Global Interactive Journal of World Religions and Cultures (ISSN: 2985 - 0975)

CULTURAL TRANSMISSION AND GLOBAL INFLUENCE IN THE GUITAR INTERPRETATION OF THE MAGIC FLUTE

Li JiaLian[1], Zhang Yuxin[2]
Faculty of Music, Bangkokthonburi University[1-2]
China[1], Thailand[2]

Email: graduatestudentbtu@gmail.com,[1] pingnaping@gmail.com[2]

Received: June 16, 2025; **Revised:** December 27, 2025; **Accepted:** December 27, 2025

Abstract

This article explores the cultural transmission and global influence of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's The Magic Flute through its reinterpretation in classical guitar repertoire, focusing on Fernando Sor's Variations on a Theme from The Magic Flute. As one of Mozart's most symbolic and culturally embedded operas, The Magic Flute represents Enlightenment ideals, Freemason philosophy, and a synthesis of German folk and Italian opera styles. Its transformation into a solo guitar work by Sor exemplifies how European musical heritage traverses cultural and geographical boundaries. By analyzing the melodic structure, harmonic development, and technical performance aspects—including legato, ornaments, glissando, arpeggios, and chordal playing—this article reveals how guitar techniques serve not only as a tool of musical interpretation but also as a medium of cultural adaptation. **The research highlights** how global classical guitar traditions preserve, reinterpret, and transmit iconic European compositions across time and context. This investigation affirms the enduring relevance of cross-cultural music-making and its role in shaping a shared global musical culture.

Keywords: Cultural transmission; Global influence; Guitar interpretation; Magic flute

Introduction

The classical guitar was born in the early 16th century. As a Western plucked instrument, it has a long and ancient history. It belongs to the same category of classical stringed instruments as the lute and the harp, and is known as the "three major Western instruments" together with the piano and the violin. In the "first golden age" of the development of guitar music - the classical period, a large number of outstanding musicians appeared in Europe, as the center of music culture. Among them, the Spanish composer Ferdinando Sor (1778-1838) is a dazzling pearl (Sadie, 2001). He has been committed to improving the status of guitar in the music world, and the six-string guitar has reached its peak under his efforts. Sor is a prolific composer who has dabbled in different types of music. He has written operas, instrumental solos, vocal pieces, ballets, symphonic works, etc. The musical genres are also very rich: there are rondos, fantasies, sonatas, divertimentos, theme variations, etudes, etc. But his main achievements are in classical guitar, and he has formed a complete classical guitar education system. His music has a distinct classical style, rich harmony and strong musicality. He is known as the Beethoven of guitar music. His representative works include "The Great Solo", "Moonlight" and "Variations on a Theme of the Magic Flute". From the late 18th century to the early 19th century, driven by the Enlightenment, bourgeois democratic ideas were deeply rooted in the hearts of the people. Cultural trends influenced the creation of art, and the understanding of new culture and new ideas permeated into artistic works. With the pursuit of the ideals of "freedom, equality, and fraternity" and the development of humanistic ideas, the music at this time advocated a sense of nature, that is, pleasant to the ears, and did not force the audience to understand the complex musical structure, but gave the audience a relaxed and pleasant experience (Chen, 1998).

Source of the Melody and Theme of the Music

Mozart (Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, 1756-1791) is one of the three great masters of the Vienna Classical School. His works are exquisite and delicate, with a high degree of unity in content and form. He created 19 operas in his lifetime, the last of which is "The Magic Flute". It is a masterpiece that combines the styles of German folk songs and Italian operas. It has both the rigor of drama and the ease of comedy. Therefore, it is regarded as the greatest comprehensive German classical opera. The overall style of "The Magic Flute" is solemn and full of yearning for freedom and peace. It is said that the motivation for its creation is related to "Freemasonry". "Freemasonry" appeared in Britain in the 18th century and is a fraternal organization with religious colors. It advocates that people pursue rationality and perfect themselves, emphasizes morality and kindness, and adheres to theism. Later, the Freemasons launched the Enlightenment Movement. Opposing the feudal autocratic system and pursuing bourgeois democratic ideas became the trend of the times, which gradually developed the Freemasons to a scale comparable to Catholicism. Mozart was a member of this huge system, and the ideas of the Freemasons were often reflected in his works. His musical style is simple, light, and full of humanism. At the end of the first act of The Magic Flute, there is a chorus of slaves. Sol selected this theme for adaptation and created a guitar work consisting of one theme and five variations. Sol's creation was also deeply influenced by Mozart. His works are full of pleasant liveliness and innocence. He uses cheerful music to express his pursuit and yearning for freedom and peace (Tyler, 2002).

