

# Preludes, Cadences and Composition for Guitar in 19th-Century Teaching Practice

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Despite the mountain of pedagogical publications for the guitar in the 19th century, we still are unsure as to how a student actually learned the instrument – the practical aspects: technique, theory and performance practice. Presumably the student would visit the local teacher, if there was one, and be instructed in posture, basic technique, and reading music, before being fed a diet of Lessons, Exercises and Studies, leading to 'proper' pieces. In that respect, the process would be little different from recent teaching practice since the 1950s. However, one area largely neglected in our own time, but very much integrated into 19th-century practice, is the combined study of improvisation and composition.

Imagine if we had a manuscript workbook by one of Sor's or Giuliani's pupils. It would give us a fascinating insight into how they actually taught the guitar. The *Georgina Gregory* manuscript (henceforth, GGms) from 1830s Edinburgh goes some way to revealing much about how one Scottish teenager learned from one of the world's finest guitar players and composers of the day, Felix Horetsky. Horetsky – a Polish émigré of international stature as guitar performer, composer and pedagogue – apparently lived in Edinburgh's fashionable New Town district for some twenty years, teaching, publishing and performing, first in Scotland Street, and then in the slightly down market Clarence Street, the move possibly reflecting his dwindling income in old age. He had one student who would become quite famous, Stanislaus Sczeganowski, who, after a period of study with Sor in Paris, would return to Edinburgh to take over the late Horetsky's teaching practice. Edinburgh could boast two of the finest guitar performer-composer-teachers, active in the heart of the city for some forty years.

The GGms contains no lost masterworks, but does contain many tuneful exercises and studies, some Polish airs by Horetsky, a piece by Giuliani, and some arrangements of Scottish airs. It can be downloaded in its entirety **from this website**. I have also made some **mp3 files of selected pieces**. Of chief interest to this essay, however, is the notation of various chord sequences which were presumably used to teach harmonic progressions, and could be used for improvised preludes, cadences and compositions.



Here we have two cadence progressions in the relative major and minor keys of G and Em. The initial tonic G Major chord quickly becomes the Dominant 7th of the new key of C Major (modulation to the Sub Dominant). An augmented 6th takes us home to the original key of G Major, which is reinforced by a final Dominant-Tonic cadence. Then, the Tonic E minor becomes a Dominant 7th leading to Am (again, a modulation to the Sub Dominant). The following 6/3 chord leads to a classic 6/4 5/#3 cadence before the return of the tonic. These two short passages introduce the compositional practice of Home and Away; consonance leading to dissonance, before returning Home emphatically. It is a satisfying arch-form compositional structure which has served music well in various stylistic guises for

many a century, and is the bedrock of Tonal music. The question is: what does one do with these examples?

**Here is an mp3 file** of the G Major cadence progression. I start with a straight reading, and then try an improvisation. I begin by doing something with the G Major chord, just playing a melody over the open G and B strings, then I follow the chord sequence, adding a melodic figure over the 6/4 chord before the final chord. You can tell, hopefully, that I am exploring. Then I do a much simpler variation with just the open G as a pedal. Finally I return to my original idea, which has been taking shape in the back of my mind. It's not bad - certainly there is room for improvement - but I think you get the idea, which is to use the chords to underpin melodic movement.

There are a few other such progressions scattered throughout the manuscript, and one can imagine the teacher encouraging the student to experiment with different textures and time signatures. Try the above and the following in various time signatures – 3/4, 4/4 and 6/8. Maybe add arpeggios, repeated notes, scale passages, a melody and bass only. As a 'for instance', look at how many times Giuliani outlines a V7-I cadence, and how he varies it. The possibilities are endless. Don't be afraid to make mistakes, to experiment; and above all, remember that this is meant to be enjoyable!



The image displays two systems of handwritten musical notation for a G Major cadence progression. Each system consists of two staves. The first system shows a sequence of chords: G major, and G major. The second system shows a sequence of chords: G major, and G major. The notation includes various rhythmic values and melodic lines, illustrating different ways to play the progression.

Horetsky was obviously keen on such creative learning as he went on to publish a volume of *Preludes, Cadences and Modulations in every Key for the Guitar*, Op.21. You can **download it here**. It gives some insight into how he might have improvised or composed music over such cadences. The first example will be used as an exemplar:

No. 1.

*a piacere*

Bar 1: a Tonic major scale.  
 Emphatic. 'This is the key'.  
 Bar 2: the Tonic note is used as a  
 high pedal.  
 Bars 3 and 4: A descending tonal  
 sequence leads back to the Tonic in  
 Bar 5: The Bb at the end is the first  
 accidental, signifying a modulation.  
 Bars 6 to 10: A motific meander  
 through various keys before  
 Bars 11 to 13 : the outlining of a iib –  
 V – I cadence

This prelude displays quite a variety of musical devices: scales, sequences, motifs, modulation, tonal uncertainty and its opposite. Overall, a journey from consonance to structural dissonance to consonance. The third prelude is quite different:

Nº 3.

Here we have a rolling arpeggio with modulations to the Dominant and Relative Minor areas. Nothing too adventurous. The student would be expected to see and hear the underlying block chords, á la GGms. It would be a tremendously useful exercise to return to the GGms cadence progressions to attempt interpretations along the lines of both these Preludes: the varied and the constant. Again, don't look for quick perfection. At this stage the process is more important than the end result. In my own experience, I can sometimes glimpse a 'proper' composition emerging, like a figure from chiselled rock...although one with a rather strange expression on its face! Again, the process is more important than the end result.

Some of Horetsky's Op.21 Preludes seem over-composed, such as the *ALLA BOLERO* (No.6), but with experience, it is perfectly possible to improvise complete pieces.

Horetsky goes on to provide many cadence progressions such as the following:

...and modulations in all possible keys. Used in the manner intended, any serious guitar student would be improvising Preludes in a short time, possibly even complete pieces. The above cadence progression could serve a piece of five minutes duration, or be done in seconds. A study of how composers like Sor, Aguado and Giuliani used such underpinnings in their compositional process would supply the performer with a valuable stock of gestures and clichés, so important to the art and practice of improvisation and composition.

See my earlier [essay on improvising preludes and cadenzas here](#).

Horetsky was not alone in his advocacy of Preludes and Cadences. See also:

Giuliani – Op.100 Nos. 17-24: *Preludi ad uso cadenza servendosene avanti di cominciare un pezzo di Music a* (Preludes which serve as cadences to be played before beginning a piece of music) – excellent examples, some varied, some constant.

Aguado – New Guitar Method (1843) includes *Preludes Or indications of the key in which a piece is to be played* – 22 examples, all varied.

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