International Acclaim for *Fernando: Beethoven of the Guitar*

Beautifully written and meticulously researched, this biographical novel is a fascinating account of the amazing (and amazingly unknown) life of Fernando Sor, the greatest virtuoso and composer in the history of music for guitar.

— Santiago del Rey
Editor and Translator, Barcelona

This extraordinary trilogy on the life and times of Fernando Sor is a rare triumph that combines historical fiction with philosophical romance. Lou Marinoff offers us a virtuoso performance, entwining music, mystery, and metaphysics in a gripping tale whose motto may well be summed up in the author's own wise words—"truth is stranger than fiction, and fiction is nothing but truth in disguise."

— Makarand R. Paranjape, Ph.D.
Professor of English Literature, Jawaharlal Nehru University
Director, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla

The secret to any great book is a great story. Lou Marinoff's historical novel about the life of Fernando Sor is exactly that. All classical guitarists know how important a figure Sor was and is to their world, but this book goes far beyond that. Rich in Spanish history, its monarchy, and the Napoleonic Wars, it will be a most enjoyable and informative read for people from all walks of life.

— Peter McCutcheon
Honorary Professor of Classical Guitar, The University of Montreal

Lou Marinoff's latest book, *Fernando: Beethoven of the Guitar,* is a *tour de force*, written as a novelized history of the great Catalan composer and guitarist Fernando Sor (1778-1839). Marinoff conjures up in great detail the intrigues and politics of the rulers of Spain, England, France, and

Russia, who employed Sor to entertain and instruct their families, and who favored Sor above other composers. The Catalan's life intersected with leading artists of his time including Paganini, Berlioz, Goya, and Goethe. So vivid is the style with which he re-creates the episodes of the composer's life, the author has the knack of causing the reader to feel present in each scene. A guitarist himself, Marinoff's great love and affinity for Sor are evident throughout this three-part opus. Bravo on an engrossing account of this fascinating genius!

— Maestro Cesare Civetta
Founder and Music Director
Beethoven Festival Orchestra, New York

Lou Marinoff's *Fernando*: *Beethoven of the Guitar* is many things. It's a historical novel, and most readers will find the 'historical' aspect the prominent one, but they'll keep reading because it's not just a history but a delightful embroidering of a history few of us knew much of. We are taken not only—and very thoroughly—through Fernando Sor's remarkable life, but also through the tumultuous history of Europe forming the stage of that life. I'm sure that almost all readers will be hugely informed, and completely fascinated by this book, which is so beautifully written that it will seem a lot less lengthy than it is. Its three parts are devoted to Early, Middle, and Late Sor, as it were, and having read the first you will be unable to resist going on to the second and then the third. The last chapter is devoted to his legacy, which amounts virtually to the christening of the classical guitar as a serious instrument, an employment that had been essentially unheard of before Sor's day. The book is not only a history but a romp, following its eminently likable as well as extremely gifted hero through a Europe you probably didn't know much about, and doing so with a level of gusto that is unlikely to be equaled. Hats off to Marinoff for this astonishing book!

— Jan Narveson, Ph.D., O.C.
Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, University of Waterloo
President, Kitchener-Waterloo Chamber Music Society

History simply tells us about facts. The historical novel, though, is an instrument that allows readers to relive important events by introducing us into the intimate lives of great historical figures. This is exactly what Lou Marinoff does in recreating the life of an extraordinary but mostly unknown Catalan musician of the XVIII and XIX centuries: Fernando Sor. Marinoff says, "My main literary goals in writing this trilogy were to resuscitate dry bones of facticity by adorning them with human flesh and blood; to animate desiccated dates with a pounding heartbeat and a surging pulse; to restore remote events to an all-embracing immediacy; and to revivify long-dead names with vibrant personalities and vivacious passions."

Marinoff transports readers to another time and place, both real and imagined. As we know, writing historical fiction requires a balance of research and creativity; Marinoff expertly handles both elements in a masterful way. This cast of real people living the events of their time has given the author rich territory to tell a wholly distinctive story; creating this fantastic literary piece required a profound knowledge of the genre and unique music appreciation, both of which Marinoff possesses. By reading this book, the reader can relive many historical moments, including the unique encounter and conversations held at the Duchess of Alba's Palacio de Liria; of note, she was also the patron of Francisco de Goya. There are many more important and significant historical events such as Sor and the Inquisition, Napoleon's Invasion of Spain, the Battle of Bailen, the first defeat for the French invaders, and the execution of Madrileños at the '2 de Mayo' by French firing squads (as portrayed so majestically by Goya in his series called 'The Disasters of War'). Marinoff conveys the spirit, manners, and social conditions of a past age with realistic detail and fidelity, framed in beautiful prose. This is a very enjoyable read on many fronts.

A colleague of mine who serves as a professor at a very prestigious Spanish university told me that if we want to truly know Spanish history of the last centuries, it is fundamental to read literature pieces instead of only history books. I believe this to be absolutely true in the case of Fernando Sor. Marinoff has given us a welcome and exceptional gift to better understand the life of this extraordinary musician.

— Juan Carlos Mercado, Ph.D.
Dean of Interdisciplinary Studies, Center for Worker Education
The City College of the City University of New York

Few biographers tell the story of a life as compellingly as Lou Marinoff. In creating a 'romantic historical' novel about Fernando Sor, we *live* 'Fernando's' life step-by-step; we don't just know about his movements, we *feel* them. We experience his challenges as both guitarist—fighting to give his very instrument the recognition it so deserved and, indeed, deserves—and as a man. We feel both his losses of loved ones and the sense of bereavement when forced by circumstances to leave his native, beloved Spain. We feel his loves, too; even, or perhaps especially, when they are conflicted. And as we follow Fernando across Europe to Paris, to London, to Russia via Cologne, Bonn, Brussels and other cities, we see him in the arms of fame and fortune. And as we 'travel', we encounter a multitude of familiar figures, from Cherubini and Clementi to Méhul to Goethe.

