
FOUND: A GIULIANI GUITAR, KEPT IN A LONDON BANK SINCE 1816

BY PAUL PLEIJSIER, AMSTERDAM

This article originally appeared in "Soundboard", published by the
Guitar Foundation of America, volume XXVIII, fall/winter 2001/2002.

A highly ornamented guitar, built by Pons in 1812, once belonging to Empress Marie-Louise, and then given to Mauro Giuliani, has recently come to light in a London bank. Prior to its discovery, no guitar having a direct connection with Giuliani was known to exist. This article describes the instrument and discusses the sequence of events that led to its coming into the possession of Christopher de Monte, a young English gentleman who was apparently the dedicatee of Giuliani's Concerto, Op. 36. Giuliani gave him the guitar in 1815, but de Monte died prematurely in 1816, while returning to England. His guitar and belongings were put in a storeroom at the bank of Coutts & Co. Today, some 180 years later, this discovery presents us with a veritable time capsule of musical knowledge.¹

CHRISTOPHER DE MONTE

The story surrounding the "Giuliani" guitar and its owners is best told chronologically. The instrument's short-lived final owner, Christopher de Monte (sometimes written D'Monte), should be introduced first. We know about him from a unique primary source—his own diary, preserved with his music and other personal effects in the Coutts & Co. Archive in London.²

Christopher Bilderbeck de Monte was the son of John de Monte Esq., a distinguished merchant from the port city of Madras in southern India, and his wife, Mary Bilderbeck. In 1810, at the age of sixteen, Christopher was sent to England to further his education. While there he was placed under the care of Sir Coutts Trotter, a partner in the bank of Coutts & Co., this firm having been associated with his father's business. Young de Monte fared well in England, though he suffered from intermittent fever, probably having contracted malaria earlier, in India. If he could survive the notorious British climate, his doctors told him, he could survive anywhere. This encouraged Christopher to interrupt his studies to travel abroad. In early 1815, employing two carriages, he embarked on a *Grand Tour* of the Continent, taking him to France, Belgium, Holland, Germany and Austria. Europe was in a turbulent period at the time. Christopher, a keen observer, was to play his part in it, meeting some famous people along the way.

De Monte comes across in his diary as an opinionated person, with a special interest in the French Revolution and the charismatic leader who emerged from its aftermath, Napoleon Bonaparte. The Englishman's stay in France coincided with the fateful return of Napoleon

from Elba, during what became known as the *Hundred Days*. While crossing the French countryside, de Monte would stop his carriage, asking peasants for their opinion on the former Emperor. He met with mixed reactions. One time he even had to flee in haste, when people showed their hostility both toward Napoleon and toward himself, for having asked the question.

In the capitals he visited, de Monte had entrée to high society. For example, the Mayor of Brussels, Baron J. Vanderlinden D'Hooghvoorst, invited Christopher to a ball where the King and Queen, the Anglo-Dutch military commander Wellington, the Prince of Orange, and many high officers were among the guests. De Monte wrote in his diary: "Saw the Duke of Wellington who seemed to be in very high spirits and looking better than he did in London, but pale."

Year, month, place and the particular guests present indicate that Christopher seems to have witnessed a historically significant event: the ball hosted by the Duchess of Richmond on June 15, 1815. It occurred on the eve of the subsequent battles of Quatre Bras and Waterloo (which might go some way towards explaining why Wellington looked pale that night). The contrast between the splendor of the ball and the carnage and catastrophic events that soon followed was nothing short of remarkable. History does record that Wellington pretended not to be very worried, in an effort to reassure the high society of Brussels. Toward midnight, however, when informed that Napoleon had moved with all his forces on Charleroi and that there was nothing in front of Mons, the ball ended on a note of alarm. Wellington believed he had been "humbugged" by Bonaparte. Before joining his

army, he hastily studied a map provided by the Duke of Richmond.³ Some of the officers present at this party arrived at the battlefield still wearing their formal dress.

Wellington succeeded in keeping the lid on panic. Christopher does not seem to have been aware of any. He described the ball as “superb.” Little did he know that the occasion would mark the definitive fall from power of his hero, Napoleon Bonaparte, and that his own personal Waterloo would not be far off as well.

MEETING GIULIANI

De Monte’s diary suggests he had a passion for music. In the Dutch town of Haarlem, De Monte paid no less than 13 Florins to hear the great organ of the Sint Bavo Church, one of Holland’s most famous instruments, which in the past had attracted visitors such as Händel and Mozart. While in Germany, he attended concerts and wrote: “the Saxons are fine performers on the musical instruments.” In addition to this, the Coutts & Co. Archive holds several receipts for unspecified “music lessons” received by de Monte in the course of his education. Although he was an amateur (a lover) of the guitar, his father wanted him to put down that “fiddle”⁴ and take up the pianoforte instead.

