

Resources and Repertoire for the Guitar Ensemble

Presented by Sam Bergstrom

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Gear

Classical Guitars to consider

Yamaha Classicals

- CG 192
- CG 182
- CG 162
- CG 142

Acoustic Basses

Consider any models from the following brands (and I encourage getting them with pickups):

- Breedlove
- Ibanez
- Fender
- Takamine

Clip-on Tuners – a must (\$10 - \$30 a piece). You can have students share if necessary.

Strings – While there are a ton of different brands and types of strings out there, I want to just mention a few options I have really gravitated toward. I have really enjoyed the D’Addario J45’s and La Bella 2001 strings for classical guitar. However, I have switched a couple of years ago to the Carbon strings, which offer a slightly more rigid and longer lasting string. Carbon strings are a bit more expensive, but you should make that up by not having to change them as often (they easily last twice as long), which will also save you time in the long run.

- Traditional Classical Guitar Strings
 - D’Addario EJ45 Normal (are offered in bulk at a lower price per pack)
 - La Bella 2001 Medium (or Medium Hard) Tension Strings
- Carbon Classical Guitar Strings
 - D’Addario Carbon NT Classical Strings – EJ45FF
 - La Bella Vivace Carbon Medium Tension

Footstools – they are nice and fold up, but can get expensive. Consider getting yoga blocks or cut a 4” by 6” post into 8” pieces (very similar in dimensions to a yoga block).



Humidifiers – in dry cold climates, it is important to humidify guitars and other wood instruments. Best way is to keep guitars in cases when not in use and have humidifiers that go into the sound hole, or the case, or preferably both. Oasis humidifiers are nice to use in the sound hole.



In-case humidifiers can also be purchased or are easy to make with a sponge and plastic container (such as a travel soap case). Cut holes in the case and cut sponge to fit the case. Use regular tap water to get sponge damp (but not too wet so that water is spilling out of the case). Put in case.



Technique & Supplements

- Pumping Nylon (by Scott Tennant)
 - A standard handbook for classical guitarists. Some of the exercises (and definitely pieces) can get advanced, but there are some wonderful exercises for newer players as well.
 - A Modern Approach to Classical Guitar (by Charles Duncan)
 - There are 3 levels to this method or you can purchase the composite (all 3 in 1 book). This method might fit better within a class guitar environment, but some of the exercises could be helpful in an ensemble situation as well.
 - Classical Guitar Pedagogy (by Anthony Glise)
 - This text is an excellent source for guitar teachers wanting to go in depth with classical guitar technique, especially in one on one situations. This text is dense and thorough and could easily be overwhelming for those teachers not as comfortable with the guitar. It might be worth a peruse for some.
 - Hal Leonard Guitar Method (2nd edition by Will Schmid and Greg Koch)
 - This method is also a 3 volume series that you can also get in one composite book. Like the Charles Duncan method mentioned above, this might be better suited in one on one situations or a class guitar environment. However, this method could also be used as a supplement to your ensemble and it takes a less classical route, but begins to prepare students for more folk and popular playing with more of a focus on accompanying, chords, and improvisation. I like to use this method in my class guitar classes.
 - Sight Reading for the Classical Guitar (by Robert Benedict)
 - There are two different books by Benedict. The first is levels 1-3 and the second and more advanced book is levels 4 and 5. This is an excellent source for reading exercises, which we know all guitarists could use!
 - Reading Studies for Guitar and Advanced Reading Studies for Guitar by William Leavitt
 - These two texts come from the Berklee series. The first book works through all keys in the first 7 positions while the second and more advanced book focuses on positions 8-12. Much of this material might be a bit challenging for many high school groups, but you might have luck with using some of these studies to supplement your group's work on sightreading.
 - Solo Guitar Playing by Frederick M. Noad (book one)
 - This is a nice method for individual lessons or even class guitar. There are also reading exercises and technique that can be incorporated into an ensemble setting. I also really enjoy how this text includes an ensemble section at the back of the book with nearly 40 pages of trios and quartets from easy to medium easy levels.
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Composers, Arrangers, & Repertoire for Guitar Ensemble

The Guitar Ensemble, A Collection (7th edition), edited by Randall Nye

A large collection of music for guitar trios and quartets as well as a smaller section of duets and quintets. Levels range from easy to medium advanced and most the repertoire is in the baroque and classical eras.

