



Fantaisie Romantique
19th-Century Eastern European
Guitar Music

JAMES AKERS

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James Akers *guitar*

Instruments:

Nine-string guitar, anonymous, Berlin, c. 1890 (tracks 1–6, 29–32 & 36–39)

Eight-string guitar after Stauffer by Scott Tremblay 2012 (tracks 7–23 & 33–35)

Six-string guitar, anonymous, Vienna, c.1840 (tracks 24–28)

Mikhail Polupayenko (1848–1902)

Fantasia on Zaporozhye Themes

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------|
| 1. Moderato–Dumka | [1:39] |
| 2. Andante | [1:18] |
| 3. Allegro moderato | [1:41] |
| 4. Larghetto | [3:59] |
| 5. Allegro vivo (Dance) | [1:41] |

Johann Decker-Schenk (1826–1899)

6. Ukrainische Weise

Johann Dubez (1828–1891)

Fantaisie sur les motifs Hongrois

- | | |
|---------------------|--------|
| 7. Allegretto | [1:19] |
| 8. Andante, Csardas | [1:35] |
| 9. Moderato | [0:40] |
| 10. Allegretto | [0:56] |
| 11. Vivace | [1:07] |
| 12. Allegretto | [1:11] |
| 13. Tempo di marcia | [1:26] |
| 14. Allegro | [0:36] |
| 15. Andante | [0:33] |
| 16. Allegretto | [1:02] |
| 17. Tempo primo | [1:03] |

Nicolai Petrovich Makaroff (1810–1890)

Fleurs du Nord, Op. 3, No. 1

- | | |
|---|--------|
| 18. How did I upset you | [1:33] |
| 19. Along the Street
(I walked on the flowers) | [1:24] |
| 20. Dear Cow go home | [0:47] |
| 21. Ach, on the bridge, on the bridge | [0:42] |
| 22. Down on Mother Volga | [1:03] |
| 23. Kamarinskia | [1:42] |

Pietro Pettoletti (c.1795–c.1870)

Fantaisie sur une Romance favorite de Paschkoff, Op. 31

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------|
| 24. Introduzione | [2:48] |
| 25. Theme and Variation | [1:53] |
| 26. Allegretto | [2:34] |
| 27. Polonaise | [1:32] |
| 28. Allegro vivace | [0:38] |

Johann Decker-Schenk

Fantaisie Romantica

- | | |
|----------------------|--------|
| 29. Tempo di polacca | [2:05] |
| 30. Allegretto | [2:29] |
| 31. Andantino | [0:43] |
| 32. Tempo di valse | [1:30] |

Johann Kaspar Mertz (1806–1856)

Arr. Nicolai Petrovich Makaroff

Capriccio, Op. 9

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------|
| 33. Andante | [2:24] |
| 34. Andantino molto espressivo | [4:06] |
| 35. Finale | [1:18] |

Nicolas Pavlistcheff (1802–1879)

Grande Fantaisie sur un motif de l'Opera "La fiancée" d'Auber, Op. 25

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------|
| 36. Andantino | [2:23] |
| 37. Allegretto | [2:51] |
| 38. Allegretto sostenuto | [1:20] |
| 39. Allegro con spirito | [2:49] |

Total playing time [63:07]



Fantasia Romantique: 19th-Century Eastern European Guitar Music

With the exception of the Austrian composer Johann Dubez, the majority of the composers represented on this album are strongly connected to the Russian Empire. Some were born in Russia (Pavlistsheff, Makaroff) or Ukraine (Polupayenko), whilst others resided there for most of their lives (Pettoletti, Decker-Schenk). Whatever disparate causes connect them to Russia or Ukraine, one thing unites them: they composed for the European guitar in the tuning familiar to every guitarist today. In this regard, they constitute a minority, since the lion's share of music published in Moscow or St Petersburg during the nineteenth century was for the seven-string instrument, often called the 'Russian seven-string guitar', with its unique G major tuning. It is important to mention here that the dichotomy 'seven-string verses six-string guitar' should not be taken literally – both kinds of guitar often had additional bass strings, therefore, technically speaking, more than six or seven strings. The adjectives 'six-string' or 'seven-string' in Russian sources always refer to the instrument's tuning, not to the actual number of strings *per se*.

