A musical work for the classical guitar and a study of the compositional process

A Senior Project

presented to the

Faculty of the Music Department

California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Bachelor of Arts

by

Matthew Goodman

December, 2013

© 2013 Matthew Goodman

#### A musical work for the classical guitar and a study of the compositional process

#### Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Discussion of the project	ii-xii
The Score of the Composition	1-13
A complete set of the Performance Parts	1, 2

A musical work for the classical guitar and a study of the compositional process

Abstract

For my senior project for California Polytechnic State University, I composed a piece of music, five minutes in length and had the Cal Poly Guitar Ensemble rehearse the piece. This composition is programmatic, and speaks about the nature area surrounding Florence, Italy. Jim Bachman, the director of the Cal Poly Guitar Ensemble, allotted me four, 10 minute rehearsals where I video recorded the group playing through my work. I wrote a 10 page paper on composing for a guitar ensemble and the pitfalls, problems, and circumstances that arose while writing, editing (including fingerings), and rehearsing. In my project I addressed the steps I went through to write the new piece of music, and I also include my score and the individual parts to the composition. Keeping the performers notation perspective in mind was one area I focused on while composing.

I hope you take pleasure in listening to this work, as much as I enjoy writing it!

A musical work for the classical guitar and a study of the compositional process

Michelangelo would walk and paint in the nature that was a fifteen miles from Florence, Italy. Fiesole, which is the town and surrounding area, has many nature trails to walk, bicycle, or ride horses I had the good fortune of staying in this gorgeous setting, residing in Florence for six months (Oct 2006- March 2007) while my wife studied architecture there, and spent many days on these nature paths. While I was walking out there, I thought about how much Michelangelo respected his craft and how much attention and power he invested in art itself. I look to take this outlook on in my life, and the nature area of Fiesole helps me connect with nature and art. Inspired from this life-changing residency in Italy, I chose as my senior project the composition of a programmatic piece for four classical guitars on: "Fiesole: The Hillsides of Tuscany."

Nature and the symmetry of nature play an important role in my piece. The opening motive starts out slow; just like when I walked the hills, I could only walk so fast, so things are visually going by slowly, in the stillness of nature. At first, in nature, there is this inherent --- STOP --- of the world. We usually are running as fast as possible to go, go, go, but we arrive in nature, and we are just overtaken by the slowness. The world almost seems to stop. In my piece, the melodies start to sequence like the symmetry of plant life as you walk down nature's path. In nature, the beauty grows replication and being compounded on itself, creates more intricate, grandiose exquisiteness, and intensity. Nature is mirrored because the harmonic rhythm and notes per measure start to move faster, gradually, showing the experience of nature's own adrenaline rush. This can only happen once we are out of our urban lives.

Simple happiness is another thing I wanted to emphasize in this opening melody. The trail we would walk inspired a calm, content feeling. The slow, patient, jovial lines symbolize the crumbling, deteriorated stone walls, hundreds of years old that lined the trail at parts. Also, I built on the idea that the stone visually (or nature to some) may look boring, old, or simple but will actually outlast the test of time in its own slow subtle way. The opening melody is much the same--simple.

In addition to the gradual build up, using the principle of increasing animation, I wanted to have a noticeable change in the piece to bring out more depth and create a part where rhythm dominated. I wanted to write something my peers would have fun playing. People seem to love rhythm, whereas my mind stays on melody--but I think this may be misguided sometimes. At times the melody is driving my euphoria, but it actually is the rhythm that is the real motivator. Sometimes I will take a melody apart from a given piece, and they seem not to be as special, odd, or intricate by themselves. Only with the company of a well placed rhythm, does the magic of the symbiotic music become fully realized. At measures 19-26, 39-47, 67-74, and 85, a steady, driving, motor-based rhythm is established. This passage is chordal and relatively easy because it repeats so much in the individual parts. Repeated notes, in similar rhythms, also guided my compositional choices when writing for the Cal Poly Guitar Ensemble.

