of the circumstances of the time, pertaining to both the guitar itself as an instrument, and the level of codified pedagogy behind it. At a time when Beethoven was exploring distant key relationships and pushing established forms to their seeming maximum potential in sonatas and symphonies, guitarists such as Sor and his duo partner Dionisio Aguado were still squabbling over the best way to even hold the guitar, in addition to whether or not it should be played with the fingernails of the right hand. (Aguado purportedly recommended the use of a floor stand, called the tripodion, to support the guitar, and frequently played with his fingernails in order to produce a louder tone, both of which were considered unusual at the time. Sor, by contrast, preferred to use a table as a support for the instrument, and did not play with his fingernails).

In light of the fact that such basic technical considerations were not even generally agreed upon among players, it should not come as much of a surprise that much of the music can be considered substandard, as it was perhaps more concerned with exploring the actual technical potential of the instrument than in creating a body of work striving to profound artistic depths. The sheer number of guitar studies published by Sor can attest to this, as well as Aguado’s publication in 1843 of his New Guitar Method, a book that would ultimately lay the foundation for the standardization of guitar technique in the 20th century. Numerous other method books and short study pieces, published by

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16 Coelho, 4.
their contemporaries, also testify to this fact. It is notable that the scope of technique presented in these methods went far beyond the rudimentary, chord teaching books from the previous century. In a sense, we can witness the birth of a brand new instrument at this point in history.

**The Technique/Creativity Cycle**

Considering the nascent state of guitar pedagogy during this time period, it is perhaps beneficial to reflect on the relationship between instrumental technique and its relation to compositional creativity. Obviously, there has always been a give and take dynamic between these two forces: on the one hand, composers often write passages that seem impractical to play at a particular moment in time, but then a proceeding generation of performers somehow manages, through technical and pedagogical innovation (be it physical or mental), to accommodate what at first seemed impossible. From this point on, the gestures in question become part of the working vocabulary of the instrument, and eventually, even part of its pedagogical foundation. On the other hand, the lexicon of instrumental technique available at a given time certainly informs a composer, and this information provides an underlying technical framework upon which a piece for any given instrument is then conceived and developed.

As an example, we can look at Beethoven’s famous *Hammerklavier Sonata, Op. 106*, for piano, from 1819. One who is familiar with the work will no doubt recall that in its time, it was considered to be utterly unplayable. It would take Franz Liszt, arguably the leading keyboard virtuoso of the following generation, to finally offer a masterful interpretation of it. Upon hearing Liszt’s performance of the work in the Salle Erard in Paris in 1836, Hector Berlioz, in a review, likened Beethoven’s masterpiece to a “riddle
of the Sphinx,” and declared, “A new Oedipus, Liszt, has solved it, solved it in such a way that had the composer himself returned from the grave, a paroxysm of joy and pride would have swept over him… Liszt, in thus making comprehensible a work not yet comprehended, has proved that he is the pianist of the future.”¹⁷ In this case, we certainly get a sense of the successive generation building upon the creative ambitions of the previous one, and in this way, we see within any established pedagogical tradition a built-in reservoir of musical ideas, suggested by the instrument, that are then implemented and assimilated into a composer’s works. Consequently, it stands to reason that the richer and more evolved the pedagogical foundation of a particular instrument, the richer its potential repertory.

It may seem incongruous to cite examples of keyboard repertoire in an essay devoted primarily to the guitar, but there are some remarkable parallels between the two instruments, which I will discuss later. However, when looking at the relatively linear development of the keyboard and its repertoire, one can nonetheless begin to see one of the ways in which the guitar is unique. While the keyboard continued to evolve and change over the course of time from its initial establishment in the 14th century, it can easily be argued that relative to the guitar, these changes were quite minor. The interface of the keyboard — the way the keys were laid out and presented, the tuning of the notes relative to each key — remained relatively consistent throughout this entire time period, in spite of the myriad mechanical advancements that would eventually yield the organ, clavichord, virginal, harpsichord, pianoforte, and eventually the modern piano.

The same cannot be said for the guitar, an instrument whose interface existed in several different forms prior to the 19th century: there was the 4-course guitar; the 5-course guitar; in addition to its various, closely-related cousins, the lute (including the formidable “archlute” and theorbo), the vihuela; and eventually, the modern six-string guitar. The continual addition of courses of strings over time, not to mention the wide variety of different, popular scordatura tunings, some of which (like the classic French “re-entrant” tuning of the Baroque period) would render pieces playable on one instrument completely unsuitable on another.

Example 1.4: Two typical re-entrant tunings used by the 5-course Baroque guitar.  

![Example 1.4: Two typical re-entrant tunings used by the 5-course Baroque guitar.](image)

Much of the repertoire contributed by Gaspar Sanz and his contemporaries, for example, needs to be “adapted” (or perhaps even more appropriately, “arranged”) to fit on more modern instruments, and even in this case, many of the unique subtleties (for example, the campanela runs that so frequently occurred in this music — one of its more distinguishing characteristics) are completely lost. Consequently, trying to capture the extent of the guitar’s repertoire from the Renaissance through the early 19th century on a single, standardized instrument is next to impossible.

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18 Russell, 160. A “re-entrant” tuning is one in which the strings are not necessarily tuned in continuous descending order from high to low, but rather feature a middle course that is “split:” the lower string of the course continues the progression downward while the treble string “jumps up” into a higher pitch register, thereby “re-entering” the strummed texture as an upper tessitura melodic note.

19 Russell, 160. Campanelas from the Italian “campana” for “bell.” This was a specific effect facilitated by re-entrant tunings, whereby scale passages could be created simply by strumming across the strings. The strings would continue to resonate, creating an effect similar to playing a scale on a piano with the sustain pedal depressed.
Needless to say, trying to codify so many different techniques specific to such a multitude of different instruments in some form of coherent pedagogy was equally challenging, and resulted in what must have been a wide variety of approaches to guitar playing, in spite of tablature books indicating where one was to place his fingers in order to form specific chords. Consequently, it is worth asserting that much of what we now consider to be a deficiency in compositional quality among guitarists in the 19th century was perhaps, in some way, caused by a lack of a thorough technical approach that was capable of inspiring musical development, which could then, in turn, inspire the additional advancement of additional technique. In succinct terms, the “technique/creativity” cycle of the guitar was just beginning to spin in the 19th century, when the instrument itself and what was to become its standard tuning were firmly and finally established.

Even with the instrument’s establishment, however, it continued to develop at an alarmingly fast rate, and well into the 20th century. It was not until 1840 that Antonio Torres Jurado, an Italian guitar maker, invented what we now consider to be the modern six-string guitar, with standard dimensions, neck length, and number of frets. But other additions were continually made even later — the late 19th century French composer Napoléon Coste reportedly composed and performed on a 7-string guitar, and other performers continued to add additional strings (especially bass strings) to facilitate compositions with expanded pitch ranges. The great 20th century Spanish guitarist Narcisco Yepes frequently performed on a 10-string instrument.

This continuing advancement in terms of instrument construction and design rendered the codifying of a single, unified pedagogical approach to the guitar almost
impossible. The finer points of instrumental technique — perhaps methodically and painstakingly developed and applied to specific instruments — could quite easily change depending upon both the style of repertoire being performed, and the specific type of instrument. Given this wide gamut of discrepancies, it is easy to see why Sor and Aguado might struggle with one another to define an approach that seemed most suitable.

None of this is meant in any way to imply that instrumental technique on a keyboard (or any other instrument, for that matter) is a simple affair: naturally, there are numerous different approaches to defining and refining methodology. But, it seems only logical that the task is somewhat easier when the interface remains the same, as it does in the case of the keyboard. One can play and perform the harpsichord works of Domenico Scarlatti on a modern piano without having to necessarily “adapt” or “arrange” it, whereas the same cannot be said for the lute songs of John Dowland, if performed on a modern six-string guitar. This is not meant to imply that many fine adjustments would not have to be made on the part of a pianist performing a work by Scarlatti, especially in terms of dynamic control, articulation, and the corresponding muscular involvement. These changes are relatively small, however, when compared to what a guitarist must go through to play the works of Alonso Mudarra.

This argument is not made for its own sake, but rather to offer one possible explanation as to why so many 19th century guitar works are considered “inferior,” at least from the standpoint of musical analysis, which Coelho cites as a primary reason for the guitar’s absence from important historical accounts of musical development in the 19th century. Coelho’s comment seems to suggest that much of the inherent “greatness”

20 Coelho, 4.
of Western classical music — especially with regards to music from the 19th century — has emphasized harmony, the exploration of tonality, and perhaps most importantly, the area where harmony and form intersect. As stated earlier, larger compositional structures and the development of chromatic harmony were outgrowths of this preoccupation. It is naïve, however, to suggest that artistic greatness can be determined solely through musical analysis. Consequently, in the following chapter, I will discuss how and why the guitar was unable to meet the aesthetic demands of the 19th century, both through analysis, and through some subjective consideration of the qualities that imbue other more established works from the same time period with their lofty status as masterpieces.
Chapter 2: “The First Golden Age”

“There’s a remark of Giacometti: he said he wants to make his sculpture so that if the tiniest fragment was found, it would be complete in itself in such a way that one almost might be able to reconstruct it.” 21

— Morton Feldman

Meeting the Insatiable Demands of Romantic Tonality

The central premise of this chapter is that guitar music from the 19th century is considered “inferior” due to its lack of ambitious harmonic and formal exploration, at least relative to masterpieces from the same era. This lack of exploration led to a banality in musical design that resulted in a repertoire both devoid of multi-movement, large-scale compositions (with some exceptions) — and perhaps even more importantly — lacking in the spontaneous, colorful, and expressive harmonic elasticity that characterizes so many of the great works from this period. Conversely, although a deficit of high quality 19th century guitar music is indubitable, a positive trend does emerge as the century progresses: the level of technique and pedagogy behind the guitar expands, increasing its compositional potential. Consequently, the instrument begins to flourish by the end of the 19th century, especially within the context of smaller musical forms. By the time tonality and chromatic harmony begin to unravel in the early 20th century, the guitar — no longer required to conform to a fashionable tonal rhetoric it is largely ill equipped to accommodate — begins to mature.

A Case for Comparative Analyses

The statement by Morton Feldman in the chapter heading above — allegedly detailing a creative concept of the Swiss sculptor Alberto Giacometti — seems an appropriate distillation of the idea on which the following is based. If guitar music from the 19th century can be said to be inferior, then some serious consideration of its repertoire relative to a more superior body of work must be undertaken. Few instruments from the 19th century can claim as important and culturally profound a repertoire as the piano, whose harmonic capabilities and fluency satisfied the ever-growing compositional concerns of the Romantic composers. Incidentally, the repertoire of 19th century piano music is enormous, and while the guitar repertory from the same time period is relatively small, it is nonetheless substantial enough to make an exhaustive study of its contents prohibitive, at least within the context of this essay. As a consequence, this chapter will explore only a few specific pieces from each instrument’s catalog, relative to one another with respect to the general time in which they were composed. The intention of such an exercise is to illustrate how these more specific “fragments” represent the overarching “whole” of classical music in the 19th century, especially concerning the aesthetic and stylistic preoccupations of the time, the guitar, and the works which form the foundation of its fledgling repertoire.

Attempting to compare different works — by different composers and for different instruments — presents some difficulties. There are a number of considerations to take into account, among them performance practice and style, to say nothing of compositional precedent, and the inherently unique characteristics of each instrument. Nonetheless, the guitar and piano are similar in some important respects: both are
harmonic instruments, capable of producing complex chordal accompaniments to more melodic and motivic foreground material, and both are capable of rendering extended, complex contrapuntal forms such as fugues (although the guitar’s capabilities in this regard are admittedly somewhat limited). Consequently, these inherent capabilities combine to create instruments of startlingly rich textural variety.

Furthermore, both have access to a wide variety of dynamics, at least from a relative perspective. This may come as a surprise to those who consider the guitar to be a quiet instrument — surely this is true, but it’s worth noting that a single note on a string can be played almost inaudibly, or plucked forcefully to render a “punchy” tone. Additionally, chords may be strummed loudly, producing rather dramatic dynamic gestures, and loud percussive sonorities such as the golpe have been part of the instrument’s sonic repertoire since the Baroque period. It is perhaps helpful to consider the guitar an instrument with a sizeable dynamic range, albeit within the confines of its generally limited volume producing potential. This is in striking contrast to an instrument like the harpsichord, which although capable of elaborate harmonic and contrapuntal complexity, is completely incapable of any dynamic contrast whatsoever.

As a final component of similarity, both instruments have a sound comprised of a sharp transient attack followed by a tail of decay. This informs an important area of musicality in that both instruments are similar in their treatment of legato technique and sustained harmonic resonance. In keyboard playing, a performer may choose to perform a

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22 Anyone who should doubt the guitar’s ability to render fugues should look no further than Bach’s Fugue from the Prelude, Fugue and Allegro, BWV 998 (among many others). The Fugue from BWV 998 was most likely composed for a keyboard instrument, and is quite complex, but nonetheless remains wholly convincing in transcription form on the guitar. Mention of this particular work is intended to illustrate the guitar’s potential, not to allege that it is a piece from the guitar repertoire.

23 Russell, 160. A golpe is a percussive effect, sounded by tapping the body of the guitar with the right hand fingers, most commonly on the soundboard.
melodic passage *legato* by simply “overlapping” successive notes: the piano key of the first note is kept briefly depressed while the key for the next note is played, allowing the two tones to slightly overlap. On the guitar, this is a built-in quality of the instrument itself when crossing strings with melodic ideas, which occurs quite frequently. The guitarist may wish to keep the fingers of the left hand depressed on one string while playing the subsequent notes on another, creating this same type of gentle overlap. With regards to sustain, the pianist typically uses the sustain pedal of the instrument to allow notes and chords to ring indefinitely, creating a harmonic resonance over which melodic ideas are then typically presented. The guitar, of course, does not have such a mechanical contraption, as this is an inherent feature of the instrument. In guitar compositions, strummed chords and arpeggios are often allowed to resonate freely in harmonic accompaniment figures, while melodic ideas are developed in the foreground.

Discussing these similarities, however, is in no way meant to suggest that the two instruments do not contrast significantly. Obviously, the guitar cannot match the piano in terms of sheer volume, and regardless of each instrument’s potential for harmonic elaboration, the piano’s range exceeds the guitar’s, as the interface of the keyboard provides a far greater potential for chordal variety, voicing, and consequently, voice leading in harmonically based music. Nonetheless, a discussion of the potential of the guitar relative to the piano is intended to show that it is an instrument capable of complex harmonic and textural variety that, in its own contained way, could be considered sufficiently infinite, at least relative to a single-line melodic instrument such as the French horn. Even bowed string instruments, which are capable of successfully implying
fairly complex harmonies through their use of double and triple stops, fall far short of the fully voiced harmonic possibilities possessed by the guitar and the keyboard.

**Beethoven, Sor, and Giuliani**

Given the considerations listed above, comparing the piano works of Beethoven with the guitar works of Sor and Giuliani may, at the very least, seem nonsensical. Consequently, it should be stated that the exercise is intended primarily as one of exploration, and to illustrate how and why guitar music of the 19th century is so often considered to be inferior, at least in the context of the aesthetic concerns of the time.