In Vienna, de Monte met Mauro Giuliani. The fact that Giuliani was not only a most famous guitarist, but also chamber virtuoso to Empress Marie-Louise (1791-1847), wife of Napoleon Bonaparte, must have been a double attraction to de Monte. If his possession of Giuliani’s studies, Op. 1, 54, 55, and additional didactic material by Giuliani in manuscript (for a discussion of this, see below) indicates anything, it implies that de Monte took guitar lessons from the master. A teacher-student relationship would also serve to explain the personal rapport De Monte seems to have enjoyed with Giuliani. Nevertheless, we lack an account of Giuliani’s teaching, since de Monte had discontinued keeping a diary on a daily basis. This was the result, most probably, of an intensifying social life in which *bon vivant* Giuliani may or may not have been a factor. There seems also to have been another connection between de Monte and Giuliani: the latter’s second guitar concerto is dedicated to “Mr. de Monte.”

WHO EXACTLY WAS THE DEDICATEE OF GIULIANI’S OPUS 36?

Giuliani’s *Grand Concerto*, Opus 36, displays a dedication to an unspecified “Mr. de Monte.” Giuliani-biographer Heck writes: “Nothing is known of its dedicatee, a certain Mr. de Monte, but his name conspicuously lacks a title. He could easily have been

one of the wealthy Viennese middle-class, a certain *je ne sais qui*, who probably helped defray the publication costs and perhaps recompensed the composer in some way, as was the custom.”⁵ It is tempting to assume that this “Mr. de Monte” is one and the same as our Christopher. However, as Erik Stenstadvold (who has been at Coutts) correctly points out in a letter to the bank, Giuliani’s second concerto had already been advertised in 1812,⁶ and Christopher de Monte did not arrive in Vienna until 1815. Did Christopher just happen to have the same surname as this certain *je ne sais qui*? Or was Christopher, indeed, the dedicatee and was Opus 36 not published in 1812 after all? Alternatively, did he contact Giuliani at a much earlier date without recording it in his diary? Judging from the printed music in Christopher’s possession, he was not a virtuoso guitarist capable of tackling the concerto. But then, among Christopher’s printed music are *three* copies of said concerto, all bearing the Artaria plate number 2251.⁷

Whatever the case, if Mauro Giuliani felt indebted to de Monte for some reason, he must have realized that a special guitar he had in his possession would make a perfect recompense, given de Monte’s interest in the French Revolution and its protagonists. This was the guitar formerly owned by Empress Marie-Louise.

GIULIANI’S ACCOMPANYING LETTER

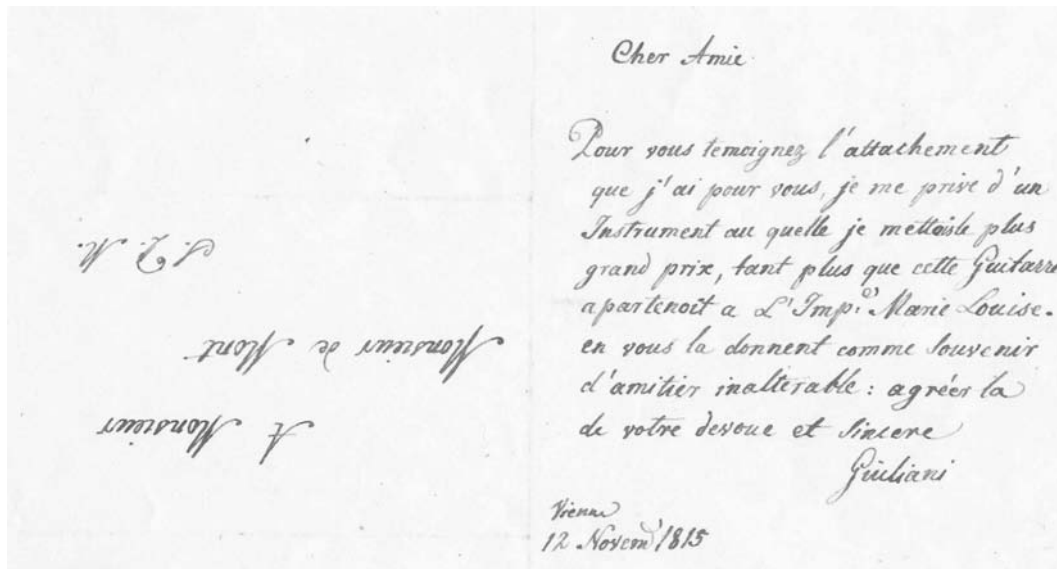
The guitar, as kept by the bank, is accompanied by a letter in French signed “Giuliani,” together with some printed compositions, most of them by Giuliani (see list at the end of this article), and some musical manuscripts in two different hands. One of the hands, identical to that in the letter, can safely be assumed to be Giuliani’s. Its style of music writing is not far removed from the (later) Giuliani original reproduced on page 268 of Heck’s *Mauro Giuliani*...