I wrote the piece in four parts, using the soprano, alto, tenor, and bass voicing we learned in our music theory classes at Cal Poly. Our ensemble has been performing pieces of this nature. In "Fiesole" each guitar has its own line, and each line is only one note at any given time. I did this because as an ensemble we are used to sight-reading and performing pieces using single lines: therefore, I decided to compose for the group's

already established capabilities. There is no voice crossing at any time in the piece. Guitar I has the melody much of the time, or starts out the sequence of the melody, and is always the highest pitch. Similarly, Guitar IV always plays the bass or lowest pitched notes. Guitar IV plays the least amount of notes, creating a firm bass of stability much like the relative geologic flatness of the Tuscany province. Guitars II and III harmonize and repeat motives in staggered entrances.

A pitfall I ran into while composing this piece entailed the key in which to compose. Originally I wanted to start in E minor using the lowest pitched, open string E as the bass and bottom of the whole piece. No note would be below it, so when the low pitched E note hit or rang, it would satisfy our bottom as being solid and firmly established. I also choose E minor because of the relatively easy key signature of only one sharp, and it is used in beginning classical guitar repertoire. I changed my mind quickly though, for D# (the leading tone that is so critical in the key of E minor) is a hard note to play on the guitar for extended passages and for our group. Not being able to use the dominant chord in first inversion--a harmony that rises up from that problematic D#-proved to be a big roadblock that I didn't want to push through either. G major, on the other hand, has the same key signature, does not use the D# note as the leading tone, and it is widely used in all kinds of guitar literature. G major is a calming key, and the younger sight-reader wouldn't have to feel nervousness from a dissonant key or difficult passage of notes. The key choice was now settled: but this wasn't the last stumbling stone.

Another problem that arose was the difficulty of the composition. While composing, at one point I realized that it was going to be a technically complicated piece,

at least for our ensemble. Two members are good sight readers while the remaining seven are newer to the trade, so I backed off and wrote extensive measures of quarter notes sprinkled with eighth notes in Guitars II, III, and IV. Only in Guitar I do the sixteenth notes dominate. I wrote the piece in 4/4 time to align with the common time signature of our rock and radio generation.

The aspect of this score that took the most time was the written right- and left-hand fingerings for each individual note. For the left hand notation, I use the traditional *1, 2, 3, 4*, for the index, middle, ring, and pinkie fingers respectively. For the right hand, I used the traditional *p, i, m, a*, for the thumb (*pulgar*), index (*indice*), middle (*medio*) and ring (*anular*) fingers. The right-hand notation letters are initials of the Spanish word for them. When writing these fingerings I made sure to alternate fingers for each pluck, so no finger would play two notes without another finger playing in between. All of Guitar IV is played with the thumb, which on the other hand, customarily plays continuous and repeated notes in the bass. I started out using the *p, i, m* and *a*, in the right hand but quickly dismissed the ring finger or *a*. It seemed hard enough for the students to read new, harder material without exercising the less coordinated ring finger too. During measures 27-86 the ring finger is sparingly used and only then, mostly for repeated chordal or more folk and rhythm-based, finger-picking patterns found in measures 39-47, 67-74, and 85.

When writing the fingerings in, I started at the beginning and worked for sixteen bars before coming to a difficult run of notes. I then had to back up and rewrite the fingerings so the index finger could hit the third sixteenth note, D5 at the right time, and then all of the other fingers could follow in a circular, repeating pattern fluently. I ended

up looking at the arpeggios that extended rapidly over an octave, or passages that had a higher number of notes per bar, and wrote those fingerings first and then backtracked until I encountered rests or half notes.

Having decided the right- and left-hand fingerings for each note, I then fused together the information into single, combined indicators. For instance if the right hand plucked with the index finger (i) while the left-hand depressed a string with the middle finger (2), I wrote the symbol i2 above the note. Although my system had internal logic to it, I unknowingly placed the fingerings together in an untraditional way by welding them together. In addition, I notated them above or below the notes wherever they fit into my score cleanly and functionally in my Finale notation software. Usually the fingerings are separated, and the right hand fingerings appear below the note, and the left hand fingerings are written above the note. Similarly, when I wanted a note to be played on the second string, I untraditionally wrote out "2<sup>nd</sup> srg." on the score and on the individual parts. Customarily, the string number would be merely circled next to the note. I also wrote dashes until the player was to change strings, a helpful but relatively rare practice in guitar notation. Although Dr. Russell said he liked my progressive attempt at notation, I decided it is wiser in my future works to make my composition readily available to a wider audience, by using the same notation used for hundreds of years. Also, it is good to write in the same musical language as past musicians, as for example, the contribution of Gaspar Sanz, who wrote *Instrucción de música sobre la guitarra* española, which is one of our founding guitar pedagogical writings, Robert de Visée's Livre de pièces pour la guitare (Paris 1686), and Santiago de Murcia's Codice Saldivar no. 4, two other historically significant books of specific finger notation.

