

A close-up, high-angle photograph of a guitar's bridge and strings. The bridge is dark, possibly black or dark wood, and features six silver-colored saddles. The strings are of various colors: a reddish-brown top string, a green string, a yellow string, and a light-colored bottom string. The background is a light-colored wood grain.

The Poor Branch

Nineteenth-century
guitar music
by Ivan Klinger

James Akers
guitar

Ivan Andreevich Klinger (1818–97)

Nineteenth-century guitar music

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About James Akers:

'A superb player'
The Independent

'Played with beauty, taste and subtlety [...] utterly enchanting'
BBC Music Magazine

Ivan Andreevich Klinger (1818–97)

Fantasia, Op. 2

1. Introduction – In the Garden [2:22]
2. I Love Pear [1:21]
3. A Birch Tree Stood in the Field [1:06]

Morceau de Salon, Op. 11

4. Introduction – Andantino – Allegro [6:03]

Four Pieces, Op. 21

5. Fantasia on the Romance 'Tell her'
after Princess Elizaveta Kochubey (1821–97) [4:19]

Ivan Andreevich Klinger

Fantasia, Op. 4

6. Introduction – Mother, My Dove [3:06]
7. You Are My Soul, Beautiful Maiden [2:01]
8. Romance, It Used To, It Used To [3:28]

Serenade, Op. 7

9. There Are Many Dear Things
in the World [5:19]

Two Pieces, Op. 16

10. Elegie par Henri Vogel [4:42]
after Heinrich Vogel (1845–1900)

11. Fantasia on Four Themes, Op. 15

- The Guys Were on Their Way from Novgorod –
How the Breeze is Blowing [4:44]

Pyotr Bulakov (1822–1857), arr. Klinger

12. **My Little One** [2:14]

Ivan Andreevich Klinger

Fantasia on Two Russian Songs, Op. 10

13. The Song of Love, in Ancient
Times and Now [4:22]
14. Who Could Love So Passionately [1:29]

Fantasia on Three Themes, Op. 17

15. You Are My Soul,
You Are My Strength [2:09]
16. Do Not Wake Me Up [2:01]
17. Rachel quand du seigneur
from 'La Juive'
after Fromental Halévy (1799–1862) [3:48]

Two Pieces, Op. 16

18. The Orphan's Song [3:52]
after Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka (1804–1857)

Fantasia on Two Themes 'The Poor Branch', Op. 18

19. The Poor Branch [2:47]
after Vasily Polikarpovich Titov (1650–1715)
20. I Will Go Scythe the Grass [2:33]
after Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka

Total playing time [64:18]



The Poor Branch: Nineteenth century guitar music by Ivan Klinger

Today, the name of Ivan Andreevich Klinger (1818–1897) is equally unknown to Russian and Western guitarists. This is unfortunate since Klinger's output is substantial and of high quality. Moreover, Klinger created a unique repertoire, balancing genuine Russian folklore with the Western-European *bel canto* tradition. One would expect Klinger's music, so elegantly poised between East and West, to be a major attraction for both Russian guitarists and their Western colleagues, however, the present album of James Akers is the premiere recording devoted to the music of Klinger.

Klinger was born in 1818 to a family of Austrian and German colonists in Seltz near Kherson (today, Ukraine). At the age of eighteen he began his military training. In 1847, having reached the rank of Staff Captain, Klinger was ambushed by a unit of Chechen fighters, captured and imprisoned. Klinger left several written testimonies about his experiences which included being chained, starved, and tortured. His release was secured in 1850 and in 1864, suffering poor health, Klinger retired from the army having reached the rank of lieutenant-general.

One unexpected outcome of Klinger's years of captivity, has been to provide modern scholars with important archival material. In 2017, a Chechen scholar, Muslim Murdalov, published a book summarising all the available information on Klinger, including his known writings. It is thanks to Murdalov's work that I am able to share these details about Klinger's life.