The Beethoven piano piece that is considered — the *Fantasia in G Minor/B♭ Major, Op. 77* from 1809 — is a highly idiosyncratic piece from Beethoven’s “middle-period,” and provides a point of reference from which to examine the *Grande Sonate No. 2, Op. 25* (1827) and the *Grand Solo, Op. 14* (1822) by Fernando Sor; and Mauro Giuliani’s *Gran Sonata Eroica, Op. 150* (1821).²⁴ It is worth noting that each of these three composers was skilled at writing for other instruments. While this is obvious in the case of Beethoven, it is probably less known that both Sor and Giuliani composed extensively for other performing forces, ranging from solo piano pieces to orchestral works. This is an important fact, if we consider that many of the ambitious compositional procedures exhibited in Beethoven’s piano works are reflected in his larger chamber and orchestral pieces. Given this tendency, it does not seem unreasonable to assume that the smaller works of Sor and Giuliani — guitar works included — also function as microcosmic windows into their larger compositional identities.

http://www.delmar.edu/music/faculty/phii/eroica.html (accessed January 5, 2010). There is some uncertainty surrounding the composition date of *Op. 150*. Giuliani seems to allude to it in a letter dating from 1821, although it was not officially published until 1840.
From this precursory examination, it will be easy to glean that the guitar repertoire from this period lags comparatively in the realm of harmonic sophistication. By itself, this might not be enough to indict these works as inferior, however, when we consider the degree to which the exploitation of harmony imbues Beethoven (among with many others) with his poignant sense of expression and nuance — certainly among the primary reasons for his attributed greatness — we will come to understand why the corpus of 19th century guitar music cannot adequately compare.

Beethoven’s Fantasia is immediately notable for its harmonic structure. Eschewing the typical tonic/dominant relationship of sonata form, it is a somewhat freewheeling, unpredictable, and improvisatory work. In some ways, the Fantasia can be thought of as an exploratory piece, perhaps similar to the “Serioso” Quartet, Op. 95 (from a year later in 1810). Indeed, both pieces share some similarities — compacted form, with unconventional harmonic relationships and modulations providing the bulk of the works’ respective structures. While such attributes frequently characterize the form of the “fantasy” of Beethoven’s time (and earlier), we can, in Op. 77, begin to see some semblance of the groundwork for the expansive harmonic ideas that would come to identify Beethoven’s late-period works. A large picture of Op. 77 reveals a form comprised of no fewer than four different tempi, three changes of meter, and seven different episodes in distinct keys, the last of which is itself a set of seven contrasting variations. While numerous tonicizations of various key areas typically abound throughout, a clear harmonic structure can nevertheless easily be discerned:
1.  G minor: mm. 1-5 (Introduction)
2.  A♭ Major: mm. 6-15
3.  B♭ Major: mm. 16-38
4.  D minor: mm. 39-80
5.  A♭ Major: mm. 81-92
6.  D Major: mm. 92-158
7.  B Major: mm. 159-248 (Variations)

It has often been suggested that the reason so much guitar repertoire has suffered in regard to harmonic exploration is because of some inherent limitation of the instrument itself. In an interview from 1996, the contemporary guitarist Eliot Fisk was asked why Classical and Romantic composers’ works were so difficult to transcribe for the guitar. He responded:

That was a period in music history where the guitar went out of fashion because it wasn’t very well suited to the style. Sonata form is a bit antithetical to the guitar’s possibilities, in the sense that it’s dealing with transpositions of a fifth of specific musical material. That can be a problem on the guitar, since it often takes you out of the realm of the open strings. For example, Schubert’s music has many modulations that play in a virtuosic way with enharmonic possibilities. He uses third-related keys and the extremes of the flat and sharp keys. Composers for the guitar during this period, like Sor and Giuliani, did the best they could but couldn’t transcend the limitations of the instrument. In Sor’s case the result was melodic monotony; in Giuliani’s, harmonic monotony.²⁵

We should keep in mind that this quotation is partly about the art of “transcription” versus the art of “composition.” Nonetheless, it is easy to understand how the problems

confronting one procedure would inform the other, especially regarding the area of harmonic structure and variety. In light of Fisk’s comment, Beethoven’s Op. 77 — and the ambitious harmonic structure it displays — presents an interesting perspective from which to view the Andante of Fernando Sor’s Op. 25.

Although the first movement of a multi-movement sonata, the Andante is not itself in sonata form, this structure being reserved instead for the second movement, Allegro non troppo. The Andante is not so easily categorized in terms of its form, and in this way, seems to exhibit some “fantasy-like” characteristics. However, Sor’s harmonic ambitions fall far short of those exhibited by Beethoven: a double bar in mm. 58 seems to suggest a conception of simple binary form, with the predominant key areas limited to the conventional relative major/minor relationship between C minor and E♭ major, with a short detour through F minor at the beginning of the “B section” in mm. 59.

By itself, the simplicity exhibited in Sor’s harmonic design really tells us nothing of the work’s inherent quality. However, an important distinction should be made between harmonic structural design and the use of harmony as a more local device. While tonicization of different keys — both close and remote and idiomatic and unidiomatic — is seen frequently in the works of Sor and Giuliani (and even elsewhere in Op. 25), it never seems to gain much traction as an element of style. When listening to Beethoven’s Op. 77, by contrast, one gets the sense of flowing in a river of perpetually evolving harmonic scenery. This harmonic elasticity is pervasive, and ultimately becomes part of the fabric and the nature of the music. Subtle, local details of voice leading and harmonic progression are varied, embellished, and elegantly assimilated into their larger formal constructs, and ultimately the meaning (or expressive intention) of the work itself. It is
easy to perceive the seeds of what would eventually become complex chromaticism in this music. In the works of Sor and Giuliani, the use of local harmony never reaches this zenith of fluency, and in the case of how this harmony informs the structure of the work, seems to function more as an inelastic, formal “mold” than as a real, integral, working part of the overall "gestalt."

For example, examining Beethoven’s *Op. 77* more closely yields a rich plethora of local and colorful harmonic subtleties. While a full accounting of all of them is beyond the scope of this chapter, one may adequately suffice to show the level of ingenuity at work. In one technique of which he seems relatively fond of using in transitions, Beethoven shrouds the harmony in ambiguity before eventually allowing a particular key area to surface. Once tentatively established, he may develop it, only to reveal that is part of a longer modulatory strategy. One such place where this is acutely apparent is in the transition between the second episode in A♭ major and the episode in D major:
Example 2.1: Beethoven, *Fantasia, Op. 77*, mm. 81–104

There is a fascinating sleight of hand at work here — Ab morphs into Bb minor and then ultimately moves up an augmented unison to B minor! However, this is not the end of it: a strong cadence in mm. 99 seems to forcefully suggest that we are actually in D major, but this is thwarted once again in mm. 104, where an F♯ major chord becomes the fundamental sonority for the rest of the episode. D major is scarcely alluded to again,
and instead, we cycle through a series of tonicized diatonic harmonies before F♯ is established once again, this time, clearly as the dominant to B major and the beginning of the variations section in mm. 159. In this sense, the entire D major episode — a substantial portion of the piece — could be seen as a prolonged F♯ dominant to the following B major section. It is interesting that Beethoven would use a D major key signature upon which to build such a structure, but it does not seem entirely out of character given the mediant key preference that has been set elsewhere in the piece: F♯ is the mediant key of D major, and perhaps, this was yet another way of reflecting this formal element in the design of the piece.

It should be noted that this observation is not being made pedantically. The objective analysis of such a passage can do nothing to communicate its musical effect, which in some way is one of complete, aural suspended animation. We must admire the passage not for its inherent syntactical cleverness, but rather for the psychological sensation it arouses in the ear of the listener — one of delayed gratification, suspense, and ultimately of resolved mystery. In this sense, even the B major variations take on a new meaning. This whole section of the piece is the only time that a specific harmony is retained for a significant duration, with chromatic alterations being limited to some embellishing tones and the employment of a few specific secondary dominant chords. It is somewhat ironic that the only place in the piece where we get any real sense of melodic and thematic development is largely devoid of any significant harmonic exploration. It is almost as if the desperate searching that has occurred previously has all been moving towards this one point — in the mediant of the original key, no less!
While Sor’s Op. 25 does contain several effective local harmonic techniques — any of which could have found a home in Beethoven’s compositions — the work falls far short of achieving the intrinsic level of harmonic fluency and elasticity that characterizes Op. 77. As illustrated in Example 2.2, local harmonic movements in Op. 25 rarely move beyond the employment of simple (and fairly brief) tonicizations, such as in mm. 10-15, when Sor briefly tonicizes both G major and F major, following each with their parallel minor equivalents. After meandering through B♭ with some additional tonicization of C minor, we do not get firmly established in E♭ major until mm. 23. From this point forward, we remain in the key of E♭ with a few brief tonicizations to F minor and C minor, occurring mostly in mm. 38–40. The effect of these local harmonic gestures is certainly piquant — at least for a moment — but they are abandoned and ultimately forgotten as they are subsumed into the ensuing harmonic stasis that characterizes much of the rest of the movement.

**Example 2.2:** Sor, *Grand Sonata No. 2, Andante, Op. 25;* mm. 8–20
One piece may seem far too little from which to draw any concrete judgments or conclusions regarding the harmonic resourcefulness inherent in Sor’s work. Consequently, we may choose to examine another work that has acquired a solid place in the 19th century guitar repertoire, his *Grand Solo, Op. 14*. Unfortunately, *Op. 14* also seems to suffer from the same paucity of harmonic variation, as it rarely leaves the realm of the tonic/dominant relationship, and in spite of its virtuosic treatment of melody, employs the use of much more square, literal melodic repetition. In fact, the only place where *Op. 14* moves significantly away from its predictable series of repeating phrases and conventional sonata form harmony is in the development section. A cadence in A major in mm. 122 is immediately followed by a move to B♭, and then to the remote key of D♭ in mm. 129.

**Example 2.3:** Sor, *Grand Solo, Op. 14*, mm. 121–134
The introduction of these chords and keys in the context of the piece so far is really quite extraordinary, if admittedly realized somewhat gracelessly. Completely sudden and unprepared, the move to D♭ is both striking and mysterious. Unfortunately, it is also a wasted opportunity, as no sooner is this remote key established than it is abandoned in favor of a long series of descending arpeggios heading to D minor in mm. 137–144. The repetition of the same rhythmic 16\(^{th}\) note pattern over the course of eight full bars of arpeggios comes across as both stiff and unimaginative from the standpoint of musical texture, and while the key of D minor is refreshing in context of the work’s previous bright, major sonorities, it is developed for little more than ten full bars, and is built entirely around a two bar rhythmic phrase that repeats literally five times (albeit with some basic harmonic variation). The insistent pedal created in the top voice by the presence of the D minor D-F dyad further underscores the ensuing monotony.

\textbf{Example 2.4:} Sor, \textit{Grand Solo, Op. 14}; mm. 145–155

The issues presented here relative to \textit{Op. 25} and \textit{Op. 14} — and the extent to which they can be considered compositional “weaknesses” — may be a matter of subjective opinion. In fact, if they were isolated cases, it might not even be worth mentioning, but these types of problems seem to plague many pieces in the surviving guitar literature
from the 19th century. The unfortunate overall effect of these issues yields pieces that seem inflexible, blocky, stilted, and inelegant. It is an arguable point whether the opposite qualities represent all that is desirable in music — especially from a 21st century perspective — but it seems safe to suggest that these adjectives do not describe the ideal aesthetic goals to which working composers strived in the early and mid-19th century.

**Mauro Giuliani: Gran Sonata Eroica, Op. 150**

In contrast to Sor, Giuliani’s *Gran Sonata Eroica, Op. 150* seems to fare significantly better under aural and technical scrutiny, if still falling somewhat short of the bar set by Beethoven. While clearly in sonata form, and in a key of great resonance for the guitar — A major — Giuliani finds interesting ways, both subtle and bold, to make the harmonic form more malleable. In light of the fact that the first theme enters in the dominant of E major in mm. 50, a modulation to the key of B in mm. 37 is not in itself so surprising. What is interesting, however, is how Giuliani then employs the use of a G natural in the following bars. The effect is one of some harmonic ambiguity — while proceeding dominant chords are strongly resolved to an implied “tonic” of B major, thereby suggesting this sonority, the persistent use of the flatted 6th scale degree and the appearance of an E minor chord in mm. 42 seem to contradict this assessment and suggest we are actually in E minor. Although hovering ambiguously between the major and minor modes of a shared tonic is not uncommon in other music of the time, the effectiveness of this harmonic device on the guitar in creating a sense of tonal variety and suspense throughout Giuliani’s *Op. 150* cannot be overlooked.
Example 2.5: Giuliani, *Gran Sonata Eroica, Op. 150*; mm. 37–48

The situation is further obscured in mm. 45, when Giuliani proceeds to introduce a full-fledged G\(^7\) chord, which is then resolved to C major in the passage above. At this point, we can probably assume that the presence of the note G natural — in addition to providing some interesting harmonic shading — is additionally serving as a way to get to G, and then ultimately to C major, but to what end? By the time C major is fully established in mm. 47, Giuliani immediately whisks us back to B major, only to set it up as the dominant to E, and thus, preparing the entrance of the first theme in mm. 50. It would be interesting enough if this scenario occurred only once, but C major is tonicized once again, albeit very briefly, in mm. 104, and as previously, it is immediately subsumed back into E major.
Example 2.6: Giuliani, *Gran Sonata Eroica, Op. 150*; mm. 102–105

The development section of *Op. 150* begins in E major, briefly flirting with both G major and G minor, before establishing a full resolution on G major in mm. 133. From this point forward, it once again serves as a dominant to C major, and in mm. 144, a wide section in this new key begins to develop. A welcome textural and rhythmic change is initiated in mm. 169, as rising and falling triplet-figure arpeggios create a somewhat relaxed mood that truly does seem to echo Berlioz’s sentiment regarding the guitar’s “dreamy, melancholy” characteristics.


At this point, the meaning of the previous allusions to C major in mm. 45–48 and mm. 103–104 should be clear: they both function as a sort of harmonic “foreshadowing” of the substantial modulation to C major in the development.

These examples are particularly interesting for reasons other than their inherent syntactical design. In the larger context of this chapter, Giuliani’s *Op. 150* reveals two
important points: that the guitar, as an instrument, is fully capable of rendering both subtle and large harmonic shifts and modulations, and furthermore, that these motions can have deep structural and compositional significance. The catch, however, is that such elegant formal designs must be carefully contrived in order to work effectively on the instrument, a point that Berlioz asserted in his *Treatise on Orchestration*. By carefully choosing specific keys that use and share a preponderance of open strings and idiomatic harmonies, Giuliani is able to create a fairly elaborate formal construct. This demonstrates that while the guitar can lend itself to significant harmonic exploration, its capabilities in this regard are generally confined to relatively few key areas. This is in great contrast to the piano, an instrument whose harmonic flexibility is virtually unlimited — a resource that the major Romantic composers ceaselessly exploited. Given these conditions, and the instrument’s relatively small potential in terms of sustained volume, it should not come as a surprise that the major composers of the 19th century avoided the instrument: its esoteric harmonic complexities, while not insurmountable, were likely more of an obstacle to composition than a potential resource.