With regard to rehearsal time, I was allotted four, 10-minute sessions during guitar ensemble rehearsal, in order to have the students play my senior project. They would sight-read my piece the first session, and practice, and run through as much as possible the following three weeks. I wanted to provide a challenge and also a piece that they could be proud of once finished. This is not an easy piece, but it is do-able. I was going to look for places that challenged the players and find solutions on how to smooth those places out.

Rehearsing ...ouch! The first rehearsal was harsh, but by the end, the introduction was recognizable, and two students were able to sight-read through the first repeat. In our ensemble we have four freshmen and four other non-music majors, so it is a relatively inexperienced group. As we rehearsed, we only approached the halfway point of the composition by the end of the first day. The quality of sound that was produced this first day was undesirable. To give the students credit, it was only the first rehearsal since the summer, so understandably, the students were a little rusty.

Watching the recording, I can see the sixteenth notes were too many and too fast, and the tempo I started the group on was a bit too brisk. The running eighth notes over adjacent bars, coupled with the syncopated sub-melody or higher-pitched notes occurring on the off-beats, were roadblocks. Changing strings in the middle of a run of eighth notes was also problematic. The dotted rhythms tripped up some players too, but by encouraging them, I helped them produce a better tone. This also allowed them to be more comfortable and play wrong notes, and then they could hear the mistake and correct it, transforming this unpolished performance closer and closer to becoming the written

composition. I was surprisingly calm while I conducted, which helped keep the environment positive and comfortable.

Dr. Russell is my advisor, and after the first rehearsal we were discussing the piece. He suggested that I compositionally could off-set one of my mono-rhythmic portions, syncopating it. Instead of two half notes, we observed it could be altered to become a *quarter note-to a half note-to a quarter note*, in one of the guitar parts—much like we find in the music of Josquin de Prez where he often has three voices move in mono-rhythmic activity while the fourth voice is mildly syncopated..

The second rehearsal was a little better. Not much practicing had taken place, so the same quirks popped up. I started off not conducting this rehearsal because guitar ensembles don't have conductors, and I wanted the group to read and play together. This fell apart rather quickly, and one student asked if I would conduct. I found that conducting helped a lot and especially conducting legato. They really hit the down beats whenever I would exaggerate--and pull and drive--the pulse passionately with my hands. Vocalizing the melodic line helped with one player. Once I verbalized the pitch and rhythm, he was able to copy the rhythm through the rest of the sequence. Dr. Davies said 90% of the progress we make in rehearsals is obtained with our ears. This specific student went from less that 50% of the rhythm being right and 75% of the notes being played correctly to playing both almost perfect. After this rehearsal Dr. Russell and I discussed the fingerings and different approaches to notation.

The third rehearsal progressed much the same. This time I had the class play individual beats and hold them out to hear the sonority. This seemed to work very well,

but it took most of my rehearsal time. I see now there is a balance between getting specific and pushing onward.

Magic almost occurred in the fourth rehearsal. The melody was definitely recognizable, and I could hear the inner voices of Guitar II's and III's countermelody starting to peek its way through, right from the initial downbeat. I helped the group when I was conducting, by reminding them we were approaching measure 8 and that the repeat was about to happen. The repeated intro was clean and clear. I could hear all of the chord tones, and I was very happy with the attention to timbre quality. Again, I can see practice was not realized, but the students pushed on seemingly sight-reading. Wrong notes would come out, but they were striving to correct them. I can see this piece was good for the class's reading notation. Bar sixteen seemed to be the measure where the group needs more work.

At the end of this fourth and last rehearsal, I asked if there were any comments or suggestions on how to make it easier to read or play. One student liked the fingerings and said it helped him to read it. Another student said "I dig it!" referring to the entire piece. Those were all of the comments from my peers, but they all applauded and agreed with the student that they liked the piece.