The letter by Giuliani was written and addressed on a single sheet, folded over upon itself for mailing in such a way that the address alone would have appeared on the outside (see illustration). It was sealed with red wax, which is still much in evidence. Here is the transcription, followed by an English translation:

*A Monsieur
Monsieur de Mont
S.P.M.*⁸

*Cher Amie,
Pour vous temoigner l’attachement
que j’ai pour vous, je me prive d’un
Instrument au quelle je mettais le plus
grand prix, tant plus que cette Guitarre*





*apartenoit a L'Imp^{re} Marie Louise.
en vous la donnent comme souvenir
d'amitié inalterable: agréer la
de votre devoue et sincere*

Giuliani⁹

Vienna

12 Novem 1815

Dear friend,
As evidence of my fondness for you,
I herewith deprive myself of an instrument
which I have valued most highly, all the more
so since this guitar belonged to the Empress
Marie Louise. In giving it to you as a souvenir
of enduring friendship, please accept it from
your devoted and sincere

Giuliani.

Vienna

12 November 1815

In 1814, Empress Marie-Louise, *née* Habsburg, had returned to Vienna following the banishment of her husband to Elba. In that year, or in 1815, Giuliani was appointed chamber virtuoso. According to the early Giuliani-biographer Isnardi, Marie-Louise gave Giuliani "the famous lyre guitar which Napoleon had ordered made just for her."¹⁰ The roots of Marie-Louise's good will toward Giuliani may have gone back to 1811, while she was in Paris. This was when Giuliani's Opus 27 was published; a *romance* (song) entitled *Marie-Louise au Berceau de son Fils*. The elaborately engraved title page shows a young mother, Marie-Louise, standing next to her baby son, who is lying in his imperial cradle.

Isnardi is known to have made mistakes in his early biography of Giuliani. Might the matter of the "lyre"

guitar be a slip of memory? Might it in reality have been the Pons guitar? The latter's 1812 date fits the proper time frame. Judging from its elaborate ornamentation, it certainly could have been ordered in Paris "especially for Marie-Louise." There may well have also been a lyre guitar, which Marie-Louise might have given to Giuliani as well.

THE MUSICAL MANUSCRIPTS: A MISSING LINK?

Upon first seeing the unknown Giuliani manuscript material at Coutts, the initial excitement of this author quickly gave way to disappointment over the contents: seemingly endless repetitions of tonic and dominant chords in the keys of C and F, and nowhere a melody in sight. Only a few first-position chords are employed. Arpeggios are rarely called for, most of the pieces being of the 'oom-pah' variety, where the three upper strings are sounded simultaneously after the thumb has played the chord's root.

The elementary technical level and the slight musical value of the material initially made it seem unworthy of further attention, until it was realized that material of just this nature is rather unique in Giuliani's known output. For the first time we see how Giuliani must have catered to the *absolute* beginner, how he would have bridged the gap between zero-level and the next step up, the level required for his simplest published compositions. As such, this mundane stuff arguably forms a missing link in Giuliani's guitar didactics.

There are two manuscripts:

- MS 1', entitled "Raccolta / di Vari pezzi favoriti di / Opere e Balletti / missi per / Due Chitarre / da / Mauro Giuliani." 23 pages, of which 10 are used.

- 'MS 2', entitled "Raccolta / di / Vari pezzi per due Chitarre / Chitarra 2," comprising 10 pages.

Selected titles of the contents are given at the end of this article.

These two volumes (in the case of the second, a rather flattering name for a gathering of loose papers) are very much *ad hoc* collections of elementary teaching pieces. 'MS 2' appears to be entirely in Giuliani's hand. 'MS 1' shows two hands at work. Giuliani's betrays itself by the dash-like writing of the note heads, the skilled execution of musical clefs, and various other calligraphic details. The other hand looks neat but less experienced in musical notation. It provides more rounded note-heads. In one of the musical pieces, Giuliani's hand takes over from the other.¹¹

The manuscripts contain simple themes taken from popular operas and ballets (most of which are long forgotten), in arrangements for two guitars by Giuliani. At Coutts, only the accompanying, chordal part survives. In a typical guitar lesson, these accompaniments would have been played by the student, while Giuliani would have taken the task that was still well out of reach of the student: that of playing their melodies. Giuliani would have done this either from memory or from yet another manuscript, which is not part of de Monte's papers at Coutts. The obvious copying of material from MS 2 into MS 1 would imply that MS 2 was Giuliani's personal volume, from which his students perhaps had to copy material into their own notebooks. However, as shown by MS 1, Giuliani did some of the copying himself, probably in situations where the source volume was not around or when time was tight and his own volume was needed for an upcoming guitar lesson. For reasons unknown, Giuliani's manuscript ended up in de Monte's possession.

All this suggests that Giuliani, as a teacher, drew upon the fashionable music of his day for instructional ends, as most applied music teachers have done for generations. It is hardly surprising that exercises of this type were not published.

While copying them out in manuscript, however, the student would learn the elements of music writing and pick up some theory. While practicing them, he would get acquainted with basic chords. Indeed, after diligently practicing a prescribed dose of Giuliani's *Studio*, Opus 1, to teach his right hand fingers some independence through repetitive arpeggiations, our student would have been ready to tackle a genuine little entry-level composition like Giuliani's Opus 54. As noted earlier, both these works were among those that de Monte left behind.