Naturally, this discussion brings us back to an idea presented earlier — that of the “technique/creativity” cycle — wherein the conventional lexicon of instrumental writing at a particular point in time serves to inspire creativity, while that same creativity then pushes the boundaries of established instrumental technique. The inherent lack of harmonic and textural variety afforded by the guitar, at least in the context of early 19th century tonality, is a prime candidate for consideration in light of this idea. As has already been discussed, both Sor’s and Giuliani’s publications concerning guitar technique, published in their lifetimes (not to mention more by Aguado, Moretti, and
others) seem to suggest an instrument in a phase of early development. At a time when the foundations of keyboard technique had already been established and in existence for well over 100 years (conservatively speaking), technical approaches to the guitar were still being formulated. In his article “Gran Sonata Eroica: A Case for Its Authenticity,” Philip Hii states:

> A characteristic feature of much early nineteenth-century guitar music is its reliance on textural and harmonic formulae. These formulae are dictated to a large extent by technical considerations such as left-hand chordal shapes and right-hand fingerings. As a consequence of using these formulae, a certain degree of sameness is sometimes unavoidable between different works conceived in the same key…

Although this particular quote is referring specifically to Giuliani’s Op. 150 and issues of his own “self-plagiarism,” it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that the state of affairs this statement affords us concerning the guitar could be applied to most all of the music written for the guitar in the early 19th century. Indeed, it seems to suggest that while guitar composers of the age were active in creating a repertoire for the instrument, given the myriad styles, notational methods, and techniques that preceded them (and the fact that the instrument as we know it today was not even firmly established until around 1840) they were perhaps more concerned with exploring, consolidating, and refining the technical advancements that had previously been established than they were with pushing the limits of the instrument’s capabilities, thus expanding their own compositional vocabulary. This statement is not intended to sell short their achievements, for had they not made them, the following generation of guitarists and composers dedicated to the

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26 Philip Hii
instrument would certainly not have been able to make the enormous strides that characterize much of the guitar music from the late 19th century.

Coste, Mertz, and Chopin: Basis for Comparison

Beethoven was one among several great composers active in the early 19th century, and in many ways, his name has since become synonymous with the music of his time period. So, in a sense, it is with Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849) and the succeeding generation, at least in the context of the piano. As a historically certified, brilliant composer whose work evolved almost exclusively around his instrument, he makes an excellent figure with an established catalog from which to examine two of his contemporaries working in similar veins on the guitar: Napoléon Coste (1805-1883) and Johann Kaspar Mertz (1806-1856). Similar to the previous discussion, the point of this comparison is not so much to make a case for the affirmation or denial of the somewhat less exalted status of Coste, Mertz, and the guitar relative to Chopin and the piano, but rather simply to examine the syntactic and aesthetic qualities of the different pieces in the context of the style of the time.

Frédéric Chopin: Prelude, No. 15, Op. 28 (The Raindrop)

Prelude No. 15, Op. 28 — one of the set of twenty-four piano preludes Chopin composed from 1835–1839 — is most commonly known by the name imparted by Hans von Bülow, “The Raindrop.” The piece has become a staple of the piano repertoire, and is one of the most well known of Chopin’s Preludes. In addition to frequent performances
and recordings, the work has even insinuated itself into popular culture, being used most recently, for example, in a television advertisement for a popular video game.27

A work in rounded binary form, the piece’s most defining quality is the stark contrast that Chopin creates between its constituent A and B sections. The A section, in D♭ major, features an open and somewhat airy melody, but the drama ensues in mm. 27, when the work seems to pivot 180 degrees to the parallel key of C♯ minor, initiating a tense, dark, and obsessive B section. After a “break” in mm. 60, which seems to abate the drama in favor of a more melancholic and introverted episode, the piece transitions its way back towards D♭ major, and a reiteration of the initial theme in mm. 76. While not exactly far reaching in its formal aspirations, the contrast that Chopin initiates between these two key areas is nonetheless irrepressibly effective, and is a simple but extremely eloquent formal and expressive device.

We must examine the work more closely, however, to fully appreciate the rich content that comprises these larger, constituent formal divisions. Once again, the technique of “harmonic foreshadowing” seems to come into play when, amidst the rather serene delivery of the melody in D♭, a move to A♭ minor in mm. 12 — followed by a further excursion to B♭ minor in mm. 16-18 — seems to cast a long shadow over the otherwise placid proceedings. After hovering on B♭ minor, with some suspenseful ambiguity courtesy of a dyad containing the notes C and E (the nucleus of the leading tone triad in D♭) the original melody returns to its previous, blissful unfolding, seemingly unaware that anything has even happened.

27 A portion of the middles section of Prelude No. 15, Op. 28, was featured in a 2008 advertisement for the video game Halo 3, made by Bungie Software, and available for Microsoft’s X-Box 360 game system.
Example 2.8: Chopin; Prelude No. 15, Op. 28; mm. 10–20

Naturally, the turn to C# minor in mm. 27 and the rather heavy, two-voice theme introduced in the bass is in itself sufficiently bold to support the B section, which holds little in terms of harmonic movement, aside from a nod in the direction of the mediant key of E in mm. 40. Incidentally, this shift in emphasis provides the climactic focal point of both the section and the work in total. This intensity is mitigated in mm. 60, however, when the theme is dispersed across different registers of the piano — the upper voice moving into the upper part of the right hand texture while the bass continues its somber elocution. This dispersion in register no doubt contributes greatly to the change in mood that occurs here — one that seems to hover between deflated anger and resigned defeat. The melodic voice in the right hand continues to switch between different high and middle registers before transitioning almost immediately back to Db in mm. 75 for the conclusion of the work.
Example 2.9: Chopin; *Prelude No. 15, Op. 28*; mm. 68–76

If there is nothing extravagant about the harmonic structure Chopin creates in this work, the same cannot be said about its central motivic idea — the notes of Ab and G# — whose ceaseless repetition is no doubt the source of Bülow’s imagistic title. Simply put, enough cannot be said about this device, which permeates almost every bar of the work, certainly figuratively, if not literally. What begins a seemingly pleasant and light accompanimental gesture is transformed into one of dark obsession, and then back again, in an effortless and yet surprising way. It is a marvelous invention, not for its complexity, but rather for the expressive might and variety that Chopin is able to draw from such simplicity. In continuing our consideration of what constitutes musical greatness, one must concede that there is a small, musical universe existing within this work, one that seems to have a trajectory and a lifespan of its own, in spite of its outwardly seeming, simple appearance. The same cannot be said for every work, of course, and it seems reasonable to suggest that it is partly this quality — inherent in even the simplest of Chopin’s works — that is responsible for his colossal cultural stature.
Napoléon Coste: *Le Départ — Le Retour, fantaisie dramatique, Op. 31*

A nine-minute fantasy in two distinct sections, *Le Départ — Le Retour* was composed in commemoration of December 29, 1855, the date the French army returned to Paris after their successful siege of Sebastopol in the Crimean War. Relative to Sor and Giuliani, Coste’s work inhabits a different universe. Of course, this should not be a surprise, given that it was composed several decades later. Composed mostly in the keys of E major and E minor, the work is similar to the Chopin in that it rarely goes too harmonically far afield, its larger constituent sections modulating primarily to the mediant key of G major and the dominant of B major. Nonetheless, we see in this piece enormous advancement in the treatment and the exploitation of the guitar’s harmonic and textural capabilities, and within this relatively conventional harmonic framework enormous resourcefulness and imagination: tonicization of remote keys (if not full modulations), surprising chord substitutes, modal mixture, and extended episodes of shifting harmonic ambiguity to name a few.

We see such examples even in the first six measures of the “introduction.” After two opening bars in a warm and open sounding E major, a move to C# minor in mm. 3, followed by a shift to its dominant of G# in mm. 4, seems both surprising and refreshing, providing a dark, if brief, twist to the opening, and suggesting something slightly askew or ominous. If this subtle harmonic twist in the introduction were an isolated occurrence it might not be worth mentioning, but it continues to appear throughout the following episode. A move to an A minor chord on beats 3 and 4 of mm. 8 restate and underscore the tension that was previously alluded to, as does the striking introduction of a C major chord.

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chord in mm. 10. Obviously, these two chords are introducing a hint of E minor to the texture, creating an inherent modal ambiguity that, although used sparingly, pervades the entire work, and is quite effective.

**Example 2.10:** Coste, *Le Départ — Le Retour, Op. 31;* opening bars, mm. 1–11

I do not wish to overstate the importance of Coste’s use of the “mode mixture technique,” nor do I wish to try and make a case for his originality in this regard. Given the other music of his time, this syntactical device was hardly unique to him or *Le Départ.* What is notable about the work, however, is the extent to which this idea becomes a working part of the form and dramatic conception of the piece. This is a stark contrast to the works of Sor and Giuliani discussed earlier (although, certainly not to
Beethoven). We see in Le Départ the device of harmony becoming something complex, subtle, and elaborate on a local scale — and similar to Beethoven — in the sense that it is developing into something beyond a mere formal mold into which a composer pours notes.

A further example of this harmonic elasticity occurs in the second part of the piece, Le Retour. In mm. 129–136, Coste introduces an eccentric progression of eclectic chords: chained diminished 7th and augmented 6th chords seem to skirt around and embellish C#, although once again, the major/minor ambiguity is present. It is not until mm. 134 that the gesture comes to rest fully in E major, followed finally by a seemingly strong dominant chord in mm. 135. Coste cannot seem to resist the urge however, to throw in one last twist, as he passes through E minor on the way to E major in mm. 136, the bar that initiates the coda of the work.
Example 2.11: Coste; *Le Départ — Le Retour, Op. 31*; mm. 129–136

Coste’s employment of such a progression is striking for two reasons. The first is its immediate musical effect: we appreciate the arrival on E major in mm. 136 all the more as a consequence of Coste’s so cleverly withholding and obscuring it from us via
the pleasurably disorienting passage that precedes it. Perhaps more importantly, however, is the fact that in this passage we once again see the deeper interweaving of harmonic flexibility into the fabric of the work, and a suggestion that we have moved far beyond the conventional treatment of harmony so typical in guitar music of the early 19th century.

**Johann Kaspar Mertz: Elegy**

In the liner notes to his CD *Le Romantique*, noted concert guitarist David Leisner states, “the *Elegy*... is perhaps the greatest piece of the 19th century guitar repertoire.” To say that the Elegy is “beautiful” is perhaps a trite understatement, as the richness, intensity, and depth of expression in this particular work is undeniable. Naturally, it is these qualities that have secured its place as a masterpiece within the guitar world.

In an essay published in *Classical Guitar Review*, Simon Powis states that the *Elegy*’s “inventive use of harmony and complete exploitation of the guitar’s melodic ability, display the height of Mertz’s oeuvre.” While I agree with the second half of his statement, I find his assertion that Mertz’s use of harmony in this work is “inventive” to be a bit of an overstatement, unless he intends his remark to be interpreted in a kind of minimalist context. Although the work contains a plethora of textural, melodic, and contrapuntal invention, its approach to form and harmony is still somewhat reserved — at least relative to other pieces from the middle of the nineteenth century, or even in the context of Coste’s *Le Depart, Op. 31*. Nonetheless, in the same vein as Chopin and the “Raindrop Prelude,” Mertz proves capable of drawing enormous expressive power from what is a fairly simple harmonic conception.

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29 David Leisner, Liner notes from *Le Romantique*, (Cleveland: Azica Records, 2003), CD ACD-71223.
With regards to harmony, the piece rarely leaves the realm of A minor, with the exception of a move to the mediant key of C major in mm. 30, and then again in mm. 54. On a more local scale, harmony rarely moves beyond the diatonic chords belonging to A minor, the exception being the modest, ornamental use of secondary dominants to the chord of E major, and as a pivot modulation device in the above mentioned modulation to the relative major key. In contrast to Coste’s *Le Départ*, we find relatively few of the harmonic devices that made that particular work engrossing: an insistent use of modal ambiguity, complex chromatic progressions — and most importantly — the fluidity with which this dimension of composition is integrated into the work.

But it seems an injustice to try and dismiss the work simply on these grounds. If, in spite of its apparent harmonic reserve, the *Elegy* is considered by some to be emblematic of the height of 19th century guitar literature, then certainly this must be based on some other qualities inherent in the work. With this in mind, one must assert that one of the *Elegy*’s outstanding qualities is in its treatment of melody. One excellent example of this is in the opening of the work. A slow, simple, block chord progression in the incipient bars acquires a melody in mm. 3, which itself begins to develop through the introduction of more rhythmic activity. Concurrently, the accompanying block chords that began the work start to “tear apart” into a second contrapuntal voice. By mm. 5, a fully formed 3-part texture has emerged, encompassing the melody, a middle voice providing a steady, pulsing rhythmic accompaniment, and a bass. By mm. 8, the bass and top voice begin trading melodic roles in an extended call and response type of dialog. Mertz holds our attention by gradually spinning out and revealing the melody.
Example 2.12: Mertz, *Elegy*, mm. 1–10

A notable aspect of the melody that characterizes much of the introduction is that it is somewhat compressed in register, never exceeding the interval of the minor 6th. This feature, along with Mertz’s conspicuous insistence of repeating specific intervals in melodic succession, both form important aspects of the work’s expressive identity. The falling half-step from F → E in mm. 4 (the “falling motive” in *Example 2.12*), in addition to its appearance, embedded in the accompaniment, at the end of mm. 6 and beginning of mm. 7, becomes an obsessive motive developed in the B section of the work. Once firmly ensconced into the rapid arpeggio figure that predominates this latter section, the motive seems to create the dramatic effect of desperate pleading, which does not seem an entirely inappropriate interpretation given the title of the piece.
Similar to Coste, upon hearing Mertz’s *Elegy*, one is immediately aware of the fact that he is far from the world of Sor and Giuliani. Although the harmonic aspect of the *Elegy* is limited in scope, there is another important quality that distinguishes this work: that of texture. The fast, rolling arpeggios that characterize the B section of the piece were a significant technical and creative contribution to the guitar world at the time, functioning in a similar way as the tremolando figures — introduced by Beethoven and his contemporaries on the piano — that so expanded the inherent “orchestral” qualities of that instrument. Although Mertz cannot be solely credited for this — indeed, Coste’s work shows similar employment of this same device — the guitar’s ability to suitably render a musical “middle ground” texture was a significant achievement that would from that time onward be an important component of the guitar’s inherent technical capabilities.

**Some Final Considerations**

The comparison between Coste’s *Le Départ, Op. 30*; Mertz’s *Elegy*; and Chopin’s *Op. 28, No. 15* demonstrates positive development for the guitar in terms of harmonic and textural variety, and overall compositional quality, and this implies that the
disparity between the guitarist/composers and the major composers of their day was less radical than it was in the time of Sor, Guiliani, and Beethoven. In both Coste’s and Mertz’s work, we see significant advancements not only in the quality of guitar music relative to their time, but also in the instrumental technique that allowed these advancements to flourish. Simply put, it is as if the “technique/creativity cycle” alluded to earlier in this essay had been given a monumental push. Coste began to mine the harmonic potential of the fretboard, and weave pieces of greater harmonic spontaneity and expression. Mertz, in his *Elegy*, seemed to abandon the Romantic preoccupation with complex harmonic form altogether in favor of a more flexible contrapuntal and melodic approach that allowed the guitar to resonate more freely. Both exploited the use of new accompanimental devices, assimilating polyphonic counterpoint into rolling, arpeggiated textures.

