

# Guitar Pedagogy Final Exam

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## 1 Matanya Ophee

A major point that Ophee makes in the introduction of his examination of Spanish language guitar methods is that the methods take the perspective that the student does not have a teacher. The methods are designed to take the student from relatively beginner-level status to some level of mastery without a teacher. Another important thread that Ophee identifies, though not as directly as he could have, is that each of these methods want the reader to take the guitar seriously. In the method by Ferandiere, *Arte de Tocar La Guitarra Española* (1799), Ophee states that Ferandiere that the guitar “must not be played only for the accompaniment of fandangos and boleros, but regarded as a serious instrument for the performance of chamber music.” This statement is taken as assumed in each of the other methods. The ‘evolution’ of these methods seems to be centered around complexity. The earliest methods examine the principles of playing the instrument; the later methods attempt to take a more extensive, progressive approach to the instruction. The student starts with relatively benign etudes and exercises and progresses toward more difficult repertoire eventually working on mastering concert pieces. In speaking about the ‘evolution’ of these methods, Ophee states that

there is a qualitative difference: the newer pedagogies found new ways to talk about the guitar and its technique. These new ways of communication were necessary in order to adapt to a faster, changing world. But the actual, physical business of teaching a student to move a finger across a stretched string or placing another on the fingerboard, has changed little.

He speaks here, mainly about the changes in how one talks about the instrument. This is a necessary component of a method.

## 2 Michael Chapdelaine

It is interesting to think about pedagogy as a mountain or as a turn. I am not entirely sure that it is an accurate or useful metaphor. When approaching this question, I feel that I must use the same rubric for the examination of finger-style guitar pedagogy as Chapdelaine does for classical guitar pedagogy. I think that Chapdelaine mentioned the large amount of importance that is placed on technique in the classical guitar pedagogy. I take this to mean tone production. If I were to use this approach, I would have to say that finger-style guitar is not yet at its apex. We have not had any real in-depth

examinations of tone production. We have not had an Aaron Shearer figure. The technique of playing a steel-string acoustic guitar has not been codified as it appears to have been in the nylon-string world. I think that we are at the bottom of the mountain in finger-style guitar pedagogy. If we disallow classical guitar pedagogy as contributing to finger-style guitar pedagogy, we are in the beginning phases of its development. We have not had 200 years of pedagogical study from which we can draw. If we all classical guitar pedagogy to contribute, *we are* the reorientation that Chapdelaine mentions.

It would have to take an extreme turn in order for the mountain metaphor to be considered appropriate for finger-style guitar. We seem to take an entirely different approach to the performance of the instrument. Especially here at UWM, technique is not necessary if some one is able to produce acceptable results.

### 3 Eigeldinger and Nyberg

One major similarity that I see between these two readings is the willingness to change, or be malleable for a given student. Set curricula does a student no good if that student is not getting it. It seems, from Eigeldinger's introductory remarks on his research into Chopin as instructor, that Chopin cared deeply for ensuring that each of his students understood a given item, such as melodic phrasing. In order to ensure that his student were understanding what he was teaching, he would change his language when it seemed that a student wasn't comprehending the previously used language. It seems to me that Nyberg is recommending a similar approach to the instruction of students.

### 4 The Canonization of Finger-Style Guitar Pedagogy

This question is interesting especially following the previous question. It almost begs the question, "is it *ever* beneficial to canonize anything?" I think that if we canonized finger-style guitar pedagogy right now, we would immediately recognize our error — we would go the way of the classical guitar and no longer be relevant. I think that it might be beneficial to take a long, difficult look at how we instruct finger-style guitar as a means to perhaps establish some sort of goal orientation. This might take the form of ensuring that students are able to perform a wide variety of finger-style guitar repertoire. I think that we might feel like failed teachers if our students are only able to play one sub-style of finger-style guitar, like left-hand over technique. I think that it would be beneficial to examine each student individually and assess his or her weaknesses and strengths and find a way to reduce the weaknesses and build upon the strengths. Is this canonization? I don't think so. Canonization of the pedagogy might look more like requiring that in order for a student to reach the next level of repertoire she or he would need to perform a particular composition at a certain level. There would be ten or twenty or a quarter-million levels with a particular piece which must be performed in each level. I do not think that this would be advantageous for the student, the teacher, or for the genre.

An interesting side note, composition is an integral component of finger-style guitar. How would the canonization of finger-style guitar pedagogy interact with this element? Would each teacher of finger-style guitar also need to be able to versed in composition pedagogy? Is composition pedagogy canonized?

## 5 The Most Important Characteristics of a Successful Lesson

There are several important characteristics of a successful lesson which can be identified through an analysis of the supervised teaching sessions we had this semester. A major characteristic is the teachers effective use of language. The instructor must be away when he or she is communicating about specific details. For instance, when talking about the fingers of the hands, the instructor should use the identifying names that are used for each finger. It may be beneficial to tell the student use your first finger of your left hand, your first finger is your index finger of the your left hand. The effective use of language is even more important when instructing a student who's first language is not the primary language used in the private lesson. The instructor should not use language in a haphazard manner when translation needs to occur.

Another important characteristic that I can identify is that the instructor should not expect to get to everything that he or she prepared for the lesson. The instructor needs to be able to devote more time or energy to a certain passage or musical event if it is obvious that the student requires this time or energy. It would be a disservice to the student to gloss over such a thing simply because the teacher wants to be able to get to everything.

## 6 Finger-Style Guitar Existentialism

*Finger-style guitar doesn't exist; it just derives from classical guitar.*

I do not believe that this statement is defensible. Finger-style guitar does not share the same history as classical guitar. Would a classical guitarist say that Blind Blake derives from classical guitar? My guess would be that that guitarist wouldn't want to be associated with Blind Blake. I think that classical guitar finds itself as associated with written traditions of music. Finger-style guitar seems to have a stronger link to oral traditions of music than it does written traditions. This can be easily observed by composers of finger-style guitar and their propensity to not write down there music in a prescriptive manner.

I am actually surprised that someone would say that finger-style is derived from classical guitar. It seems more to me that this person is either trying to get finger-style guitar students or talk about how great classical guitar is. I think that a similar statement could be made of classical guitar if you examine its history in Spain. It seems to me that it might be derived from an oral tradition just as much as it is derived from a written tradition. So, classical guitar doesn't exist; it is just protected from the rain by the umbrella of finger-style guitar.