In allowing himself space over three volumes ('Youth, Celebrity, and War'; 'Exile, Favor, and Triumph'; 'Glory, Finale, and Legacy') Marinoff allows for huge elucidations on historical context, politics and war. In so doing, not only do we feel enriched, but we also feel inspired to investigate further, just as one is inspired to seek out the music of the illustrious 'Fernando' (a highly recommended endeavor, incidentally). One of Marinoff's specialties, philosophy, also finds its place in the discourse. And by using fiction to create bridges between the facts we do know about Fernando, we come out with a satisfyingly complete picture of the composer.

An uncanny prophesy of Sor's greatness by a gypsy palm reader sows the seeds as Fernando frees himself from his father's restrictions, has his education at Montserrat and goes on to have a momentous meeting with Goya, a great man who towers over Sor's life, inspiring him to his best. The gypsy prophesy returns time after time, like a supernatural thread through his life.

"In short, music gushed out of Fernando like water from a modern fire-hose," says Marinoff. It shot out of him in a multitude of directions, from Somers Town in London to deepest Russia. It is a pleasure and a privilege to live Sor's life in these pages, to rejoice in his triumphs, to feel his heartaches. An extensive bibliography and webography complete the picture.

Over a decade in the making, Lou Marinoff's *Fernando* is a work of passion that leaves one energized and, notwithstanding the length, eager for more.

— Colin Clarke
International Classical Music Critic, London

Fernando: Beethoven of the Guitar is an incredible historical novel of a Spanish musician-composer caught up in the upheavals of the Napoleonic Wars. It is simply extraordinary that Marinoff uses the medium of a historical novel to paint the relationships between the protagonists of this Napoleonic period. And for me, particularly important were the friendships between many engaged 'liberals', who were also artists of one kind or another: writers, composers, performers, dancers, poets, painters … artists who were not just 'artists for the sake of being artists'!

I have never learned so much about European history in all my life! In Book II, I experienced Fernando's grand tour voyaging toward Russia like a series of literary jewels, which permitted me to 'meet' some of my greatest 'heroes' including Goethe, and never in frivolous ways. At the same time, Professor Marinoff lets us see that such exemplary personages were also human beings, yet in contexts that were complex and often dangerous. I learned implicit lessons on courage here. History *lives* through the pen of this author!

After reading all three volumes, I feel that Marinoff's message of demonstrating the horrors of war was as intentional as the decision of the great Spanish artist Goya to visually depict the realities of that horrible era. And although Marinoff does not express this in so many words, or hit us over the head with his own convictions, I felt perhaps his underlying message was in fact, through the voice of Fernando, that war and violence are not the solutions to resolving problems among human beings.

These books are also a treat for the senses! Cuisine from all over Europe is described to the point where your mouth waters, and it's a delight for those who want to discover such things. In the same way, the wonders seen from a traveling carriage, including the countryside, are depicted until we actually feel the breeze, see the sun's rays in changing

seasons, hear the different birds … And of course, there are also exquisite details of all the palaces Fernando visited.

There is obviously the inestimable gift the author gives Spain and its artists and musicians, in restoring Fernando Sor to his rightful position as a 'son of Spain' who took the guitar to unimaginable heights. This was so very long in coming, because Fernando was the victim of the era and its contradictions, and of the jealous, power-hungry leaders who governed nation-states and empires——not the least being Napoleon. In this context I was delighted to find references to Beethoven and his longing for a new Humanism to take hold in Europe.

During this historic COVID-19 pandemic, Professor Lou Marinoff has given us an enormous gift in numerous ways, not the very least being the ability to travel without getting on a plane. And learning critically important lessons of history that will stand us in good stead in the coming years. Anyone who felt that history in school was a bore, this is your antidote!

Some of the *most* impressive things for me were the anecdotes we discover about Fernando's approach to education. First of all, he never stopped teaching. And he did not position himself as someone to be adored and mimicked. Professor Marinoff shows us that Fernando believed it vital to boost the confidence of his students, to the point where he even proposed to perform with them, with the student playing the first part and Fernando the accompanying parts. What generosity of heart!

There are connections between things alluded to at the start of the novel and taken up again near the end, which convey a tremendous sense of 'coming full circle'. Gives one the marvelous impression that life is one enormous continuity. Is this not in several ways an autobiography, dear Professor Marinoff? Those parallels between that young man in Canada (late in Book III), and the life of Fernando, are absolutely astounding despite obvious differences in place and époque. What a labor of love by this guitar-playing philosophy professor-author, to come up with this precious life story!

— Michèle de Gastyne
President, Musique Universelle Arc-en-Ciel, Paris

Fernando

Beethoven of the Guitar

LOU MARINOFF

Waterside Productions

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Waterside Productions
2055 Oxford Ave
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Dedicated to the unique artistic spirit of Catalonia
and to the great musical traditions of Spain

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Schopenhauer, and Spinoza, and for the inspiring example he thereby set. Since the psychiatrist Yalom had so successfully fictionalized the lives of these important philosophers, it loaned credence to the hope that a philosopher could attempt to do so for an important guitarist and composer.

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Author's Preface

This is a work of historical fiction. First conceived in 2009, it gestated for nine years, its development abetted by intermittent intervals of intensive research, regular episodes of eclectic reading, and frequent periods of protracted reflection. The lengthy labor itself began in May 2018, culminating in the trilogy's birth almost three years later, in March 2021.