The Russian guitar tradition of the nineteenth century was mainly associated with the seven-string guitar with its unique tuning, DGBdgd. Many hundreds of publications for this guitar survive and today it is undergoing a major revival. Klinger, however, was one of the few guitarists from the Russian Empire to devote himself to the Western style six-string guitar.

Klinger's *Fantasia, Op. 2* dates from 1869. It is a potpourri, comprised of three genuine Russian folksongs, *In the Garden*, *I Love Pear* and *A Birch Tree Stood in the Field*. The last, was notoriously used by Tchaikovsky in his Fourth Symphony. Klinger adds a delightful introduction, before presenting the three songs in sequence, intermingled with short connecting snippets. Interestingly, in every song there is a variation in which Klinger imitates the famous Russian instrument, the balalaika. Klinger's balalaika imitations sound surprisingly authentic and this texture – *a la*

balalaika – features frequently in his variations on Russian folksongs.

The next composition, **Morceau de salon**, is proof of Klinger's own exquisite melodic sensibility. Preceded by a virtuosic introduction, the salon tunes seem to be inspired by both Russian romances (art songs) and Italian *bel canto*. Some are nostalgic, others more dance-like, but all demonstrate impeccable taste and imagination.

Klinger builds his **Fantasia on the Romance 'Tell her'** on a well-known romance by Princess Elizaveta Kochubey (1821–1897). It has a short introduction and very short coda, otherwise Klinger's Fantasia consists of several statements of the theme without drastic melodic or harmonic changes. Klinger's skilful arrangement, however, offers us some rich, enjoyable textures, perfectly executed for the six-string guitar.

Fantasia, Op. 4 is based on the songs *My Mother, My Dove* and *You Are My Soul, Beautiful Maiden* and ends with the celebrated *Romance, It Used To, It Used to*. Although composed by different authors, the first two of these songs share the same faux-folk style. The first is by Alexander Gurilev (1803–58), who attempts to capture

the so-called *protiazhnye* ('dragging') style of folksong with his melismatic melody. In collections of romances, such songs were usually marked 'Russian', to distinguish them from more cosmopolitan art songs. The second song has a much lighter tempo and is by a very established composer, Alexei Lvov (1798–1870). Lvov is best known for composing Russia's 1834 National Anthem *God Save the Czar*, but here he shows a different facet of his talent. *You Are My Soul* only superficially resembles Russian folksong through its upbeat mood and folksy lyrics. Melodically and rhythmically, it resembles a mazurka, which, in the context of Russian music, has a Polish connotation. This leads us to the third theme, *It Used To, It Used To* by the Russian-Polish composer Mikhail Vielgorsky (1788–1856). Vielgorsky's romance is full of pulsating accompanying notes that create an anxious nostalgic feeling. This translates perfectly to the guitar. Klinger does not diverge far from the original melody, but presents it in various delightful textures before ending with a virtuosic flourish.

Klinger's **Serenade, Op. 7** is based on a song called *There Are Many Dear Things in the World*. This theme may have been a Romance or is, perhaps, the translation of an Italian title. Since the original source

is unknown, it is impossible to judge exactly what Klinger added to the song. It is, however, a convincing serenade, with a variety of pleasing musical characters.

The next piece on the album, **Elegie Op. 16** is an instance of an adaptation so creative that it could almost qualify as an original piece. The template is a piece for viola and piano by the German singer and composer Henri Vogel (Heinrich Vogl) 1845–1900. Klinger's transcription displays astonishingly bold decision making in his artistic choices. For example, in Vogl's composition, the accompaniment in the second section has an uninterrupted flow of demisemiquavers with occasional additional voices. This dense texture is not possible on a solo guitar, so Klinger, for the most part, omits the accompaniment, but occasionally refers to it by including rapid arpeggios. This results in an interesting effect, as the originally concurrent events are laid out consecutively.