The contributions these composers made both in terms of guitar technique and their respective repertoires undoubtedly expanded the scope and capabilities of the instrument. In their music, many of the naïve, two-part melody and accompaniment figures that dominated so much of the guitar music of the early 19th century are gone; as are the monotonous, open string ostinati; facilely repetitive arpeggio patterns; and formulaic chord progressions. They had instead been replaced by complex and subtle considerations of harmony — both local and formal — elaborate musical passages, and episodes featuring two and three part counterpoint, in addition to a wealth of embellishing and accompanimental techniques. It is as if the different worlds — suggested in the complex polyphonic lute music of John Dowland and his contemporaries, and in the later guitar works of Francesco Corbeta, Luis de Milán,
Robert de Viseé — had finally started to merge and become manifest. This is, however, an observation based on a very specific and local set of comparisons, and in order to gain a larger perspective on how this exercise fits into the larger picture, we must leave the micro-realm of the specific, and instead “zoom out” and capture the whole *gestalt*.

In the preface to a 1982 Zerboni Editions score to Filippo Gragnani’s *Tre Duetti*, Ruggero Chiesa made the following observation regarding early 19th century guitar music:

> Guitar compositions of the 19th century, with the exception of those of a didactic nature, haven't received the attention they deserve from either scholars or performers. The superficial accusation made of such literature that it is of little artistic value, is the result of a series of misconceptions which have been passed on due to the absence of an adequate historical and aesthetic analysis, and due also to the unfamiliarity of the performers with music which demands a brilliant technique too often superior to their ability. Oppressed by the works of the great Romantics and intimidated by such technical difficulty, guitarists have preferred to ignore a period which often presents music of excellent substance. However, today increasing attempts are being made to revalue the music of those who kept the instrumental tradition alive even in the countries that saw an almost total predominance of opera. A careful selection of these compositions reveals works which compare well with the best pages of other more successful composers and which deserve to be included in today's concert programs.³¹

This quote is interesting for two reasons: first, it seems to confirm and perfectly encapsulate the prevailing, dismissive attitude towards the instrument typically held by members of the musical elite (that it is “of little artistic value”), and second, it adequately projects the insecurities of guitarists and guitar aficionados who are confronted with the

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³¹ Ruggero Chiesa, prefatory notes to *Filippo Gragnani, Tre Duetti*, (Milan: Edizioni Suvini Zerboni, 1982).
musical deficiencies that seem to be an inherent part of this early repertoire (that they are “oppressed by the works of the great Romantics”).

In light of this seeming indictment, the point of this chapter was to try and take a snapshot of the 19th century guitar within the context of its time, and to explore its musical (and thus, cultural) development in the world of classical music relative to other works of the same time period. The hoped for result, of course, is that by making such a close examination of several guitar pieces, I would in some small way be able to make a dent in the deficit of “adequate historical and aesthetic analysis” that Chiesa suggests. Naturally, the examination of so few pieces can yield only a somewhat limited picture, and it may seem rash to draw forth any hard conclusions based on such a narrow field of evidence. A more extensive critical discourse should certainly consider the exploration of more works, especially by the guitar composers presented here. Among these would be Giuliani’s famous Rossiniane, Op. 119–124, a collection of highly virtuosic, extended-form fantasies based on operatic themes by Rossini. These, along with the Guitar Concerto in A, Op. 30, tower among the 19th century guitar repertoire, as do several other works by Sor, including the Variations on a Theme by Mozart, Op. 9 — one of the guitar world’s most famous and beloved pieces — as well as his numerous studies, etudes, and duets. The Mertz and Coste works discussed here are but two among the respectably large creative output of both composers, not to mention the works of other composers such as Regondi, Paganini, Legnani, and others.

I must confess, however, that I suggest this primarily out of political correctness. Although I have little doubt that such an extensive survey would unearth some additional precious artifacts, I feel a fairly strong inclination to assert — in disagreement with
Chiesa — that further study of the majority of the 19th century guitar repertoire would clearly replicate the pattern established previously. In light of this, and as the Morton Feldman quote that opens this chapter suggests, I feel confident that the picture presented here is an adequate enough “piece” from which a “whole” can be constructed. From a purely qualitative standpoint — at least as determined from the perspective of historic criticism made in the 21st century — it seems as though the best efforts of even the bet 19th century guitar composers are, at their pinnacle, on par with works whose quality is somewhat commonplace among the output of other composers our culture has since deemed “great.”

What are we then to make of this apparent lack of high quality repertoire? Succinctly put, I think the answer can be found in a combination of factors addressed in the early part of this chapter. The first is the lack of great composers who wrote for the instrument. As Julian Rushton states: “With the Italian Giuliani (1781-1829), who also wrote guitar concertos, [Fernando] Sor was the leading figure in the brief Classical efflorescence of an instrument which, despite its cultivation by Paganini and occasional use by Weber, was neglected by major composers.” This neglect, most probably, was in itself due to the two main factors that Berlioz contributed in his Treatise on Orchestration: that the instrument is somewhat esoteric to write for without first-hand knowledge of it, and that its relatively quiet volume did not make it practical for use in chamber and orchestral music. The first of these points — knowledge of the instrument — was likely exacerbated by the fact that the guitar was still evolving in the early 19th century, with 5-, 6-, and 7-string instruments all in frequent use. Certainly, the lack of

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instrument standardization made the prospect of writing for it that much more dubious to a non-guitar playing composer.

In the 1840s, inertia finally began to slow the physical evolution that marked the guitar’s development from the Renaissance through the 19th century, when the Spanish luthier Antonio Torres Jurado began making what would become the archetypal guitar model that is still in use today. With this standardization, and the appearance of several guitarist luminaries in the early and mid-20th century, the guitar repertoire would begin to emerge from the shadows of the Romantic era and begin to assert its potential as an instrument capable of producing truly great repertoire on the world stage.
Chapter 3: Emerging into Maturity — The Guitar in the 20th Century

Emerging Into Maturity

When referring to the guitar, one striking difference emerges between the music of the 19th and 20th centuries. In the former time, almost all of the music composed for the instrument was written by composers who were also guitarists. In the 20th century, however, this began to change, as prominent concert guitarists began recruiting other non-guitarist composers to write for the instrument in an effort to create a broader and more diverse repertoire. Many famous collaborations ensued, and several of them went on to yield works now considered to be of outstanding cultural value.

This chapter will explore three specific pieces born of three such successful collaborative ventures: Benjamin Britten’s Nocturnal after John Dowland, Op. 70, commissioned by the British guitarist Julian Bream; Alberto Ginastera’s Sonata for Guitar, Op. 47, commissioned by the Brazilian guitarist Carlos Barbosa-Lima; and finally, the Sequenza XI by Luciano Berio, commissioned by the American guitarist Eliot Fisk. These works in particular form a unique triad, as each of these composers is noted for their singular and personal style. Given the variety of compositional aesthetics that permeate the musical landscape of the 20th century, it is to be expected that each of these composers would bring a variety of different compositional approaches to bear upon the guitar. Furthermore, each collaboration is somewhat culturally unique: Britten’s Nocturnal uses a piece by John Dowland — the English, Renaissance composer — as its source of inspiration; the Ginastera Sonata draws upon elements of Argentinean folk music; and the Berio Sequenza XI is notable for its somewhat taut, modernist aesthetic.
Examination of these works will demonstrate how fluently the guitar accommodates these different styles, influences, and techniques, and creates a picture of an instrument that has finally come of age. In light of these developments and the success of these works, it is perhaps worthwhile to consider the guitar an instrument better suited for a different system of tonality than the triadic system of the 19th century. Perhaps its more resonant, singing qualities are conjured not by the relatively sweet sound of major and minor triads, but by the more free, diverse, and less hierarchically constrained language of 20th century atonality.

The Segovia Repertoire and Beyond

Before such an examination can take place, however, credit must be given to the person who perhaps single-handedly ushered in the “Second Golden Age” of the guitar — the Spanish guitarist Andrés Segovia. It is difficult to overstate the role that Segovia played in the world of 20th century music. Consequently, an account of the guitar in this time period without mentioning his contributions would be incomplete. It was through his tireless efforts in concertizing and commissioning that the instrument seemed to find a global champion, and it was he who perhaps single-handedly elevated the status of the classical guitar in terms of its worldwide popularity, and established it as a “legitimate” concert instrument. As Townsend Plant states in his article Joaquín Turina and the Classical Guitar:

Segovia refined the modern guitar technique and made it his mission to elevate the guitar as a serious concert instrument capable of the highest forms of expression. He quickly became an international name and he filled concert halls and dazzled audiences with his virtuosity and poetic musicianship. For the first time in history, non-guitarist composers wrote significant works for the instrument. Composers such as Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1959) from Brazil, Federico Moreno
Torroba (1891-1982) from Spain, Manuel Ponce (1882-1948) from Mexico, and Mario Castelnuevo-Tedesco (1895-1968) from Italy all wrote numerous compositions for the guitar. These works filled out Segovia’s programs, which also included transcriptions and revived guitar works from the previous centuries.33

Incidentally, Segovia’s rise to prominence coincided with a great nationalistic movement in Spain, in which Spanish composers were searching for a “true Spanish identity in their music.”34 Among the luminaries of the time that were searching for this more ethnically inspired voice were Isaac Albéniz (1860-1909), Enrique Granados (1867-1916), and Manuel de Falla (1876-1946). Inevitably, as these composers and their contemporaries delved into the process of forging an identifiable Spanish voice in their works, they were drawn to the well of Spanish flamenco music. In light of these circumstances, it is not so ironic that proletarian associations with the guitar — and the problems these associations presented for its acceptance by high culture elites — would once again reassert themselves. Plant explains:

Ironically, it was flamenco music that Segovia was trying to separate himself from as he strove to build a reputation as a concert artist and to earn the respect for the guitar it deserved. One of Segovia’s missions was to “rescue” the guitar from stigmas associated with popular and folk styles that had, in his view, plagued the guitar for years. He felt that flamenco music — the popularized flamenco that was being played at the time — represented the pedestrian art forms with which the guitar had been primarily associated.35

There are two great ironies inherent in the circumstances that Plant describes. The first is that, as the champion of the guitar, Segovia would feel the need to turn away from one of the predominant musical trends of the time in order to more easily create a space

34 Plant, 22.
35 Plant, 22.
in which the guitar could find acceptance. In addition to the Spanish composers mentioned above, the reacquisition and integration of folk music into concert music was being pursued by other colossal musical figures of the time, such as Igor Stravinsky, Béla Bartók, Zoltan Kodaly, and Aaron Copland. This simple fact speaks volumes about the depth of the inherent “inferiority complex” (at least through the eyes of high culture) against which Segovia presumably felt he was struggling. One can only infer that had he embraced this trend, he may have felt that he would merely be reinforcing a debilitating stereotype about the instrument. The second great irony of this predicament is that in spite of how Segovia apparently felt about the influence of folk and flamenco music on the guitar, he did not hesitate to create excellent transcriptions of Albéniz and Granados piano works. The two most famous of these are perhaps Albéniz’s Asturias and Sevilla — from the Suite Española, Op. 47 — both of which are now perhaps more famous in guitar transcription form than in their original form for piano. Given the pervasive influence of flamenco in these works, which is perhaps their most striking characteristic, it is interesting that Segovia would choose to shy away from this aspect in the works that he commissioned, and criticize many of the composers with whom he closely worked, such as Turina and Torroba, for their blatant inclusion of particular Spanish folk elements.36

It also raises another question: did he somehow feel that because the works were originally written for the piano, the more pedestrian qualities were somehow laundered through the filter of the keyboard, and were thus “clean” and more capable of acceptance when transcribed for the guitar? The English guitarist and composer John W. Duarte seems to support this idea in his book Andrés Segovia, As I Knew Him, when he states,

36 John W. Duarte, Andrés Segovia, As I Knew Him (Pacific, Missouri: Mel Bay, 1998), 127.
“...he was averse to propagating overtly ‘popular’ music, unless the ‘folk’ elements were presented in European art-musical dress, giving them a cloak of respectability and dignity.”

In spite of Segovia’s enormous contributions to the guitar repertoire, he has not been immune to criticism. It has often been stated that although he strove to win higher acceptance for the instrument — a goal that he undoubtedly achieved — his musical tastes tended to run somewhat conservatively. Consequently, the extent of his interest in performing new works — even works that were expressly written for him — was often subject to his deep criticism and ultimate, abject rejection. Concerning Segovia’s judgment, the guitarist John Duarte relates the following: “Frank Martin was less fortunate; his Quatre pièces breves, now standard repertory, were rejected as ‘not music,’ after which chastening experience he never again wrote for the guitar. Roussel’s Segovia won the maestro’s approval but Milhaud’s Segoviana did not!”

Segovia’s tastes were also responsible for his apparent reluctance to commission many of the early 20th century’s greatest composers, including Stravinsky and Schoenberg, both of whom were reportedly eager to write for him, if only he had asked. In a telling anecdote, Duarte again describes a meeting between Segovia and Stravinsky, in which the latter asked why Segovia had never approached him to compose a new work for the guitar. Segovia’s reported response was “Because I do not want to insult your music by not playing it.” With regard to Schoenberg, the composer included a guitar part in his Serenade, Op. 24, and had approached Segovia about performing it, “but

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37 Duarte, 127.
38 Duarte, 46.
39 Duarte, 132.
Segovia never performed this composition because he disliked the dissonant compositional context of the central European avant-garde composers.\textsuperscript{40} In a somewhat different and more detailed account of the same anecdote by Robert Craft, Segovia supposedly responded to Schoenberg’s overture by saying, “‘I will be glad to work on it and to play the part in my performance’ if Schoenberg will accept ‘suggestions.’”\textsuperscript{41} Schoenberg refused, and thus, Segovia did not play the work. In a final, telling detail regarding Segovia’s tastes and aesthetic tendencies, Duarte states, “Segovia was anxious to ‘modernize’ and extend the language of guitar music… At the same time there was a cutoff point, defined in musical terms rather than by the birth date of the composer: Turina (1882) and Manén (1883) looked to the past, Ponce was OK, but God preserve us and the guitar from Stravinsky (1882), Martin (1890) and Milhaud (1892)!\textsuperscript{42}

It would be all too easy, given the advantage of hindsight, to criticize Segovia for these apparent shortcomings, but his contributions to the guitar world, and his success in permanently binding the instrument to the larger musical culture in which he participated, is both undeniable and extremely valuable. While an absence of solo works by Stravinsky, Bartók, Berg, and others could be lamented, there is certainly no guarantee that the commissioning of such works would have resulted in stalwarts of the modern repertoire. In the meantime, the works that would ultimately come to be known as the “Segovia repertoire” — the many works by Torroba, Ponce, Villa-Lobos, Turina, and others — have gone on to secure an esteemed place in the guitar repertoire, a repertoire that Segovia was then, in turn, successful at inculcating into the musical culture at large.

