

# Three Early Guitar Concertos (the Earliest-Known Guitar Concerto and Two Others) from Late Eighteenth/Early Nineteenth-Century Paris: Vidal, Doisy and Doisy-Viotti

by Stanley Yates

© 2010 Stanley Yates. All Rights Reserved.

---

The late eighteenth century, a transitional period during which the guitar shifted from a baroque instrument of five courses to a classical-modern one of six single-strings, is a presently little researched period in the general history of our instrument. One consequence of the scant attention paid thus far to this important period is an almost complete lack of evaluation of the repertoire performed by late eighteenth-century guitarists. A second is a lack of evaluation of the social-musical context in which these guitarists functioned. The discovery of three guitar concertos from the period – which include the earliest-known concerto for the guitar along with two substantial three-movement works – is therefore doubly interesting: it not only adds significantly to the slender catalogue of surviving Classical/Early Romantic-period concertos for the instrument, it also sheds some light on the activities of professional guitarist-composers active at that time.<sup>1</sup>

While the Classical/Early Romantic-period guitar concerto is not quite a rarity, it is not exactly a profuse genre either: the present catalogue of eight surviving works consists of single examples by Antoine Lhoyer (1768-1852), Luigi Legnani (1790-1877) and Francisco Molino (1768-1847), a pair of works by Ferdinando Carulli (1770-1841) and three works by Mauro Giuliani (1781-1829).<sup>2</sup> The addition to this catalogue of three further works is therefore quite significant. The works in question are the *Concerto pour la Guitarre* (c.1793) by B. Vidal, the *Grand Concerto pour la Guitare* (c. 1802-03) by Charles Doisy and Doisy's *Second Concerto pour la Guitare* (c. 1804) (an adaption by Doisy of the Violin Concerto No. 18 in e-minor by Giovanni Battista Viotti (1755-1824)). Copies of the original editions of all three are archived at the Library of the Royal Conservatory of Music in Liège, Belgium.

B. Vidal (d. 1800) – we do not know his first name beyond the initial – was a Spanish guitarist active in Paris during the last three decades of the eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup> The scant biographical details we know of him come almost entirely from brief entries found in the nineteenth-century dictionary of François-Joseph Fétis and the account of Parisian publishing activity compiled by

---

<sup>1</sup> I learned of the three works from the Norwegian guitarist and scholar, Erik Stenstadvold, who was kind enough to send copies. The three concertos have been recently published by Chanterelle Verlag in a joint edition by Stenstadvold and myself. In addition, I have recently completed a recording of the three works which, at the time of writing, will be available shortly.

<sup>2</sup> At least eight further works, reportedly published during the period, are not known to have survived to the present day: six concertos for guitar and strings were advertized in the catalogue of works attached to Fernando Ferandiere's *Arte de Tocar la Guitarra Española* (Madrid, 1799) and two concertos by Parisian guitarist Pierre Porro were reportedly published in Paris sometime between 1807 and 1811.

<sup>3</sup> I am indebted to Erik Stenstadvold for the biographical and bibliographical information that follows here and throughout the article.

Anik Devriès and François Lesure.<sup>4</sup> Vidal arrived in Paris sometime before 1769, the date at which his compositions began to appear with various publishers there and a period of growing interest in the guitar among the growing Parisian middle class. He performed at the *Concert spirituel* in 1776,<sup>5</sup> the only guitarist to appear on that prestigious Parisian concert series (it is tempting to imagine that the concerto under discussion here is the work he performed there) and he is known to have travelled to London in 1790. Pierre Gatayes (1774-1846), a Parisian guitarist of the next generation, in his *Seconde Méthode de Guitare, Op. 26* (Paris, c. 1815), states that Vidal contributed to the development of the guitar with “a learned and bold execution” and Charles Doisy, the accompanying guitar concerto author under discussion in this article, dedicated a work for guitar and piano to him.<sup>6</sup>

Vidal’s guitar concerto, a two-movement work in D-major, was advertised for sale in 1793,<sup>7</sup> some ten years before the next known guitar concerto, a work by Antoine Lhoyer published in Hamburg in 1802. The Vidal concerto is, therefore, the only surviving example of the genre from the eighteenth century, and the earliest known concerto for the guitar. The title page of Vidal’s concerto reads as follows:

CONCERTO / Pour la Guitarre, / avec Accompagnement, / De deux Violons Alto et Basse, / Par M.;<sup>r</sup> Vidal, / Maître de Guitarre, / OEUVRE [blank] / Prix 4.;<sup>lt</sup> 16.;<sup>s</sup> / A PARIS / Chez Bouin M. de Musique et Cordes d’Instruments / Rue S. Honoré près S. Roch, N. 504 / on trouve tous les Ouvrages de l’Auteur, a la même adresse.