It was advantageous to the progress of the rehearsals that I, the composer, was present. Rehearsal development proceeded smoother because I knew the piece, was able to quickly answer any question, and was able to interpret on the spot notational questions. One instance of this is when the fingering notation was cleared up quickly right at the start and proved helpful.

Some aspects that could have been written differently, and could also prove to be beneficial, are splitting the left and right hand fingering notations on either side of the note head and rewriting some of the individual parts so the running eighth notes do not change strings as often. Composing more repeated notes could also prove to be valuable. I could use fewer notes per measure in the end of sections or phrases and have the simple harmonic lines stand out instead of using smaller note values. This proved to be an instant musical stoppage. We performed one of G.F. Handel's "Passepied in C major" arranged by John Duarte, where the notes were few and far between, but it still had movement and complexity without using short note values.

I wanted to compose a piece that was playable for the group and bring the idea of the foreign hills alive in the minds of the performers. Like Michelangelo, I wanted to create my art in the purest and most innocent way, and by doing this be able to stimulate emotion from my piece. Being inspired is what music is all about for me. Having an idea and letting the mind be taken on a rollercoaster ride by the music, is an exhilarating experience. So many people are not open enough to listen to music, resistant to letting the notes awaken emotion and take them over. I believe the more we expose new listeners to this programmatic design, the more they will be able to experience music passionately. I may have been able to spark something in my peers to write a composition themselves.

I wrote this piece in hopes of inspiring a fellow Cal Poly Guitar Ensemble member to compose a piece of music. I hoped to do this by explaining to the ensemble how I put the piece together. During the first rehearsal I gave a two-minute background talk about my piece, "Fiesole." I explained my title and the choice of key signature. I

also talked about the repeating and echoing themes that run through the piece and to be aware of those. I mentioned that most everything was written in first position on the guitar, except for the high-pitched notes in Guitar I's part. First position on the guitar is located on the fret-board closest to the head, and furthest away from the body (or big box). This is the position that most beginning guitar method books have the students start at. This is the easiest place on the guitar for me to read as well, so I figured that it would be the most trouble-free for my peers.

I also wanted to have nothing affecting my compositional process. I wrote this piece for myself, and I wasn't thinking of pleasing anyone's ears but my own. This helped let ideas unfold more naturally. I use the same rhythm in the melody for measures 3-5 and into 6, and the melody just sequences three times. I do this again in measures 7-10. A simple sequence can ease the mind and doesn't have to show off by using standout or distinctive-sounding, frenetic notes with excessive personality. I also made this compositional decision not to get too intricate or busy in the individual parts. Similarly, I wanted not to stray too far away from a stable melody. In retrospect, I should have continued writing this conservative way. At measure 19, the sixteenth notes become unplayable and ruined what could have had simple grace. I was truly writing for myself here. I should have looked at the material we have played in class, and strictly, not used short note values. The sonata form is another thing that changed my compositional process. It made decisions for me in key areas and length of sections. One freshman commented that he heard the melody come back. When he recognized the melody, a light appeared in his eyes and I saw the magic of the sonata form come alive in a modern social situation. I informed him it was the recapitulation, and I am glad I didn't discard

that compositional technique for my ultra-individual compositional method. I wrote this piece while I was alone and in nature too, just like when I was in Fiesole. This enabled me to be more relaxed, calm, and carefree.

I enjoyed writing the composition, "Fiesole" because it brought me back to a simple time in my life, where I was able to enjoy nature and be immersed in the natural world and life environment. Music shares the same healing power and awe-inspiring emotions that nature can extract from us. I hoped to bring this feeling to life through my portrait of this simple and elegant place of scenery.