\textsuperscript{42} Duarte, 127.
From one perspective, Segovia gave the guitar a vigorous push, and consequently, set into motion an evolution of the instrument, its practitioners, devotees, audiences, and repertoire that grew exponentially throughout the 20th century. Additionally, it can be conjectured that it is this “push” that laid the foundation of the continued growth in popularity and repertoire that continues with comparable vigor even today.

From another perspective, however, one could choose to view the “Segovia repertoire” in a larger historical context, and take note of how even after all of Segovia’s contributions, the repertoire still seems somewhat behind the times, at least relative to other music at the time (and not too unlike some of the 19th century repertoire discussed earlier). This perception alone could account for the fact that many of the composers who were closely associated with Segovia are perhaps most notable for their guitar compositions than for anything else. This is in striking contrast to the collaborations that would occur in the following generation, as Duarte states:

One significant difference between our own time and that in which Segovia was encouraging non-guitarist composers to write for him is that, whereas many of those who wrote for him became far more famous through their guitar music than they might have done through their other works, the reputation of many of those who have written at the prompting of other, later-generation guitarists (Britten, Tippett, Ginastera, Arnold, Walton, Henze and others) have in no measurable way depended on their guitar works.43

**Benjamin Britten: Nocturnal after John Dowland, Op. 70**

Benjamin Britten’s *Nocturnal after John Dowland, Op. 70* has established itself as one of the finest contributions to the guitar repertoire ever made. In his book, *The Music of Benjamin Britten*, author Peter Evans suggests that the *Nocturnal* “deserves a far

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43 Duarte, 79.
higher place in the common view of Britten’s achievement than it has yet gained.”\textsuperscript{44} A close inspection of the piece yields a composition rich with subtle detail, harmonic ingenuity, and melodic invention. While Britten himself should deservedly receive unlimited credit for his ingenious exploitation of the guitar’s capabilities, it has been noted that his collaboration with Bream was close, as he would occasionally write to ask him if certain passages or techniques would be possible.\textsuperscript{45} The results of this communication were evidently fruitful, for as Bream recalls:

When the piece arrived, I found I didn’t have to change anything, not one note. It’s the only piece written for me of which that is true. Oh yes, except for one tiny blemish, where Britten had contrived to place two notes on the same string. When I pointed this out to him he was simply horrified! It was as though you’d pointed out some terrible gaff in his social behavior. \textsuperscript{46}

Aside from its entertainment value, this anecdote is worth mentioning, as it seems to dispel what many modern composers have come to believe about the guitar, and serves as a counter statement to Berlioz’s assertion (presented in Chapter 1) that the guitar is impossible to write for unless one plays the instrument himself. While exploiting the full capabilities of the instrument admittedly remains a somewhat complex affair, it does not appear to be something that cannot be overcome with some communication, at least in Britten’s case.

Bream gave the world premiere of the \textit{Nocturnal} at the Aldeburgh Festival on June 12, 1964. The piece exhibits a “reverse theme and variations” form, whereby the theme, the John Dowland song \textit{Come, heavy sleep}, first appears in its entirety at the end of the work, rather than at the beginning. It is preceded by a series of eight unique

\textsuperscript{44} Humphrey Carpenter, \textit{Benjamin Britten, a Biography} (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1992), 422-423.  
\textsuperscript{45} Carpenter, 423.  
\textsuperscript{46} Carpenter, 422-423.
variations, each of which references the Dowland in sometimes direct and other times more abstract ways. The work is somewhat programmatic, with movement titles like Very Agitated, Restless, Uneasy, and Dreaming all suggesting moods pertaining to sleep, or the absence of it. In light of the lyrics of the Dowland song, and the obvious metaphorical relationship it draws between sleep and death, it seems safe to suggest that the programmatic element in Britten’s Nocturnal holds a similar thematic significance.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the Nocturnal is its approach to harmony. Britten is able to constantly suggest and maintain a loose sense of tonality or modality, although it is generally always obscured by foreign tonal elements. The result of this process on the overall sonority of the piece is immediately audible, and perhaps even serves a double purpose: it renders the music restless and searching, and at the same time imbues it with a dark, mysterious, and hypnagogic feel, one perfectly fitting of the adjective nocturnal.

Regarding the following analysis, references to the John Dowland song Come, heavy sleep are relative to Britten’s transcription of the work, which appears at the end of the Nocturnal. It should be noted that Britten transposed the work from Dowland’s original key of G major into E major, no doubt because of the rich sonorous quality of this key on the guitar. Apart from this, there are two meter issues resulting in barlines being drawn in slightly different places in Britten’s transcription than in the original. All other aspects of the Dowland original, however, have been preserved in the Britten, and the above considerations are deemed to be insignificant or irrelevant for the sake of analytical reference.
Examples 3.1a and 3.1b are copies of the variation Musingly, which opens the piece, as well as Britten’s transcription of the Dowland song as it appears at the end of the Nocturnal. The song can easily be divided into nine phrases, with the ninth phrase being a repeat of the sixth. It should be noted that in the original Dowland version, this ninth phrase goes on as an exact repetition of Phrase 6 to cadence in the key of G major, whereas Britten takes the opportunity this repetition affords to “fade out” the song via a soft, harmonically ambiguous, repeating figure. This latter characteristic is used to great effect by Britten as a means of connecting the variations in their attacca form throughout the Nocturnal. With this in mind, it is notable that each variation tends to adhere to this same structure; phrases comprising the variations often times are literally analogous to their corresponding phrase in the Dowland. Furthermore, in addition to general phrase structure, many times the contour of Dowland’s melodic line is preserved, if not its entire interval content, although this is often closely followed as well.
Example 3.1a: Musingly, from the Nocturnal after John Dowland, Op. 70.
Example 3.1b: *Come heavy sleep*, (Britten transcription) from the *Nocturnal after John Dowland, Op. 70.*
In *Example 3.2*, I have created a “map analysis” which demonstrates each of these general parameters relative to the first variation, *Musingly*. The top staff displays Britten’s monadic writing in *Musingly* as it corresponds to the Dowland melody on the bottom staff. The intervals comprising the Dowland and Britten melodies (as they appear in melodic succession) are given above the top staff in order to illustrate the similarities between the two works. The smaller notes are considered ornamental, and additional intervals are given below the bottom staff only when there is a discrepancy between the two composers’ melodies. It should be stated at this point that a detailed analysis of *Musingly* is important, as it functions in many ways as a “Rosetta Stone” that unlocks some of the more abstract facets of Britten’s compositional process throughout the *Nocturnal*. It will also help to clarify many of the more obscure relationships between Britten’s variations and the Dowland song.
Example 3.2: “Map Analysis,” *Come, heavy sleep* (Britten transcription) and *Musingly*, from Benjamin Britten’s *Nocturnal after John Dowland, Op. 70*
Example 3.2: “Map Analysis” (continued)

[Musical notation image]

[Explanation of musical analysis continues]
When looking at the map analysis, several striking similarities appear. The first is of course Dowland’s embedded melody — at times chromatically disguised — but beyond this there are other peculiarities. The first is in the approach to cadences. Upon studying the Dowland (Example 3.1b), it is easy to see that harmonic movement within phrases is often facilitated by the interval of a perfect 5th (P5), and even more frequently by its inverted cousin, the perfect 4th (P4). This is seen, for example, at the closing of the very first phrase, where the vocal line descends from B to E through a I-V-I harmonic progression. The same tendency is also seen in Phrase 3, where the melody rises from G# to C# through a I-V7/IV-IV progression, and in the next bar, where it moves from B down to F# via I-V/IV-IV-V. Similar cases are also seen at the beginning of Phrase 4, and three times in succession at the beginning of Phrase 7.

One interesting difference between the two pieces is in the treatment of these 4ths and 5ths. In Musingly, when instances of these intervals appear, they are changed into tritones. What is the reason for this? Is it a byproduct of a particular compositional process, or a carefully contrived decision made to fulfill the tonal requirements of the moment? We will return to this question a little later, but for the time being it does provide a clue to Britten’s method for variation writing, at least in Musingly.

In his article Dowland Unchained: Cross Transformations in Britten’s Nocturnal, M. Rusty Jones deals exclusively with the first variation of the Nocturnal. In it, he has provided an extensive analysis that reveals how notes comprising the melodic phrases of Come, heavy sleep are embedded as melodic focal points in Britten’s variation, and offers a method through which to analyze the tonal content of the work through what he defines as cross-type transformations. He states: “Passages that are transformed from one type of
pitch collection, such as a diatonic scale, into a completely different type of collection, such as octatonic, modal, or whole-tone scale, are said to undergo a *cross-type transformation.*

Upon examining Phrase 1 of the map analysis, it is clear how Britten has preserved the notes of Dowland’s original phrase. If one wanted to analyze this passage in conventional terms, it could be asserted that the original melody has been embellished with neighbor tones and passing tones, designated as ‘N’ and ‘P’ respectively in *Example 3.2a* below. In the example, all notes that are unmarked have been preserved from the original, with the exception of the F# in the second bar, which has been raised a half step from its corresponding tone in the Dowland. This raised half step, however, reveals a fine example of Jones’ *cross-type transformation*, but only if the other tones are considered as part of an overall pitch collection and not merely as ornamental notes. Looked at from this perspective, it at first seems that Britten has changed the passage from a diatonic major to an octatonic collection. The only caveat now is the Gb in the second bar, which can be explained as an embellishing tone having a downward tendency to F#. This would appear to explain why the descending P5th of the Dowland melody is changed into a tritone in Britten’s variation: the melody has been re-contextualized as part of an octatonic scale.

**Example 3.2a: Britten, *Musingly*, Phrase 1**

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Example 3.2b: Britten, *Musingly*, implied octatonic collection in Phrase 1

\[ \text{Example 3.2b: Britten, *Musingly*, implied octatonic collection in Phrase 1} \]

The second phrase exhibits the same characteristics, however, it transforms to a different octatonic scale. In this context, the odd note is the B#, which similar to the G♭ in the above example, can be considered an embellishing tone leading upwards to the C#.

Example 3.3a: Britten, *Musingly*, Phrase 2

\[ \text{Example 3.3a: Britten, *Musingly*, Phrase 2} \]

Example 3.3b: Britten, *Musingly*, implied octatonic collection in Phrase 2

\[ \text{Example 3.3b: Britten, *Musingly*, implied octatonic collection in Phrase 2} \]

Defining these first two phrases as octatonic may seem appropriate enough, but a question arises: from where does Britten get the other notes that are not in the original melody? One explanation could be that Britten is simply using a kind of ornamental turn. However, another explanation — especially in consideration of the variation form — comes from the Dowland song itself. Upon studying Dowland’s melodies, it is apparent that they exhibit very clear, up and down stepwise motion. *Examples 3.4a* and *3.4b* below show compressed versions of Dowland’s melodies in Phrases 2 and 3 respectively:
Example 3.4a: *Come, heavy sleep*; Britten trans.; Phrase 2 melody compressed, mm. 2-3

Example 3.4b: *Come, heavy sleep*; Britten trans.; Phrase 2 melody compressed, mm. 3-5

Furthermore, if one examines the inner voice accompaniment part in measure 1, he is sure to find the following:

Example 3.5: *Come, heavy sleep*; Britten trans.; Phrase 1 accompaniment figure, mm. 1

The turn-like patterns shown in each of the examples above are strikingly similar, at least in contour, to the notes that Britten uses to embellish his embedded version of the Dowland melody in *Musingly*. Henceforth, it is now possible to make a direct motivic connection between the Dowland song and the connective “tissue” that adorns Britten’s variation of Dowland’s melody.

With the suggestion of an octatonic sonority in the first two phrases, Britten seems to twist the material in Phrase 3 in order to “morph” into a different tonal sphere — that of the whole tone collection. The most interesting part of this passage is how Britten manages to create a “cross fade” between these different sonorities. The octatonic collection in the first bar, incidentally the same collection implied in Phrase 1, is
immediately proceeded by a small whole tone fragment — just enough to disorient the
listener, while foreshadowing the sonority to come. The chromatic figure in mm. 2
dissolves this further until the third bar, in which the octatonic collection that comprised
the second phrase of the variation is alluded to. This collection, however, is obscured by
the superimposition of a whole tone scale above it. It is not until the repeated B’s descend
down to F at the end of the bar that the listener is finally made firmly aware of the sonic
transformation that has taken place.

**Example 3.6a:** Britten, *Musingly*, Octatonic and Whole Tone collections in Phrase 3

It’s worth noting, however, that there is an alternate, and perhaps deeper,
harmonic interpretation of this passage. If one chooses to perceive the various octatonic
and whole tone collections simply as an aural veneer — and hears past it — he will
discover that these various fragments also belong to more conventional tonally based
scales.

**Example 3.6b:** Britten, *Musingly*, Polytonal interpretation of Phrase 3
It may at first seem a tossup as to which of these perspectives affords a more accurate view of the harmonic world comprising the Nocturnal — something akin to the classic “is the glass half full or half empty?” conundrum. Indeed, this type of rich tonal ambiguity permeates Musingly and the work as a whole. However, examination of Phrase 6 grants us a clearer understanding of the forces at work here, and provides an insightful clue into Britten’s harmonic conception for the work in its entirety. It is perhaps the richest of them all, and Britten exploits many of its features in very unique and insistent ways throughout the Nocturnal.

In the context of this particular variation, Phrase 6 is notable for its introduction of a clearly defined E major chord. It should be mentioned that this is the only time thus far that the listener has been afforded such a distinctive proclamation of triadic harmony. But the harmony is irritated by an F in the top voice that repeatedly falls downward a perfect 4th to C. This is an obvious resonance of Dowland’s melody, but the difference here, of course, is that the F and C in the top voice are alien to the key of E major, and hence, a conflict is established.

It is curious that Britten would introduce an element of this strength here, (reinforced as it is by his consistent development of it throughout the rest of the Nocturnal) when there is almost nothing in the Dowland that would suggest such a struggle. Indeed, the corresponding phrase in the Dowland is among the simplest of any in the song. Perhaps this is the reason for Britten’s purposeful distortion? Creative mysteries aside, thorough analysis of the phrase yields some interesting questions. The cadence on C at the end of Phrase 5, especially through the use of the three, whole step descending pattern beginning on E, seems to imply an F major tonality in the top voice at
the beginning of Phrase 6. This would make a bi-tonal passage comprising E major and F major, two keys only a half step apart! Something happens in the second bar, however, that changes our mind.

**Example 3.7:** Britten, *Musingly*, Phrase 6

![Example 3.7](image)

The G♯ of the E major chord in the bottom voice, arpeggiated amidst the falling 4th in the top, is simultaneously interpreted as an A♭ relative to the F and C, thereby suggesting an F minor harmony. In a sense, the G♯ functions as a pivot, that bridges these two harmonically disparate worlds. It is only towards the end of the passage, when in the top voice the first four notes of an ascending C minor scale are proclaimed, that we come to understand that the forces at odds with each other here are E major and C minor. (Incidentally, it is worth mentioning that C minor has been the only triadic key that has even been hinted at thus far, brushed upon ever so innocently in Phrase 4). Ultimately, the top voice comes to rest on F once again, only this time it has been “phrygianly tonicized” by G♭, leaving no doubt as to its tonal identity.