The main figure and primary focus of the work is Fernando Sor, a prodigious Spanish guitarist and composer. He led a remarkable life and left an enduring legacy. The background to his story, and the historical context that shaped his trajectory, encompasses the tumultuous era of the French Revolution, the rise and fall of Napoleon, the Europe of Bonaparte's aftermath, and the struggles for political and social reform that pervaded the entire period.

Fernando experienced the painful birth of one of Spain's most bitter internal conflicts. As a liberal-minded artist, he embraced the values of the enlightenment, and wanted Spain to reform herself politically and socially. But as a patriot, monarchist, and Catholic, he resisted Napoleon's attempted imposition of such reforms by invasion and coercion (1808-1813). An ugly rift soon opened among the Spanish people themselves, such that anyone who identified with enlightenment values was deemed a traitor to Spain and branded an *afrancesado:* a Francophile in the most pejorative sense. There was no middle ground. Anyone who desired that Spain liberalize and democratize on her own terms, even if he ardently supported the monarchy and the Church, became unjustly but irrevocably associated with the Jacobins, and thus was demonized. This conflict bitterly divided Spain. It eventually drove Fernando, along with tens of

thousands of his liberal compatriots—not only artists and intellectuals, but also politicians, soldiers, engineers, bankers, and merchants—into exile.

Even two centuries later, embers of that conflict still smoldered. When I found myself in Madrid's National Library in 2012, pursuing research on Fernando Sor, the librarian in the Music Department shot me a disapproving look, scowled darkly at me, and hissed "*afrancesado*" under his breath. While that surprised me at the time, it became all too comprehensible as my research progressed. I gradually discovered how Fernando himself was internally torn by that very same conflict, and how it would haunt Spain over and over again, re-manifesting in her subsequent Carlist Wars, and even (if not especially) in her traumatic Civil War. A dear Spanish friend prevailed on me to mention this anecdote, because he said that relatively few Spaniards today know what '*afrancesado*' means. If only more Spaniards knew, they might finally douse those embers with reconciliation and understanding, preventing them from ever flaring up again. Maybe this novel can help assuage these deep historical wounds.

Literarily, this portrait of a heroic artistic figure against a turbulent background strives to accomplish two related goals.

First, it attempts to weave, as seamlessly as possible, factual events of Fernando Sor's biography as reliably documented (most authoritatively by Brian Jeffery) with plausible fictional threads that bridge the many tantalizing gaps of missing data between and among known facts—connecting the dots, as it were, to fabricate a continuous tapestry of his life. Ideally, someone who knows nothing about Sor before reading this trilogy will be unable to disentangle fact from fancy, and will simply enjoy the tale.

Second, from the vast mountain of documented historical material on the age of Napoleon, this work endeavors to mine the richest veins of events in which Fernando himself became caught up, once again embellishing his romances, friendships, and relationships with historical figures, or indeed inventing plausible encounters that dovetail with established facts. Ideally, an historian who knows much about the era yet little about Sor will find nothing in the story that is contrary to history,

neither in its selected events nor in its fictional forays. Thus even such an historian will be unable at first sight to distinguish fact from fancy, and may likewise simply enjoy the tale.

A third and relatively specialized readership consists of those who already know something, if not many things, about Fernando Sor's music, life, and times. Such readers are especially well-placed to discern where fact leaves off and fiction begins, yet hopefully they too will appreciate that wherever literary license is invoked, its purpose is to enrich the narrative with plausible invention. Where history is mute, creativity can speak.

In Spring 2020, I sent a draft of this trilogy to Brian Jeffery for his inspection. As mentioned, his biography of Sor is the 'gold standard' for accuracy and completeness, and I had been consulting his second edition (1994) all along, as the veritable 'bible' of known facts about Fernando Sor's life. Among many things unknown to historians during more than two centuries were: the name of his first wife, how and where they met, the exact circumstances of their departure from Spain, the precise date in 1815 of their daughter's birth, and the place, date, and cause of her mother's death. Those details, among others, being still unknown when I wrote the trilogy, my creativity rose to the occasion.

Then Brian Jeffrey dropped this bombshell: as fate would have it, while I had been fully absorbed by writing, busily inventing missing dots and their plausible connections to known facts, new historical data had meanwhile surfaced. Unbeknownst to me but simultaneously in 2020, Jeffrey had just published a revised third edition of his biography of Sor, revealing new data concerning a few (but not all) of these aforementioned long-missing bits and pieces. Some new facts had been unearthed by the diligent labors of Josep María Mangado; yet others had been provided to Jeffery in dribs and drabs, as various scholars encountered them fortuitously during historical researches in far-ranging subjects. Indeed, when Brian and I had last met in London, in 2016, he shared with me details of Sor's brush with the Inquisition, which he had published in a separate paper in 2012. That episode had been long unknown to him, and thus was not mentioned in his 1994 edition of Sor's biography. Thanks to his 2012 article, the episode is woven into the fabric of this trilogy (in Book I).

So in May 2020, desirous of honoring Jeffery's third (2020) edition within the context of my literary tale, I felt compelled to do some additional 'invisible weaving' for general readers, updating the tale in light of some, but not all, recent disclosures. Jeffery, Mangado, and a small handful of experts will recognize the very few places where this trilogy deviates from newly revealed historical details. Sticklers for history and Sor alike should read Jeffery for themselves. Even so, there still remain inevitable gaps in factual knowledge of Sor's life, to be bridged, if at all, by future historians and biographers. But since this trilogy is historical fiction, it is also, and by definition, informed yet not embalmed by facts alone. We can demarcate between these two genres as follows: history strives for perfect accuracy but never tells a complete story; historical fiction strives to tell a complete story but never claims perfect accuracy.