# Fiesole Hillsides of Tuscany

Matthew Goodman







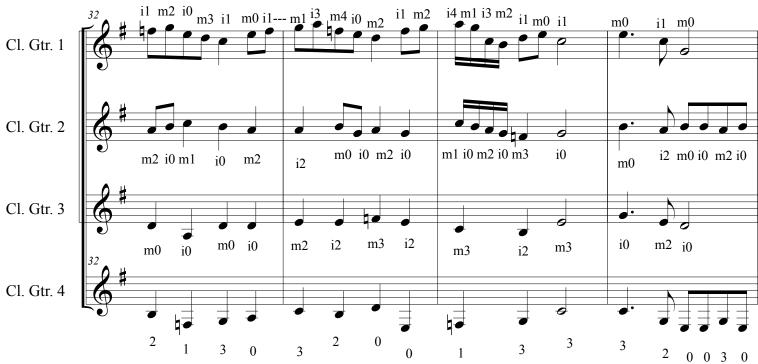
0 1

0



 $0 \quad 0 \quad 1 \quad 1 \quad 2 \quad 0 \quad 0 \quad 3 \quad 4 \quad 0 \quad 1 \quad 0$ 















m0

i3

2

2

i0

m0

**p**1

0

m0

1

i0

0

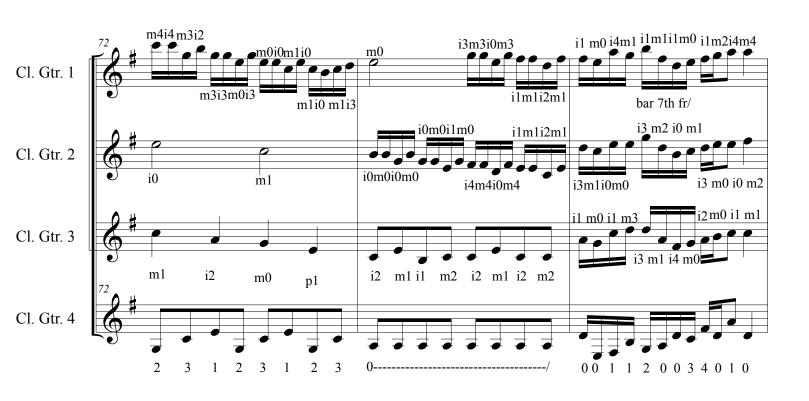
m0 p3

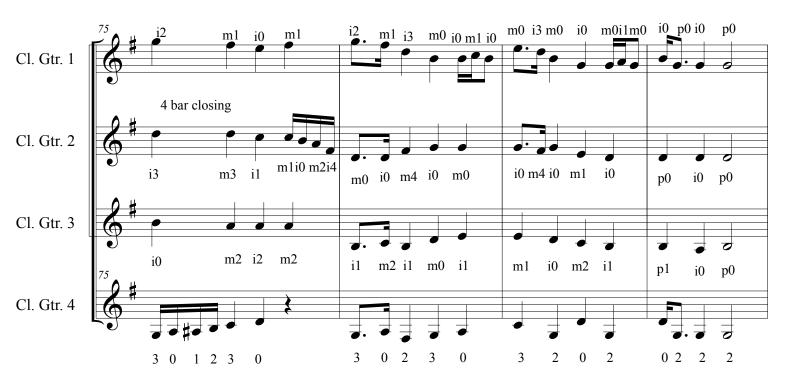
0

0









 $\mathbf{o}$ 



0

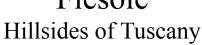
0

0

2,3

Guitar #1

Matthew Goodman





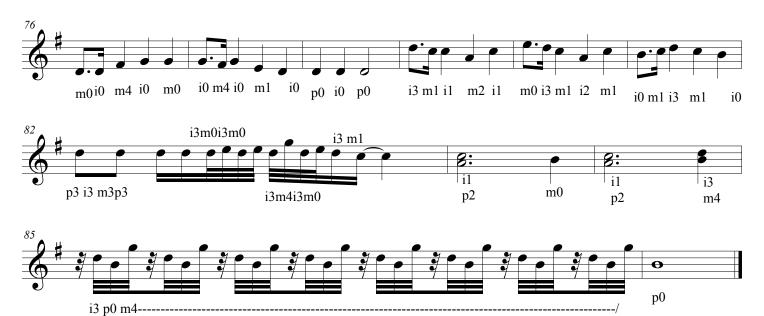


## Fiesole Hillsides of Tuscany

Matthew Goodman







## Fiesole Hillsides of Tuscany

Guitar #3

Matthew Goodman





# Fiesole Hillsides of Tuscany

Guitar #4

Matthew Goodman