Essential Elements Guitar Ensembles – there are many of these books with very accessible arrangements of jazz and pop tunes. Most are in 3 parts where the 3rd part is the bassline (but written in treble clef). There are also chord symbols so you can have a 4th part playing those. Each book within this collection is graded as to give you an idea of which might work for your group, but most seem to fall within an easy to medium-easy level. Here is a link to peruse the many themed books:

<https://www.halleonard.com/menu/419/essential-elements?seriesfeature=EEGTR&subsiteid=7&dt=item#products>

Mel Bay Jazz Guitar Ensembles – There are 3 books in this series and each at a different level (level 1-3) written for 4 - 5 guitars. There doesn't seem to be a significant jump in difficulty from level 1 to 2, but these are nice pieces for introducing students to jazz styles and chords. Most tune are open for solos and some include backgrounds to be played under the soloist. There are about 5 original tunes per book and there is also a 4th book in this series, *Blues Guitar Ensembles*, that offers 16 original blues tunes in the swing style.

<https://www.melbay.com/Products/99875EB/jazz-guitar-ensembles-level-1.aspx>

Eythor Thorlaksson – Icelandic guitarist and composer/arranger. There are almost too many great pieces to even think about singling any out, but I will try anyway. He also writes in a variety of levels. You can find several pieces at a beginner's level as well as some more advanced pieces. You can find many of his nice arrangements on free-scores:

<https://www.free-scores.com/Download-PDF-Sheet-Music-eythor-thorlaksson.htm>

Here is a list of just a few of Thorlaksson's arrangements:

- 12 Guitar Trios for Beginners (short and easy arrangements for newbies)
- South American Folk Song Suite (medium-easy level)
- Spanish Dance by Granados (he has several) – these are a little more advanced compared to the previously mentioned pieces.
- Cueca by Agustin Barrios Mangore – A Chilean Dance that is a medium difficulty.
- La Pastoreta (Catalan Folk Song) – an easy level piece where everyone sticks in first position and 8th notes are mostly stepwise.
- Las Mananitas (Mexican folk Song) – easy level piece where the first gets exposure to playing up to 5th position. A little more challenging than La Pastoreta, but a tune often sung for birthdays.

Jurg Kindle – Swiss composer. Has a ton of great compositions and arrangements for young groups through intermediate. I usually program at least one of his compositions or arrangements on most of my concerts. Here are some of my favorites:

- Techno – Very fun piece students love to play. A medium level 4-part piece that exposes students to extended techniques. This is a little easier to play than it looks, but it still has some challenges due to the syncopation and 7/16 meter inserted in a couple of spots. Worth checking out though!
- Kalimba – 4-part piece based on African and Afro-Cuban Rhythm and instruments – medium level
- Kangogi – Similar to Kalimba, this is another piece based African rhythms and percussion instruments. This piece is medium to medium advanced based on the tricky harmonics at the beginning and challenges with more independent parts.
- Funky – a medium level must do! Very cool piece.
- Guitar Lounge – This medium-level fun piece for 4 guitars comes from the same series as some of the other Kindle compositions that infuse popular styles (such as Techno and Funky). The first part requires the use of a bottleneck slide and it is quite syncopated in the 4th part (bass), but surely a piece all will enjoy.

- Bavardages & Plaisanterie – a 2 movement composition that ranges from medium-easy to medium and written for 3 guitars.
- PartiTango – a 4-part medium level piece

Aside from many great pieces to purchase, Kindle also offers several guitar pieces for free download. Check out this link to some of those titles:

<https://www.juergkindle.ch/archive-1/gratis-downloads/>

Jeremy Sparks – I love so many of his arrangements. Here are a few to check out:

- 3 Sonatas by Domenico Scarlatti (definitely a medium advanced piece)
- 6 Pieces by John Dowland (ranges from medium-easy to medium in skill level)
- American Folk Songs (range from medium to medium advanced)
- The Four Seasons (all seasons), Vivaldi – Definitely more of a medium-advanced piece overall, but nice arrangement of this great work.
- Irish Folk Medley – This 4-minute, 4-part medley is medium level piece and definitely one of my favorite arrangements by Sparks.
- Rondo Alla Turca (W.A. Mozart) – a 4-part medium-advanced level due to the technical demands of the 16th note passages in all 4 parts, but a great piece and fun to play.
- Three Preludes by George Gershwin – another challenging 4-part piece that is probably medium to medium advanced depending on which prelude you play.

