

Story one: The death of the recorder or, Beauty Eclipsed

Conventional wisdom has it that the recorder disappeared in the nineteenth century, surpassed by its great rival, the flute. The growing popularity of larger concert venues and bigger ensembles drowned its sweet voice. Music of increased melodic and dynamic range forced it into retirement. It lay neglected and very nearly forgotten until its renaissance in the twentieth century.

Story two: The czakan, wherein an instrument goes for a walk

In Vienna in the first decades of the nineteenth century, a Hungarian instrument called the czakan flourished. A cousin of the recorder, it was blown and fingered in almost exactly the same manner. Despite its bizarre origins as an instrument hidden in a walking stick, the czakan developed a technical sophistication that allowed it to play music of gratuitous virtuosity.

Story three (an alternate ending to story one): In which beauty is not really eclipsed

Story two exposes a fissure in story one, a tiny crack, often covered over and hidden in footnotes. If czakans really existed, and they truly used the same fingering system as the recorder, and we have a body of extant repertoire for them, why couldn't the recorder sneak into the nineteenth century after all?

Story four: Where an upstart rises to fame and glory

In the early nineteenth century, the guitar underwent multiple technical transformations across Italy, France and Spain. Flamboyant, virtuoso players such as Sor, Moretti, Giuliani and Carulli swept through the Continent, England and Russia with their new-fangled guitars. These God-like creatures composed and performed pieces fashioned to astonish and enthrall. In their wake, they left swooning audience members, dying to recreate the evening's magic in their own drawing rooms. Avid hordes of well-to-do amateurs rushed out to buy instruments and music. They hoped to win hearts, social kudos, and perhaps come a little closer to the divine with their own renditions of the latest tunes. Guitar treatises, journals and reams of simple, arpeggio-like accompaniments were churned out by savvy publishers. The guitar ascended to its status as the instrument *par excellence* for every domestic occasion.

Story five (or story two continued): In which the walking stick sings

Not to be outdone by flashy guitarists, maestro czakan players Heberle and Krähmer gathered disciples through their proselytising concert missions in Vienna. Of course, publishers got in on this act too. Czakan tutors written by these greats educated hungry players. Collections of scores of arrangements of operatic tunes fed them popular, playable repertoire. A few concert showstoppers were published as a reminder of what the gods could do. Uncomplicated to play at a basic level, the czakan was ideal for rendering for charming, fashionable melodies.

Story six: The czakan and the guitar united or, Marital Felicity

So it was that Romanticism blossomed. Virtuoso players wooed audiences across the lands. Star-struck, affluent lesser mortals longed for this transcendence. They bought the materials, and tried to grace their salubrious homes with the same enchantment. Czakan and guitars came together in a marriage of common interests and shared sensibilities. Whole operas were arranged, favourite waltzes migrated from the ballroom into the drawing room, tender expressions of love, hope and loss were proffered nightly in exclusive parlour gatherings. It was a match made in heaven, or at least in nineteenth-century drawing rooms.

Story seven, in which a new room is invented: Furniture fit for domestic use

These stories stirred us to imagine this, our own early-nineteenth-century salon. The czakan tale, and the historical body of guitar solos and accompaniments, transcriptions, arrangements and re-arrangements, gave us the foundations. The pieces that we play by Krähmer, Sor and Mertz are early-nineteenth-century artefacts, more or less intact. The Guiliani *Ländler* are re-upholstered in period style, and the Strauss is pure frivolity.

Furnishing our room with instrumental relics of this period, we collected a couple of themes and variations. Both themes were taken from operas, and remodelled as instrumental works. Given that Chopin, Sor and other nineteenth-century composers clearly had no qualms about restyling vocal material for instruments to play, it seemed feasible to do the same. Our room began to take on a different character as we added songs by Schubert, Brahms, Mendelssohn, Moretti and Sor.

Story eight: Stories we have known

As an instrumentalist, having a text to work with is a foreign and illuminating experience. Their stories inspired moods and tempi, their texts aided decisions about articulation and phrasing. We became fascinated with several of the people inhabiting the poems. We sat with troubled Gretchen, shot with longing and a desire she knows will ruin her. Our hearts ached for the young boy from *Die schöne Müllerin*, haunted by memories he is unable to bear. *Ständchen's* eloquent, ardent lover was irresistible. The protagonist of *Scheidend* watched over us as we played his farewell.

Story nine: Envoi

It has been a great pleasure dreaming up, building and furnishing our room. The surrounds are gracious, the music eloquent and agreeable. Languid melodies recline over filigree guitar settings, and the convivial company keeps us all in good spirits. We hope you'll stay a while.

Genevieve Lacey