



Guitar Collection

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GUITAR FAVOURITES

Albéniz • Torroba • Granados • Falla • Villa-Lobos
Turina • Barrios • Tárrega • Paganini • Myers

Norbert Kraft



Guitar Favourites

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While compiling this collection of “favourite” guitar pieces, many of which I have played for much of my musical life, I realised that not only was it this music which first attracted me to the guitar, but this is the repertoire that has enticed a world of guitar lovers to the instrument’s special charm and magic. These pieces, mostly quite brief, and mainly Hispanic in origin, embody the soul of the guitar.

Perhaps the most popular Spanish music is a handful of pieces by Isaac Albéniz, written originally for the piano, but played more often in transcription on the guitar. In fact, Albéniz did not write any music for the guitar, but clearly had his national instrument in his “mind’s ear” when composing for the piano. Inspired by various regions or cities in Spain, these pieces evoke the haunting and mysterious character that is Spain in every measure. *Asturias*, named after the northern mountainous province, is subtitled *Leyenda (Legend)* and may be the musical telling of a mountain tale, that seems to grow more exaggerated with the building of each phrase. *Mallorca* depicts the beautiful shimmering island in the swaying rhythm of a Barcarolle (boat song), as though Mallorca had been set adrift in the Mediterranean. The writing is very much in the style of the great piano composer, Fryderyk Chopin, and clearly alludes to the fact that Chopin lived for a time in Mallorca. The city of *Sevilla* is the heart of “flamenco country”. Based on one of the fundamental flamenco dances, the *sevillanas*, the lively, rhythmical opening and conclusion suggest a flamenco “fiesta”, but the central section interrupts with the mournful cry of a flamenco singer. These haunting, impromptu melismas, and the suggestion of the tango rhythm, conjure up the dark anguish of the “cante hondo” style.

The twentieth century witnessed an unparalleled revival of the guitar, owing mainly to the pioneering efforts of the great Spanish guitarist Andrés Segovia. Among the first composers to respond to Segovia’s requests for new music were his countrymen, Federico Moreno-Torroba, and Joaquín Turina. Moreno-Torroba

was most famous for his zarzuelas - light, often comic operas which were incredibly popular, with their earthy characters and intrigues. In his *Andante* (from the *Sonatina*), Torroba draws forth a lyricism and sweetness that seems to turn the guitar into a vocal instrument. In contrast to Torroba's large output, Turina wrote only a handful of pieces for the guitar, and almost all are based on flamenco dance forms. The *Fandanguillo*, *op. 36*, uses the *fandango* rhythm stated in the opening measures by drumming on the guitar, and builds to a brilliant climax through a series of improvised sounding figures. The dance-form *Soleares* takes its name from the Spanish word for "solitude" (*soledad*), and depicts loneliness through its repeated rhythms and dark harmonies.

The Paraguayan guitar-composer Agustín Barrios Mangoré, worked in relative isolation in South and Central America, although his music is full of European classical influences, notably those of J.S. Bach, Chopin, and Tárrega. His hundreds of pieces can be divided into three main categories - homages to the Baroque, South American folk-music based pieces, and works in the nineteenth century Romantic style. It is the latter category in which the touching *Barcarole*, *Julia Florida* belongs, with its delicate melodic lines and effusive sentimentality.

Francisco Tárrega's pivotal influence on the classical guitar can still be felt today, as he is considered to be the founder of modern guitar technique. Rather shy of concert performing, Tárrega mainly played for intimate gatherings of friends, and his compositions are primarily brief miniatures, rarely exceeding five minutes in length. The *Mazurkas* played here are modelled after those of Chopin, but instead of the pianist's brooding longing for his Polish homeland, Tárrega's mazurkas reflect the earthy soul of Spain, and his deep love for the guitar. Perhaps the best loved piece of the entire guitar repertoire is *Recuerdos de la Alhambra* (Memories of the Alhambra). Inspired by that beautiful ancient palace in the hills of Granada, Tárrega reflects on the delicately carved, intricate filigree in the very walls of the buildings, through the delicate figurations in this tremolo study. *Rosita* is a bright, perky little Polka, that is full of whimsy. Tárrega makes abundant use of his characteristic *glissandi* - sliding effects that here add to the humour.