My main literary goals in writing this trilogy were to resuscitate dry bones of facticity by adorning them with human flesh and blood; to animate desiccated dates with a pounding heartbeat and a surging pulse; to restore remote events to an all-embracing immediacy; and to revivify long-dead names with vibrant personalities and vivacious passions. *Fernando* invites the reader on an artistic, political, and romantic thrill ride, seamlessly weaving biography, history, art history, literature, musicology—and a few touches of philosophy—with inventive literary fiction.

During the trilogy's lengthy gestation and laborious birth, a number of friends inquired as to my motive for writing it in the first place. "Why a novel about Fernando Sor?" they asked. Given that the work has consumed so many years and not so little effort in the making, it seems a fair question. To answer most generally: Fernando Sor is a great musical treasure of Spain, interred under many layers of forgotten events, neglected achievements, and divisive conflicts. Relatively few contemporary Spaniards even know his name. Out of gratitude to the Spanish people for their enthusiastic reception of my popular philosophy books, I decided to unearth this buried treasure of their nation, polish it, set it like a precious gem, and offer it to Spanish readers—and beyond them, to aficionados of the Spanish guitar and music lovers everywhere— as a token of my esteem.

Beyond this, a more personal answer to the question is given during the course of the final chapters, which treat Sor's legacy and its impact on my own life, and which may serve to remind the reader of two rather oddly conjoined propositions: first, that truth is stranger than fiction; and second, that fiction is nothing but truth in disguise.

Lou Marinoff
Monroe, NY
March 2021

Introduction

Many readers of this splendid biographical novel will be amazed, for at least three reasons. First of all, for the exceptional magnitude of the character it portrays. To a vast majority, Fernando Sor is just a name glimpsed in some program of pieces for classical guitar. Few people could imagine that this barely-recognizable composer, born in Barcelona in 1778, was a celebrity in his day: a virtuoso acclaimed all over Europe, in constant demand in London and Paris, adored by ladies of the aristocracy, fêted in Weimar by Goethe himself and appointed, at the summit of his career, Concert Master of the Imperial Court of Tsar Alexander I. His compositions for piano and orchestra, as well as his ballets, were resounding successes, and his pieces for guitar earned him the distinction of being the first to elevate this instrument from taverns and street corners to concert halls. In sum, to form an idea of his huge fame, it suffices to know that among the guests at a dinner party held in Paris on his fiftieth birthday were musicians like Niccolò Paganini, Luigi Cherubini, Hector Berlioz and Franz Liszt, artists like Eugène Delacroix, and writers like Victor Hugo and George Sand.

The second reason for amazement is self-evident. How can it be that such a character is nowadays so little known in his own country? Certainly not because his music has fallen into oblivion. On the contrary: pieces by Sor are still regularly performed and can be found in the repertoire of any classical guitarist; in fact, performances of his master works are still required to graduate from some conservatories. Why, then, has such an extraordinary life for an artist of his time remained so obscure? Sor committed an apparently unforgivable sin: he

was an *afrancesado*. Although he initially fought against the Napoleonic invasion and composed patriotic songs of immense popularity, afterwards, once Joseph Bonaparte was installed on the throne, he reckoned (as did many other liberals) that Spain would be better off under an enlightened monarchy than with the restoration of the corrupt and inept Bourbons. History, however, ruled against him. Fernando VII regained the throne, reinstated absolutism and the Inquisition, and cruelly expelled all *afrancesados*, who were outlawed, condemned to exile for life, and branded traitors to the country. It can now be said that they were rather patriots of another Spain: of a very different Spain, whose eventual birth would require much more time and suffer yet more labor pains. Even so, what is surprising, and what really makes one pause to reflect, is that such condemnation has persisted up to this very day.

The third reason for amazement, of course, is that this vindication of the figure of Fernando Sor has been written by an author like Lou Marinoff, whom many readers know by his books of thought and philosophy, like the famous *Plato Not Prozac!*. While it is by no means a novelty that a foreigner comes to show us our own history, such a thing could hardly have been anticipated from an author like him. Even to myself, who was for many years his Spanish editor and traveling companion on extended promotional tours, the prospect of a biographical novel about Fernando Sor struck me as a perplexing idea (if not an alarming one: it is known that editors prefer that the author of a great success subsequently write a book nearly identical or very similar to the previous). Fortunately, he was carried away by his characteristic passion, a passion that runs through all his books, and confirms in these pages that he is a more multifaceted author than might be expected: a 'Renaissance Man', as he has sometimes been described, with an endless range of interests and a soft spot for the classical guitar, which he has played since his youth.

Driven by this all-encompassing spirit, and following the principle that each man is a child of his time, Marinoff offers an ambitious panorama of the age that came to shape the destiny of Fernando Sor—the age of the Napoleonic campaigns, of *El Dos de Mayo* and the Peninsular

War, to begin with, here conjured with stunning liveliness—as well as a portrait of the great figures that would mark his career, starting with the Duchess of Alba, who welcomed him in her Liria Palace, and continuing with Francisco de Goya, who honored him with life-long friendship. All this is recreated with careful accuracy and a surprising command of Spanish history, whose paradoxes, nuances and contradictions, far from intimidating the author, seem to spur his omnivorous curiosity that much more.

No less meticulous descriptions follow, during Sor's period of exile, of the sophisticated circles and concert halls of London and Paris, where Sor strengthened his reputation, and in the sumptuous account of the years spent in the Imperial Court of the Tsar, where he resided, surrounded by luxuries and admiration, with his second wife and his beloved daughter Carolina. These successive stages of this Grand Tour, which to a great extent comprise the biography of Fernando Sor, are peppered with deep reflections, wherein the reader will recognize the proverbial insight of Marinoff, and which are written with a charmingly old-fangled language that conveys a fine irony, especially in describing such characters as Godoy and Napoleon.