Annette Kruisbrink – born in Amsterdam, Kruisbrink has many wonderful pieces for guitar ensemble. Some of her pieces are great for teaching extended techniques and contemporary styles (such as aleatoric music). She also has a wide variety of compositions regarding of skill levels. Here are some of my favorite pieces:

- Let the Devil Swing – this is a 4-part piece is probably a medium-advanced level due to the technical demands with some 16th note passages, tremelo, and meter changes. However, a very cool piece to at least check out for when you have that more advanced group.
- The Lost Doll – a medium level piece due to some syncopation, meter changes, artificial harmonics. This piece is from the larger work, Flower Power Suite, but sold separately from the other movements. This is sure to be enjoyed by your students.
- Música Latina Fácil – an easy to medium-easy piece that exposes students to some Latin styles such as Bossa Nova, Tango, and others. Aside from some syncopated rhythms, parts are fairly accessible for newer players. The 4th part might either play arpeggios or chords, but there are chord symbols for 2 of the movements and you could always simplify or split this part up into 2 or more parts if that best suits your students. These pieces also lend themselves well for repeating sections for students to try their hand at improvisation.

- Railway – a medium to medium-easy piece for 6 guitars. This piece has 2 movements and does incorporate some natural harmonics and glissandos. A fun piece I plan to play again.

Mark Anthony Cruz – Some really nice arrangements and compositions. Here are just a few to mention:

- Guitar Trio Anthology, Volume 1 & 2 (some nice and short arrangements from Bach, Sor, Telemann, Giuliani, and more).
- Exchanges – medium level piece with some 16th note passages, playing up in the 10th position or so in the first part, and some chords and double stops.
- Prism – 4 part medium level piece due to length, key changes, double stops, and range of 1st part.
- What Would Michael Kelsey Do? – a medium level 4-part song with some fun pop/rock influences with inspiration from the guitarist it is named for.

<http://www.markanthonycruz.com/sheetmusic.html>

Mark Houghton – English composer who often integrates popular music sounds and inspiration into his compositions. Here are a few you might want to check out:

- Café Suite – a medium level piece with 3 movements, 1) Hard Rock Café, 2) Café Rouge, and 3) Alma de Cuba
- Dance Suite for Four Guitars – probably a medium level with each movement being a different piece (you have to order them separately). Movements are Ballad, Passacaglia, Rustic Dance, and Tango
- Guitarchestra No. 1 – a nice medium-easy piece for 6 guitars. A few of the parts require playing up to the 12th fret and there are some double stops, but a doable piece for many groups.
- Twangology (homage to Django Reinhardt) – a medium + level piece in the fun hot club style written for 5 guitars. Some key changes, upper register playing by the first two parts, chords in the 3rd part, overall part independence, and syncopation make this a little more challenging, but worth taking a look at.

Yvon Rivoal – I have always enjoyed playing arrangements by this composer and arranger. Here are just a couple to note:

- Andante from Concerto in G Major for soloists and guitar ensemble by Antonio Vivaldi, arranged by Yvon Rivoal – If you have 2 soloists (advanced students, guests, alum, etc.), this is a nice piece to feature them along with the easy, 5-part ensemble.

- Pavane by Gaspar Sanz- this is arranged for 5 guitars and is at a medium-easy level. Aside from the first part playing up to the 12th fret, all other parts can be played in first position and this is not very technically demanding.

André Couasnon – Arranger with some nice Beatles pieces. Here are a few of those to check out:

- Julia for 4 guitars – medium easy
- Lady Madona – medium-easy piece for 6 guitars. Most parts are in unison rhythm for much of the piece and the 1st part requires playing up to the 12th fret or so.
- Blackbird – a medium-easy to medium level arrangement of this classic Beatles tune. This arrangement is for 5 guitars and the 1st part plays all the way up to a high G and you will find double stops in the 2nd and 3rd parts. The 4th part has the main guitar accompaniment riff throughout and if the added bass notes in this part are too much, they can easily be reassigned to the 5th part, who basically plays the bass part throughout. A few tricky rhythms, but a very doable piece with many younger groups.

Warner Bros. Publications 21st Century Guitar Ensemble Pieces – there are a few ensemble pieces (and a book or 2) in this series that can be fun to play. Here are a couple to try:

- **Evil Ways** (Sonny Henry, arr. Rob Goldsmith) – An easy to medium-easy arrangement of a classic Santana hit. This arrangement is for 5 guitars and bass where the 5th part and bass have the same part. One part also has chord symbols. Fairly easy tune most young ensembles can handle and you can also easily open this up for solos and extended jamz!
- **Classical Gas** -a medium level arrangement of this classic instrumental, acoustic guitar-heavy piece by Mason Williams and arrangement by Bill Purse.