The sophisticated juxtaposition of these two disparate key worlds naturally leads us to consider the *Nocturnal* in the light of polytonality. Indeed, further evidence for this interpretation exists throughout the work, most notably in the 7th variation, *Gently Rocking*, in which the music is dispersed across two staves, the upper one with a key
signature suggesting B♭ minor, the lower one suggesting A minor. Furthermore, it’s worth noting that the technique of polytonality was not unusual for Britten’s time, and considering his colossal stature as a composer during his lifetime, it makes sense that he would display some compositional affiliation with his contemporaries. As Dmitri Tymoczko states in his *A Geometry of Music*, “Many of Prokofiev’s pieces… make free use of accidentals without attempting to stay within a single scale for very long. Similarly, composers such as Stravinsky, Milhaud, Bartók, and Shostakovich explored polytonal textures in which familiar musical materials are superimposed, creating the effect of clashing keys.”

Since the weighty content of Phrase 6 has now been established, it is perhaps time to revisit the question that was posed earlier about why Britten tends to contract melodic motion heard in the Dowland as P4ths and P5ths into tri-tones. The obvious answer would be that he is using octatonic and whole tone sonorities, both of which feature tri-tones in abundance, or that they are essentially just byproducts of bitonality; as a consequence, the intervals are determined through the compositional process. But certainly Britten was aware of this, and was capable of keeping the perfect intervals intact if his ear so desired, or if he simply did not feel like being a servant to process. I assert the real reason for contracting the P4ths and 5ths elsewhere in *Musingly* is so that the descending P4th motive featured so prominently in the top voice of Phrase 6 stands out. Indeed, this P4th is used as one of the primary motives in developing the other variations that comprise the Nocturnal, revealing itself in the quartal harmony that pervades some of the inner variations (such as Restless and March-like), as an important signifier of triadic harmony.

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when Phrase 6 is developed throughout, and as an extensive melodic germ in the *Passacaglia*.

Further study of the additional variations comprising the *Nocturnal* would certainly yield many surprises, but a thorough investigation of the musical syntax, construction, and sonic effect exhibited by *Musingly* alone suggests that the work is substantial enough to be considered one of the guitar repertoire’s finest, at least from an analytical perspective. Of course, the point that the various compositional strategies and devices Britten uses to such great effect are rendered on the *guitar* should not be overlooked, as in this example we clearly see that the instrument is both versatile and nuanced enough to support elegant musical structures. Among the many attributes that make the work speak so well on the instrument are Britten’s embrace of a more sparsely textured musical surface (as opposed to the chord rich textures favored by the romantics) and a freer approach to harmony (polytonal and quartal instead of triadic). These techniques afford the player more ergonomic physical mobility, and frequently allow the instrument to resonate at its maximum expressive potential.

**Alberto Ginastera: Sonata for Guitar, Op. 47**

Alberto Ginastera’s *Sonata for Guitar, Op. 47* was commissioned by the Brazilian guitarist Carlos Barbosa-Lima and completed in 1976. Mr. Ginastera had the following to say about the work:

> Although I had been encouraged by a number of musicians to compose music for the guitar from the time I was a student, the complexity of the task delayed my creative impulse, in spite of the guitar being the national instrument of my country… When the critics at its premiere received the work as one of the most important ever written for the guitar, as much for its conception as for its
modernism and its unprecedented imaginative use of sound, I thought that I had not waited in vain for several decades to make the attempt... 49

It is interesting to note Ginastera’s use of the word “complexity.” Although he does not elaborate, it seems reasonable to assume that this word was chosen, at least to some extent, to refer to the issues raised by Berlioz and mentioned previously. Regardless of his initial reservations, Ginastera proved to be amply capable of the task, and the Sonata, Op. 47 has since become a staple of the modern guitar repertoire.

The Sonata is perhaps most notable for three reasons: its infusion of Argentinean folk music, its complex harmonic conception, and Ginastera’s seeming ability to exploit all the sonic capabilities of the guitar. While the influence of folk music informs the work on both structural and foreground levels, the extensive use of different timbres, extended techniques, and dramatic rasqueado and tambora effects lend the piece both an inherent sense of drama and an extremely colorful surface. In his excellent essay “Alberto Ginastera’s Use of Argentine Folk Elements in the Sonata for Guitar, Op. 47,” Mark Grover Basinski catalogs the use of two distinct types of Argentinean folk music in extensive detail, tracing the influence of both andino and criollo musical traditions throughout the work.50 Regarding the harmonic language of the piece, he goes on to say:

The harmonic elements employed in the Sonata for Guitar are also typical of Ginastera’s mature works. His neo-expressionist idiom is typified by a very free and expressive atonality. Extensive use is made of quartal harmony, which may have been partly inspired by the tuning of the guitar. Ginastera also incorporates dodecaphonic procedures in a very free and unconstrained way,

50 Mark Grover Basinski, Alberto Ginastera’s Use of Argentine Folk Elements in the Sonata for Guitar, Op. 47 (University of Arizona dissertation: 1994), 13. Basinski describes “andino” folk music elements as deriving from the northwest mountainous region of Argentina, and “criollo” elements as deriving from the “pampas” region (the central grasslands).
avoiding strict serial techniques. Twelve-tone procedures are generally used to create short melodic segments or short blocks of harmony. While the inclusion of so many different techniques and styles is interesting, it is rather the seamless way in which Ginastera is able to integrate all these elements that the Sonata rightly earns its place of high esteem. The first movement, entitled Esordio, is in itself a capsule that clearly demonstrates the wealth of material that Ginastera is able to employ. Cast in an A → B → A¹ → B¹ form, the movement includes distinct andino and criollo folk elements, and also provides a window into the harmonic language that Ginastera uses throughout the rest of the work.

Basinski asserts that the opening of the Sonata, in its use of the strummed open strings of the guitar, is specifically reminiscent of criollo folk music. While this influence does not seem to be present in the harmonic and melodic material of the opening, he suggests that it is rather “the sound” of the guitar — as personified through this open string chord — that evokes this tradition, the guitar being an inextricable aspect of criollo music in general. In light of the lack of any hard evidence, this assertion may seem to be a stretch, but Isabel Aretz, in her book El folklore musical argentino, suggests that criollo songs were frequently preceded by a short introduction consisting of strummed chords. Additionally, Basinski cites another folk music derived work by Ginastera in which this same exact chord also appears:

The guitar itself, being the main instrument of criollo folk music, carries a broad folkloric implication, a certain inevitable history. The sound of the guitar has been a folkloric presence in Ginastera’s music almost from the very beginning. For example, the Malambo, Op. 7 (1940), for

51 Basinski, 10.
52 Isabel Aretz, El folklore musical Argentina (Buenos Aires: Ricordi, 1973), 59.
solo piano, begins with the pitches of the open strings of the guitar, E-A-d-g-b-e’. This is a perfect little intonazione, just as if a guitarist were checking his tuning before beginning the piece.\textsuperscript{53}

Ginastera himself describes \textit{Esordio} as “a solemn prelude,” and given this dispensation, it does not seem unreasonable to interpret the open-string chords that dominate the A section of the work in the manner that Basinski suggests.\textsuperscript{54} He also draws a strong comparison between the “whistling sound” that Ginastera calls for at the end of systems 2 and 4, and the \textit{criollo} guitar technique of “placing the palm of the right hand on the face of the guitar and sliding very quickly and forcefully, resulting in a loud, high-pitched squeak.”\textsuperscript{55} In the case of Ginastera, the “whistling sound” is created by slightly pinching the indicated string between the thumb and middle finger, and then sliding upwards as quickly as possible in order to create this same type of sonority (see the end of \textit{Example 3.9}).

If these two distinct traits are indeed features of \textit{criollo} folk music, the harmonic language that Ginastera employs in considerably more abstract. A prevalence of perfect 4\textsuperscript{th}s seems to be the underlying structural interval of the introductory A section, no doubt an extrapolation of the strong 4\textsuperscript{th} sonority of the guitar’s open strings and the other chords that begin the work. The A section itself consists of four distinct phrases — each successive one a variation of the first. What is interesting is the unique way in which Ginastera uses particular intervals to define each phrase variation, and how he manipulates these intervals — by expanding and contracting them — to create the overall harmonic content of each.

\textsuperscript{53} Basinski, 20.
\textsuperscript{54} Alberto Ginastera, prefatory notes to \textit{Sonata for Guitar}.
\textsuperscript{55} Basinski, 17. The author cites a personal interview he had with Roberto Aussel, Tucson Arizona, 24 March 1993, as the source of this information.
Each phrase is constructed similarly: a series of four chords, the last of which is always the six open strings of the guitar, is followed by a virtuosic arpeggio-like gesture which leads to a final chord.\footnote{The exception, of course, is Phrase 1, which ends not on a chord, but on the single high note of B\flat.} In extremely simplified terms, it is almost as if the incipient chords create an antecedent phrase, while the virtuosic figure that follows functions as both a consequent phrase and as an elaborate, almost cadential embellishment of the final chord. \textit{Example 3.8} shows the opening phrase of the \textit{Sonata}, along with indications regarding its specific intervallic content and movement. These indications refer primarily to the top note of each successive chord, as it is from these specific notes — and, most importantly, their melodic implications — that the harmony acquires its significance.

\textbf{Example 3.8:} Ginastera; \textit{Sonata, Op. 47, Esordio}; Phrase 1 (opening)

It may be a matter of some subjective speculation, but the third chord in each phrase seems to hold a similar, important position. As the chord that always contains the highest pitch of the antecedent, its sonority seems to hover, suspended throughout the rest of the bar. The return to the open string chord and the ensuing virtuosic gesture seem to be a return to a space that has already been discovered, and in a harmonic sense, the movement to the final note (or chord) of the phrase merely seems like a ligature.
connecting the note of A with the note of B♭. The fact that the last note of the arpeggio gesture itself is an A seems further evidence of this interpretation.

The intervallic motion encompassed in the chordal changes of each phrase shows Ginastera expanding the range and register of the harmony in a systematic way. For example, the top notes of each chord in Phrase 1 — a sequence of E-F-A-E — forms an interval sequence corresponding to the pattern of a minor 2nd (m2) followed by a major 3rd (M3) and then a descending perfect 4th (P4). Examination of Phrase 2 shows that this same pattern has been followed, only each interval has this time been expanded, thus creating the interval pattern of a major 2nd (M2) followed by a P4th, and then a descending P5th (E-F♯-B-E). Incidentally, the interval that connects the third chord with the last chord of each phrase also exhibits this same tendency. Whereas the single note A in Phrase 1 connects with the final note of B♭ by a m2, in Phrase 2, these two corresponding chords are connected by a M2.57

**Example 3.9**: Ginastera; *Sonata, Op. 47, Esordio*; Phrase 2 (opening)

![Diagram of interval content in Ginastera's Sonata, Op. 47, Esordio, Phrase 2 (opening)]

The interval content of each occurring “virtuosic gesture” is also highly patterned and consistent. In Phrase 1, it is dominated purely by P4ths, making the introduction of the tritone in Phrase 2 a striking and piquant move (as well as another example of interval

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57 For the sake of this discussion, octave placement will not be taken into account and interval details will be described only in terms of pitch class.
expansion!) As I will discuss later, this tritone is an important singular element, and goes on to gain even greater significance in the B section of the movement. The rest of the gesture in Phrase 2 is defined as a series of alternating 3-note chords, ascending via a sequence built on M2nds: the first chord is characterized as a combination of a M3 and a M7 from the bottom note, the second as a combination of a M3 and a M6 (or a 1st inversion minor triad). The repetition of the note A in the bass creates an insistent pedal tone. It is interesting how the M2 interval content of the internal sequential pattern further mirrors the M2 that connects the third and last chords.

Phrase 3 transposes the opening chord sequence up a fifth, and adds further intervallic modification. Although we are far from the world of any kind of functional tonality, the choice of a P5 for a transposition seems curious — is there some resonant ghost of a dominant sonority implied here? Whether or not Ginastera intended such a feeling is debatable, but the strength of the note B in the bass of the first two chords, followed by the third chord on C (which in itself seems to function as a kind of Phrygian embellishment of the previous chords) seems to opaquely suggest such a connection — at least sonically speaking — upon returning to the insistent open-string chord based on E. This perception is further enhanced by the rather dramatic shift in register the transposition requires, and the guitar’s tendency to sound more “intense” (if admittedly less resonant) as one travels up the neck of the instrument. The pattern of interval expansion seen between Phrase 1 and Phrase 2 does not remain the same here, with the exception of the interval that once again connects the third and last chords, which in this case, has been expanded to an augmented 2nd.
Example 3.10: Ginastera; *Sonata, Op. 47, Esordio*; Phrase 3 (opening)

When examining the arpeggio-like figure, it is interesting to note that the contents of Phrase 3 seem to be a combination of the primary elements used in the corresponding parts of Phrases 1 and 2. Pairs of harmonic M7ths, presumably derived from the first set of 3-note chords in Phrase 2, are performed sequentially in a series of melodic, falling P4ths, this latter component of the passage reflecting the preponderance of this same interval in Phrase 1. The alternation of the notes E and A in the bass register also seems to support this idea. The low, open E string resonates freely throughout Phrase 1, but is exchanged in Phrase 2 for the low open fifth string of A. Phrase 3 sees these two notes fused together in melodic succession, while still performing the same pedal tone-like function. Additionally, the rising internal sequence of this gesture once again imitates the same interval that connects the third and last chords — the m3 (or +2) — and can be interpreted as an intervallic expansion of its respective counterpart in Phrase 2.

The last phrase of the opening of the *Sonata* seems to combine the intervallic content of all the preceding phrases. The opening chord sequence of Phrase 4, this time beginning on A♭, is once again a striking move, and seems to somewhat alleviate the increased tension felt by the move to B at the beginning of Phrase 3. This amelioration is only temporary, however, as the following move to C on the second chord seems to recall
this tension, and then increase it further by moving to C#. Also, in this final phrase, we see that the connection between the third and last chords has once again been expanded — this time to a P4, the dominant intervallic “building block” of the whole opening section.

**Example 3.11:** Ginastera; *Sonata, Op. 47, Esordio;* Phrase 4 (opening)

The virtuosic gesture in Phrase 4 is the most complicated one of all, and combines the “genetic” interval classes of each of the preceding three phrases. For example, if we recall the manifestation of this passage in Phrase 2, we see that the overall sequence was built on the interval of a M2nd, but if we “zoom in” one level further, we notice that the bottom note of each successive chord rises chromatically by half-step, while the individual chords that comprise each sequential pair fall by half step.

**Example 3.12:** Ginastera; *Sonata, Op. 47, Esordio;* Sequence pattern of Phrase 2

*Example 3.11* shows that this exact same pattern is inherent in the corresponding part of Phrase 4, only in this particular case it is cast in an overall descending
progression. While the harmonic content of each passage differs significantly, the fact that the two patterns mirror each other is undeniable, and certainly reveals a design conceit. Regarding the harmony apparent in this section of Phrase 4, it too seems like a further expansion (or at least mixture) of the same elements used earlier. In Example 3.13, I have identified the sequential chords comprising this passage as diminished 7ths, which alternate with another more dissonant “super-chord.” This “super-chord” seems to embody the distinct intervallic combinations present in each of the preceding passages.