On a personal level, the life of Sor was marked by great loves and great tragedies; also by the hard experience of exile, by the longing and constant desire to return to Spain; but above all by an endless devotion to music that impelled him to compose without respite, to perform in public with the guitar and other instruments, to explore the most varied genres—from boleros and popular songs to operas, ballets, symphonies and pieces for piano—and to write a *Method for Spanish Guitar* that is still considered one of the most remarkable books on the technique of playing this instrument. This kind of passion is always infectious: firstly, as explained at the end of the trilogy, it was transmitted to his great successors, Francisco Tárrega and Andrés Segovia, and later on to the author himself. I have no doubt that it will transmit itself to the reader too. After witnessing in these pages so many rehearsals, so many performances and concerts, and so many standing ovations from thrilled audiences, I think that no reader will fail to feel an urge to listen—maybe for the first time—to Sor's *Variations on a Theme by Mozart* or his

Studies for guitar. If the author's ultimate goal was to rescue Fernando Sor from oblivion, that is the greatest compliment that can be paid to this magnificent book.

Santiago del Rey
Editor and Translator, Barcelona
March 2021

Artistas españoles, que sentís en vuestras mentes la llama del genio, si llevados de un noble amor á la gloria, aspiráis á conquistar las palmas y coronas que sois acreedores, pasad las fronteras de vuestra patria; las recompensas que esta os destina, son la indiferencia, el desaliento y quizá la miseria.

Artists of Spain, who feel in your spirits the call of genius, if you are inspired by a noble love of glory and desire to conquer the laurels and crowns which you deserve, cross the frontiers of your country; for the rewards which your country destines for you are indifference, discouragement, and perhaps penury.

—Eusebio Font y Moresco
La Opinion Publica
Barcelona, January 1850

(English translation: Brian Jeffery)

Fernando: Beethoven of the Guitar

Book III: Glory, Finale, and Legacy

Part 7. Fernando in Glory, 1823-1826

Chapter 36. Moscow: Sweetness and Light

The urgency of their escort's pace was well-founded, as the company soon discovered. The heavy autumn rains and mud-bath roads, which had slowed then bogged them down en route from Berlin to Warsaw, now turned to snow flurries and frost-hardened ruts. Shivering in the chilled air and jolting along the rutted, pitted, cratered road, they donned their warmest clothing from the baggage wagon, gritted their teeth against the frozen bumps, and learned to brace themselves even on smoother sections, as at any instant they could be bounced in all directions.

For days on end they passed though vast tracts of farmland, the autumn harvest long since in, on whose stubbled fields ragged serfs scythed, gathered and bundled remains of anything usable for fuel or fodder. Between these immense patchworks of agricultural estates, each of whose lands, livestock and serfs were the property of some noble or other comfortably ensconced in his rural mansion, the company passed through dense virgin forests untouched by human hands. There the roads were crowned by cathedral-like canopies of deciduous hardwoods shedding torrents of browned leaves to the forest floor, interspersed with thick stands of towering fir trees already dusted by snow. The woods were pierced by slanting yellow rays of late autumn sun, whose shafts of light and shadow striped their path.

Neither cities, nor towns, nor country inns awaited them at each day's end. Instead, by late afternoon, they simply tuned off the main road and headed to the mansion of the nearest estate. They halted in

its forecourt of hard-packed earth, while Captain Ivanov rapped on the main door, brandishing a letter from the Tsar. The members of this esteemed company were His Imperial Majesty's honored guests en route to Moscow, the letter said, and assured the noble landowner that Tsar Alexander would be eternally grateful for any hospitality accorded to them that night, a velvet-veiled threat reminding the noble that the Tsar owned absolutely everything and everyone in the realm, including the so-called landowners themselves. Without fail or hesitation, the noble was galvanized into action by this missive, summoning a swarm of serfs to attend to all their needs and wants. Their horses were fed and stabled; their cavalry escort given a hot supper and warmly bedded in servants' quarters; while Fernando and his family were shown to proper guest rooms, offered hot baths, and invited to the dining room table to share the bounty of the house, all prepared and served by domestic serfs. The landlord as a rule did nothing save ring bells and issue commands, which were obeyed at once. After supper the company retired to the parlor, sipped cups of tea from a steaming samovar, and were regaled with the history of the house and the grand deeds of its noble forebears. Next morning they were fed a light breakfast and given a packed lunch, and resumed their journey.

As they approached the vicinity of Moscow, the forests gradually diminished and gave way to unbroken tracts of farmland, until one mid-November afternoon, on the distant horizon, they spotted the iconic onion-shaped domes of Saint Basil's Cathedral gleaming in the sinking sun. Captain Ivanov dispatched a rider to alert the house-staff of their coming, and next morning they rode into the city itself. Proceeding westward along Kutuzovsky Prospekt, named after the Field Marshal who resisted Napoleon's invasion, they crossed the bridge into the elite Arbat district, continued west to the Kremlin, then turned north up fashionable Petrovka Street, toward the Bolshoi Theatre.

Of course Moscow was still recovering from the inferno of 1812, which had consigned the city to flames, consuming thousands of structures and transforming Napoleon's would-be conquest to scorched earth, but Tsar Alexander's single-minded determination to rebuild Russia's historic metropolis, bigger and better than ever, was already yielding

widespread fruits. He had engaged accomplished engineers and master builders from across Europe to help redesign and reconstruct the city, under the supervision of famed Russo-Italian neoclassical architect Joseph Bové. Unlimited hordes of serfs awaited their command. What Russia lacked in industrial development at the time, she made up for in sheer slave labor. Hence much of Moscow through which Fernando and his company rode, that crisp November morning of 1823, resembled a sprawling construction site on a scale they had never before beheld.

