

KERTSOPOULOS AESTHETICS

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A

A musicological approach on “Kertsopoulos Aesthetics”

In examining the historical evolution of guitar as an instrument that constitutes an aesthetic object, we constantly encounter a dialectic relation between “form” and “content”. We observe that every period produces resonators in diverse shapes and materials, with various numbers of strings and several tunings, thus enabling a continuous interrelation between scholarly and folk tradition of the instrument. These successive alterations provide series of instruments quite particular in sound content, since their specific sound characteristics, namely range, intensity and timbre, differ significantly from instrument to instrument. The revival of such a dialectic interaction between “form” and “content” of guitar, proceeding in the centuries, together with the addition and adaptation of innovative contemporary elements, compose “Kertsopoulos Aesthetics”. Greek guitar soloist and composer Smaro Gregoriadou has concentrated on rebuilding the instrument’s long aesthetic experience and projects on an international scale the need for a re-definition of the instrument’s sound and technique. A re-definition that respects history and advances investigation, that exhibits artist’s individuality and contributes to the evolution of the instrument itself. All these ideas are incorporated into the word “reinventing”, which constitutes the nucleus of the art of Smaro Gregoriadou.

REINVENTING GUITAR!

B

A historical survey based on instrument’s evolution in form and sound

Chordophones like Sumerian lyre, Egyptian bow-harp, nefer etc, appear from 2000 B.C in Mesopotamia ² and from 1500 B.C. in Egypt. These instruments usually varied in form and had long necks, small rounded or rectangular resonators and several quantities of strings applied on their bodies. Around 500 years later two types of chordophones appear in Greece, lyra (lyre) and kithara (guitar). Kithara was considered as a developed and completed form of lyra, nevertheless lyra, kithara and phorminx were so closely associated with each other, that their names could often be used as synonymous. Ancient Greek philosophers in their texts elucidate anyway that term *kitharizein*, guitar playing, referred to all string instruments in general. For *solo guitar interpretation* and *solo guitar interpreter without singing*, they were often using terms *psilē kitharisis* (high-tuned guitar playing) and *kitharistēs* (guitarist), respectively, as distinguished from *kitharode* (guitar player – singer) and *varvist* (varvitos player), who both played lower-tuned types of guitar. In Terpander’s time guitar had triangular shape and seven strings, while from 6th c. B.C. onwards, nine-, ten-, eleven- and twelve- stringed guitars were in wide use.

C

Middle Ages (450-1450) – Renaissance (1450-1600)

In Middle Ages, musical instruments mostly accompanied voice in peasant songs. 13th and 14th centuries witness isolated types of guitar with 3 or 4 strings ³ under the names *guitarra moresca*, *guitarra latina*, *vihuela de penola*. By mature years of Renaissance, a spirit of return to antiquity pervades Europe and the art of polyphony begins to flourish. Predominating renaissance types of guitar were sixteenth-century four-course guitar and six-course vihuela, which, for all their similarities, were regarded as different instruments, as most sources suggest. Vihuela after Spaniards or viola da mano for Italians becomes more and more popular. Lute’s tunings and string quantities were constantly developing. Lutes with four or five courses of strings were predominating at the time, the former being intended for polyphonic music, the latter for songs’ accompaniment. It is worth mentioning that around 1630, some lute players did not hesitate to put 15 or even 20 courses of strings on their instruments, but since sound boards were forced with enormous tensions, they ended in 10 to 12 courses.

D

Baroque period (1600-1750)

Passing from Renaissance to early baroque era, double-course guitar underwent considerable modification in form and sound, with smaller or larger convex portions, distinctive decorations, application of gut or wire strings in high, middle, or low tunings and numerous performing techniques adopted by players. On the one hand these specific techniques sprang from the concrete amount of strings each time in use, on the other hand they were reflecting the aesthetic preferences of period virtuosi as of folk players. In the early 17th century the four-course guitar and the vihuela had both been overtaken in popularity by the five-course guitar, which was immensely popular in Spain and widely played in France and Italy. A distinctive type of five-course guitar which first appeared in Renaissance was chitarra battente. Until the mid 17th c. it was built exclusively from Italian luthiers, and was only played by virtuosos due to its considerable technical difficulty. Between 1640 and 1700 the Parisian school of lutherie came to the fore and flourished. Italian chitarra battente was always built with an arched back in added or embodied wooden strips and possessed rich ornaments, while on the contrary French-built battentes were usually flat-backed and retained generally a basic simplicity in form. Both types of battente had five courses of triple or occasionally double wire strings.

E

Classical period (1750-1820) until present day

Transition from late baroque to classic era is accompanied with radical reforms in European music tightly connected to social changes. Music no more constitutes of an expression exclusively associated to popular spectacles, but also fosters social distinctions. Arrival of Bourbons' dynasty in Spain encouraged a change in musical taste of the era, conformed to French style galant. Thus in the course of 18th c. guitar also undergoes considerable change. Dimensions increase, bouts are modified, decorations diminish, but guitar's most significant change is focused on the replacement of double courses to six single strings. Many researchers consider this precise change to have been responsible for the void of interest that characterized guitar repertory during the first half of 19th century. Spanish luthiers and players were the only to faithfully insist on the tradition of double courses of strings for 70 more years, contrary to the new aesthetic preference of single-stringed guitar, which was born in France and had already been by then established in the rest of Europe. Guitar aesthetics of six single strings encouraged a series of modifications in form that in the middle of 19th c. ended in guitar's body shape and proportions we are so familiar with today, attributed to Spanish luthier Antonio de Torres. In 1948 the eminent maestro Andrés Segovia in collaboration with strings constructor Albert Augustine, introduced nylon strings. Segovia's vigorous personality together with his sublime art of playing persuaded guitarists to adapt this new aesthetic proposition, in spite of the fact that significant disapproving reactions have initially been expressed against nylon's dullness in tone-colour up to then totally unacceptable.

