

A Study of the Solo Guitar Répertoire of the Early Nineteenth Century

By

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A revolution took place in the guitar world during the late 18th century and lasted into the first few decades of the 19th century. Between, approximately, 1760 and 1820 the six-string guitar was gradually replacing the five-course Baroque instrument. The double-courses were abandoned in favor of single strings and structural changes, such as fan-bracing, were improving the sound of the guitar. Finally, technological improvements, such as metal tuners, were making for a more reliable instrument.

This was also a period of radical transition for the repertoire of the instrument as well as its place in the musical world. The technical and musical approach to the instrument was changing along with its physicality. Players and composers were taking full advantage of this “new” instrument’s potential. The purpose of this paper is to take a look at this important time in the history of the classical guitar. My focus is on the players, composers, and pedagogues of the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century, the period sometimes referred to as the “golden era” of the guitar. Within the context of a survey of the most common musical forms used by guitar composers during the early 19th century, I have traced the development of the répertoire and made observations about the place of the guitar in the social and artistic life of the period. I will also introduce the reader to some of the most influential figures of the early Romantic guitar and survey the most important teaching methods using facsimiles of manuscripts and first publications.