The **Fantasia, Op. 15** is one of Klinger's most successful compositions. It is based on two contrasting themes, one rustic, one refined. Romani ('Gypsy') entertainment was extremely popular throughout the nineteenth century in Russia. Along with their repertoire, their unique performance

style, comprised of great rhythmic vitality and fine melismas was hugely influential. The title of the song Klinger uses is, *The Guys Were on Their Way from Novgorod*. It is attributed to Alexander Dubuque (1812–98) whose 'Gypsy songs' were highly praised at the time. Klinger's arrangement is superb, clearly reflecting the virtuosity and capriciousness of Romani performance. Also light and playful, the second tune comes from an unlikely source, the opera *Askold's Tomb* by Alexey Verstovskiy (1799–1862). Verstovskiy's Romantic opera achieved great popularity in the nineteenth-century Russian theatre, and curiously, was the favourite work of the Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin. Klinger's variations are truly exquisite, virtuosic, demanding, and daring.

The next piece on the album is strikingly simple in form: it is a setting of a love song, **My Little One**, by the celebrated Russian song-writer Pyotr Bulakhov (1822–85). It consists of a statement of the theme, a single variation, and the theme again. This is Klinger at his best, full of wit and elegance.

The next item is Klinger's **Fantasia: The Song of Love in Ancient Times and Now Op. 10**, with the addition of a flirtatious folksong *What Was the Reason to Walk on the Hills*. The message of these themes is transparent.

We have a stern late-eighteenth-century tune, *Who Could Love So Passionately*, varied in the most Klinger-esque fashion. The theme appears in various registers, and the virtuosic passage work communicates to the listener that eighteenth-century love was a serious even dramatic business. The second theme is a yet unidentified song that must have been popular in the 1860s. It is lighter, dance-like and carefree, showing that something must have happened to the ethics of love towards the middle of the century. Interestingly, the stern 'Old Love' motif returns in the coda, sounding even gloomier, as it is set in the bass. Perhaps the coda serves as a synthesis in the Fantasia's narrative: if, on the surface, mid-nineteenth century love is light and flirtatious, in the depths of its torments one finds the same notes as a century earlier. This is where the piece would stop but, following the improvisatory culture of the nineteenth century, Akers appends one more tune to the Fantasia. This tune *What Was the Reason*, is a genuine folk song and Klinger cleverly includes a *balalaika* imitation. The subject matter is typical of Russian folksongs: a woman prefers her young lover to her old husband.

Klinger's **Fantasia Op. 17** is built on three

themes. Prefixed by an introduction, notable for its unusual arpeggios complementing the *bel canto* line, the first song, a lullaby *You Are My Soul, You Are My Strength* belongs to the pen of Pavel Bulakhov, Pyotr's brother, a successful lyric tenor at the St Petersburg Imperial Opera. This particular romance-lullaby was so popular that one, unexpectedly, finds references to it in literary sources (e.g. by Nikolay Leskov). The second tune is a genuine peasant song *Do Not Wake Me Up*, and following his routine for folk material, Klinger treats us to another *balalaika* imitation. There follows a *bravura coda* which could have been the grand finale but is followed by yet one more, rather unexpected tune. This concluding melody is a setting of the aria *Rachel, quand du Seigneur* from Fromental Halévy's (1799–1862) *La Juive* (The Jewess), his first and most successful opera.

The next piece, a setting from Mikhail Glinka's 1836 masterpiece *A Life for the Tsar*, may somewhat shake our assumption that Klinger was isolated from the Russian guitarists of the seven-string school. Klinger titles this publication **The Orphan's Song 'Ah, Not Poor Me' from the Opera, Life for the Tsar, Music by M. I. Glinka**. However, there is strong evidence that Klinger's



transcription is based on a publication of Andrey Sychra (c.1773–1850), the nineteenth century's foremost exponent of the seven string Russian guitar.

