

### **The early six-string guitar.**

The transition from the Baroque five-course guitar to a recognizably modern instrument with six single strings took place gradually during the second half of the 18th century and the first decades of the 19th century in Spain, France and Italy. A deep-bodied instrument in the Gemeentemuseum (The Hague) labelled 'Francisco Sanguino, me fecit. En Sevilla año de 1759' is the earliest known six-course instrument, and is also notable for pioneering the use of fan-strutting to strengthen the table. Documents relating to the sale of musical instruments in Spain show that the six-course guitar became increasingly common from 1760 onwards, steadily superseding the five-course instrument, and was the most common form of guitar through Iberia by the 1790s. In Paris, the Italian-born guitarist Giacomo Merchi was still recommending the traditional five double-course in *Le guide des écoliers de guitarre* (c1761), but by 1777 (in his *Traité des agréments de la musique exécutés sur le guitarre*) was advocating 'my manner of stringing the guitar with single strings ... single strings are easier to put in tune, and to pluck cleanly; moreover, they render pure, strong and smooth sounds, approaching those of the harp; above all if one uses slightly thicker strings'. Many of Merchi's Parisian contemporaries still favoured five double-courses – for example Bailleux (1773) and Baillon (1781) – while six double-courses remained the standard form of stringing in Spain well into the 19th century, and it seems to have been guitarists from Italy and southern France who were primarily responsible for the introduction of single strings, preferring the unambiguous bass notes that they produced, and initially using them on instruments originally intended for double-courses. By 1785, makers in Marseilles and Naples were building guitars specifically intended for six single strings (the often-repeated claim that Naumann, Kapellmeister at Dresden, was responsible for the addition of the lower E string at some point after 1688 can therefore safely be dismissed), and this new design gradually came into general use throughout much of Europe.

Changes in the basic instrument were many, and the guitar lost much that it had in common with the lute, establishing during the early decades of the 19th century the form that was to develop into the modern guitar. Machine heads were used instead of wooden pegs, fixed frets (first ivory or ebony, then metal) instead of gut; an open soundhole replaced the rose; the bridge was raised to a higher position (and a saddle and pins introduced to fasten the strings); and the neck became narrower. The flat back became standard, and proportions of the instrument changed to allow the positioning of the 12th fret at the junction of body and neck. Separate fingerboards were introduced, at first flush with the table, later raised to lie 2 mm or so above it. The rectangular peghead gave way to heads of various designs, often a distinguishing mark of the maker. Generally, lavish decoration disappeared, though some ornate guitars were made in the 19th century and the use of fan-strutting was further developed in six-course guitars made in Cádiz by José Pagés and Josef Benedit (figs.5c and 12). As well as fan-strutting in the lower half of the table, a cross-strutting system appeared in the part of the table above the soundhole. Other important makers of this period were René François Lacôte of Paris and Louis Panormo, active in London.

Instruction books reveal that there was no standard approach to playing technique. Earlier traditions persisted; the right hand was still supported on the table (on some instruments a piece of ebony was let into the table to prevent wear), although Nicario Jauralde (*A Complete Preceptor for the Spanish Guitar*) warned against resting the little finger on the table as this prevents the hand moving for ‘changes in Piano and Forte’ and inhibits ‘the other fingers acting with Agility’. Right-hand finger movement was still confined mainly to the thumb and first two fingers. The technique for attacking the strings was normally *tirando*, with the fingertips rising after plucking; *apoyando*, in which the finger brushes past the string and rests on the string below, was little mentioned and apparently not generally applied. Performers were divided over whether or not to employ the fingernails in the production of sound; Fernando Sor (1778–1839), the leading Spanish player, dispensed with nails, while his compatriot, Dionysio Aguado (1784–1849), employed them. The left-hand thumb was sometimes used to fret notes on the lowest (E) string, a technique made possible by the narrow fingerboard. The instrument was held in a variety of ways, and was often supported by a strap round the player’s neck; Aguado even invented a special stand – the tripodion – on which to rest the instrument.

Tablature was abandoned in the second half of the 18th century, with staff notation superseding it, at first in instruction books and song accompaniments. The earliest staff notation for guitar evolved in France and in Italy, the notational conventions for violin music being evident in early solo pieces for 6-string – or, as it is now known, classical – guitar. The convention of notating guitar music on one staff headed by the G clef, the actual sounds being an octave below written pitch, is still in use.

The first published music for six-course guitar appeared in Spain in 1780, the date of *Obra para guitarra de seis órdenes* by Antonio Ballesteros. Further methods appeared in 1799: Fernando Ferandiere’s *Arte de tocar la guitarra española* and Federico Moretti’s *Principios para tocar la guitarra de seis órdenes*. In this latter work, Moretti (a Neapolitan in the service of the Spanish court) provides an insight into the difference between the instruments in general use in Spain and Italy at the end of the 18th century:

although I use the guitar of seven single strings, it seemed more appropriate to accommodate these Principles to six courses, that being what is generally played in Spain: this same reason obliged me to publish them in Italian, in 1792, adapted for the guitar with five strings, because at that time the one with six was not known in Italy.

Both Sor and Aguado were indebted to Moretti for making them aware of the possibility of part-writing for the guitar, and the two became very active outside their native Spain. Aguado, whose *Escuela de guitarra* was published in Madrid in 1825, settled for a while in Paris, but Sor pursued the career of a travelling recitalist, bringing the guitar to a much wider audience. Before leaving Spain, Sor had acquired some reputation as a composer; his opera *Telemaco nell’isola di Calipsowas* was successfully staged in Barcelona in 1796. In Madrid, Sor’s patron was the Duchess of Alba. Also living in Madrid was Boccherini, who, inspired by the enthusiasm of his patron, the Marquis of Benavente, made arrangements of several of his quintets to include the guitar.

