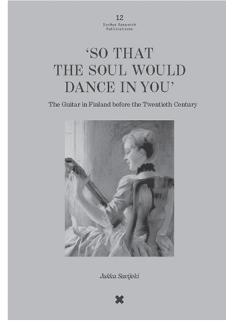


*“So that the Soul Would Dance in You”: The Guitar in Finland before the Twentieth Century,*

by Jukka Savijoki.

Helsinki: Sibelius Academy, 2019.  
DocMus Research Publications 12,  
451 pp. (<https://helda.helsinki.fi/handle/10138/304992>).



The quotation in the title is taken from a letter from the Finnish poet, also called the “Finnish Bellman,” Jakob Gabriel Leistenius (1821–1858). Of Leistenius it is said that “the guitar was his friend; in solitary moments he struck chords on it so that the soul would dance in you if you heard them.” In this well-produced book, Finnish guitarist, pedagogue, and researcher Jukka Savijoki presents a very broad, easy-to-read, and deep description of the guitar’s development in Finland up to the end of the nineteenth century. Published by the Sibelius Academy, the book is written in English and covers over 450 pages.

Sweden and Finland formed a united kingdom from the thirteenth century until 1809, when Finland became an autonomous Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire. But it is not until the 1810s and 1820s that the first traces of the guitar can be found in Finland. In the Swedish part of the kingdom, the guitar was represented as early as the seventeenth century. A more parallel development is shown by the Swedish lute, which also appeared in Finland both before and after 1809. Seeing Savijoki’s long research work presented in book form, one is both impressed and fascinated by how well he manages to transform a large and varied—but at the same time fairly meager—research material into a coherent history. Savijoki’s broad perspective, where all facets of guitar playing come under the spotlight, is not that common, but one finds a similar approach in Christopher Page’s books on the history of the guitar in England.

Savijoki combines these many details into a vivid picture of the guitar and its players in Finland. He has used the Finnish daily press extensively, in the form of articles and in particular of advertisements. Some information in the advertisements should be taken with a pinch of salt—as in the relatively frequent occurrence of the term “Spanish” guitar. This may mean either that the guitar in question was manufactured in Spain and imported to Finland, or that it was a “Spanish” model guitar. I think that it was mainly the latter variant and that the guitars came mostly from Germany, Austria, and possibly France. As far as I know, guitars made in Spain were not exported to any great extent during the earlier part of the nineteenth century.

The book opens with a solid background description in

which Sweden plays an important role, among other things with the development of the Swedish lute, until the 1810s. Some manuscripts with music for the Swedish lute are preserved in Finland, and some of these can be linked to the music copyist Jacob Preusmark in Stockholm. Several lutes made in Stockholm are preserved in Finland, but there are also some made in Finland from the early period, namely by Carl Fredrik Thusberg in Turku, Anders Grönberg in Sveaborg, Carl Petter Sundqvist and Enoch Järnfeldt in Turku. Thusberg was, by the way, the father of the earliest known female guitar teacher in Finland, Maria Fredrica Thusberg.

By the early nineteenth century, there was already a demand in Finland for guitars, guitar music, strings, and teachers, as is clearly shown by advertisements in the daily press. As with Sweden and the rest of Europe, but on a slightly smaller scale in Finland, interest in the guitar reached its peak during the first half of the century and then weakened during the latter part. And as in Sweden, the guitar in Finland was initially a pleasure and interest for the more affluent social classes in larger cities such as Turku, Helsinki, and Viborg. Another common feature with Sweden and the rest of Europe is that female guitar players seem to have dominated. This is not least evident in the preserved images and artwork that Savijoki reproduces and describes. The many Swedish names that appear in early Finnish guitar history may surprise the reader. In most cases, of course, these are Swedish-speaking Finns, a population in Finland that has been a linguistic minority for centuries. Today, most Swedish-speaking Finns are located in Ostrobothnia, on Åland, and along the south coast from Turku to Uusimaa.

During the nineteenth century, there was hardly any guitar music printed at all in Finland; players were completely dependent on imports. Until 1809, there was a similar situation as in Sweden, where Olof Åhlström’s exclusive privilege to print music hampered competition and development in both Sweden and Finland. The music stores in the larger Finnish cities, however, had an extensive imported assortment of music for guitar, as evidenced by advertisements and preserved music catalogs. Savijoki provides the reader with a comprehensive list of all the guitar music available in Finland during the nineteenth century, and it is indeed an impressive amount. Unlike Finland, Sweden had its own—albeit limited—production of printed music for guitar from the introduction of lithography in the early 1820s and after the cessation of Åhlström’s privilege.

Another difference is the lack of guitar composers in Finland during the nineteenth century. Only a couple of names appear: Axel Gabriel Ignelius and Carl Theodor Möller. Sweden had some of more significance, such as Edvard Brandes, Fredrik Wilhelm Hildebrand, Otto Torp,

Johan Jakob Nagel, and others. Hildebrand also arranged many songs by the Finnish composer Bernhard Crusell for guitar accompaniment. Accompanied song similarly dominates the Swedish guitar repertoire. Some production of guitars occurred in Finland, but only a few are preserved and they exhibit the same “provincialism” as their Swedish counterparts. Carl Petter Sundqvist, Olof Granfeldt, Anders Lindros, and Enoch Järnfeldt are among the better-known Finnish guitar builders. Finland had very few appearances by professional guitarists, and sometimes these appearances were linked to the artists’ travels from Stockholm to Saint Petersburg or vice versa. Saint Petersburg was the “capital” of Finland from 1809 to 1917 and an important cultural center in the Baltic Sea area. Two German guitarists who visited Finland were Adam Darr and the whistling equilibrist Karl von Gärtner.

Jukka Savijoki’s broad survey is peppered with deep dives into auction records, advertisements and articles in the daily press, inventories, biographical information,

preserved guitar music, pictures and much more. I find it hard to see that anything is missing from the book, and Savijoki clearly provides all his sources. With Savijoki’s book and Erling Møldrup’s study of the guitar in Denmark, *Guitaren: Ett eksotisk instrument i den danske musik*, at least two Scandinavian countries have had their guitar histories described—and one must probably allow that Finland is leading in terms of accuracy, breadth, and depth in history writing. Yet despite his extensive research, Savijoki believes that there still are additional areas in the history of Finnish plucked-string instruments to continue researching. So it is with all good research: you come across sidetracks that you have to leave, but which in themselves are often interesting to follow and immerse yourself in.

—KENNETH SPARR

“The GFA has long been the most comprehensive US-based source for information on the guitar community’s news, its teaching institutions, recordings, scholars, as well as its brightest talents. I cannot imagine either an aficionado or aspiring guitarist being fully informed without the aid of GFA membership.”

—Jason Vieaux

JOIN GFA TODAY!  
GUITARFOUNDATION.ORG