An interesting insight may be gained from examining MS 2. Above some of the pieces, a musical staff is written in with small note heads. These so-called *incipits* served as a reminder of the melody of the piece in question. Significantly, in the Giuliani manuscripts, they are

notated in a different key. The key of A is found whenever the accompaniment is in C. In one case, D is found over F. The melodic fragments will only fit their accompaniments when transposed upwards by a minor third. This indicates that Giuliani played these melodies using a capo on his guitar, or, indeed, that he used a *terz-guitar* in his teaching.

CHRISTOPHER'S WATERLOO

To complete the biographical sketch of Christopher de Monte, a word about his demise: correspondence (preserved in the Coutts Archive) between Coutts Trotter and de Monte suggests that the young Englishman, after he recovered from a serious illness, intended to visit Italy. This is also confirmed by a pack of (unopened) letters of recommendation to several firms in that country. However, disaster struck. His health gave way. Instead, he left Vienna for England. On the journey home he "vomited blood on the road in such quantities," that he felt embarrassed despite his illness. There was evidently another problem as well. De Monte had run out of money. Despite his connections with Coutts & Co., no bank would help him. For medical assistance, he had to rely on the sympathies of physicians along the way, indemnifying them with some of his own possessions. Nevertheless, the trophy of his *Grand Tour*, Marie-Louise's guitar, he kept until the end.



De Monte died on February 5, 1816, in the German city of Rastatt, situated close to the French border, apparently having suffered the fatal effects of both malaria and tuberculosis. The few belongings still left in his possession, among them what was described in an accompanying letter¹² as the "beautiful guitar," were sent to Coutts in London. According to the burial register,¹³ his "disconsolate parents" removed his remains from Rastatt to a chapel in Covelong, India. Christopher had been in the "22nd year of his age."

THE GUITAR

The guitar looks virtually new, showing no dents or blemishes. This superbly built instrument rests in a case finished in green leather. A mother-of-pearl shield inlaid in the headstock proudly displays the maker's name. It reads:

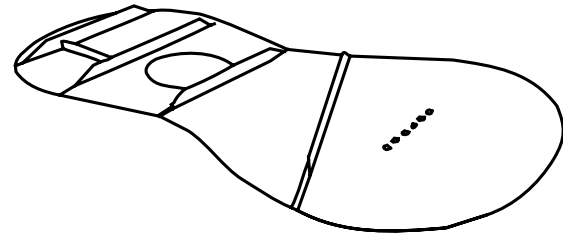
Pons Fils, à Paris 1812

The guitar represents the state-of-the-art in French guitar building during the early years of the 19th century. The body shape with its small upper bout and flat bottom is an intermediate between the old Baroque style and more curved contemporary French designs. Given its modest size, it could be considered a ladies' model. Back and sides are made of quilted maple, the flat back being lined in spruce. (Gary Southwell: "You could use rejected tops as back veneer.") String length is 63 cm., relatively standard for the time. The guitar does not have a raised fingerboard (a feature not commonly found until the 1820s). It has seventeen silver frets of rectangular section (sometimes called *bar-frets*), making its highest note an *a*. Its twelfth fret lies well within the confines of the body.¹⁴

Clearly, the Pons is a no ordinary instrument. The bridge has elaborate mustaches in a garland pattern, finely cut from ebony; they cover a large part of the guitar's lower bout. Precious materials abound. The edges of the soundboard and soundhole are lined with pearl floral motifs in black mastic. A tortoise-shell ring lines the end grain inside the soundhole. The pearl-inlaid bridge holds the strings by means of six routed pearl pins. Nut and saddle are both mother-of-pearl (which, apart from looking special, "would also contribute brightness to the sound," says Southwell). Silver is used in the tuning mechanisms. Despite its decoration, the guitar definitely was not meant to be *all show no go*, as several performance-related details will show.

Luthier Pons took special care to give the upper notes on the first string their due resonance. In addition to stiffening the upper bout of the soundboard by two customary crossbars, he joined them with a member running parallel to the strings as well. This little brace is located under the chanterelle and is about half as high as its neighbors. This technique was known to lute makers,

but was not a common feature of early 19th-century guitars. It can be found on certain flush-fingerboard guitars made by Lacote, one being dated Paris, 1830.¹⁵ Before the introduction of raised fingerboards, construction techniques like this may have favored the exploitation of the guitar's highest register.¹⁶



The bracing of the soundboard of the Pons guitar.

Two transverse bars support the guitar's lower bout. One of these is placed in a slanted position, giving the treble side of the table greater stiffness than the bass side. This effect is enhanced by the use of an unfinished one-piece spruce top with its grain diverging from fairly wide on the bass side to very fine on the treble side.

