

Friday July 27, 7:30pm
Beaver Island Community Center
Opening Night Gala Benefit Concert
Matthew Cochran, guitar

Program Notes

The modern-day acoustic guitar is a fretted instrument, with 6 strings. Considered a chordophone (an instrument producing sound by vibrating strings stretched between two points), the guitar is unique from other string instruments because of its tuning and construction. The inspiration for the modern-day guitar came from several instruments. The gittern was the first guitar-like instrument dating back to the 13th Century in Western Europe. A popular instrument with court musicians and medieval minstrels (performers and entertainers), the gittern was a small round-backed instrument with four pairs of double-strings called courses. Similar to the modern-day guitar, a plectrum (pick) was used to strum the courses to produce sound. The gittern did not hold a place of importance in medieval society, and was considered a folk instrument used to accompany peasant songs. The vihuela is another early ancestor of the modern-day guitar. Originating in 15th and 16th Century Spain, Portugal, and Italy, the vihuela had five or six courses (pairs of strings) made of gut (a type of cord produced from the intestines of sheep or goats). Frets (a raised, horizontal element on the neck) were also a feature of the vihuela allowing different notes to be produced as the fingers pushed strings against the frets. Frets are still seen on the fingerboard of modern-day guitars.

Innovations in the structure and design of the guitar during the Baroque era resulted in the Baroque guitar, a highly respectable instrument of the day. Similar to the vihuela, the Baroque guitar was a five-course string instrument, and the tuning of the Baroque guitar strings (A, D, G, B, E) can still be seen in the top 5 strings of the modern-day guitar. Construction of guitars became more elaborate and ornate during the Baroque era. The most famous Violin maker in history, Antonio Stradivari (1644-1737), built several guitars during the Baroque era, with only five surviving to this day. Spanish Baroque composer Gaspar Sanz (1640-1710) composed over ninety works for guitar, and frequently used the Baroque guitar technique of alternating *punteado* (“plucked”) and *rasgueado* (“strummed”) passages. His Suite from *la Guitarra Espagnola* features both of these styles. 20th Century composer Joaquín Rodrigo (1901-1999) was known to have used themes from Sanz’s works to inspire his own compositions.

The Classical era saw a decline in popularity of the guitar. Composers such as Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) rarely composed for the guitar, and instead featured instruments like the violin and harpsichord. However, the guitar did not lose popularity in Spain. Spanish guitar maker Antonio Torres (1817-1892) was instrumental in many design advances now considered standard for the “classical” acoustic guitar.

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The sixth string was added, wire-wound strings replaced gut strings, metal frets replaced gut frets, the size of the body was increased, the neck was lengthened, and single strings began to replace courses (double-strings). All of these advancements improved the volume, tone, and projection of the instrument. During the Romantic era, the guitar re-emerged as a popular and virtuosic instrument. Improved communication and transportation allowed Spaniards to travel and share the sounds of the guitar, inspiring a new generation of guitar composers. Spanish influence in guitar music stretched far beyond Spain, and can still be heard in modern-day guitar compositions. Both Spanish and Romantic influences are unmistakable in the guitar music of Isaac Albéniz (1860-1909), including his *Sevilla* and *Leyenda* from *Suite Espanola*, Op. 47.

As the 20th Century unfolded, guitar music continued to grow in popularity for composers, performers, and listeners. Joaquín Rodrigo (1901-1999) was influential in bringing the guitar to popularity, and became one of the most important and recognized composers of guitar music in the 20th Century. His *En los trigales*, a work depicting Spanish landscape through music, exhibits the distinctive Spanish influence heard in most of his compositions.

Pairing vocal melodies with a guitar-like instrument has been a common form of duet since the very beginnings of music. Even before the gittern and vihuela, primitive string-like instruments called bowl harps made out of turtle shells and hair were used to accompany songs, and have been dated back 4,000 years. While the guitar was initially a source of accompaniment and harmony underneath the vocal line, composers began composing specific parts for the guitar and treating it as an equal partner to the vocal line. Rodrigo's *Three Spanish Songs* displays a beautifully balanced duet between the guitar and vocal line, and is only one example of an age-old tradition of pairing the guitar and voice.

~ Laura Schipper