Sor left Spain in 1813, a move dictated by the political circumstances, and headed for Paris, where he stayed for two years. He visited London, where he gave several recitals, returning to Paris for a production of his ballet *Cendrillon*. The success of this work enabled him to visit Moscow and St Petersburg, where he played before the court. He then returned to Paris and, except for a further visit to London, resided there until his death in 1839. Paris was one of the main centres of interest in the guitar, and several other virtuoso performers settled there, including Matteo Carcassi (1792–1853) and Ferdinando Carulli (1770–1841). The latter was responsible for *L'harmonie appliquée à la guitare* (1825), the only known theoretical work for the instrument of the early 19th century. It is limited in scope, offering not much more than chordal and arpeggio accompaniment, typical of much guitar music of the period. Paganini abandoned the violin for a while in favour of the guitar, for which he composed several works. A French guitar made by Grobert bears the signatures of Paganini and Berlioz. The latter, a competent guitarist, mentioned the instrument briefly in his *Grand traité d'instrumentation et d'orchestration modernes* op.10 (1843), commenting that 'it is almost impossible to write well for the guitar without being a player on the instrument'.

The most important Italian guitarist was Mauro Giuliani (1781–1829). He first achieved fame in Vienna, where he was established from 1806 to 1819. As well as giving solo recitals, Giuliani appeared with the pianists Hummel and Moscheles and the violinist Mayseder. In 1819 he returned to Italy, settling in Rome and later Naples, where he continued to give recitals. His daughter Emilia was also a talented guitarist, and they performed together in public. Vienna, like Paris, had many enthusiastic guitarists, and much simple music was published to cater for the demand: Leonhard von Call produced many pieces of this kind, as did Diabelli. Although Francesco Chabran was teaching (and composing for) the guitar in London during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, it was not until 1815, with the arrival in London of Sor (and of the Italian virtuoso Giuseppe Anelli) that enthusiasm for the instrument became widespread. Numerous tutors were published during the first third of the 19th century (fig.14), and the *Giulianiad* (one of the earliest journals devoted to the guitar) appeared in 1833. Although interest waned in the second half of the century, the publications – into the 1890s – of Mme Sidney Pratten (Catharina Josepha Pelzer), the leading English performer, reveal that there was still a public for the guitar used in a facile way. During the final decade of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th, amateur plucked instrument orchestras enjoyed great popularity throughout Europe and the USA, with dozens of guitars and mandolins (and sometimes banjos) being used to perform original works and transcriptions of light classical music. Britain, France, Germany, Italy and the USA had many hundreds of such orchestras, the best of them competing in national and international festivals.

The majority of 19th-century publications were designed to acquaint the public with what was virtually a new instrument; as such many are didactic, and also limited in scope, as it soon became clear that few amateurs were sufficiently dedicated to master the more demanding works of the guitarist-composers. The popularity of the guitar lay in the ease with which one could manage a simple accompaniment to a song, and many of the practical tutors were limited to expounding the fundamental skills needed to achieve this. The simple pieces that take the performer a stage beyond this elementary level contain

many clichés and, as they are the products of guitarists, generally lie easily under the fingers. At a higher level are the studies designed to prepare the performer for recital works; most successful in this context are those by Aguado, Carcassi, Napoléon Coste and Sor, all of which are still of great value to students. It is to the guitarists themselves that one must turn for the best compositions from this period. Although composers of stature were acquainted with the guitar, they wrote nothing for it, and Berlioz's criticism of non-playing composers, that they 'give it things to play ... of small effect', is valid. The achievements of Sor and Giuliani in establishing a repertory of large-scale works is the most notable feature of this period. Their output ranges from easy pieces – always in demand by the publishers – to extended works for the solo instrument and diverse combinations of instruments. Giuliani composed many variation sets, three concertos (opp.30, 36 and 70), a number of duos for guitar and violin or flute, a work for guitar, violin and cello (op.19), and a set of three pieces for guitar with string quartet (op.65). Sor's textures are sometimes more complex than Giuliani's, and richer in harmonic variety. In his sonatas opp.22 and 25 Sor introduced a larger number of themes than is usual in this form, thereby compensating for the restrictions in development imposed by the limitations of the instrument. His most successful composition was the Variations on a Theme of Mozart op.9, a virtuoso showpiece that neatly summarizes the possibilities of early 19th-century classical guitar technique and remains the most frequently performed piece of guitar music of the period. Although they cannot be classed as works of great stature, the compositions of the early 19th-century guitarists are often charming, elegant and vivacious enough to be heard with pleasure.

**Ex.3** Fernando Sor: 'Andante largo', *Six petites pièces* op.5 no.5 (?1824)

The image displays a musical score for a piece by Fernando Sor. The score is written on four staves, each beginning with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a time signature of 2/4. The music is characterized by a slow, spacious feel, consistent with the 'Andante largo' tempo marking. The first staff features a series of chords and eighth-note patterns. The second staff includes a prominent sixteenth-note run marked with a '6' above it, indicating a sextuplet. The third and fourth staves continue the melodic and harmonic development with various rhythmic values and chordal textures. The notation includes slurs, ties, and dynamic markings such as 'p' (piano) and 'f' (forte).