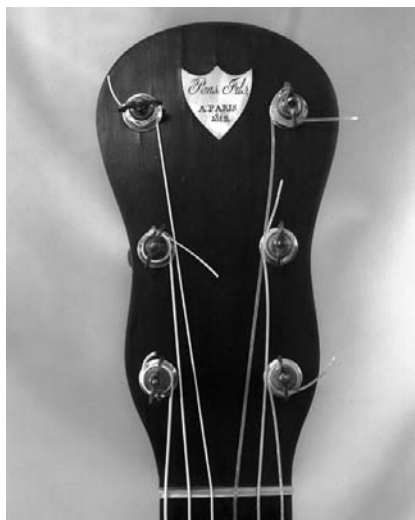
ADJUSTABLE-FRICTION PEGS: A FRENCH 'EVOLUTION'?

The guitar's locking tuners are very impressive. Their design is an improvement over the ordinary wooden friction peg. Here the peg, sitting in a metal sleeve in the headstock, has a threaded metal rod running through its center. By means of a little wing-nut on top of the peg, its friction can be adjusted. During tuning, the peg can be made to turn easily without slipping. This allows for one-handed operation. Often a wooden friction peg requires the use of two hands in tuning: one hand to turn it and another to provide support as it is seated firmly into the headstock. Upon attaining the right pitch, the Pons adjustable-friction peg could be secured in place. This elegant and effective tuning system forms an intermediate phase in the transition from wooden friction pegs to worm-gear machined tuners. Pegs of this type seem to be a French invention. They were used by different guitar makers, such as Lacote and G. Martin, and were possibly derived from similar mechanisms first seen on lyre guitars. On the Pons guitar they were beautifully executed in silver, the ebony buttons sporting finely engraved pearl inlays.

A nice touch, found in numerous contemporary instruments, is an ebony veneer covering the back of the neck. This produces a luxurious, non-sticky surface, enabling position-shifts to be performed without lifting the thumb from the neck. The guitar has a carved strap button located in the endblock. It is not placed centrally between back and top, but like other early French guitars, rather more towards the top, giving the guitar less op-



Headstock with adjustable-friction pegs and mother-of-pearl nut



Inlaid shield on headstock reading "Pons Fils à Paris 1812"



Back of headstock with mother-of-pearl inlaid pegs

portunity to topple over when played with a strap. The other side of the strap would have been tied to the headstock. Incidentally, Giuliani probably used just such a shoulder strap in performance. He appears to be depicted in a standing position, his guitar supported in this manner, on the illustrated cover of Hummel's *Grandes Sérénades*.¹⁷

THE MAKER, "PONS FILS À PARIS"

Several instrument makers by the name of Pons are known to have produced bowed instruments, guitars and lyre guitars in Grenoble, Paris and London. These different locations, coupled with the frequent absence of given names on Pons labels, make it difficult to tell how many Ponses there actually were, and whether or not they were all from the same family. Vannes¹⁸ and Lütgendorff¹⁹ both give César (±1748-1831) as the oldest known Pons. Born in Paris, he had a commercially successful business in Grenoble.²⁰ Our Pons from Paris must have been a son of this fairly well known César, as his use of the *fils* tag would normally indicate a father active in the same trade. Old César had two sons. Vannes provides the names *Louis David*, working like his father in Grenoble, and *Joseph*, baptized in Grenoble September 25, 1781, working in Paris at the turn of the century. This Joseph, then, was probably the maker of our guitar. Vannes cites a label "Pons fils / rue du Grand Hurlleur Paris 1813."²¹ Later, the Paris Pons is known to have used a *Pons à Paris* label, having dropped the *fils* designation. Vannes reports a guitar by Joseph having been sold to the Russian court.

A luthier called Pons was active in London as well: guitars and lyres are known to exist with a *Pons London* attribution. Vannes believes this to have been Joseph. Joseph would have been one of several luthiers, like the Panormo family and the Roudhloff brothers, who mi-

grated there from Paris. Vannes mentions having seen a decorated guitar, formerly in the possession of "Queen Charlotte of England," apparently similar to de Monte's, and sporting a similar shield in the head, reading "Pons, London, 1819." Wherever he worked, Joseph Pons seems to have succeeded in attracting notable customers.

In addition to emerging as an important early maker, Joseph Pons also has the accolade of having taught an apprentice who was later to become the most renowned 19th-century French guitar maker: René François Lacote (17??- after 1853). Lacote set up his own business in Paris around 1820, an early guitar of his dating from that very year.²² On its label he calls himself *élève de Mr Pons*, Pons obviously having been considered a reputable firm. We do not know when Lacote entered Pons's service, nor when he left. But in 1812, when Marie-Louise's guitar was being built in the Pons workshop, a young Lacote might have had a hand in it.

SIGNS OF PLAYING WEAR

We took special care to examine the Pons guitar for playing wear. Could evidence of, say, Giuliani's skill still be traced in some way? We were prepared to check for marks on the table indicating possible use of the nails and favorite playing point, soiling of the soundboard that would have indicated contact with the little finger of the right hand,²³ traces of use of a capotasto, possible signs of the use of the left thumb as a fretting finger, fret wear, and the presence of broken-off string knots in the box, indicating string types and gauges used. Unfortunately, the Pons guitar turned out to be virtually unplayed. Its frets were hardly worn. The back of the neck showed no wear at all. We measured bridge height at the first string: a mere 6mm. Had its owner used his nails for playing, even very short ones would have left some marks in the

table. The original strings, apart from being corroded, didn't show signs of excessive wear either.