Music Structure

The Magic Flute Theme and Variations usually include the following parts: (**Theme)** The theme is the starting point of the work and is usually presented in a concise and direct way. In this part, Sol retains the original form of Mozart's melody and interprets it through the unique timbre of the guitar. For example, the guitar's performance in this part is relatively stable, the timbre is soft and clear,

and the rhythm is concise and bright. This part allows the audience to clearly identify the original melody and lays the foundation for the subsequent variations.

Melody: The theme melody is often a classic piece from Mozart's The Magic Flute. The guitarist accurately reproduces this melody through the chord pressing of the left hand and the plucking technique of the right hand.

Harmony: The harmony is relatively simple, and basic chord progressions are usually used to ensure that the melody can be clearly highlighted.

Variation 1: The variation part usually changes the rhythm, harmony or timbre while maintaining the basic form of the theme melody. In the first variation, Sol might make some small adjustments to the rhythm, such as speeding up the melody slightly or presenting it in a slightly syncopated form, which increases the rhythm and fluidity.

Technique: Sol might add some slight ornaments, such as appoggiatura or fast scales, which can add more layers to the variation.

Tone: Through the changes in the right-hand picking technique (such as plucking with fingertips or using nails), different timbres are presented, making the first variation a sharp contrast with the theme.

Variation 2: In the second variation, Sol often makes more obvious harmonic changes, and may switch to other keys or use more complex chord structures. The technical requirements of the guitarist will also increase, such as adding arpeggios, string skipping and other techniques, making this variation technically difficult.

Harmonic development: In this variation, the harmony may become more complex, and Sol may use tonal changes, such as switching from major to minor, or introducing new chord types such as augmented chords.

Technical development: The second variation may add some fast arpeggios or división techniques to show the flexibility and technical level of the guitarist.

Variation 3 and subsequent variations: In the subsequent variations, Sol's skills and musical ideas are richer, and the changes in rhythm, harmony, and techniques are more obvious. For example, in some variations, the melody may be reversed or reflected (such as playing the theme melody in reverse). In addition, Sol will also increase the challenge of playing by changing the right-hand technique, using more complex fingering, variable speed plucking, and pitch jumps.

Technical changes: As the variations progress, the technique becomes more complex. For example, through fast scale playing, chord jumps, and fine fingering ornaments, the guitarist can show more skills.

Rhythm and emotional changes: Sol may also make each variation emotionally different by adjusting the rhythm or using different beat changes, thereby enhancing the expressiveness of the work (Liu, 2013).

Final Variation and Coda: In the final variation and coda, Sol often speeds up and adds more techniques to bring the whole work to a climax, and finally ends with a dramatic and technical development. For example, fast scales and arpeggios may be used to create a strong emotional impact and end in a gorgeous way.

Climax: The final variation is usually the most technically challenging part, and the performer may need to demonstrate fast fingering, accurate rhythmic sense and difficult playing techniques.

Coda: The coda usually brings a perfect ending by repeating the theme or the final chord progression (Duarte, 2005).

Performance Techniques

Although this variation is not large in scale, it has rich musical connotations and is very difficult to play. It requires the performer to have skilled playing skills to accurately interpret it. From the perspective of guitar playing skills, the three techniques of legato playing, single note playing, and harmony playing all appear in the work. (i) There are three types of legato playing: slurs,

ornaments, and glissando. Slurs are also called legato. It requires the right hand to play the first note. If it is an ascending glissando, the second note is pronounced by striking the strings with the left hand. If it is a descending glissando, the second note is pronounced by plucking the strings with the left hand. Slurs appear frequently in the work, and they can be found in the theme and the second variation. It requires a uniform playing speed and controlled volume. The first note of the right hand should be solid and full, and the left hand should be flexible and accurate. The ornaments evolved from the legato, and the main ones in the work are echoes and appoggiaturas. When playing, be careful not to make the ornaments unclear because of the fast speed. You should practice slowly and patiently, and strive to accurately explain the duration of each note and play each note cleanly. Glissando is a unique playing technique of string instruments. It refers to the playing method of sliding the finger to the next note after playing the first note.