Fernando's journey to Moscow through the undeveloped Russian countryside, along with his first exposure to the city's massive reconstruction, revealed that the scale of things in general seemed illimitably larger and far more prone to extremes than anything in his experience. This impression would prove true in every dimension of his Russian sojourn. From his very first hours there, Fernando sensed that he was now in the grip of an ethos immeasurably vast, a society intractably polarized, a character moodily pensive, a temperament incurably melancholic, and an outlook fiercely proud of its disproportions yet tragically resigned to its fate. While every country was unique in its own ways, Russia somehow scaled its uniqueness to unique extremes.

As they reached the new Bolshoi Petrovka Theatre, where Félicité would soon be dancing as prima ballerina, the company saw that the building itself appeared serviceable, but was still undergoing extensive work nonetheless, including the addition of a brand new facade. Serfs swarmed all over and around it, like ants, under the orders of skilled overseers. Reconstruction was nothing new to this storied theatre. The Bolshoi ballet company, founded by Catherine the Great in 1776, had moved into the original Petrovka Theatre in 1780. That had burned down in 1805, and was replaced by the New Arbat Imperial Theatre in 1808, which in turn succumbed to the inferno of 1812. The Bolshoi Petrovka Theatre, constructed between 1821 and 1824, would be devoted to ballet and opera, while the adjacent Maly Theatre would put on plays. Along with a public park, they occupied spacious Theatre Square, all according to Joseph Bové's design.

Their coach halted at the north end of the square, across from the Petrovka Theatre, in front of the wrought-iron gates of an enormous and

stately six-storey stone building, number 2 Petrovka Street. It occupied the entire block, and contained palatial apartments of at least a dozen rooms each. These were generally occupied by high-ranking diplomats, distinguished foreign guests, and members of far-flung Russian nobility who kept *pieds-à-terre* in Moscow. The company was greeted by Sergey Ilyich Volgov, cultural secretary to Prince Dmitry Vladimirovich Golitsyn, Governor of Moscow, and his liaison to the Bolshoi ballet company, among other important entities that fell under the Prince's jurisdiction. Captain Ivanov and his men saluted Sergey and the company and, their mission accomplished, rode away to their barracks.

Sergey greeted the company formally yet affably, and led them up to Apartment 6A, on the penthouse floor, which would be their home in Moscow. On their way through the front gate they passed a guardhouse whose occupant, a retired army sergeant, saluted them, while a handful of servants had materialized and followed them, silently toting their baggage upstairs. Their huge apartment was bright and elegantly furnished. In addition to eight bedrooms, it had a large kitchen with an outsized Russian stove, an adjoining dining room, a music room, and a library. Their live-in housekeeper, Olga, presided over a cook and a maid, who arrived early and departed late each day.

As Carolina and Emma unpacked and settled into their adjoining rooms, Sergey sat with Félicité, Fernando and Joseph at the dining room table, reviewing some details, while Olga served them tea.

"As prima ballerina of the Bolshoi ballet company, esteemed Madame Hullin-Sor, you are employed by His Highness Prince Golitsyn, Governor of Moscow. So is your esteemed brother Monsieur Richard, as your *danseur noble*. As for your distinguished self, Maestro Sor, I am authorized and pleased to inform you that, in view of your international acclaim as a composer and performer, and the huge success of your recent Grand Tour, word of which has reached the Tsar's ear, His Imperial Majesty has promoted you to the position of Concert Master to the Imperial Court of Russia. His emissary will meet with you soon, to review some details. Meanwhile, pray consider me at your disposal should you require anything whatsoever. Olga, or indeed any guard on duty downstairs, can summon me at a moment's notice.

"Madame Hullin-Sor and Monsieur Richard," he continued, "the principal conductor of the Bolshoi orchestra, namely Anatoly Zakharov, and the principal choreographer of the Bolshoi ballet, namely Adam Glushkovskiy, request the honor of your company tomorrow afternoon at the Theatre, to set rehearsal schedules for December and January performances. Maestro Sor, pray consider yourself at leisure for the time being. His Imperial Majesty's emissary will soon help coordinate your calendar. Meanwhile I can tell you that His Highness Prince Golitsyn will invite you to perform in his Moscow home, early in the New Year.

"Finally, a more mundane but hardly trivial matter. The Tsar, in His omniscient concern for your well-being, surmises that you lack suitable attire to brave the frigid Russian winter. Indeed, as I observed just now on your arrival, your assorted layers of wool and cloth, while well-crafted and doubtless equal to the milder climes of London and Paris, will not withstand the bitter cold that must soon descend on Moscow. Therefore the Tsar will gift you all with winter coats of finest Russian furs. A master furrier retained by the House of Stroganov, which controls the Siberian fur trade, will visit you shortly and measure you carefully for these exclusive raiments. Pray take my word, soon enough you will all be glad of them."

With that, Sergey Ilyich Volgov bowed and took his leave. He left Fernando and his family overwhelmed by a combination of excitement and enthusiasm. Carolina's and Emma's senses were already titillated by the sights, sounds, and scents of this novel metropolis, which they could hardly wait to explore. Félicité and Joseph could scarcely contain their exuberance, for they had finally arrived at the ultimate destination of their Grand Tour, and could now begin to fulfill their highest purpose on the stage. Fernando experienced a combination of relief, vindication, and inspiration. He felt relieved that they had all travelled safely and well; vindicated that their tour had been crowned with such success; inspired by the promising future of Félicité's position as prima ballerina, by the musical possibilities that awaited him as Concert Master to the Imperial Court, and by the enlarged prospects their new home and country would afford to Carolina's education and development. Thus overcome by various excitements, little did they suspect how truly exhausted they all

were, until they sank into dreamless slumber in their soft feather beds, under warm goose-down duvets, in the all-encompassing embrace of Mother Russia.

They were fortunate indeed. As Fernando would later write in his autobiography, "In Moscow, Sor was promptly introduced to the most distinguished societies. In a country where music is pushed to a high degree of perfection, they appreciated his talent. His guitar playing affected them most. They were astonished to see him play with equal ease in all keys."