Couched in language typical of the time, this tells us little about the intended performance context of the work, chamber (one player per part) or orchestral; while the texture and scope of the work are well suited to chamber performance, orchestral performance is also possible. In an orchestral performance, as mentioned somewhat later by Francesco Molino (1768-1847) in the original publication of his own concerto for guitar, Op. 56,<sup>8</sup> the orchestral forces may be reduced to a single muted instrument per part during the solo sections of the piece.

In style and form, the work is typical of the galant, cosmopolitan Parisian concerto of the 1770s and 1780s, a genre, which for instruments other than the violin, usually comprised two movements only, both fast.

Although modest in scope, and somewhat stylistically conservative by the standards of 1790s Paris, the work is not without points of interest beyond its historical significance for the guitar. Within an otherwise textbook concerto-sonata design, the first movement is permeated with contrasting tonic-minor episodes (which appear in the opening tutti and the second and third

---

<sup>4</sup> François-Joseph Fétis, *Biographie universelle des musiciens* (Brussels, 1835-44); Anik Devriès and François Lesure, *Dictionnaire des éditeurs de musique français*. Vol. I, *Des origines à environ 1820* (Geneva: Éditions Minkoff, 1979).

<sup>5</sup> Constant Pierre, *Histoire du Concert spirituel 1725 - 1790*. (Paris: Société Française de Musicologie, Heugel et cie, 1975), p. 305.

<sup>6</sup> Further biographical detail concerning Vidal is provided by Philip J. Bone in his *Guitar and Mandolin* (Schott and Co., London, 1914), a publication notorious for its numerous inaccuracies and which must therefore be approached with caution. Bone gives Vidal’s dates as 1750-1800, states that he lived in Venice and Milan during 1792 and that he composed several concertos “for the guitar with full orchestra” which were performed in Paris.

<sup>7</sup> Anik Devriès-Lesure, *L’édition musicale dans la presse parisienne au XVIIIe siècle. Catalogue des annonces* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2005), p. 520.

<sup>8</sup> Francesco Molino, *Concerto per chitarra e orchestra, op. 56*. Modern edition ed. R. Chiesa (Milan: Edizioni Suvini Zerboni).

solos). Not otherwise noted in the Parisian concerto, it is tempting to connect this feature with Vidal's Spanish background and the Iberian sonata style, where the juxtaposition of major and minor modality is a decided feature.

The second movement, an expected concerto-rondo, likewise follows a textbook formal design and a light-hearted character typical of the style, but again features episodes in the tonic-minor. The rondo refrain is presented in identical form each time it appears, as is the case with many concerto-rondos of the time.

The guitar writing, for a five-string (or, possibly, five-course) instrument, consists of a display of idiomatic (and sometimes extended) arpeggio and tremolo textures and, even more challenging, slurred, violinistic passagework (the chromatic passagework in the second solo of the first movement is notable). It would, therefore, be a mistake to connect the piece strictly with amateur performance: the guitar part, even today, requires a well-developed technique, the aim clearly being a demonstration of genuine brilliance on the part of the performer (fig. 1).

B. Vidal, *Concerto pour la Guitarre* (c. 1793) : Rondo, mm. 18-21.



Charles Doisy, the second guitarist involved in our study, was active as a guitarist, composer and publisher around the turn of the eighteenth century. We first hear of him in 1797, when he opened a publishing business in Paris. While the majority of his compositions use the guitar in combination with other instruments, his best-known work is his lavish and highly informative guitar method, *Principes Généraux de la Guitare*, published in 1801 and dedicated to Madame Bonaparte, wife of Napoleon and later to become Empress Josephine of France. Pierre Gatayes, in his *Seconde Méthode de Guitare*, op. 26 (Paris, ca.1815), includes Doisy in his list of the leading Parisian guitar virtuosos of the time. As already mentioned, a connection between Doisy and B. Vidal exists in the form of a work for guitar and piano dedicated to Vidal by Doisy.