In the second and third variations of the work, the speed is relatively slow, and the use of glissando brings a delicate and exquisite feeling to the work. When playing, pay attention to the timing of sliding. It should not be too early. Wait until the first note is fully played before sliding, and it is best to add vibrato to make the timbre more textured. (II) There are three types of single-notes playing methods: fast scales, arpeggios, and broken chords. Fast scale runs are very common on keyboard instruments, but in string instruments, due to the changes in strings and positions, playing dense notes becomes a difficult point. For example, the 16th notes triplets in Variation 5 require the performer to practice slowly and patiently, so that each note can be clearly expressed, with a mellow tone and a coherent sound. Arpeggio techniques appear in large numbers in Variation 4 of the work (as shown in Figure 1). The 16th note triplets are followed by a series of short arpeggios, which are quadruplets or quintuplets composed of 32 notes. These arpeggios should be played accurately and flexibly, coherently and neatly. At the same time, the 16th note rest should be noted here. Although it is short, it must be expressed with appropriate muting techniques. Through the comparison of the two ranges, rhythmic patterns, and note durations, the "sense of dialogue" of the musical image is created.

The playing method of broken chords is very common and classic in classical guitar. There are a lot of music involving broken chords in different musical periods. In the fifth variation of this work, broken chords composed of triplets appear. When playing, pay attention to the uniformity of the three notes, the balance of the volume, and whether the connection between the left hand and the right hand is just right. This requires a lot of practice to strengthen the tacit understanding of both hands. (III) There are two ways of playing harmony: double tone and chord bell. As an instrument that can play harmony, the guitar is widely used in classical works. In the theme and the first variation of this work, there are many third intervals, and in the second variation, there are many sixth intervals (as shown in Figure 2). When playing, pay attention to the changes in fingering. The continuity of the music cannot be interrupted by the movement of the finger position. The position of the melody part should be clear, and the main melody part should be highlighted in the playing.

The chord chiming technique is a favorite performance technique of the composer Saul, and he has used it in many of his works. As the name suggests, chiming imitates the sound of a "bell". The high notes of the chord are kept on the open strings, and the constantly changing harmony of the low part pushes the music forward. This technique appears in the second variation of this work. When playing, it is worth noting that the right hand should have a certain strength to play the changing harmony. At the same time, the timbre of the retained part should be light but not empty, and it should be highly controlled, clear and agile.

Application of the classical guitar technique of legato in "Variations on a Theme of the Magic Flute"

Application of slur playing technique: Slur playing technique is a very high left-hand skill in guitar playing. When playing, after the player plays the first note under the slur with the right hand, the remaining notes must be plucked or struck by the left hand to produce sound. If it is an ascending glissando, after the right hand plays the first note, the following notes need to be quickly struck by the left-hand fingers to complete the pronunciation; if it is a descending glissando,

after the right hand plays the first note, the following notes only need to be plucked by the left-hand fingers pressing the strings to complete the pronunciation. Generally speaking, when playing slurs on guitar, the rhythm and volume should be grasped, especially the use of left-hand fingers. In "The Magic Flute Variations", there are two main pluck techniques for slurs. The first pluck technique is performed by the player's middle finger and ring finger. On the surface, this pluck technique is relatively simple, but if you do not pay attention to the maintenance of the high-pitched fingering when plucking the strings during the performance, you will achieve twice the result with half the effort②. For example, when playing the legato of the theme of Variations on a Theme of the Magic Flute, you need to pay attention to the use of the left index finger. The left index finger should press the fingerboard but not too hard or too soft. If too much force is used, it will be difficult to hook the string. If too little force is used, it will leave the fingerboard along with other fingers that are hooking the string. At the same time, you should pay close attention to the direction of the finger that is hooking the string. To ensure that the sound is full and full of power, the finger must be close to the fingerboard when hooking the string, avoiding contact with other strings. The second hooking technique needs to be completed on one string. Compared with the legato played on other strings, there is no need to worry about hooking other strings when playing legato on one string, so this hooking technique is relatively easy. However, if the left little finger is obviously weaker than other fingers in strength, flexibility and independence when hooking the string, it is difficult to achieve the desired effect. For example, in Variation 2, there is a group of 32-note legato. For this group of legato, not only the playing speed is required to be fast, but also the requirements for the pitch are very high. If the performer cannot master the string-pulling technique well during the performance, it is difficult to play a clear sound (Lin, 2012).