Roland Dyens – An amazing composer and guitarist we recently lost. Most of his music is far too challenging for most high school and even college groups, but here is one piece worth noting:

- Austin Tango (still medium-advanced, but doable by some more advanced HS groups)

Leo Brouwer – Probably one of the most revered living composers of the guitar. Brouwer is a Cuban guitarist and composer who has several solo pieces as well as some fun and interesting ensembles. Like Dyens, most of Brouwer’s ensemble music is perhaps a bit too challenging for most high school (and even college) groups, but some pieces offer a nice exposure to aleatoric music and the use of extended techniques.

- Cuban Landscapes with Rain – This piece is probably one of Brouwer’s more well-known ensemble pieces and integrates elements of aleatoricism and pointalism. This is probably more of a medium-advanced piece, but achievable by some advanced high school groups. In either case, grab this score and listen to a recording as it takes you on a journey of a rainstorm starting ever so slightly until it is almost hailing through the use of the Bartok Pizz. Even if it is too advanced for your group, it is a great piece to have your group listen and react to.
- Toccata – An advanced 4-part piece that is worth trying out if you have an outstanding group.

And here are some more women composers and arrangers for guitar to check out:

- **Veronique Gillet**
 - Some easy to medium level music. Check out a few of her pieces here:

https://productionsdoz.com/nos-artistes/gillet-veronique?lg=en_US

- **Louiselle Mathieu**
 - She has some easy level music for guitar and piano. Check out some of her titles here:

https://productionsdoz.com/nos-artistes/mathieu-louiselle?lg=en_US

- **Nadia Borislova**
 - Some nice compositions for solo and guitar ensembles. More of her music tends to be a bit more advanced, but still worth checking out. Look through some of her titles here:

https://productionsdoz.com/nos-artistes/borislova-nadia?lg=en_US

- **Maria Linnemann**

- I know of only one piece for more advanced groups. Check it out here:

https://productionsdoz.com/nos-artistes/linnemann-maria?lg=en_US

- **Cristina Azuma (more arrangements and editions)**
- **Elisabeth Bayer (more arrangements and editions)**

A few more pieces and composers to mention:

120 Chorales, volume I, Chorales 1-30 by J.S. Bach, arranged by Logan Gabriel

- Very playable and great warmups for working on playing together as an ensemble

Celso Machado – Brazilian composer, guitarist, and percussionist.

- Danças Populares Brasileiras – Probably a medium to medium-advanced collection of pieces for 4 guitars. Very fun Brazilian pieces you can take liberty with repeating and opening up for improvisation.

Ignacio Cervantes

- 2 Danzas – fun pieces at a medium level.

A Gaspar Sanz Selection (6 pieces arranged for guitar quartet arr. By Ian Gammie)

- nice arrangement of some classic Sanz to expose your students to this well-known baroque guitar figure.

Websites for Music, Accessories, & Resources

- **Long & McQuade** (I'm sure you all know of this awesome music store that can help with getting your group set up with instruments, music, and accessories!)

<https://www.long-mcquade.com/>

- **Les Productions d'Oz Doberman-Yppan** (great site for searching and finding guitar ensemble music)

[Products - Sheet Music for Guitar | Les Productions d'OZ \(productionsdoz.com\)](#)

- **Guitar Solo Publications** (they have accessories and printed music. The second link is to their classical guitar list of pieces where you can search for many combinations of instruments. I usually search for trios, quartets, and 5+ guitars for ensemble literature.)

<https://gspguitar.com/>

<https://gspguitar.com/printed-music-methods/classical-guitar.html>

- **Strings by Mail** (strings, accessories, and music)

<https://www.stringsbymail.com/>

- **Free Scores** (site with loads of free downloadable music. It may take a bit of sifting through though).

https://www.free-scores.com/index_uk.php

- **Guitar Down Under** (free arrangements of ensembles and solos)

<http://www.guitardownunder.com>

- **Scribd** (lots of books, articles, and music. Requires a paid subscription to access, but you can sign up for a trial to see if it is worth it. I have found some good things here, but it is helpful to know exactly what you are looking for).

<https://www.scribd.com/>

- **Forrest Guitar Ensembles** (tons of nice arrangements by Andrew Forrest. Duos, trios, quartets, quintets, and orchestras often with requinto parts are available for free).

<https://www.forrestguitarembles.co.uk/>

- **Class Guitar Resources** (You can find several collections of guitar ensembles at various levels as well as other resources. Most editions are between \$10 and \$20).