As every guitarist discovers at the outset, keys that utilize open strings—A major and minor, C major, D major and minor, E major and minor, G major—lend themselves most easily to chording. But Fernando's formidable technique, efficient fingering, and boundless imagination had freed him from these normal constraints. So in Russia, as everywhere else, he would soon amaze audiences with his guitar, and in the process charm the most influential ladies of the Imperial Court. Yet as we will shortly see, while Fernando's autobiography did not overstate the favor that his guitar playing attracted, it underplayed the enormous popularity of his ballets, and beyond that his importance as a composer.

Russia being a land of extremes, unbridgeable chasms yawned between affluence and poverty, fortune and ruin, glory and ignominy. Although compared to their patrons, the incalculably wealthy Houses of Romanov and Golitsyn, Fernando and his family were living off mere scraps from the table, next to ordinary Russians, who comprised more than ninety percent of the population, the Sors had attained a station most could never dream of. Félicité's annual salary of seventeen thousand rubles, for instance, was twice that of a Colonel in the Russian Army, who moreover had to pay for his own gold-braided uniform, sword, valets, horses, stable, and high-rent apartment. Hence senior officers necessarily came from noble families, who spent lavishly maintaining their sons in such positions. Daughters could be even more costly, as sizeable dowries were required to marry them off.

While typical noble families had incomes of millions to tens of millions of rubles—the bigger their estates, the more serfs they owned, and the more serfs they owned, the more the Crown dispensed to

them annually—they found themselves constantly in debt. Perpetually unable to pay off their debts, they resorted to taking out loans in parallel, using the same properties or valuables as collateral several times over. The importance of an aristocratic family could be gauged by the extent of its indebtedness. And it was impossible for banks to call in these non-performing loans, for then the entire system would collapse. During Catherine the Great's reign, her lover Grigoriy Orlov had an allowance of ten thousand rubles a week, and so the Orlovs built their palaces with debts backed by state money. The richest man in the empire at that time, Grigoriy Potemkin, incurred staggering debts of millions at a time. Aristocratic families had to staff the senior officer corps and the senior civil service, but beyond this they produced nothing except heirs, whether in or out of wedlock, who in turn produced nothing except more heirs to incur yet further debt.

Meanwhile, the serfs, who were not persons under the law but rather the property of their nobles, produced all the food, performed every kind of labor from hard to soft, served the army as conscript cannon-fodder, and were taxed to the hilt. Ninety percent of the Russian populace lived hand-to-mouth, with barely a couple of kopeks to rub together. Thus they likewise and necessarily went into debt, and moreover were terrified to do so, because the Orthodox Church taught them that debtors went straight to hell. At the same time, the Church had no choice but to countenance the system, since this Russian Christian institution, unlike its Roman Catholic branch that wielded theocratic powers in Europe, was under the thumb of the Tsar. For the Tsar owned everything in Russia—the lands and all they contained, the peoples and all they possessed, the priests and all the pulpits they preached from.

So Félicité's salary of seventeen thousand rubles was generous indeed, especially considering that her rent was paid by the City of Moscow, and her elaborate costumes provided by the Bolshoi Ballet Company. Her brother Joseph received a salary of twelve thousand rubles as a *danseur noble*—one of the few professions in which leading men earned less than leading ladies—and had to buy his own tights, but lived rent-free with his sister and in-laws. As Concert Master to the Imperial Court, Fernando's salary was twenty thousand rubles, and he would be expected

to compose, perform, and travel between Moscow and Saint Petersburg more or less on demand. This suited him fine in any case, and of course he too lived rent-free. Thus the Sors found themselves as materially well-off in Russia as any non-noble could ever expect to be, which, although not at all their main goal in life, nonetheless freed them from mundane if essential concerns over their upkeep, and permitted them to devote their abundant energies and conspicuous talents to their joint and several arts.

As Fernando shortly discovered, the Russians pushed not only musical composition and performance "to a high degree of perfection," but also did the same with ballet. Félicité came home from rehearsals breathless with excitement, exuding superlatives at the technique of the Russian dancers. All graduates of the Bolshoi Ballet Academy, they were fortunate to have been rescued from the brutality of Russian feudalism by the Tsar's desire to develop indigenous talent in the performing arts. Originally founded as an orphanage by Catherine the Great in 1763, the Academy itself was established a decade later, under the direction of Italian ballet master Filippo Beccari. He began recruiting the most promising child dancers (orphans or not), starting at age nine, and virtually adopted them, subjecting them to a rigorous regime, developing the ablest into performers of the highest caliber. After a succession of French and Italian ballet masters, the Academy's first Russian, Adam Glushkovskiy, took over in 1811. While the Bolshoi still needed to import prima ballerinas from abroad, its native Russians would soon enough become innovators in their own right— starting with the fabulous Elena Ivanovna Andreïanova, born in 1819—eventually making the Bolshoi Ballet world-famous. They were driven by a nascent aspiration of equaling, then exceeding Europeans in mastery of the dance.

It was much the same with music, only slightly more advanced. The 'Golden Three' Russian composers of Catherine the Great's Imperial court—Artemy Vedel, Maxim Berezovsky, and Dmitry Stepanovich Bortniansky—had all studied with Italian music masters, either in Russia or abroad. Dmitry Bortniansky's best student, Anatoly Zakharov, became the first Russian-trained conductor of the Bolshoi orchestra, while Tchaikovsky himself would later edit a ten-volume edition of Bortniansky's works. The 'Golden Three' planted seeds of distinctively

Russian compositions that would soon germinate in the young mind of Mikhail Glinka, who was only nineteen when Fernando arrived in Moscow, but destined to become the inspiration for a century of Russian innovators whose genius would transform the entire musical world: Pyotr Tchaikovsky, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Modest Mussorgsky, Alexander Scriabin, Sergei Rachmaninoff, Igor Stravinsky, Dmitri Shostakovich, and Sergei Prokofiev among others.