There is indeed an aria in the opera entitled *The Orphan's Song*, but it is a different tune altogether. Klinger's arrangement actually corresponds with the Trio from the Epilogue of the Opera. Nowhere is this referred to as *The Orphan's Song* other than in Sychra's earlier publication.

In order to create 'one character's song' from a Trio, Sychra approached the score with freedom and inventiveness. He omitted the vocal ensemble parts, thinned down the orchestral texture, and removed repetitions. This resulted in a piece fifty-seven bars long. Klinger's version is exactly the same length. I do not believe it can be a coincidence and most likely Klinger worked directly from Sychra's score and titled his piece accordingly.

Even if this is an 'arrangement from an arrangement', it is still based on music by one of Russia's greatest composers, Mikhail Glinka. Musicologists credit Glinka with having the ability to write original music that sounds like Russian folksong. The, so-called, *Orphan's*

Song is a perfect example of this. The melismatic melody is reminiscent of a Russian *protiazhnaiia* ('dragging') song, with its asymmetrical phrases and complicated rhythms. However, these coloraturas, uniting Italian opera with the Russia peasant art, are Glinka's own creation and through Klinger's art translate into an impressive, virtuosic guitar composition. The album concludes with Klinger's **Fantasia, Op. 18**, which is based on two songs, both written by well-known composers in imitation of the Russian folk style. Following a brief, unusually virtuosic, introduction, we hear the first song, **The Poor Branch** by Nikolai Titov (1800–75). It is a sentimental dialogue about a branch that loses all hope having being torn away from the native tree and swept out to sea. Klinger creates two variations in his own 'textural' style, in which the melody is always present, but is stated in the bass or woven into rapid arpeggios. A series of inventive modulations lead into the bravura Gypsy song *I Will Go Scythe the Grass* by Glinka. Perhaps in an attempt to capture the capriciousness of the Romani performance style, the song appears in several different tempi and in two different keys. This Fantasia ends with a particularly impressive Finale demonstrating Klinger's command of

the 'Russian style' of his epoch.

I strongly believe that with the release of the present album the name of Ivan Klinger will firmly occupy the place it deserves on the Guitar Olympus. Playful and serious, virtuosic and challenging, his music is long overdue for the attention of today's guitarists.

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Photograph: Douglas Whates

James Akers (guitar)

Critically acclaimed musician James Akers was hailed as 'the great Scottish guitarist' by *Classical Guitar Magazine* and, in a review from *Gramophone*, his playing was described as, 'containing all the warmth, colour and expressive richness one could hope for.' James has, throughout a varied career, explored music from a historical and stylistic perspective, combining diligent research with expressive performances to communicate the continuity of musical endeavour through the centuries.

James was born in Scotland and began playing guitar at the age of ten. He was largely self-taught before having lessons with Robert Mackillop at Napier University, Edinburgh. Whilst at Napier he turned his attentions to playing period instruments and pursued this as his principal study at the Royal College of Music, with Jakob Lindberg. James completed his studies at Trinity College of Music, studying with Jacob Heringman and David Miller, with additional lessons and advice from Paul O'Dette and Elizabeth Kenny.

As a soloist James has performed throughout Europe, the Middle East and Australia. Widely active as a chamber musician, he has accompanied leading

singers and vocal groups including Dame Emma Kirkby, Miriam Allan, I Fagiolini, Ex Cathedra, Stile Antico, Solomon's Knot, the Dunedin Consort and the Marian Consort and instrumental groups such as Fretwork, Chelys Viol Consort and The Rose Consort of Viols. As a continuo player James has worked for many major opera companies including, English National Opera, Welsh National Opera, Opera North, and Innsbruck Festival Opera and orchestras and chamber groups including The Scottish, Irish and English Chamber Orchestras, Northern Sinfonia, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, The Ulster Orchestra, and The Essen Philharmonie.

James has performed on numerous recordings, film soundtracks, theatrical stages, and broadcast for the BBC, France Musique and RTÉ Lyric, Ireland.

James lectures in early plucked strings at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

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