

Cultural History of the Guitar in Latin America

News from Argentina,
Guatemala, México, and Perú

Edited by

Luis Díaz-Santana Garza

Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas, México

Series in Music



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Preface

Despite great public interest in the guitar, few books are dedicated to the instrument's history. In the Spanish-speaking world, we can find few publications, especially in Argentina and Spain, but not even one about the Latin American guitar in English. Such a lack of research prompted me to propose to several academics the preparation of a book that serves as a first approach to the social, cultural, and economic role of the instrument in Latin America, seen mostly from the perspective of the inhabitants of the Spanish-speaking countries on the American continent.

This book aims to disseminate the rich and complex history of the guitar in Latin America, with emphasis on México, covering a period that goes from the viceregal epoch to the second half of the twentieth century. The collaborators are some of the most outstanding guitarists and researchers of the instrument from Chile, Guatemala, México, and the United States. The chapters explore the importance of composers, performers, repertoire, and guitar construction in Latin America and the US, but also seek to comprehend the instrument's cultural and social role and its economic ecosystem. Due to the long chronology proposed, this book not only deals with the modern guitar but also with the baroque guitar, and there is even a chapter dedicated to the traditional instruments that have historically been heirs to the Spanish guitar.

The originality of this work resides in the use of historical and humanistic tools: it is based on a current bibliography and archive references, and it is one of the first books published in English on the history of the guitar in Latin America. The first chapter, *The Guitar in the Viceroyalty of Perú*, written by Alejandro Vera, offers us a general overview of the instrument in the powerful Viceroyalty of Perú, seeking to give visibility to the social, economic and cultural role that the guitar had, and providing first-hand information about musicians, amateurs, builders, and merchants, in a little-studied region. Before getting into the subject, the author highlights an idea that is very important throughout this volume: that the guitar was assimilated and modified in Spanish America, and consequently, sometimes, it is difficult for researchers to be sure if the instrument mentioned in a certain manuscript or book is a Renaissance or Baroque guitar, a *vihuela*, *bandurria*, *guitarrilla* or *discante*. The importance of this chapter lies in the fact that the author makes a critical review of the historical bibliography that mentions the guitar or music tangentially in the Viceroyalty of Perú, but also, much of the information that he presents about the instrument is taken of important historical archives, highlighting the Municipal Archive of Lima, the General Archive of the Nation of Perú, and the

National Historical Archive of Chile. At the end of the chapter, Vera includes a valuable appendix where he mentions the sources of guitar music in the Peruvian Viceroyalty.

Alejandro Vera notes that “the knowledge about its cultivation (of the guitar) in colonial America is still insufficient,” and quoting the late Mexican guitarist and music historian Antonio Corona Alcalde, he emphasizes that “most testimonies in this regard come from the Viceroyalty of New Spain, and even for this region, there is relative poverty of sources.” Indeed, the knowledge we have about the guitar since colonial times in México is scarce, and in the case of the Viceroyalty of New Spain, most of these testimonies exclusively mention México City, thus Juan Frajoza, in chapter 2, *Diego Risueño, A Peninsular Musician Before the Novohispanic Inquisition*, tries to shed light on events far from the viceregal capital, in this case in the region of Guadalajara, in the west of the current Mexican territory, a city that was the head of the *Real Audiencia de la Nueva Galicia* (Royal Court of New Galicia) during colonial times. It is true that both the Mexican researcher Gabriel Saldívar and the American musicologist Robert Stevenson mentioned Risueño in their writings, but, considering the extensive document regarding his trial by the Inquisition, Frajoza affirms that both “made a poor reading of their sources.” This chapter proposes an insight into the private life of Diego Risueño, a Spanish guitarist and harpist who settled in New Spain during the sixteenth century.

In chapter 3, *Scale Exercises for Five-course Guitar from a Late Guatemalan Manuscript*, Juan Pablo Pira Martínez writes about a small manuscript for a five-course guitar kept in the Museo del Libro Antigo (Old Book Museum), in Antigua, Guatemala. This work, known as *Regla de Entrastar (Rules to put frets)*, includes an explanation of music notation, music theory, tablature, and guitar chord notation. Many different music notations appear in this manuscript: *alfabeto* chord notation like Joan Carles Amat’s, Italian guitar tablature, and modern guitar notation are found in proximity. No date is provided, but an arrangement of *La Marseillaise* suggests that this manuscript was probably written in the late eighteenth century or early nineteenth century. The document also includes repertoire and exercises, which are this chapter’s main interest. While most guitar tutors for the five-course instrument focus on chord notation and strumming patterns, *Regla de Entrastar* includes a set of seven major and minor scales followed by a small arpeggio. Even though this is a common feature of modern methods, this is unusual for the baroque-type instrument. An edition both in tablature and modern notation is provided with the intention of making “period exercises” available to students of baroque guitar.

Chapter 4, titled *Perceptions of the Guitar in Mexican Periodicals, Poems, and Chronicles: From the End of Viceroyalty to the Nineteenth Century*, hopes to give an account of the spread of the guitar in all social strata through periodicals

and writers in nineteenth-century México. Based on cultural history, I analyze the factors related to the social perception of the instrument and the categories in which it was located by the chroniclers of the time, highlighting its relationship with popular culture. Thus, I propose that the guitar became a *symbol* of identity and incipient nationalism, despite the unequal perception that society had of the instrument.

