

# NAPOLEON COSTE

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# Selected Concert Works for Guitar

Edited by Jeffrey McFadden

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The guitar works of Napoléon Coste (1805–1883) can be heard with increasing frequency on the concert stage. His works were reprinted in the 1980s and, with the recent availability of digitized archives, the works of this brilliant French guitarist are now widely available in period editions.

Some of Coste's best-loved concert works have been included in this edition, which provides an opportunity to correct errors found in the originals, and to update/translate the composer's markings. But this edition also offers the chance to look between the lines, reconsider exactly what the composer intended, and make these intentions explicit for today's performer. Coste was a great melodist with full command of the enriched harmonic palate of the mid-to-late 19th century, and, perhaps most importantly, he had a powerful guitaristic intuition and a deep understanding of the guitar fretboard, which he used with great creativity in crafting his concert music.

This performance edition of Coste's important works aims to provide the modern guitarist with fully-fingered, easy-to-read, corrected score, uncovering the composer's fretboard logic. By doing so, we learn not just how charming these pieces are for audiences, but how fun they are to play for the accomplished guitarist!

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## Life and Works

Napoléon Coste published his last works for guitar in the early 1880s. By this time, the guitar had shifted to the domain of the hobbyist musician. A decline in esteem for the instrument had been underway since the middle of the 19th century, brought about by the predominance of orchestral, operatic, and piano music, combined with public expectations and tastes. Coste had come to Paris as a young man in the 1830s and was integrated into a thriving guitar culture—so thriving that it was, and still is, referred to as the “guitar mania.” But he was, in fact, in the wrong place and time. Coste reached his artistic apogee at a time when the guitar was much derided by critics and disappearing from public consciousness. As a consequence, Coste's works, including some of the finest guitar music of the 19th century, were consigned to obscurity after his death. It wasn't until a full 100 years later, when his complete works were issued by editor Simon Wynberg, that Coste would take his rightful place among the greatest guitarists/composers of his era. Today, his music is at the core of the guitar's standard repertoire.

Claude Antoine Jean Georges Napoléon Coste was born on June 27, 1805 in Amondons in eastern France. His father was a captain in the French military and a loyal follower of Napoléon Bonaparte, thus naming his son after the Emperor. Coste began studying the guitar at an early age under the tutelage of his mother. By his teen years, his family had moved to Valenciennes at the northern perimeter of France and here Coste established a reputation as a talented young performer and teacher. In 1830, he moved to Paris. There he soon became acquainted with the great guitarists of the day, many of whom, namely Fernando Sor, Matteo Carcassi,

Dionisio Aguado, and Fernando Carulli, were still active in the city. His strongest influence was Sor, with whom Coste studied not just guitar but also harmony and counterpoint. Sor was his mentor, and later, his duo partner (Sor's last published guitar music was for guitar duo and dedicated to Coste). Coste came to be an admired and acclaimed performer and teacher, and an esteemed member of the extraordinary Parisian guitar firmament. His first works appeared around 1830, just as the guitar's fortunes were beginning to decline. He remained in Paris and continued publishing guitar music over the next 40-plus years, initially with important publishing houses. Later, because of a diminished market, he would be forced to self-publish.

In 1856, at the height of his creative life, Coste took part in a competition for new guitar works organized in Brussels by the Russian nobleman and guitarist Nikolai Makaroff. 64 pieces were submitted by 31 different composers at the competition. The first prize was awarded posthumously to Johann Kaspar Mertz, who had died in the period between the submission deadline and the announcement of the prize winners. Mertz received four votes. Coste submitted his Opp. 27–31 (Op. 31 was apparently submitted after the deadline and was refused adjudication), and he was awarded second prize with three votes. Despite not winning the competition, the prize brought considerable lustre to Coste's career, and his publishers did not hesitate to mention this success in the front matter of his printed works.

In the early 1860s Coste suffered injuries to his arms or shoulders. It has been suggested that he broke his right arm falling down a flight of stairs. He writes in a letter only that it was a “disastrous accident” that had befallen him. In any case, his injuries were severe enough that he was forced to retire as an active recitalist. He continued to teach in Paris and publish guitar music until his death at 77 on February 17, 1883.

The 11 pieces included here can be considered among Napoléon Coste's masterworks. They span a 40-year period, roughly 1840 to 1880, comprising Coste's peak artistic life, and encompassing both his early and mature styles. Following is a chronological listing with publication information:

- **Divertissement sur *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Op. 9** (1839) *Paris, Bernard Latte, later reprinted by L. Mayaud et Cie.*
- **Rondeau de Concert, Op. 12** (Probably 1840) *Richault, Messonier, and chez l'auteur.*
- **La Cachucha, Op. 13** (1839/40) *Paris, Richault.*
- **Deuxième Polonaise, Op. 14** – Appears in a manuscript from the 1850s but was probably written in the early 1840s. It also appears in another manuscript as Op. 29, but *La Chasse des Sylphes* as published by E. Girod is the true Op. 29 (and was one of the submitted pieces in the Makaroff competition).
- **Fantaisie sur deux motifs de *La Norma*, Op. 16** (1843) *E. Challiot.* Existed in some form as early as 1838.

188

2.

*f*

*i m i*

*a m i*

*léger i m a*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 188 through 193. It begins with a first ending bracket over measures 188 and 189. Measure 188 has a forte (*f*) dynamic. Fingerings for the right hand are indicated as 1, 2, 4, 1, 2, 4. The piece concludes with a *léger* marking and fingerings 3, 0, 1.

194

*m*

020

*a m*

*i*

*p*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 194 through 199. It starts with a mezzo-forte (*m*) dynamic. A fingering of 1, 2, 0 is shown. A measure rest of 20 measures (020) is indicated. The system ends with a piano (*p*) dynamic.

200

*a m i*

*p*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 200 through 206. It begins with a mezzo-forte (*m*) dynamic and features a melodic line with fingerings *a m i*. The system concludes with a piano (*p*) dynamic.

207

*v*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 207 through 214. It features a melodic line with accents (*v*) and a piano (*p*) dynamic.

215

*cresc.*

*a i m*

4

Detailed description: This system contains measures 215 through 222. It begins with a crescendo (*cresc.*) marking. Fingerings *a i m* and a fingering of 4 are shown. The system ends with a piano (*p*) dynamic.

223

*cresc.*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 223 through 231. It features a crescendo (*cresc.*) marking and ends with a piano (*p*) dynamic.

232

BVII<sub>3</sub>

*a m i m i*

*m i*

*p*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 232 through 238. It includes a BVII<sub>3</sub> chord marking. Fingerings *a m i m i* and *m i* are shown. The system concludes with a piano (*p*) dynamic.

239

*m*

*i m i m*

*i m i*

*a m i m*

*i m a*

*diminuendo*

*p*

*più mosso*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 239 through 246. It starts with a mezzo-forte (*m*) dynamic. Fingerings *i m i m*, *i m i*, *a m i m*, and *i m a* are shown. The piece concludes with a *diminuendo* marking, a piano (*p*) dynamic, and a *più mosso* tempo change.



52

RONDEAU  
VILLAGEOIS

Allegretto

61

66

71

76

81

86