In addition to his legendary violinistic prowess, Niccolò Paganini was also an accomplished guitarist. He wrote dozens of pieces for solo guitar, and for guitar in combination with other instruments. The *Romanza* is drawn from the *Grand Sonate* for guitar with violin accompaniment (sic!), which is by far his most intricate guitar writing. The *Sonate's* outer movements exhibit the fireworks we usually associate with this composer, but in this tender *Romanza*, Paganini's melodic gift comes to the fore. In this arrangement for solo guitar, I have incorporated the violin part, which was so scant as to be almost humorous.

Unlike Albéniz, Enrique Granados did not delve into the world of the gypsies and the *cante hondo* of flamenco music. Instead, his musical mind focused on Madrid, and his compositions assume a more aristocratic character, especially in his *Goyescas* for piano, and the *Tonadillas* for voice and piano, inspired by the painter Francisco Goya. However, in the *12 Spanish Dances*, originally for the piano, a number of Andalusian elements appear; in fact, the subtitle of *Danza No. 5* is *Andaluza*.

Manuel de Falla, on the other hand, embraced gypsy and flamenco musical elements, using them in almost all of his works. The *Miller's Dance*, from the ballet *The Three Cornered Hat*, is the flamenco dance-form the *farruca*, and in its original scoring creates the effect of a giant orchestral guitar. It is fitting then, in this transcription, to return the piece to its conceptual home - the guitar.

As the guitar travelled out of Spain to other countries, it not only carried with it its inherently Hispanic musical traits, but also adapted to the indigenous music of its newly adopted home. One of the many places the guitar settled, and was embraced nearly as a 'national instrument', was Brazil, and it found its way into the hands of that country's most important composer, Heitor Villa-Lobos. Though small in number in relation to his entire prolific output, Villa-Lobos' guitar pieces are among the most important in the repertoire. The *Preludes* date from 1940, after the composer had lived in Paris, and are his most often played pieces. Far from simplistic, the *Preludes* are a staple of the guitarist's repertoire, owing to their sheer melodic beauty, and their obvious 'hands on' compositional

elements. Clearly, Villa-Lobos sat with a guitar in his lap as he composed the many parallel chords, harmonics, and other passages so proper to the instrument. *Prelude No. 1* begins with a theme in the low register of the guitar, a sonority used often by Villa-Lobos for its sumptuous expressive beauty. The whimsical stops and starts of *Prelude No. 2* invoke the humourous “capadocia” (a charlatan), to whom this is an homage. The *Douze Etudes*, completed in Paris in 1929, carry a laudatory preface by Segovia, who compared their “nobility, ingenuity, grace, and poetic emotion” to the works of Scarlatti and Chopin. Each Etude uses an aspect of technical skill as its compositional basis, and weaves this together with the magic of Brazilian harmonies and rhythms. *Etude No. 11*, a favourite recital piece, features a central flurry of arpeggios, which incorporates the evocative melody presented in the two outer sections. The last of the set, *Etude No. 12*, uses a curious technique of sliding chord patterns with the left hand alone, without the usual right-hand plucking, thereby forming a superb shifting exercise. In its central section, a haunting, savage-sounding aboriginal theme is presented in rapid repeated notes. This is the liveliest of all of the *Etudes*, and may perhaps depict the festive laughter of the Rio Carnival.

Film composer Stanley Myers used the *Cavatina* in his music score for the movie *The Deer Hunter*, originally played by the great Australian guitarist, John Williams, whose arrangement for solo guitar I play here. This gentle, hymn-like setting of the *Cavatina*’s delicate melody is beautifully expressed by the subtle, inward magic of the guitar.

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Norbert Kraft has been heralded by critics, audiences and fellow musicians as one of the most outstanding guitarists of his generation. A best selling recording artist, with over a dozen CDs and recordings currently available world-wide, Norbert Kraft's award-winning recordings on the Naxos and Chandos labels have won him extraordinary praise. He also serves as the artistic director of the Naxos Guitar Collection. Norbert Kraft is in great demand as a recitalist and concerto soloist; in addition to his touring, he has given a number of Command Performances for dignitaries and head of states, including two of Canada's Prime Ministers and several foreign ambassadors, and was chosen to represent Canada at the World Expo '90 in Osaka, Japan, and at Expo '92 in Sevilla, Spain. A respected educator, Norbert Kraft is a Professor at the University of Toronto, has compiled and edited many musical publications, including the extensively used Royal Conservatory Guitar Series.