Although definitely a quality instrument, worthy of being in the possession of a Giuliani, it is highly unlikely the Pons was Giuliani's concert guitar. Nor would there be reason to hope so, as no concert player would ever part with his favorite instrument.

WHY WAS IT GIVEN AWAY?

One can only guess at the reason why Marie-Louise gave away a gem-like guitar, given to her by Napoleon in the early days of marriage. She might not have been an able player, but then, a nice place in the music room or in the boudoir could easily have been found for the little instrument. The fact is, she had no great affection for Napoleon whom she married for political reasons. In a letter to her father dating from 1814, she is known to have said: "Napoleon lost the battle, a pity he didn't lose his head as well." Marie-Louise's low regard for the Emperor might have caused her, by extension, to devalue—or at least to part more easily with—the presents he gave her. Another factor probably played a role: soon after she had returned to Vienna, Marie-Louise was "in the arms and bed of the Austrian Hussar general placed at her side to protect her."²⁴ Any gifts that reminded her of her time with Napoleon might have had to go.

Just what it was that made Giuliani, in turn, give the Pons guitar away does not become clear from merely examining it. He might have regarded it as a ladies' instrument, unsuitable for his own use. Yet, in the end, Giuliani's actual concert guitar(s) simply must have had a better, bigger sound.

Giuliani's instrument(s) hailed possibly from Naples, an important center of early six-string guitar making and the place where Giuliani most likely had his formal musical education.²⁵ Perhaps the Pons guitar stems from the period in which "in the goodness of the body or box, the Neapolitan guitars in general surpassed those of France and Germany."²⁶

STRINGS

The most interesting single aspect of the de Monte guitar (in this writer's view, at least) is the survival in the case, if not on the guitar proper, of six original strings dating from 1816 or before. No other strings of this vintage survive in quite this way, revealing to us what they were like, what gauges were in use, and how they might have been manufactured.

Sometimes "old" strings are found in cases of old guitars, but none of these can be dated with certainty. Easily datable though the de Monte strings may seem, they nevertheless seem to raise new questions. First of all: were they a set? As they are now off the guitar, this is impossible to say with certainty.²⁷ However, if they were (and their graduated sizes merit consideration of this possibility), the Pons had been strung in a non-standard way: five of its strings are wound (silver or silver-plated copper on silk) and only the first string is plain gut.²⁸ Unfortunately it is impossible to tell whose taste this supposed stringing would have reflected: Pons's, Marie-Louise's, Giuliani's, de Monte's, or anyone else's. The gauges are:

1:	0.90 mm	plain
2:	0.79	wound
3:	0.89	"
4:	1.18	"
5:	1.30	"
6:	1.50	"

The first string alone will give a tension of more than 13kgf when tuned to e1 (with a1 at a low 415hz). This is an impressive 5kgf more than the first string of a (very) high tension set on a modern 65cm concert guitar (a¹ = 440 hz).

This tension may seem too high for a gut string, but theoretically, a gut string will not break at this pitch.²⁹ A more likely candidate to snap at concert pitch would be the wound second string with its thin silk core. Or could these six strings, if they were a set at all, have been assembled to sound well and give a good string tension at a pitch level well



below standard tuning (maybe up to a quarter), perhaps to accommodate a particular singer's voice range? Aside from the set-question, research of the individual strings may yield invaluable information to stringmakers interested in recreating the strings of the past for use with historical guitars.

CONDITION OF THE GUITAR WHEN FOUND

Once put in the storeroom, the Pons was exposed to a climate of extreme dryness. As a consequence, when its case was opened for the first time in almost two centuries, its neck had become detached, its garlands had separated from the top and most of the inlay had fallen out. Mr. John M. Lodge, a restorer of bowed instruments, was engaged by Coutts. He managed to conserve the instrument, but did not restore the original angle between neck

and body. As a result, the (replacement) strings now lie flat on the frets.³⁰ This makes it impossible to assess the guitar's most important characteristic: its sound. Gary Southwell reckons it not worthwhile to bring the instrument back into playing condition. A de-naturing of the wood should have brought about a decisive loss of strength and elasticity, particularly in the soundboard. As a result, Southwell feels the guitar would soon collapse under full string tension.



Visitors to Coutts & Co. on February 2, 1998. From left to right: Gary Southwell, Paul Pleijsier, and the archivist, Tracey Earl.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THIS GUITAR?

As the bank's present day's archive department could not trace any living member of the de Monte family, the guitar and Christopher's other belongings were registered as *customer oubliette*. Normally, the contents of a bank's storerooms and safe deposit boxes are secret, but now the existence of the Pons could be made public. The Archivist had advised us that Coutts has no intention to dispose of *customer oubliette*, lest any unknown descendant turn up.

It cannot be denied that this poor Pons has had a rather unlucky life. Created to be treasured, it was passed capriciously from one hand to the next. There is no evidence that any of its three owners gave it any serious playing. It spent most of its existence in a storeroom. When finally rediscovered, it was already beyond resuscitation. What little chance there was left for the guitar to raise its voice was precluded by the resetting of the neck. Is this where the story must end?

