

REVIEWS: (cont.)

Sinier, Daniel and Françoise de Ridder.
La Guitare = The Guitar = La Chitarra,
Paris, 1650-1950, Addendum.

Turin: Edizioni Il Salabue, 2015.

This striking oversized (25 x 34 cm. / 9.75 x 13.5 in.) and lavishly illustrated book emanates from Edizioni Il Salabue, a specialty publisher known for books and catalogs on violin making and luthiery in Piedmont and Emilia-Romagna, and renowned for the high quality of its photography and printing. It is the third publication in the series *La Guitare*, authored by the team of “Sinier de Ridder” (as the authors (Daniel Sinier and Françoise de Ridder identify themselves in the books). It is an addendum to their Volume I: *Paris, 1650-1950*, which appeared in 2007. Volume II, dedicated to instruments from Mirecourt and the provinces, came out in 2011. All three books are filled with sumptuous photographs; the thoughtful and authoritative text is provided in French, English, and Italian.

The authors have gained an impressive reputation for their painstaking restorations of museum quality instruments. After studies at the *École nationale supérieure des arts appliqués et des métiers d’arts* (ENSAAMA), they established a Paris workshop where they restored antique instruments for the city’s antique dealers. In 1979, they transferred their workshop to the commune of Saint-Chartier (Indre) in the Centre-Val de Loire region, close to the geographical center of France. Since then, according to their website, they have taken apart “over 3000 guitars, mandolins, lutes, zithers, theorbos, viols, etc.,” taking “notes, photos, drawings, casts and prints,” compiling a unique and priceless archive of documentation regarding antique musical instrument restoration. They were featured in *Soundboard*, Vol. XXXIII, Nos. 3–4 (2007) in a cover story about their resurrection of a 1676 Baroque guitar by the Prague luthier Leonhard Pratter, and they have also published articles in *Classical Guitar* and other journals. Although their expertise is international, they are particularly interested in French instruments.

The first volume was dedicated to guitars built in Paris. Its 70 pages of text were followed by a 130-page photo album of 54 museum-quality guitars, including splendid examples from luthiers such as the Voboam family (Baroque guitars) and Edmond Saunier and Lambert (18th-century transitional guitars). There are several spectacular early Classical guitars by the Pons family and many examples by René Lacôte, but also several guitars from the 1930s by Julián Gómez Ramírez, Selmer-type guitars, and a 1969 Bouchet. In many cases the photos are accompanied by full-color x-rays, and there is an appendix with detailed measurements of each guitar.



The second volume, following the same format, is focused principally on the curious phenomenon of Mirecourt, a village in the Vosges where luthiery became a local industry in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Literally thousands of musical instruments, often unsigned, were produced by a “remarkable professional system controlling ... each stage of the construction ... from the wood trade to the apprenticeship of the young, the finishing, the set-up and the sale” to a distribution network of travelling salesmen and to “the most prestigious workshops in France and abroad.” By 1835 there were as many as 600 workers employed, producing not only musical instruments but also bows, cases, and machine heads. One source states that in the year 1836 Mirecourt produced 2,000 guitars ranging in price from 5 to 100 francs. Perhaps this competition explains why the luthiers of Mirecourt were so innovative—even daring—in their designs, construction techniques, and decoration. The authors identify many of the luthiers and their workshops, including names such as Roudhloff (D. and A. were two brothers trained by their father François in Mirecourt; they relocated to London, where Regondi favored their guitars), and Nicolas Grobert, who made a guitar played and signed by both Berlioz and Paganini. Also included in Volume II are a few luthiers from Besançon, Lille, Lyon, etc.

The Addendum volume being reviewed here is the third volume to appear sequentially, but it is not intended to be a Volume III but rather a “Vol. Ia.” In the decade since the publication of Volume I in 2007, a number of significant but previously unknown guitars have passed through the Sinier de Ridder workshop or otherwise come to their attention, such that they decided an update was called for. The new book has the same dimensions and format as the previous two volumes, but is shorter and proportionally less expensive: thirteen guitars (including six by the Voboam family, five by Lacôte, and an award-winning Pons) are featured in 40 pages of text, with 25 pages of photos.

The Voboam dynasty flourished from around 1600 to 1730, and included at least six luthiers over four generations, spanning the reigns of the first four Bourbon monarchs of France. They prospered particularly during the long reign of Louis XIV, who himself played guitar and inspired his court to do the same. In addition to informative historical background, the Sinier de Ridder team have much to say about Voboam’s construction techniques, including the archaic neck setting and the top under tension. The Voboams were, famously, masters of ornate inlay and marquetry, but they tried to minimize embellishment on soundboards, which diminished the vibration and therefore the sound. The backs and sides, however, are often nothing short of spectacular, incorporating exotic woods, tortoise shell, ivory, and mother of pearl.

The Pons brothers also made exquisite instruments, one of them earning a prize in the National Exhibition in Paris in 1827. It featured a screw mechanism that enabled a performer to adjust the string height. That guitar, or one just like it, had rested forgotten in an attic until a few years ago, when it was brought in pieces to the Sinier de Ridder workshop for restoration. They were able to identify the guitar and to determine that the patent for the adjustable action had been registered to Louis-David Pons (Pons *jeune*), a son of César Pons. Louis-David may have had help from one of his brothers, a clockmaker and goldsmith who also probably “designed and made the sumptuous metallic flowers inlaid with precious stones on the Pons lyre-guitar roses,” as well as the Pons mechanical “butterfly” pegs. The Sinier de Ridder restoration is amazing, and the photographs of their progress are fascinating.

René Lacôte is perhaps the most famous of the early French guitar builders, internationally known and admired. Several unusual Lacôtes are featured here, including a *décacorde* (ten-string guitar) of the sort he built for Carulli. Another discovery involved several Lacôte guitars with unexplained but matching holes and the addition of a reinforcing cleat on the back. Sinier de Ridder were able to determine that the guitars had been modified for use with Aguado’s *tripodison*, and to identify other modifications, including an inner soundboard, related to the same device. Their observations on some of the problems caused by

the *tripodison* are fascinating. The most daring guitar in the book is an 1850 *enharmonique* guitar attributed to Lacôte, with six channels grooved into the fingerboard, one under each string. Into the channels were fitted individual moveable frets, allowing the player to adjust them, raising or lowering the pitch, to alter the standard equal temperament.

The Sinier de Ridder team plan three future volumes on guitars from Italy, England and the German states, and Spain, for a total of five volumes. And while on the subject of the publications of Edizioni Il Salabue, I should mention here another noteworthy book from that publisher, in the same size and format as the above but not the work of the French couple. It is *La Chitarra: Quattro secoli di capolavori = The Guitar: Four Centuries of Masterpieces*, edited by Giovanni Accornero, Ivan Epicoco, and Eraldo Guerci (Cremona: Edizioni Il Salabue, 2008). The text (about 90 pages) is in Italian and English, and there are more photographs (150 pages) depicting 72 guitars from across Europe, and spanning the Baroque era to the early 20th century (including Hauser I, Ramírez, Santos, Simplicio, etc.).

These are sumptuous books, heirloom publications documenting splendid instruments, with authoritative texts. They are expensive, but they are—like the guitars depicted within—museum quality.

—RICHARD M. LONG

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