While representing the Western variety of the instrument, these guitarists did not completely ignore the seven-string guitar tradition. Pettoletti, Pavlistsheff, and Polupayenko also composed and published for the seven-string guitar. However, their strong connection to Western – and Central-European guitar music makes it logical to consider them separately from their purely seven-string playing peers.

It appears that the vast early nineteenth-century repertoire for the seven-string guitar was dominated by a single genre, variation sets based on Russian folksongs or other, often well-known, tunes. By the 1840s this repertoire shifted toward independent compositions, many of which could be called 'genre pieces' or 'Romantic miniatures.' The six-string guitar repertoire of the latter half of the nineteenth century clearly developed according to some other timeline as, most of the compositions on this album date from the second half of the century and are still based on pre-existent tunes, many of them folksongs. However, the treatment of these tunes, the way they are intermingled with additional original material, together with the melodic and harmonic language of the authors make these pieces recognizably 'Romantic.'

Mikhail Polupayenko studied medicine at the universities of Kharkiv and Kyiv, in modern day Ukraine, but we know much more about him as a concertising guitarist than as a medical doctor. He must have started playing the seven-string guitar in his native Kharkiv, but then continued lessons on the Western six-string guitar with the celebrated virtuoso Marek Sokolowski (1818–1883). Actively performing all over Ukraine, Polupayenko was close to the circle of St Petersburg guitarists and mandolinists led by the Austrian-born Johann Decker–Schenk. Polupayenko's last concert was in 1902 in Bakhmut, the town whose name is known to most Westerners today due to its heroic resistance against the Russian invasion of 2022.

The original title of Polupayenko's **Fantasia on Zaporozhye Themes** — *Dumy i vesel'e zaporozhtsa (Meditations and Merriments of a Zaporozhets)*— needs some explanation. The author clearly identifies himself with a Zaporozhets, which in the context means: a Zaporozhian Cossack. Thus, Polupayenko self-consciously announces a Ukrainian national fantasy, yet none of the tunes he uses can be recognized as Ukrainian folksongs or Cossack ballads. He labels an earlier section in triple meter 'Dumka', which is

a vague reference to *dumy*, the predominant genre in the Ukrainian epic tradition. Later in the piece, one encounters a section labeled *pliaska*, or dance – again, this tune is not recognizable as a pre-existing Cossack dance.

Nor does the thematic material of Decker-Schenk's **Ukrainische Weise** strike one as originally Ukrainian. The dedicatee of Polupaenko's *Fantasia*, the Austrian guitarist Johann Decker-Schenk settled in Russia in 1861 and uninterruptedly lived in St Petersburg until his death in 1899. It is, therefore, possible that Decker-Schenk's interest in Ukrainian music developed due to his friendship with Polupayenko. Starting from around 1890 and until Decker-Schenk's death nine years later, the two guitarists annually toured St Petersburg, Voronezh, Kharkiv, and Yuzovka (now: Donetsk). Perhaps the Ukrainian part of these tours made the Austrian virtuoso aware of the distinctive musical culture of Ukraine and inspired him to attempt to recreate it in his own compositions.

Similar to Decker-Schenk's *Ukrainische Weise*, the **Fantaisie sur des motifs Hongrois** ('Fantasy on Hungarian Themes') by the mandolin, guitar and harp virtuoso Johann Dubez is a piece by an Austrian composer who was attracted to an exotic

local colour, in this case, Hungarian. Unlike Dekker-Schenk, however, Dubez uses real Hungarian instrumental genres and melodies. After a flashy introduction, the first theme is a slow Hungarian *csárdás*, something that any educated listener would discern. The next theme (marked 'Moderato' in the score) would not strike one as recognizably Hungarian, yet it comes from the nationalist 1844 opera *László Hunyadi* by Ferenc Erkel (1810–1893). In the 'Tempo di Marcia' one recognizes the celebrated *Rákóczi March*, familiar today through the famous settings of Hector Berlioz and Franz Liszt. Since this march has always been a symbol of the Hungarian fight for independence, its inclusion must have been a bold statement for an Austrian composer. It is tempting to draw parallels between Dubez's *Hungarian Fantasy* and 'Ukrainian' works by Polupayenko and Decker-Schenk as musical responses to the stifling political regimes of the two corresponding empires.