Fortunately, the "beautiful guitar" may finally get some of the attention it has long deserved. This author, living in the Netherlands, has arranged for it to be part of an upcoming exhibition at the Gemeentemuseum, in The Hague.³¹ There, among a great number of other historically interesting 19th-century guitars, Marie-Louise's once-proud Pons instrument will again be in the lime-light.

MUSIC AT COUTTS, FORMERLY IN THE POSSESSION OF CHRISTOPHER DE MONTE

Printed works by Giuliani:

(Modern, abbreviated titles are given as in the Heck checklist, *op. cit.*, pp. 194-229.)

Guitar solo:

- Opus 1: *Studio*. Vienna, Artaria.
- Opus 38: *Six Variations on "a Schisserl und a Reindl."* Vienna, Artaria.
- Opus 54: *Les Variétés Amusantes (Recueil de Pièces faciles à l'usage des Commençans)*. Vienna, Imprimerie chimique.
- Opus 62: *Six Variations on an Original Theme*. Milan, Ricordi.

Two guitars:

- Opus 16(a): *16 Oesterreichische nazional Ländler*. Vienna, Artaria.
- Opus 55: {12} *Ländler*. Vienna, Steiner.

Voice and guitar:

- WoO, vocal-3: *Le Troubadour du Nord*. Cahiers 1-8. Vienna, Artaria.

Guitar and string quartet:

- Opus 36: *Grand Concerto*. Vienna, Artaria. Three complete copies.

Arrangements by Giuliani in manuscript:

Two guitars:

'MS 1': "Raccolta / di Vari pezzi favoriti di / Opere e Balletti / missi per / Due Chitarre / da / Mauro Giuliani." 23 pages, of which 10 are notated.

'MS 2': "Raccolta / di / Vari pezzi per due Chitarre / Chitarra 2." 10 pages.

Selected titles found in the mss. (no composers mentioned): *Marche de la Vestale*, *Marcia dell'Opera Sargino*, *Balletto dell'Opera Ferdinand Cortes*, *Pièces du Ballet de Zeffur 1-4*, *Nina*, *Nella Nina* (*Nina* might be the Ballet by Persuis of which de Monte possessed printed music, see below), *Tre Walzer*. The only original Giuliani composition included is *12 Ländler per due Chitarre Opera 55*. It is technically on the same level as the other pieces.

Printed works by other composers:

Guitar solo:

- T. Gaude: *Kleine Stücke für die Gitarre*. Hamburg, Rudolphus.
- [Various authors]: *Pièces choisies*, 1e Livre. Hamburg, Rudolphus.

Two guitars:

- A. Spina: *Pièces Choies du Ballet Zephir*. Vienna, Mechetti.

Flute and guitar:

- C. Fürstenau: *Trois thèmes variés*. Hamburg, Rudolphus.

Other:

- Jusdorf: *Zehn Leichte Lieder für Gitarre und Pianoforte*, Opus 1. Hamburg, Rudolphus.
- Persuis: [Music from the ballet] *Nina oder Der Wahnsinnige aus Liebe*. 3 Vols. Vienna, Steiner.
- Schlottauer: [Music from the ballet] *Arlequin und Colombine*. Vienna, Cappi.

ENDNOTES

¹ Guitar maker Gary Southwell, an expert on early 19th century guitars, photographer Klaas Fopma, and the author were allowed to examine the guitar and its paraphernalia. Sincere thanks are due to Tracey Earl, archivist at Coutts & Co., who wrote the original story of Christopher de Monte in the 1990 summer edition of Coutts' in-house journal, *The Three Crowns*. Ms. Earl constructed Christopher's biography from his own diary and various other documents at Coutts. All biographical details in the present article were taken from that research. The author also thanks Dr. Thomas Heck, Giuliani scholar and contributing editor of *Soundboard*, for helping to prepare the English version of this article for publication. An earlier, less complete version of it appeared in two installments, in German, in *Gitarre & Laute*, XXI, nos. 4 & 5 (1999): 21-26 and 23-28 respectively.

² The frequent short quotes that appear throughout this article, unless otherwise stated, are all drawn from de Monte's diary.

³ Various modern historians fault Wellington for his presence at the Richmond ball with reproaches such as, "Instead of directing his troops, he was dancing in Brussels." They attribute his ultimate victory at Waterloo not so much to the effectiveness of his own strategies as to his sheer good luck.

⁴ From a letter of de Monte Sr. at Coutts. "Fiddle" is an expression of sarcasm and is not to be taken literally.

⁵ Thomas Heck, *Mauro Giuliani: Virtuoso Guitarist and Composer* (Columbus: Editions Orphée, 1995), p. 52.