**Example 3.13:** Ginastera; *Sonata, Op. 47, Esordio;* Phrase 4 “super-chord” interpretation

![Example 3.13](image)

Examination of this chord reveals a rather complex harmony, capable of at least two different interpretations. In the first case, it appears as an interlocking superimposition of two M7ths, separated by a tritone (+4). When viewed from this perspective, it seems to comprise elements of Phrase 3 (the M7 and the 4th). However, the augmented 4th is an obvious difference, and hence, it raises a question — is it an incorporation of the tritones first heard in Phrase 2, or is it simply another example of Ginastera’s “expanding” intervallic content to create new sonorities? A second interpretation shows the chord to be two distinct tritone pairs, separated by a P4th. In this latter case, the chord may be still be described as containing elements of the previous two phrases, the tritone once again on loan from Phrase 2, the P4th being borrowed from the melodic interval connecting the M7ths in Phrase 3. As briefly mentioned above, it is curious to note that the other chords involved in this sequence are full-fledged diminished
7th chords, although given their context, they certainly do not behave this way, as their usually poignant and distinctive sonority is mitigated by the general, surrounding dissonance of the harmony. In the penultimate gesture of Phrase 4, another sequential episode — this one featuring groups of falling M3rd's that are themselves separated by P4ths — seems to lend confirmation to the ideas that the movement is both deeply rooted in the sound of quartal harmony, and that intervallic expansion and contraction generate both melodic and harmonic variety.

The B section of *Esordio* is somewhat more restrained in character. Once again, the influence of Argentinean folk music is felt, but in contrast to the A section, the folk elements introduced here have their roots in the andino tradition. Ginastera himself describes the B section as “a song which was inspired by Kecua music,”58 “Kecua” being a derivative name for the Quechua Indian tribe, who are indigenous to the mountainous, northwest region of Argentina.59 Basinski goes on to cite two specific andino influences in this passage: the baguala, a song in a slow tempo, usually accompanied by a simple drum-like accompaniment; and the vidala, another type of andino song that displays a tendency towards ternary, dotted rhythms, and the use of the raised 4th scale degree as a defining melodic characteristic.60 (One may recall the introduction of the tritone interval in Phrase 2 of the opening of the work, and the remark that this interval would be significant in the B section). Consequently, it seems plausible to conjecture that the use of this distinct interval in the preceding section functions as a kind of “foreshadowing” of its...

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58 Alberto Ginastera, prefatory notes to *Sonata for Guitar*.
59 Basinski, 34.
60 Basinski, 34.
return in B, where it becomes the melodic focal point of the Kecua folk song that Ginastera employs.

**Example 3.14:** Ginastera; *Sonata, Op. 47, Esordio;* B Section, Phrase 1

![Diagram of Example 3.14]

In *Example 3.14,* the drum-like effect of the *tambura* passage is, as Basinski suggests, yet another manifestation of *andino* folk music (specifically the *vidala*), as is the stepwise decent of the melody in mm. 3 to its final cadence in mm. 4.\(^{61}\) The second phrase of the B section, show in *Example 3.15,* repeats this same melodic gesture with a slightly varied harmonic accompaniment, and then again at a transposition of a P5\(^{th}\). The salient harmonic feature of both passages is, with some mild exceptions, the continued use of chords built on 4ths, both in “perfect” and “augmented” varieties, and the fact that the notes of the chords within each phrase form a 12-tone aggregate when combined.

**Example 3.15:** Ginastera; *Sonata, Op. 47, Esordio;* B Section, Phrase 2

![Diagram of Example 3.15]

The A\(^{1}\) and B\(^{1}\) sections that complete *Esordio* are formally much smaller than their corresponding precedents, but feature the same respective techniques, if in

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\(^{61}\) Basinski, 29 and 34.
somewhat modified variation form. Incidentally, in spite of the contrast and variety displayed in the remaining three movements of the *Sonata* — *Scherzo*, *Canto*, and *Finale* — one can easily discern a consistent use of these same elements: the influence of folk music, a predilection towards quartal harmony, and a penchant for discovering unique sonorities and timbres.

In discussing *Esordio* and the compositional techniques that seem to have been employed in its creation, I have merely touched on the surface of what is undoubtedly an expansive and rich musical creation. Further examination of the piece would do well to consider the myriad, uniquely guitaristic extended techniques Ginastera employs, and the value that they add to the expressive nature of the music: the wild *glissandi* and *tremolandi* of the *Scherzo*, and the specifically ingenuous use of *rasgueado* and *tambura* in the *Finale*, to name just a few. While I in no way wish for my neglect of these issues to be interpreted as a sign of my deeming them unimportant, I nevertheless feel that these elements are somewhat superficial (if no less an important part of its *gestalt*), and consequently, not directly responsible for the *gravitas* that I feel is inherent in this work. While the “exterior” of the piece is undeniably beautiful, it is the consistent, thoughtful use of musical language; its intricacies; and interconnectedness that make the *Sonata* such a substantial work, and that successfully unifies its four movements into a strong, cohesive artistic statement.

Additionally, it’s important to consider that almost all of these points would be moot if it weren’t for the success of the work on the instrument. While a challenging and virtuosic piece in the purest sense, Ginastera has found a way to bring a variety of rich sonorities out of the guitar. The insistent use of quartal harmony and frequent open
strings ensures that most of the fully voiced chords and sequences he writes will sound with power and resonance when necessary. Furthermore, as the passages and chord shapes map so idiomatically onto the instrument, it is possible for the performer to play the music with minimal risk of incurring holes or gaps in the texture due to awkward shifts or impractical fingerings.

As discussed previously and throughout this essay, it is exactly these musical strengths and subtleties that have typically been lacking in much of the guitar repertoire, whereas pieces that contain many of the superficial “bells and whistles” of gratuitous virtuosity are in no short supply. Consequently, my examination of this work is intended to reveal that the guitar is, as a medium of artistic expression, capable of accommodating and expressing a wide variety of ideas — both intellectually refined and viscerally effective — into a synergistically reconciled whole.

**Luciano Berio: Sequenza XI**

Luciano Berio’s *Sequenza XI*, completed in February 1988 for the guitarist Eliot Fisk, is a towering work in the modern guitar repertory, as much for its virtuosity as for its unique idiomatic rendering on the guitar of a highly complex and abstract musical language. In spite of this abstraction, however, the work draws upon a deep harmonic conception and maintains a rich, colorful façade, both of which contribute to its impact as a dramatic and highly effective work. A single movement lasting approximately fifteen minutes, it shares common ground with the other thirteen pieces comprising the composer’s famous *Sequenza* series, namely in its attempt to engage virtuosic technique
while still remaining idiomatic to the particular instrument for which it was composed.\(^{62}\)

It is interesting that the *Sequenza XI* should appear so late in Berio’s oeuvre. Given the technical complexities of the guitar alluded to throughout this essay, and the fact that two of the last three works in the *Sequenza* series (*XII* and *XIII* for bassoon and accordion, respectively) represent instruments at least equal to the guitar in their inherent idiosyncrasies, one may be tempted to infer that like Ginastera, Berio was not ready to reconcile with these difficulties until later in his life. Alternatively — and in keeping with the more pedestrian aspect of the guitar’s place in classical music — perhaps he simply turned to it only after the supply of more standard, conventional instruments had been exhausted!

Regardless of Berio’s creative motivations, the *Sequenza XI* is nonetheless remarkable. The overall sonic fabric of the piece at first seems endless in its fractal-like intricacies, but it is still easy to discern a few basic, motivic “elements.” If we use the science of chemistry as a metaphor, we could say that these “elements” then combine to create more complex “compounds,” which in turn join with one another like links in a chain to create the subsequently larger episodes and formal divisions of the piece. It is the different combinations and temporal juxtapositions of these basic elements that lend the piece its enormous textural and dramatic variety while still allowing it to remain a convincing and cohesive totality.

The *Sequenza XI* seems to consist of three primary elements, as shown in *Examples 3.16a–3.16c*. While there are certainly many more characteristic motives and

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sonorities infused throughout the work, I perceive these other “compounds” as being variations, or derivatives of these three “primary elements.”

**Example 3.16a:** Berio; *Sequenza XI,* “Element A,” passage 1.1–1.2

The first of the primary elements begins the work, and is identified chiefly by its vertical, chordal composition. It is further defined by its own specific harmonic identity, which relies heavily on the use of the guitar’s open strings, and the rather delicate sonority that Berio ascribes to it throughout the piece. Element B, which first occurs at 1.2, takes this chordal idea and prolongs it linearly through the use of *rasgueado,* which in contrast to Element A is both violent and sonically sustained.

**Example 3.16b:** Berio; *Sequenza XI,* “Element B,” passage 1.2–1.3

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63 As the score to *Sequenza XI* contains no barlines, locations within the music are given as a combination of page and system number. Thus, an indication of 1.2 means page one, second system; 7.4 means page 7, fourth system; etc.
The last element of the group, first encountered at the end of 1.4, unravels this more vertical approach through a rising melodic figure that ends in a filigree-like, three-note trill.

**Example 3.16c:** Berio; *Sequenza XI,* “Element C,” passage 1.4

Similar to the vertical chords that begin the work, Element C also embodies a unique and very specific harmonic function, although a very different one than that which is suggested by the chords in *Example 3.16a.* I will return to this shortly, but the harmonic identity of Element C is significant in that it serves as an “alter ego” to the harmonic sound world of Element A. The duality that is created is exploited to great effect throughout *Sequenza XI,* and is in large part responsible for the range of contrast inherent throughout the work.

Finally, regarding these fundamental elements, it is worth considering that Elements A and C can each be distilled down into two smaller constituent “units,” and in both cases, one of these units seems to be imbued with a “transitional” quality. In the case of Element A, the chords that are performed *tambura* — and the soft percussive effect that results — seem to bridge the general world of Element A with the percussive *rasgueado* effect that characterizes Element B. For Element C, the transitional unit is the ascending figure that leads to the three-note trill. Given its arpeggio-like construction, it can easily be interpreted as a linear “unfolding” of the previous elements’ more vertical quality. This type of interplay between elements is visible throughout the opening of the
piece, where all three of these elements first appear, connected by their transitional “units.”

In addition to these fundamental motives, there are numerous other sonic events that assert their importance through the use of repetition, and which can best be described as a “fusion” of these initial elements. Among these are the single note rasgueado and Bartók pizzicato figures that are followed by rich chords, used extensively in the section from 2.5–3.2 and illustrated in Example 3.17.

**Example 3.17:** Berio; *Sequenza XI; “fusion” of Elements B and A, passage 2.5–3.2

![Example 3.17](image)

Naturally, this small device seems to draw from the rasgueado quality of Element B and the more chordal sonority of Element A, with other instances following soon after. For example, in 3.6–3.7, Berio writes a linear melodic fragment that alternates between three chromatic notes (similar to C) but embeds them in a single-note rasgueado texture (similar to B).

**Example 3.18:** Berio; *Sequenza XI; “fusion” of Elements B and C, passage 3.6-3.7

![Example 3.18](image)
Additionally, the extensive use of tremolo throughout the section lasting from 4.1–5.4 embodies these same qualities: the repeated note of the tremolo echoes the repetition inherent in the rasgueado of Element B, while the bottom “accompaniment voice” carries over the harmonic element from the ascending figure of Element C (see Example 3.22).  

Regarding the harmonic language of the Sequenza XI, it can be parsed largely into two specific and contrasting dialects: the first is characterized as being somewhat lush and quasi-tonal, and centered around the open string pitches of the guitar. This is, incidentally, the salient harmonic feature of Element A. The other is derived from a twelve-tone set divided into two distinct hexachords. This approach is manifested in the harmonic construction of Element C. Paul Roberts, in his essay on Berio’s Chemins series, describes the harmonic world of Sequenza XI:

The innate sense of tonality that emanates from the resonance of the guitar’s open strings — and which has therefore always conditioned its use — was seen by Berio as the ‘damnation’ of the instrument. Naturally viewed in a positive way, this was a feature to be exploited. Thus Berio devised a harmonic scheme that draws on tonal references inherent in the instrument, together with a more complex, distant harmony, using a dodecaphonic series consisting of six tritones used in conjunction with each of the open strings. This creates a very rich harmonic sound-world… The duality of the harmony (tonal–non-tonal) is reflected in the application of a contrasting series of playing techniques, derived from flamenco and classical guitar techniques.  

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64 The use of the term tremolo, both here and in the context of classical guitar music in general, usually refers to the rapid execution of the same note with the right hand fingers. Often, the right hand thumb plays an additional voice underneath the tremolo line to create a counter-melody or accompaniment figure.

65 Paul Roberts, “The Chemins Series,” in Berio’s Sequenzas, ed. Janet K. Halfyard (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 130. Berio’s Chemins series is a group of works for solo instrument and orchestra/ensemble that use the Sequenzas as their point of departure. In the applied citation, Roberts is discussing Sequenza XI — and its inherent harmonic language — within the context of Chemins V, the work in the series that uses the guitar and is based upon Sequenza XI.
Regarding the two hexachords comprising the dodecaphonic aggregate, they are each notable for their intervallic construction, which relies heavily on both the tritone and the perfect 4\textsuperscript{th}.\footnote{For the sake of the following discussion, intervallic inversions are treated as equals, so a P4\textsuperscript{th} = a P5\textsuperscript{th}, a m3\textsuperscript{rd} = a M6\textsuperscript{th}, etc.} In his excellent essay “A Polyphonic Way of Listening In and Out of Focus: Berio’s \textit{Sequenza XI} for Guitar,” Mark D. Porcaro illustrates each of these distinct hexachords, and reveals the underlying intervallic construction that makes them unique.\footnote{Mark D. Porcaro, “A Polyphonic Way of Listening In and Out of Focus: Berio’s \textit{Sequenza XI} for Guitar” in \textit{Berio’s Sequenzas}, ed. Janet K. Halfyard, (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 266.}

\textbf{Example 3.19a:} Berio, \textit{Sequenza XI}, Hexachord A

\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{hexachord-a}

\textbf{Example 3.19b:} Berio, \textit{Sequenza XI}, Hexachord B

\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{hexachord-b}

Previously, I asserted that Element C contained its own unique harmonic identity. Indeed, one will notice upon examination of this figure (Example 3.16c) that it specifically embodies Hexachord A, illustrated in Example 3.19a. It is worth noting that these two hexachords often appear in their relative distinct sets, but Berio will often borrow one or two notes from the other set “in order to blur the boundary ever so slightly
between the two hexachords.”68 For example, beginning in the middle of 1.5, what begins
as a statement of Hexachord A is infused with the note E, a member of Hexachord B.
This, in turn, is followed by a complete statement of Hexachord B, which then descends
through a passage containing notes from both collections.

Example 3.20: Berio; Sequenza XI; hexachord mixture, passage 1.5

I also stated earlier that the tremolo section beginning in 4.1 combined traces of
Element B with the harmonic resonance of Element C. Nowhere throughout the section is
this more apparent than in the brief episode which begins at the end of 4.5 and proceeds
through 4.6. Here, we see two distinct iterations of these hexachords in the lower voice,
pitted against the note G, the open third string of the guitar.

Example 3.21: Berio; Sequenza XI; hexachords in context, passage 4.5–4.6

Consequently, given the fact that Element C contains the first manifestation of
this specific use of dodecaphonic harmony, and that this harmony manifests itself
prominently throughout the work through its linear identity, it seems that most all of the

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68 Porcaro, 265.
more “melodic” sequences in *Sequenza XI* can be traced, at least to some extent, to this specific element.

