

The Guidonian Guitar

Musicianship on the Classical Guitar



Bryan Keith Burns, D.M.A.

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Preface

From the early years of my guitar studies, I had always felt a disconnect between the material covered in music theory classes and how those concepts related to my instrument. University classes on music theory, aural skills, and form/analysis did not directly relate to my studies on the guitar. Without being shown a direct application of music theory and aural skills to my instrument, I often questioned the relevance of these classes. Similarly, the focus of my private lessons on the guitar was heavily weighted toward technique and aspects of performing, rarely discussing the importance of understanding music theory and how it informs our performance. As a student, I intuitively understood the need to link these skills (solfeggio and music theory) to my guitar playing and it became a very important part of my learning process. As a professor, I consistently encourage my students to solfege their pieces and the individual lines within each of them. I often find great resistance on their part as these skills should have been introduced much earlier in their learning process. This problem is only amplified when they begin to prepare the more complex pieces in the repertoire. In approaching guitar studies from the perspective of solfeggio and music theory, the *Guidonian Guitar* is one of the few sources in modern guitar pedagogy that offers practical solutions to these issues. Using this method, I am hoping to provide a step-by-step guideline for my students on how to achieve fluency in solfeggio and musicianship.

Playing the guitar is both a physical and intellectual endeavor. We must understand the importance of cultivating both aspects to succeed as professional guitarists. An intelligent musician should be able to understand and apply all sections of music education to their instrument. The *Guidonian Guitar* method does an excellent job of demonstrating music theory and ear training concepts while showing their direct application to the guitar.

This book should be seriously considered as playing a major role in any university guitar program with an aim at developing high-level students that not only play the instrument well, but also understand and internalize the music they perform. The *Guidonian Guitar* will serve as the formative steps and inspiration toward a long journey and relationship with the guitar, one in which musicianship leads and directs the technical aspects of one's guitar playing.

- René Izquierdo
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
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<https://www.reneizquierdoguitar.com/>

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Introduction

While writing the preface to his revised guitar method in 1843, Dionisio Aguado addressed an important issue regarding the relationship between instrumental study and overall musicianship. On the opening page of his preface Aguado writes, “Anyone who devotes himself to an instrument with a view to making progress must first have learned sol-fa.”² A similar sentiment can be found in the writing of one of Aguado’s contemporaries, Fernando Sor.³ A century later, Emilio Pujol recommends that anyone wishing to study the guitar in any depth should divide their work between the study of solfeggio, harmony, guitar history, and technique.⁴ In fact, all extant historical guitar treatises either assume an adequate level of musicianship on the part of the reader or recommend that harmony and aural skills be cultivated alongside instrumental studies. In other words, a serious guitar student should either already be fluent in the language of music or must study musicianship and guitar technique simultaneously.

The most relevant primary source for the Guidonian Guitar method is Ferdinando Carulli’s *Solfèges and Vocalises, Op. 195* (ca. 1822-6).⁵ Carulli was one of the most prolific composers of his time, with over four hundred extant works written for the guitar. His Op. 195 treatise on solfeggio with guitar accompaniment serves as the ideal context with which to study both solfeggio and harmony on the guitar. As students and champions of the guitar, Carulli is our direct link to the Neapolitan tradition of *partimento* composition and improvisation. I have included numerous exercises from Carulli’s Op. 195 to summarize and fortify the interval and harmonic exercises in this book.

²Dionisio Aguado, *New Guitar Method*. Translated by Louise Bigwood, edited by Brian Jeffery. London: Tecla Editions, 1981.

³ Fernando Sor, *Method for the Spanish Guitar*. Translated by A. Merrick. London: Robert Cocks & Co, 1850. Reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 2007.

⁴ Emilio Pujol, *Guitar School—A Theoretical-Practical Method for the Guitar*, Volume Three (Columbus, OH: Editions Orphee, Inc., 1983), XXV.

⁵ Ferdinando Carulli, *Solfèges and Vocalises, Op. 195*. Published by Carli in Paris ca. 1822-6.

In most North American Universities, the undergraduate student is expected to study the guitar and its repertoire while simultaneously learning music theory and aural skills. In these programs, private guitar lessons typically focus on the technical requirements, memorization, and subsequent performance of solo repertoire, while musicianship classes are taught on the piano as separate and supplemental skill sets. This disparity begs the question then, at what point do these two disciplines intersect for even the most exceptional of students? When does a gifted guitar student, having attained a high level of technical prowess on the instrument, begin to make music?

Considering our historical method books do little to address the pedagogy of musicianship directly, and the current collegiate curriculum typically falls short of effectively uniting musicianship classes with guitar studies, we must find an alternative solution to this unfortunate deficiency. It is precisely this issue that prompted the development of the Guidonian Guitar method. The sole purpose of this book is to nurture and develop musicianship through a consistent and thorough application of solmization to the guitar.

To be certain, developing musicianship toward complete fluency should be the highest priority for any instrumentalist. Musical fluency can be defined as the ability to hear, understand, internalize, and perform all aspects of the musical language in real time. One is fluent in a language when one has a large enough vocabulary, can readily access that vocabulary, and has assimilated a sufficient subset of that language's syntax and grammar.

In music, this translates to audiation. Audiation is the ability to hear internally and understand all aspects of a musical example upon hearing or seeing the printed score. In this way, musical fluency essentially enables the performer to transcend a mere phonetic recitation, ultimately allowing for a true expression of the language as an affective resonance of musical discourse. In my experience, the most effective method for attaining musical fluency through audiation is the consistent application of a sung solmization

system directly to instrumental studies. The inevitable result of mastering this method is an ability to “sing” through your instrument in a fluent expression of music.

Why do I need to solfege the pieces I play on the guitar?

The importance of singing the guitar repertoire during study is one of the most frequently addressed issues in master classes today. Although I have heard many teachers advocate this practice, I have yet to hear a sufficient explanation regarding its efficacy. Experience has taught me that the consistent application of solmization to every voice of a composition yields limitless benefits. Singing every line of a musical work independently exposes the melodic and harmonic architecture with which the music was rendered. This practice also develops crucial skills of musicianship and interpretation while simultaneously nurturing a deeper understanding of any composition. It is only through singing the notes that instrumentalists can physically experience the intervallic distances between melodic pitches, a palpable sensation that has a tremendous impact on our natural expression of musical gestures and phrases. In addition, the ability to sing musical works, with or without the instrument, contributes to a level of musical internalization that develops security and confidence. For these reasons, Solmization is a crucial aspect of instrumental pedagogy. If we are to achieve a respectable fluency in music, we must be able to sing everything we play and play everything we sing.