⁶ Heck, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

⁷ In reviewing this manuscript for publication in 2001, Thomas Heck observed, "Title-page plates were quite easy to change in old Vienna; revisions were not uncommon. Artaria might well have brought out a few early copies of Giuliani's *Guitar Concerto*, Op. 36, without a dedicatee on the title page, between 1812 and 1815. De Monte's name, as a dedicatee, could easily have been added to a (hypothetical) revised title page, in 1815, perhaps in return for favors received. No copies of an earlier or first state of the Op. 36 title page (without dedicatee) survive, to my knowledge, but that does not mean that this scenario did not occur."

⁸ It has been suggested (by T. Heck) that these letters might signify hand delivery. If so, they might stand for either French ("Sa propre main," "Ses propres mains,") or Italian ("Sua propria mano," "Sue proprie mani").

⁹ Despite some phonetic spelling, this letter does generally demonstrate Giuliani's correct usage of the French language. The author thanks Dr. Marie-José Gambin, for help with translating Giuliani's letter, and for her opinion on Giuliani's knowledge of French.

¹⁰ Heck, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

¹¹ One could assume this other hand to be De Monte's. However, at first sight, the writing style is not comparable to that found in the diary. The diary generally contains quick and fluent writing, whereas the titles found over the MS pieces seem to have been written slowly and deliberately. This author does not feel qualified to draw any conclusions in this matter.

¹² Held by Coutts.

¹³ Photocopy supplied to the author by Coutts.

¹⁴ The following measurements, all in cm. unless specified as mm., were made by Gary Southwell: string length—63, overall length—90.5, body length—44, upper bout—21.2, waist—17.2, lower bout—28.4, depth of sides—7.2-8.7, soundhole—7.4, neck width at nut—4.5, neck width at body joint—5.6, neck thickness at first fret—18 mm., neck thickness at 9th fret—22 mm., string spacing at bridge—11.6 mm. between each string, height of string at bridge—6 mm., 17 silver nickel frets.

¹⁵ See Lacote guitar on page 83 of Alex Timmerman, *De mandoline en de gitaar door de eeuwen heen* (Zwolle, 1994). In this case, the brace is as high as the transverse braces. The upper-bout brace in question can be seen, as well, on two Lacote guitars restored by Sebastian Nuñez of Utrecht.

¹⁶ Giuliani was an innovator in this respect, having employed the guitar's highest notes in his most virtuosic compositions earlier than most other players. Possibly this practice was enabled by the full-length, non-raised ebony fingerboard found on many Fabricatore guitars from Naples (and later, on Viennese Stauffers as well). This relatively stiff construction may have benefited the quality of the highest notes, as opposed to the traditional construction, whereby the highest frets were inlaid directly in the guitar's soundboard, usually giving muffled top notes, as the fretting finger impaired soundboard resonance.

¹⁷ Heck, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-68.

¹⁸ René Vannes, *Dictionnaire universel des luthiers*, 2me éd. (Bruxelles, 1951), p. 285.

¹⁹ W.L. Freiherr v. Lütgendorff, *Die Geigen und Lautenmacher vom Mittelalter bis Gegenwart* (Frankfurt, 1922). See the "Pons" entry.

²⁰ William Henley, *Universal History of Violin and Bow Makers*, vol. IV (Brighton, 1960), p. 160.

²¹ René Vannes, *Dictionnaire universel des luthiers, Tome additif et correctif* (Bruxelles, 1959), p. 46. Without explanation why this label would not be Joseph's, he attributes it to Louis David who, inexplicably, is supposed to have worked in Paris. Probably a mistake.

²² Formerly in the possession of the late Mr. Peter Pieters of Ghent, Belgium. An earlier Lacote guitar with a label reading "Lacote Sr. de Martin, Luthier, Elève de M. Pons, Rue Montmartre 109, Paris 1819", is in the collection of Mr. Tetsukazu Hosokawa. Thanks to Mr. Kurt Decorte of Ghent, for bringing this fact to the author's attention.

²³ Like other early guitarists, Giuliani might have used this technique.

²⁴ Graf Albrecht Adam von Neipperg. Alan Schom, *One Hundred Days* (London, 1993), p. 70.

²⁵ Heck, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

²⁶ Ferdinand Sor, *Méthode pour la guitare*, p. 10. English translation by A. Merrick.

²⁷ Opinions differ as to the number of strings originally attached to the guitar. Coutts archivist Tracey Earl: "I'd estimate three strings were on the guitar, one of them broken. Some more strings were rolled up in the bottom of the case." John Lodge, who restored the guitar in 1989, remembered having received the guitar without any strings. Moreover, as a restorer, he would not have thrown away any original material. He may have made a photo of the instrument before restoration.

²⁸ In 1826, Aguado mentions three wound bass strings and three others of plain gut (*Méthode complète*, § 9). Ferandière makes an earlier mention of this practice in 1799.

²⁹ As explained to this author by Mr. E. Segerman, a stringmaker.

³⁰ In 1990, the newly restored, but still stringless, Pons was to take part in a Coutts in-house exhibition. Mr. Julian Bream, who was invited to inspect the guitar, suggested putting strings on the instrument. He took this upon himself and strung it in an appropriate way, using gut treble strings.

³¹ Projected starting date: August 2002.