As stated earlier, the harmonic treatment of Element A is derived largely from the open string sonority of the guitar. A kind of far-flung tonality seems almost audible, although it is admitted to be abstracted to a great degree. If the passage is parsed in terms of a somewhat more conventional tonal language, the harmonic content of Element A seems to reside somewhere within the confines of E minor, a key strongly suggested by the guitar’s open strings. This idea is further supported by the almost exclusive use of notes contained in the E minor mode throughout the section, the one exception being the F♯ that occurs towards the end.

**Example 3.22:** Berio, *Sequenza XI*, implied E minor collection of Element A

The note E, which is the lowest open string of the guitar and the bass tone of the opening chord of the work, is the dominant note throughout Element A, and soon asserts itself in the upper tessitura, where its registrable solitude imbues it with even greater significance. Concurrently, the notes of Eb and D♯ that pervade the passage can be said to serve — in a sense — like a leading tones to E. This seems most apparent in the opening, when the fifth chord of the work, containing an Eb, moves to the sixth chord containing the F♯.
Example 3.23: Berio; Sequenza XI; “tonicization” of E₃, opening chords at 1.1

As stated above, the effect inherent in this passage is enhanced by the fact that the tonicized E₃ is now in a new, upper octave, leading the ear to perceive it as the “resolution” while simultaneously depriving the E♭ that occurs in the bottom of the chord of its previous “leading tone” tendency. Instead, it becomes subsumed and ultimately dissolved in the surrounding diatonic, minor mode sonority.⁶⁹

This also seems apparent later in the passage, although in this latter case, the E₃ is present in both chords, and suggests a sort of “pedal tone” in the upper tessitura that creates friction with the D♯ in the bass. Although certainly not a resolution in the conventional sense, the movement of D♯ to D₃ in the following chord, and the relatively stable sound of the resulting harmony, leads one to believe that the E has been properly contextualized.

⁶⁹ The use of the word “tonicization,” with all that it implies, should not be taken too literally in this context. A word like “tonalization” might be more appropriate, as it suggests a strong sense of tonality without denoting a definitive tonic/dominant relationship.
Example 3.24: Berio; *Sequenza XI*; “more tonicization” of E, opening chords at 1.2

![Example 3.24: Berio; *Sequenza XI*; “more tonicization” of E, opening chords at 1.2](image)

In a final gesture of conjecture, the low F that jumps up to the cluster at the end of the phrase also seems to carry a significant hint of conventional tonality, in that it seems to tonicize the F♯!

The use of conventional tonal language to describe the opening of the *Sequenza XI* is perhaps somewhat controversial, but I nevertheless “feel” the inherent pull of these voice leading tendencies upon hearing the work. This illusion (if it may indeed be called as such) is further supported by the fact that all of the chords that comprise the Element A are bound together either by common tones, or their use of open strings. As Porcaro states:

> When one chord moves to another in this section, Berio retains almost always three common tones and/or three open strings. In fact, this section never employs chords that do not contain at least one open string. Although the guitar can perform six-voice chords that do not use open strings, Berio never uses such chords. Because of this every chord, whether four or six voices, shares at least one common tone with every other chord…

> Berio’s concern for logical voice leading is evident mainly in the inner voices where one traditionally looks for well thought-out voice leading. ⁷⁰

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⁷⁰ Porcaro, 261.
Although the two approaches to harmony in *Sequenza XI* are unique relative to one another, it is worth noting that from an intervallic perspective, they share many things in common. As Roberts asserts above, the intervals formed by the guitar’s open strings — mostly P4ths with a M3rd between the third and second strings — is reflected in the intervallic makeup of the two hexachords, specifically in the relationships C♯→F♯ and C♭→F♭ in Hexachord A, and the E→G# and D→A in Hexachord B (*Examples 3.19a–3.19b*). The primary difference between the two approaches, at least from a theoretical standpoint, seems to be in the suffusion of tritones that permeate both hexachords, but a precursory examination of the passage comprising Element A shows that these chords are also rife with tritones. Consequently, it seems that instead of forging two completely separate harmonic worlds, Berio has actually found a way to exploit two different facets of the same one — much like night and day. As Porcaro states, “The augmented fourth, or tritone, acts as ‘the passport between the two far-flung harmonic territories’ of the perfect fourth tuning of the guitar and a ‘different’ harmony of Berio’s design.”71 Additionally, and as a consequence of their shared similarities, the two different harmonic worlds Berio constructs in *Sequenza XI* seem to play off one another, and further serve to enhance the work’s overall formal unity while providing the necessary contrast required to make it both vibrant and engaging.

**Harmonic Threads and “Little Worlds”**

The interest that the major composers of the 20th century began to take in the guitar — at the prodding of Segovia, Bream, Barbosa-Lima, Fisk, and many others —

71 Porcaro, 259. The embedded quotations are Berio’s own words as Porcaro cites them from: Berio, Luciano, *Sequenzas*, (Deutsche Grammophon, 1998), CD liner notes, 20.
vastly expanded the quality of repertoire for the instrument. This may seem a subjective assessment, and some will undoubtedly disagree, but in determining the degree of quality exhibited in these works, one must consider the extent to which the relative state of the art is reflected in them. In the pieces of Britten, Ginastera, and Berio, we see compositional techniques employed on the guitar — local, formal, melodic, and harmonic — that one would certainly encounter in the larger works of these same composers and their contemporaries, whether for solo piano or symphony orchestra. Obviously, the guitar’s maturation during the 20th century is as much a consequence of its design as it is the composers who were writing for it: the rise of bitonality and atonality unlocked and expanded a world of possibilities on the instrument for which it is well-suited. For the first time, the guitar could flexibly conform to and accommodate the evolving musical language of the time, given some knowledge on the part of the composer. This is in stark contrast to the 19th century, when formal expansion dictated by complex triadic harmony (as exhibited by Beethoven and others) could scarcely be realized on the instrument.

It is perhaps beneficial at this time to once again revisit the quote of Eliot Fisk that has become a trope throughout this essay — his comment pertaining to the difficulty inherent in transcribing much 19th century music for other instruments to the guitar, and its various components: transpositions by a 5th, mediant modulations, and extreme sharp and flat key signatures.72 When considering the works presented in this chapter, especially regarding their respective harmonic content, one must notice that they all share a similar harmonic thread — preponderance for the interval of a perfect 4th.73 It is worth

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72 Tosone, 42. See page 21 of this essay to review the particular quote in context.
73 *Musingly*, the first movement of Britten’s *Nocturnal*, admittedly does not emphatically exhibit this trait, however, inspection of the other movements comprising the work show that the P4th figures heavily in its harmonic conception.
considering how this interval comes into play specifically on the guitar, as the instrument is largely tuned in 4ths. While the various syntactical and developmental techniques that each of these composers employ are enough to show discriminating compositional minds at work, it is the resulting sound of the music that makes their work so effective. In this context, it could be argued that the tendency toward this specific interval on the guitar contributes greatly to the music’s resultant resonant quality, its overall impression, and is in some part responsible for its enduring high cultural esteem.

I once performed a solo classical guitar concert, after which a friend commented: “When you start, it sounds so quiet, but once you get used to it, it seems to inhabit its own little world!” He was, of course, referring to the guitar, and the more immediate sonic impressions that it made on him as a listener. The anecdote is important, as it illustrates a salient point. Although the instrument may be limited in its volume producing capacity — and although it does provide a wealth of various challenges to performers and composers alike — it is nonetheless an expressive vehicle capable of extraordinary diversity and nuance. If these traits seem lacking in much of the 19th century guitar repertoire, this same criticism cannot be made so easily for much of the repertoire that comes of age in the 20th. Certainly not all guitar pieces written in more recent times have risen to the level of “great works,” indeed, much modern guitar music continues to fall short of the thin line that distinguishes “high quality” pieces from mediocrity, but the same fate could easily be said of any new repertoire for any instrument or performing force.

The three pieces presented in this chapter were chosen because of their enduring popularity among both performers and scholars, and although my discussions are fixated
primarily on one particular fragment of each piece *(Musingly from the Nocturnal, Esordio from Ginastera’s Sonata, and a fairly cursory take on the Sequenza)* the fact that so much can be said about such relatively small excerpts speaks volumes about the inherent “little world” that exists within each of them. Each piece is sufficient enough in content to warrant further analytical study, of course, but as in Chapter 2, I believe that the details discussed in each devoted component of this preceding chapter are sufficiently adequate to illustrate the guitar’s ability to accommodate and adapt to the highest creative aspirations and demands of the composers herein represented. Of course, the credit for the work goes to the composers themselves rather than to the instrument, which does little more than provide an apparatus from which composers draw forth their own artistic inventions. Nonetheless, considering the fact that the guitar has often been considered to be lacking in such expressive and creative resources, it seems appropriate to clearly demonstrate the fallacy of such prejudice — a task that these specific works seem to accomplish with ease.
Chapter 4: Epilogue

“When serious art loses track of its roots in the vernacular, then it begins to atrophy.”

—John Adams

Revolution, Take 2

In Chapter 1, I recounted a quote by Craig H. Russell, who asserted that the chordal and vertical approach to music engendered by the guitar in the early 17th century was a harbinger of a radical shift in approach to music composition. The significance of this change — described in its simplest terms as a shift in emphasis from polyphony to harmony as the core structural concept in the creation of music — would mark one of the single biggest advancements in musical thought and culture, one whose repercussions are still being felt today.

In light of this — and the fact that history is said to repeat itself — it is perhaps not so surprising that the guitar would once again find itself in the middle of a musical revolution in the 20th century. While stylistic diversity could be considered a hallmark of music in more contemporary times — with each successive genre of music displaying exponential numbers of fractured sub-genres — few could disagree that the "electrification" of music, and all that such a concept entails, would be the watershed event that would once again forever change the role that music played in contemporary society. While the invention of the microphone was perhaps the first fundamental

74 www.boosey.com. Accessed January 9, 2011. The quote was part of a composer “blurb” window and seemed particularly appropriate, given the content of this chapter.
75 Russell, 153. See page 4 of this essay to review the particular quote in context.
machine required to initiate this transition,\textsuperscript{76} it did not take long for the guitar to find its place among this rapidly growing revolution.

While the invention of the electric guitar in the early 1930s was no doubt an agent of change for a variety of different musical styles, perhaps the most significant consequence of its influence could be felt in the invention and development of rock music. In light of the many lowbrow cultural associations the guitar has been associated with throughout its history, it is worth noting that at the time of its birth in the 1950s, rock and roll was perhaps considered the “lowest of the low.” Tim Brookes recounts the commentary of one well-established Nashville session guitarist — one who was no doubt more attuned to playing and recording the “country-western” repertoire that was especially popular among the rural white class at the time — with the following: “Rock and roll, that’s the lowest… You feel like a prostitute doing those types of dates. You come in there, and you’re playing garbage, and you know that man’s out to make money and he’s selling crap to the teen market. That’s probably the lowest form, the worst music.”\textsuperscript{77} With specific regards to the guitar and the role it played in the beginning of the “age of rock,” Brookes goes on to assert:

> Rock and roll was about black music and white rural music finding an audience in white urban teenagers, but the resistance to the guitar in particular was based on class rather than on race prejudice. Rockers like Elvis, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Carl Perkins were viewed — not only in the North — as white trash, and the fact that many of them were playing guitars only added to the evidence that they were no better than hillbillies.\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{76} A distinction should be made between the first recording devices. The phonograph cylinder, invented by Tomas Edison in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century, was a \textit{mechanical} device, whereas \textit{electrical} recording came to prominence in the 1920s.
\textsuperscript{77} Brookes, 166.
\textsuperscript{78} Brookes, 176-177.
White trash, hillbillies, *charlatans* and *saltimbanques* — whatever one wishes to call them — the fevered frenzy that would mark the advent of the “age of rock” had begun, and the pantheon of famous, globally iconic artists that followed in its wake, for the most part, all tended to gravitate towards playing the same instrument.

**A Reflection on the Present**

In spite of its proletarian roots, the influence of rock music in the classical world is slowly becoming manifest as the wheel of progress roll forward. In as far as this is a “revolution,” one must consider the minimalist movement of the late 60s and early 70s to have been a Trojan Horse of sorts, ushering a new approach into the prevailing modernist aesthetic that had dominated much of classical music since the 1920s. Minimalism, with its steady, insistent pulse, relatively simple harmonic conception, and relentless repetition, was both a world away from rock and yet, by virtue of its defining characteristics, connected to it on some deep, fundamental level. Furthermore, the insistence of minimalist composers on bucking the system of established ensembles and orchestras in favor of forming their own ensembles, more closely resembled the 3-, 4-, and 5-piece combo bands sprouting up all over the country, driven in no small part by the popularity of rock and roll and the electric guitar.

It is in the following generation, however, that we begin to see the electric guitar asserted even more aggressively. The composers and performers who were born in the 1950s, and who grew up on a steady diet of rock music and the cultural energy it produced have now matured, and use the electric guitar and reference rock and roll almost more out of necessity than out of choice. As this essay has focused almost exclusively on the *classical* guitar, one may be provoked to ask what relevance the latter
has in a contemporary musical world that seems poised to embrace the electric guitar and
the rock traditions it symbolizes. After all, the classical guitar seems to have little in
common with its electron-steroid cousin. While I recognize that there is a sharp divide
between the traditions of classical and electric guitar playing, in terms of technique,
repertoire, and musical context, I also believe they are deeply connected. The electric
guitar, invented primarily as a way for the guitar to be used in conjunction with other
instruments that would otherwise overpower it, most likely would never have been
conceived of were it not for the popularity of the guitar in general, which has seemingly
never waned since it was invented in medieval times.

Concerning the electric guitar and the perceived divide between it and its relative,
the classical guitar, one need only to look at the present state of affairs to see that this gap
is to some extent closing, or perhaps not even that wide to begin with. Young people who
have grown up on a steady diet of rock music and the electric guitar are turning in droves
towards the study of the classical guitar once they enter college. From the other side,
guitarists who studied classical guitar throughout college and even graduate school are
often turning towards playing the electric guitar once they leave the conservatory and
encounter the reality of making a life in music. Younger composers are eager to
capitalize on the symbolic significance of the electric guitar, in addition to writing for a
sonically diverse instrument with which they feel a close cultural (and perhaps even
nostalgic) bond. Since the electric guitar carries no serious acoustical impediments that
cannot at least theoretically be overcome, they see no reason why the instrument should
not be included in more standard, classical music contexts.
Meanwhile, the classical guitar, in spite of its inherent challenges, continues to flourish, with organizations, foundations, and festivals all over the world dedicated to its preservation, promotion, and growth. The same cannot be said for virtually any other instrument, including the piano and the violin, two instruments whose popularity perhaps most closely approaches — but still falls far short — of the guitar. The charm first extolled by Berlioz continues to be a part of the instrument’s character, and in this author’s experience, people everywhere continue to be fascinated and fulfilled on hearing great music played well upon the instrument. All these circumstances lead to more music being written, and perhaps even ultimately, the final reconciliation between an instrument whose time has come and an established cultural institution that has thus far kept it at a distance.
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