F

Historical guitar aesthetics: how are they revived and for which purpose

Guitar aesthetics of each historic period are revived by means of strings of diverse initial materials, such as wire, nylon or thread, graded by thickness and quality. By applying these specific strings to modern guitar type we are able through small constructional adaptations to convincingly approach sound aesthetics of each specific composition, mainly determined by sound features of each corresponding original instrument, namely number and quality of strings, tonality and tuning range.

To take an example, baroque compositions by J. S. Bach, D. Scarlatti and G. F. Haendel were originally written for harpsichord or baroque lute, instruments that possessed two or more courses of strings.

One of the clearest statements on early guitar's stringing can be found in G. Sanz's *Instrucción de Música sobre la Guitarra Española* of 1674, in which we read that "he who wishes noisy accompaniment, it is good to use bourdons [heavy bass strings] on the 4th and 5th courses of his guitar, as they do in Spain; but masters of Rome only prefer thin strings, since the bourdons do not come out well if anyone wishes to play separate notes with grace and sweetness."

Furthermore, R. de Visée and J. Bermudo composed guitar music in high tunings. Even in 20th c., when nylon strings and the specific mid-voiced tuning that we know today had long been established, several composers and interpreters like H. Villa-Lobos and A. M. Barrios insisted on wire guitar strings, seeking for sonority and clearness in sound.

G

"Kertsopoulos Aesthetics" and new possibilities

"Kertsopoulos Aesthetics"

- a) revive guitar's sound aesthetic variety as it came forth during the instrument's historical evolution, introducing strings in different qualities, able to be tuned from 0 to 12th fret, namely from e' (first string of today's guitar) up to an octave higher, as well as double- and triple-course stringing in simple or re-entrant tunings, and
- b) include innovations (alterations, variations) in modern guitar's form and sound.

Within these two parameters, new possibilities are provided:

1. Reliability in approaching each period's original guitar repertory.
2. Reliability in transcribing works originally written for instruments of different ranges and timbre.
3. Expansion of guitar's technical methods in order for the instrument to fulfill the demands of each corresponding aesthetic choice.
4. Creation of personal styles and aesthetic preferences on interpretation.

H

“Kertsopoulos Aesthetics” in the course of time

“Kertsopoulos Aesthetics”, which consist of theoretical as well as practical 30-year research, **2** have been premiered in Athens, 1994, by their inventor. During all relative exhibitions and presentations that have so far taken place worldwide, the following have been included:

A) instruments approaching in form and sound guitar's early predecessors, such as:

- Aa) guitars in six-single strings in various high or mid-voiced tunings
- Ab) guitars in tuning combinations of single and double courses of strings applied especially in the bass range of the instrument
- Ac) chitarra battente in double and triple courses of strings
- Ad) spanish guitar in six double courses of strings
- Ae) triple-double-single six-course guitar

B) innovative instruments, such as:

Ba) the *minimal guitar*. Although this instrument's resonator is no bigger than two centimeters in thickness and eight centimeters in width, it behaves proportionately to guitar resonators in ordinary dimensions. It is adjusted to several independent resonators, which can vary from evolved constructions to common carton boxes, thus exhibiting the particular properties of each one of them. As examples of such adaptations are taken *minimal guitar with carton or plastic resonators* and *multi-timbre rectangular guitar with one or two necks*.

Bb) *air-pedal guitar*, which consists of three incurving parts, five bridges, six main strings tuned ordinarily in e', as well as six additional wire strings, which passing through the bridges create 39 string lengths. These additional strings function as sympathetic, but equally well as tension controllers, since they are able to inactivate tensions through coming in contact with anyone of the two movable levers. These levers move through the application of a pneumatic system, which activates an air-pedal mechanism. The comparative advantages of such a construction affect all parameters of sound, especially sonority and projection, width and depth, duration and decay.

I

The **beginning** of every research emanates from questioning the evident or the established; its **route** constitutes of a permanent opposition between status quo of science and art and anti-conformist spirit borne in every innovation; its **prevalence** through its confirmed validity awaits future researchers.

J

“It is our present we are interpreting...”

“One follows a great example most faithfully by not following it: for an example becomes great when it deviates from the one preceding it!” (Ferruccio Busoni, Selbst Rezension, Von der Einheit der Musik, Berlin 1922, p.175).

K

Paul Hindemith writes in his essay on Bach: “It is not enough for us to use a harpsichord as a continuo instrument. We must string our string instruments differently, to construct our wind instruments with the scales of the time...”

L

Paul Henry Lang, the distinguished music thinker indicates: “It is always our present we are interpreting, but we are doing so by looking into the past. We must temper what may be historically desirable by what is practically and aesthetically reasonable, the ideal by the possible, in order to realize the composer's aims and intentions, even those he could not

always carry out with the means available to him. The question is that of new approaches, not only the solving of old riddles and problems...”

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Translation: Smaro Gregoriadou

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vidence has been extracted from the following bibliography:

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