[Welcome to Class Guitar Resources, Inc.](#)

- **Delcamp free classical guitar music** (mostly classical guitar solos, but there are a few duets and ensembles as well.)

[Classical guitar \(delcamp.net\)](#)

- **This is Classical Guitar** (offers videos, free lessons, sheet music, and various articles)

[This is Classical Guitar](#)

- **Guitar Foundation of America** – GFA (an organization that hosts competitions, symposiums, and has resources for teachers from various articles, advocacy, to information on guitar teaching workshops. Check out their Guitar Educator Resource Guide).

<https://www.guitarfoundation.org/>

- **Bill Swick** (has been a force in ensemble and classroom guitar education for decades and has several published resources and pieces of a variety of levels).

<http://billswick.com/>

Thoughts on Programming

- Try to incorporate music from many parts of the world
 - Folk songs from many different countries and parts of the world are a great way to teach about various cultures.
- Try to incorporate music by a variety of composers
 - Including music from women, BIPOC, and non-binary composers is important for our students to be exposed to those perspectives and experiences.
- Try to incorporate music each concert where students can improvise/solo
 - Improvisation is a wonderful skill to help develop and exposing students to the many different contexts in which this can happen is important. Jazz, blues, pop, and folk songs can all lend themselves well for open solos. However, you can also take liberty in other styles and get creative.
- Try to occasionally include a song taught, rehearsed, and performed by ear (without music).
 - It is best to choose an easier and less complicated piece.
 - Music from the blues, pop/rock, and jazz genres work well
- Try to get students involved in the creative process
 - You may have an arrangement that needs a solo section or perhaps you are arranging a blues or pop tune for your group. Try to get the ensemble to contribute by experimenting with:
 - How the piece should be arranged
 - Backgrounds for solos
 - Form
 - Arranging the accompanying parts
 - Students will have fun and take some ownership in the process

- Try to program a wide variety of styles
 - This will teach students about the subtle and no-so subtle differences in approaching pieces. For example, it could be a great lesson teaching the differences between comping and chord voicings of a Miles Davis blues tune compared to an Alman Brother's blues tune.
 - Think about programming music of the various eras in music history, but also contemporary art music and pop/rock/folk music.

- Feature guests as well as exceptional students
 - I frequently use drums (and bass) for pop, rock, and blues tunes as well as folk songs (such as Brazilian choros). Recruit a solid student or hire a professional to play along with your group on whatever instrument(s) you feel would enhance your group's experience.
 - There are many pieces that might feature a soloist, whether that be a portion of a concerto or someone to just play a few choruses of a jazz standard. Featuring a professional (or even some exceptional students) is a nice change of pace and a great way to inspire your students.

Warm-ups and Exercises

Some Warm-ups I use with my ensemble ~

I like to use at least one right hand and one left hand exercise in our warm-ups each day. In addition to this, I try to incorporate scales, scale exercises, and sight-reading as well. The following are examples of some of the warm-ups and exercises I like to use in my rehearsals.

This exercise focuses on alternating the Right Hand index and middle fingers. If students use a pick, substitute down stroke for i and up stroke for m. Try to also have students play this exercise on different strings.

i and m Alternating Exercise

1. i m i m i m i m i m i i m i m i

Guitar

2. 3 i m i m i m i m i m i m i m i

Guit.

3. 5 i m i m i m i m i i m i m i m i

Guit.

4. 7 i m i m i m i m i m i m i m i

Guit.

Right Hand arpeggio exercises are crucial for guitar players. This exercise keeps the thumb pattern consistent and alters the pattern for the index, middle, and ring fingers each measure. Although this is written with 16th notes, take this one slow until the entire group is ready for a faster tempo.

Right Hand Arpeggio Exercises

Guitar

p i m a p i a m

Guit.

3 p m i a p m a i

Guit.

5 p a i m p a m i

Slurs are also just as important to guitarists as they are for brass players. This exercise is written in 5th position and works almost every combination of left hand fingers. Try to get students to really sound out that slurred note so that it is just as loud as the first note.

Ascending Slurs

Position 5

Guitar

Guit.

3

Guit.

5

Guit.

7

Guit.

9

Guit.

11

Major Scales for Guitar

Pattern 1

VII Position

Guitar

Guitar

Pattern 2

Guit.

Guit.

Guit.

Guit.

Guit.

Guit.

Minor Pentatonic and Blues Scales

A Minor Pentatonic

Guitar

Guitar

Guit.

Guit.

A Blues Scale

Guit.

Guit.

Guit.

Guit.