Doisy's *Grand Concerto pour la Guitare* was published sometime between 1802-03, and is therefore preceded by only two surviving works in the genre (the concertos of Vidal and Lhoyer published in 1793 and 1802 respectively).<sup>10</sup>

The title page reads as follows:

Grand CONCERTO, / Composé pour la Guitare, / avec Accompagnement / de deux Violons Obligés, Alto et Violoncelle, / DÉDIÉ À MONSIEUR / César de Trogoff, / Amateur / PAR DOISY, / Professeur / Prix 6<sup>fr</sup> / A PARIS / [pasted label] Chez B. VIGUERIE Auteur et Éditeur de Musique, rue Vivienne N.º 38, ou l'on trouve toute / sorte de Musique, Instrumens, Cordes de Naples &.<sup>a</sup>

As with the concerto by Vidal, both orchestral and chamber performance are possible with, in the case of orchestral performance, a reduction to single players for the solo sections.

In style and form, this extended three-movement work is fully representative of the progressive Parisian concerto style of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in the tradition of the Italian violinist Giovanni Battista Viotti (whose violin concerto no. 18 Doisy later arranged for guitar) and his French disciples Rode, Kreutzer and Baillot. In scope and sophistication, the work is certainly one of the more substantial guitar concertos of the period and bears comparison with the most fully developed Parisian violin concertos of the time.

The first movement, "Moderato molto," is a highly-unified concerto-sonata of extended and well-balanced proportions. Doisy takes an interesting approach to extending the solo sections by not only providing all three sections with thematic material as well as passagework, but by also providing thematic interaction between the guitar and the accompaniment, thus avoiding any potential limitation of the guitar to provide extended sections of dramatic passagework (particularly in the 120-measure-long first solo). Despite its length and moderate tempo, forward movement is maintained through the well-defined mood-changes of the second solo and a sharply abridged recap (both characteristics of the Viotti style). Though Doisy's debt to Viotti is clear, it is not all-encompassing: Doisy, wisely, does not rely on a transposed restatement of the dominant-area passagework for the recapitulation but instead restates a transposed version of the melodic material only.

---

<sup>10</sup> Erik Stenstadvoid has established the date of publication of Doisy's *Grande Concerto* on the basis that by September 1803 the composer had moved from the address listed on the original edition and that the concerto, while listed in the catalogue of works by Doisy appended to the original publication, is not listed in a catalogue of Doisy's works dating from 1801-02. Stenstadvoid also notes that the work may have been composed at least a year earlier than its publication date, based on the notational system for harmonics employed in the concerto which differs from a unique system employed by Doisy in both his *Principes Généraux* of 1801 and his second concerto of c. 1804.

The second movement, “Adagio” — a typically short movement, in the Parisian tradition — is of the “arietta,” rather than the “romance” type, built around a lyrical cantabile solo framed by short tutti sections.

The influence of Viotti is clearest in the rondo finale, an organic and dramatic movement far removed from the light-hearted, sectional design of the pre-Viotti Parisian concerto. Most obviously, the rondo refrain is reintroduced gradually and appears in different form at each presentation, becoming increasingly abridged and taking varied accompaniment figuration during the solo portions. Also notable is the interruption of the second episode with a new theme, “Animato,” marked by an abrupt modulation of a descending third and stated by guitar and strings together. Formally, Doisy provides an element of sonata form with an interpolated tonic restatement in the final episode of a dominant-area theme (followed by a brief statement of the rondo refrain before the final coda).

The guitar writing, for a five-string instrument (with notes that could be played one octave lower on the then optional sixth string indicated in the guitar part with octave signs) balances melodic, thematic material with idiomatic passagework consisting of extended arpeggios and slurred violinistic passagework. Sheer *brillante* technical display, however, is not the intention (nor was it with Viotti), but rather a singing cantabile and a refined expression. Nevertheless, and despite the dedication to one C ezar de Trogoff, “Amateur,” there is plenty here to challenge the interpretative powers of the modern performer.

Again, as we noted in the concerto by Vidal, the guitar does not rest during the tutti sections of the work but is instead given continuo-style accompaniment figuration.

