**About guitar composition**

There are two antipodes in the process of composition.

The first takes the musical idea in itself as a basis for the elaboration of a certain work. In the other case, it is the instrument involved (e.g. a guitar) that inspires the composer through improvisation to compose a certain work.

Guitarists often complain that guitar music composers are mostly guitarists themselves and no ‘great composers’ who’ve also written works for ensemble, symphonic orchestra, piano,… and suggest that our repertoire would have been much richer if those ‘big guys’ had written for it.

In the 20th century, the pioneer who established the guitar as a concert instrument, Andrés Segovia, commissioned works by great composers as Ponce, Tansman, Tedesco and others who were no guitarists. Julian Bream continued this work even on a larger scale, commissioning important works by composers of the like of Benjamin Britten (the famous *Nocturnal*).

As the guitar is a very complex instrument to write for, it is necessary for a ‘foreign’ composer to work in close relationship with a guitarist to know what is possible and what is awkward to write. This is nicely illustrated in the foreword of the edition of *The Blue Guitar* by Sir Michael Tippett, where the dedicee Julian Bream describes not without nostalgia the many sessions at the house of the great man. These collaborations have resulted in a rich contribution to the humble repertoire of our instrument.

The following question could arise: What would our repertoire and reputation represent when great composers had written for guitar much earlier? What would the guitar be like if Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert had written big sonatas and concertos for guitar?

Before the 20th century, the guitar had only one golden era around 1900 when Giuliani and Sor flourished as guitar virtuosos who wrote, albeit not the most profound works, splendid and elegant music for the guitar, convincing the nobility at the cultural capitals of Western Europe.

After this, the guitar was defeated by the piano that replaced the guitar in the living-rooms of the distinguished houses. The lute underwent the same fate more than a century earlier, when the harpsichord declared the lute as an old but nice table decoration – but this is material for another article.

Beside this, the guitar has ever remained - and continues to do so on a large scale today – as a ‘popular’ instrument, not fitting well in the serious and formal context of the classical concert hall.

Still I am convinced that it is not the instrument itself, but the playing technique and short tradition that are mostly responsible for this.

When Chopin stated: ‘Nothing is as beautiful as a guitar, except maybe two guitars’. Or Berlioz uttered ‘The guitar is like a harpsichord, but expressive’ or Beethoven declared ‘The guitar is like a little orchestra’, I am sure that these giants would have written for the guitar *if they knew how to play it – but they didn’t.*

But let’s go back to the beginning of this article where I stated this archetypical antithesis between writing with the instrument as a basis, or writing with the abstract musical idea as a leading procedure.

Fact is, that most guitar composers have written for it with the instrument as the inspiring medium, representing the first way of composing just mentioned.

Having speculated a lot about what ‘could have been’, I still think we should not complain about what is: although we don’t have an ‘iron’ repertoire, we have a lot of jewels, composed by the most sensitive musicians. Jewels that don’t pretend to be masterworks, but give this special nourishment our soul seeks for.