The lexicographer and guitar enthusiast Nikolai Makaroff was a very eccentric character, with several grand passions that followed on from one another throughout his long life. It is likely that his interest in the Western variety of the guitar arose during his stay in Poland, where he first found himself whilst still in his teens.

However, his total intoxication with the guitar began only in the late 1830s and climaxed in the 1856 International Guitar Competition in Brussels that he organised.

Judging from his many published pieces and his many opinions expressed in his even more numerous literary publications, Makaroff was primarily interested in that most superficial manifestation of musicality, technical virtuosity. This can be clearly seen in every piece of music he ever published: after a brief statement of the theme, he invariably departs into very fast passages, or very high notes, or both. His **Fleurs du Nord** are no exception. Ultimately, this is a collection of genuine Russian folksongs with virtuosic variations. Remarkably, the first two songs ('How did I upset you?' and 'I walked on the flowers') are the same melodies that Fernando Sor used in his famous duet *Souvenir de Russie* – in fact, in the former, Makaroff even quotes Sor's signature melodic licks. This is a curious situation. As a six-string guitarist, the Russian Makaroff clearly learned how to arrange Russian folksongs from his Western colleagues.

Although of Italian origin, Pietro Pettoletti was born in Norway, lived in Germany, Sweden and then, at some point settled, for the remainder of his life, in St Petersburg.

In order to attain popularity in his new environment, Pettoletti taught himself the seven-string guitar, and throughout his career in Russia published for both variants of the instrument. The words in the title here (**Fantaisie sur une Romance favorite de Paschkoff**) might suggest that the romance in question was written by Mr Pashkoff. In reality, this is a well-known song in Russian style 'He fell out of love with me' written by Alexander Guriliov (1803–1858). It is remarkable how skillfully Pettoletti juxtaposes ornate, dramatic textures of his own invention with Guriliov's somewhat naive little song.

Although in Decker-Schenk's **Fantaisie Romantique** one does not hear familiar melodies, the overall intention of the composer must have been to transport the listener to the South, far from the St Petersburg snow. The opening, in the common bolero rhythm, hints at Spain, while, at a later point, one is more likely to think of Naples. The mandolin-sounding central episode of the piece intimates Italy, yet the concluding waltz seems to embody the cosmopolitan spirit of late nineteenth-century salon music, free of ethnic connection.

On the cover of his **Capriccio**, Makaroff claims that this is his arrangement, for the

ten-string guitar, of an unpublished piece by Johann Kasper Mertz (1806–1856). The diligent research of Graziano Salvoni has revealed the origins of these works. The dramatic introduction and yearning first theme of Makaroff's portmanteau both derive from Bellini operas, whilst the concluding *coda* section derives from an original work, an *Elegie*. The character of this piece contrasts greatly with Makaroff's usual extravagant virtuosity and shows the breadth of influence Mertz's music exerted during the nineteenth century.

The album concludes with **Grande Fantaisie** by Nikolai Pavlistcheff based on an aria from Daniel Auber's opera *La fiancée* (1829). Pavlistcheff's biography is rather well-documented, mainly because he was married to the sister of Alexander Pushkin, Russia's prime poet of all times. Still, Pavlistcheff's engagement with music in general and guitar in particular leaves many open questions. There is written evidence that, after retiring in 1825, he planned to become more active with the guitar, at that time, the popular seven-string variety. Yet, disappointingly, his only publication from that period is a rather undistinguished potpourri based on themes from Weber's opera *Der Freischütz*. Instead, as a result of the Polish uprising of 1830–31,

Pavlistcheff took advantage of a career opportunity and became a part of the provisional government there: he occupied important posts and was responsible for the periodicals. This must have been the time when he shifted to the European six-string guitar with additional basses and, judging from this magnificent Fantasia, mastered this tuning to perfection.

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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 USA, 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, Glynebourne and Innsbruck Festival Opera and orchestras and ensembles including The Scottish, Irish and English Chamber Orchestras, Northern Sinfonia, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, 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 RTE Lyric, Ireland.

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

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