Application of the ornament playing method: The ornament playing method is evolved on the basis of the legato playing method, mainly including various playing methods such as appoggiatura, echo, ripple and tremolo. In Variations on a Theme of the Magic Flute, Fernando Sol uses more ornaments such as echo and short appoggiatura. Short appoggiatura is a fast legato with a very short duration, and it is not difficult to play. Analyzing the ornaments in

Variations on a Theme of the Magic Flute, the most difficult ones are the ornaments in the third bar of the theme and the fifth bar of Variation. The ornaments there are incorporated into the very short 16th dotted notes, and such difficulty requires a very high level of performance from the performer. When playing, not only the speed and integrity of the notes must be ensured, but also the performance effect of the ornaments must be ensured, which greatly increases the difficulty of playing. When playing, in order to ensure the speed and integrity of the performance, quite a number of performers adopt the method of avoiding this technique. Although this has little impact on the integrity of the entire piece of music, the gorgeousness of the music is greatly reduced. In order to achieve the purpose of performance, the performer must pay special attention to the duration of the small notes in the ornaments, accurately grasp the performance techniques of the small notes, and ensure the accuracy of the duration of the small notes, and play them neatly (Zhuo & Reogkwanyongmee, 2024).

Application of glissando playing: As a unique performance technique of string instruments, glissando playing refers to the performance method in which the performer slides the first note to the next note position after playing it, so as to produce a performance method similar to vocal glissando. The melodies of the second and third variations of "Variations on a Theme of the Magic Flute" are relatively slow. The composer incorporates glissando techniques into them, fully demonstrating the softness and delicacy of the melody. In order to fully demonstrate the effect of glissando, the timing of finger sliding must be accurately grasped during performance. When the first note is played and fully pronounced, the left-hand finger pressing the string can slide down or up to the target note. At this time, in order to ensure the accurate completion of the sliding action, the left-hand arm and wrist should move slightly ahead of the left-hand fingers. If the performer can properly integrate the vibrato technique at the end of the glissando, it can not only make the glissando more accurate, but also make the tone more beautiful (He, 2010).

New Knowledges

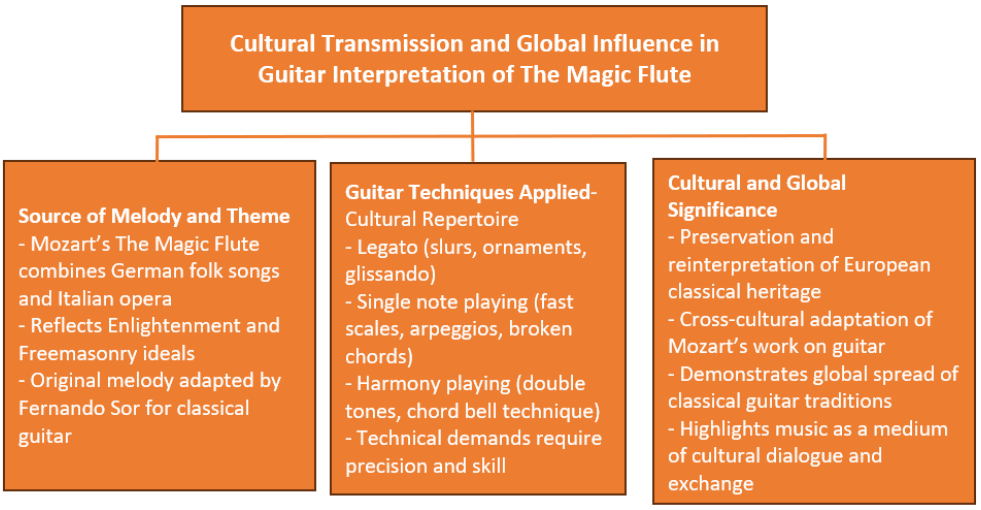

Figure 1: New Knowledges Diagram of Cultural Transmission and Global Influence in the Guitar Interpretation of The Magic Flute.

Conclusions

The guitar interpretation of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, particularly through Fernando Sor's variations, exemplifies a profound process of cultural transmission and global musical influence. This work not only preserves the original spirit and themes of Mozart's opera but also transforms them through the unique technical and expressive capabilities of the classical guitar. The adaptation highlights how global classical guitar traditions engage with European musical heritage, facilitating a dialogue between cultures across time and geography. By integrating advanced performance techniques with deep cultural understanding, this reinterpretation underscores the dynamic nature of musical globalization and the continuing relevance of classical works in contemporary global culture.

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