Doisy provides a written-out cadenza in the slow movement along with an *eingang* (a brief “lead-in” cadenza) which, in general scope and character, might provide models for the outer movements, where none are provided. While a fermata (which appear at several points in both outer movements) might provide an opportunity for a short ornamental passage it is by no means certain that this was intended — the influential Viotti provided cadenzas for his slow movements only and, in any case, most of the fermatas in this work are more easily interpreted rhetorically.

The string-writing during the solo sections is one of the distinctive features of this concerto, at least in comparison with other period concertos for guitar. Thematic interaction between solo and accompaniment during the long opening solo of the first movement has already been mentioned. While the general accompaniment texture consists of two violins and bass (the violas enter occasionally), standard for the Parisian violin concerto, Doisy departs from this frequently. In addition to the homophonic accompaniment typical of early guitar concertos, Doisy introduces a wide variety of texture and varying degrees of interaction with the soloist, incorporating forte interpolations, sections of dialog and passagework in the violins, and various combinations of pizzicato and arco. The result, again, maintains momentum and character through the solo sections, where the guitar (at least in comparison with a solo violin) might find it difficult to maintain dramatic interest through extended sections of passagework.



And in the version presented by Doisy (fig. 3):

**Moderato**  
*Tutti*

Vln. 1



*f*

Of course, we do not know upon which version of the work, and in what form, Doisy based his arrangement; nor, therefore, do we know the extent to which the thematic modifications belong to him. The two surviving sets of parts of the Viotti original were apparently both published after the French Revolution (which had forced Viotti to London), perhaps a decade after the date of composition, 1791. In the interim, the work undoubtedly circulated in a variety of manuscript copies.

The main features of Doisy's arrangement may be summarized as follows:

- *Solo part.* Thematic material is clearly recognizable, but is presented in a form idiomatic to the guitar: the original single-line solo violin part is often augmented harmonically and the range is compressed; passagework usually retains the rhythmic level of the original (eighth-notes, triplets, sixteenths, etc.) but retains pitch material only when idiomatic to the guitar: longer scale passages are usually replaced with arpeggio-type figuration, returning-figures and other slurred motives; quick ornaments in fast passages are generally omitted. The guitar part, however, does not always represent a simplification of the original violin part—Doisy sometimes offers an ornamented version of the original.
- *String parts* (Doisy omits the oboes and horns present in the Viotti original). The original parts remain largely unchanged during the tutti, though they are not identical; during the solos the general texture and material is retained, though some concession is made to the sonority of the guitar: pizzicato is often introduced; when present in all instruments (the general accompaniment texture, typical of Viotti, consists of two violins and bass) repeated-note textures are usually reduced to repeated-notes in a single instrument with sustained-notes in the remaining ones; some chords are re-voiced to open the texture to the guitar. The violas are omitted entirely in the slow movement.
- Tempo indications are moderated: for the first movement, “Allegro non troppo” to “Moderato;” for the second movement, “Andante” to “Adagio;” for the third movement “Presto” to “Presto ma non troppo.”
- Structural differences are present in the second movement only: the opening tutti contains an additional four-measure phrase but omits the concluding nine measures of the Viotti original; the second tutti is reduced from 18 measures to four (omitting a striking tonal-shift to the flattened-submediant); the second solo is somewhat compressed (though the writing for guitar is about as elaborate as that in the violin original). These changes perhaps further indicate that Doisy worked from a different version of the original than has survived to the present day.
- All three movements in the version presented by Doisy include a significant number of dynamic “hairpin” signs and accent marks, none of which are found in the surviving versions for violin.

- Again, the guitar does not rest during the tutti sections of the work, but instead provides continuo-style accompaniment figuration.

Neither Doisy nor Viotti provided cadenzas for this concerto, which in the Viotti style would appear in the slow movement only, at the end of the last solo (Doisy provides a written-out example at this point in his first concerto, as noted earlier).

The three concertos discussed here shed quite some light on the activities of Parisian guitarists at the turn of the eighteenth-century. While the guitar at this time was an instrument in transition, these works reveal an instrument utilized at a high performance level of music fully aligned with that of other instruments—something more than the general conception of the pre-nineteenth-century guitar as a facile instrument of the amateur. We await the modern publication of further works by these prototypical figures as this significant period in the history of the guitar continues to receive the scholarly attention it deserves.