Researchers have written about the cultural importance of musical instruments, the ritual function of the culture that produced them, or as objects representing extensions of the mind, body, and emotions. However, to remedy the lack of information about the *economy* of musical instruments in the Mexican and American contexts, in chapter 5, *Builders and Importers of Guitars in México and the United States During the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Sonia Medrano Ruiz and I seek to underline the status of builders and traders of instruments in the economy: “The importance of these builders and importers lies in the fact that they made the widespread use of this cultural artifact possible; the public then endowed it with new and heterogeneous meanings, promoting the dissemination and democratization of music among sectors of all social classes, contributing to education, sociability, and the transmission of ideas among the societies of the American continent.”

Chapter 6, *Más allá de la Guardia Vieja: Tango Guitar in the Long Nineteenth Century*, written by Eric Johns, is part of recent studies that highlight the Afrodescendant contribution to Ibero-American culture, observing the specific case of *tango*, a musical genre that is usually associated with white immigrants. In fact, Johns found the first reference to the word *tango* in a document by the governor of Louisiana, in which it is used as a synonym for “Black dances,” and in this chapter, he “work towards understanding tango within this lineage and the guitar’s role in that history.”

Chapter 7, “*Sin guitarra no hay canción:*” *Mexican Rural Culture in Canción Ranchera*, deals with the *cultura ranchera* that gave rise to the birth of the *canción ranchera*, a music inseparable from nationalism and Mexican identity. Here we see the way in which the Mexican state, the mass media and public opinion shaped a musical genre that has very ancient roots, and the important role that the guitar plays in its interpretation.

For his part, Alejandro Martínez de la Rosa has carried out extensive fieldwork on various traditional musical instruments from the west and south of México, particularly instruments that have a great relationship with the five-course Spanish guitar. In Chapter 8, *Two Jarana Models from Western and Southern México: Tierra Caliente and Mixteca, Twentieth Century*, Martínez de la Rosa addresses “the organological characteristics of two variants of “jarana,” a term given to several chordophone instruments in México, to be compared and define their shared and dissimilar characteristics.”

On the other hand, it is unquestionable that the artistic career of the Spanish performer Andrés Segovia was a milestone in the history of Western concert music, particularly for the classical guitar. However, his international career was promoted by various myths, stimulated by writers, fans, and the guitarist himself. Therefore, in chapter 9, *“If the guitar hadn’t existed, I would have invented it:” Andrés Segovia and His Debut in México in 1923*, I analyze the *reception* that Segovia had in the recitals that marked his debut in México, comparing his concert programs with those of other musicians who were active during that period. My proposal is that thanks to the “self-fulfilling prophecy” and the “Matthew effect,” there were important communities of guitarists in Latin America who were rendered invisible.

And if Segovia made many Mexican guitarists invisible, something similar happened with the case of the Mexican composer Manuel María Ponce, who produced an important musical corpus for the guitar. Surely, thanks to the “Matthew effect,” Ponce acquired extraordinary prestige as a guitar composer, making almost all contemporary Mexican composers invisible. For this reason, in chapter 10, *The Hidden Repertoire of the Mexican Guitar, 1923–1960*, Enrique Salmerón brings us closer to a group of creators whose works for guitar are little known. A large section of literature cited includes a variety of sources showing the author’s expertise in the field, and he mentions little-known information like the relationship of Mexican guitar players and composers with avant-garde movements such as *Sonido 13*.

As I mentioned, this book tries to be a first approach to the complex and rich history of the Latin American guitar. Our intention is that the topics we include are discussed to open new lines of research around our beloved musical instrument, a European musical instrument that nevertheless has deep roots in the cultural identity of our continent.

Luis Díaz-Santana Garza

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Part I:
Guitar in History

Chapter 1

The Guitar in the Viceroyalty of Peru

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Abstract

This chapter offers a general overview of the guitar in the Viceroyalty of Perú, seeking to give visibility to the important social, economic and cultural role that the guitar had, and providing first-hand information about musicians, builders, and merchants, in a little-studied region.

Keywords: Guitar, Viceroyalty of Perú, Music and Society

Introduction

It is a widely accepted fact that the guitar was vastly cultivated in Spanish America. Egberto Bermúdez (2001, 171), for example, affirms that guitars and vihuelas were the main types of instruments exported to the New World.¹ A statement confirmed, among other testimonies, by the thirty guitars and thirteen vihuelas that a merchant brought to Santo Domingo and Puerto Rico in 1523 (Sarno 1986, 100-1). However, it is no less true that the knowledge about its cultivation in colonial America is still insufficient and that numerous centers and territorial areas remain unexplored. Indeed, most testimonies in this regard come from the Viceroyalty of New Spain, and even for this region, there is relative poverty of sources (Corona Alcalde 1993). Among the territorial areas whose study has been neglected, Lima and the Viceroyalty of Perú are perhaps the most important, given their political and administrative relevance at the time. This does not imply underestimating previous works on the subject, such as Javier Echecopar's editions, which will be cited more than once throughout these pages. However, new studies are needed to expand the information available from first and second-hand sources to verify whether the massive cultivation attributed to the instrument was effective in the Viceroyalty of Perú and to know the users, manufacturers, merchants, and other subjects who made this possible.

Studying the guitar in colonial times also implies dealing with terminological problems that this work cannot deal with in detail. However, some essential

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