The same applied to poetry and literature as well, only this medium perennially risked attracting the disapproval of the State. The Russian people were prone to a deep-seated romantic streak tinged with a pungent sentimentality that the sheer brutality of their political system somehow enhanced yet could never eradicate. They would come to love and revere their poets and writers, but meanwhile lagged desperately behind Europe in producing them. The immortal poet Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin—later acclaimed as the father of Russian literature—was first exiled by the Tsar in 1820, at the tender age of twenty-one, for having penned controversial verse tinged with liberal sentiment. While subsequent Russian writers would soon make up for lost time, their literary tradition was still in the proverbial cradle when Fernando arrived in Moscow. It would blossom later in that century, along with Russian music and dance, producing the likes of Anton Chekhov, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Nikolai Gogol, and Leo Tolstoy, among a galaxy of immortals.

Only in chess, or so Fernando soon discovered, did the Russians produce players of unsurpassable mastery, with no assistance required from Europeans. But in all other arts that Europe most prized, and which were as yet underdeveloped in Russia, Tsar Alexander exhorted his compatriots to activate their dormant talents. This is why, as Prince Zajączek had rightly explained, the Tsar tolerated artistic masters from Europe who harbored liberal sympathies, as long as they did not espouse them publicly. Following his lead, Russians had no inhibitions against learning high arts from Europeans and, after imbibing sufficient quantities of vodka, apparently had no inhibitions of any kind whatsoever, with one glaring exception: the nobility could never be induced to alter their lifestyles, and thus they prohibited liberalism and its inevitable reforms at all costs.

So the Sors found themselves on the cusp of an emergent Russian renaissance, and made the most of their good fortune. Their hosts, in turn, wasted little time in putting their talents to good use. Félicité and Joseph debuted with the Bolshoi in December, barely a month after their arrival. They danced a popular baroque ballet, Jean-Joseph Cassanéa de Mondonville's *L'Amour et Psyché,* which had premiered at Fontainebleau in 1762, in the presence of King Louis XV, and had become an instant hit and enduring international classic. Their debut was a roaring success.

Then, in early January 1824, the leading couple premiered *Cendrillon*. Tsar Alexander had sent word to Prince Golitsyn that this was to be a benefit performance for Madame Hullin-Sor. Notwithstanding the Sors' material comfort at this juncture, the Tsar adjudged even the most successful artists to be as poor as church mice, and wanted to shower his new prima ballerina with a few thousand extra rubles. In fact, he attended this performance in person, inviting Fernando to join him in his Imperial box. Fernando deemed this an auspicious way to commence the new year, and he was hardly mistaken.

"It gives us immense pleasure, Maestro Sor, to welcome you and your incredibly talented family to Russia," said the Tsar with a friendly smile, as Fernando was ushered into the plush interior. Although finishing touches were still being made to much of the theatre, the Tsar's box had long-since been crafted and furnished to a state of perfection.

"Your Imperial Majesty honors us greatly," replied Fernando with a bow.

Fernando immediately sensed the same warm bonhomie as he had felt from the Tsar at their first meeting in Paris, at the Tuileries concert, nine years earlier. The two men had liked each other then, at first sight, and this mutual liking rekindled itself immediately. But Fernando also noticed that the Tsar had aged appreciably, sagging almost visibly under history's weighty burdens. When men wield the power of gods, thought Fernando, time takes a heavy toll.

"Our family looks forward to meeting you as well," the Tsar added. "Perhaps you will accord us the pleasure of your presence and the delight of your performance in Saint Petersburg, shall we say in March?" This, of course, was not a request, but rather a command.

"It will be an unsurpassed honor to perform for your Imperial Majesty's family and court," replied Fernando unhesitatingly.

"Splendid," said the Tsar. "An emissary will arrange it. And presently, we look forward to hearing your most acclaimed ballet, Maestro, and to watching your enchanting wife and her gifted brother dance. We are informed that the choreography is the work of the incomparable Albert, is it not?"

"Just so, Your Imperial Majesty."

The Tsar settled back with a contented air, preparing to enjoy himself thoroughly. So he did, and three times over. First, he loved *Cendrillon* itself, and especially Félicité's performance. With her as prima ballerina, he thought, the Bolshoi would eclipse Saint Petersburg's famed Mariinsky ballet, spurring them to higher levels in turn. Second, he felt buoyed by the proximity of Fernando's radiant joy, which afforded him temporary relief from his onerous burdens of state. Third, he reveled in the thunderous ovation the ballet received, and insisted that Fernando rise and take a bow as its composer. The entire evening reinforced the Tsar's self-appraisal, in that his artistic taste proved as profound as his political judgment.

Indeed, the ballet critic who reviewed this Moscow premiere of *Cendrillon* for a popular periodical, *Kultura* (*Culture*), could barely find enough superlatives, along with exclamation points, to capture his adulation of Félicité's and Joseph's dancing:

> *What a union of lightness, strength, rapidity, suppleness! The entrechats shine like lightning; the movements of their bodies paint wonderful pictures! They are creatures of the heavens! They are a flying nymph, a flying sylph! They are Descartes' whirlwinds in human form! The earth does not hear the dancers touch it, sight cannot follow them! One imagines that a sort of electric spark lifts them in the air, plays with their limbs, ever more and more, so that one cannot but exclaim in astonishment and admiration! What possibilities are offered to man! How far can he go if he has the firm desire? What are the limits of talent, of art?*

Still basking in the sweetness and light of this unqualified success, the Sor family celebrated Carolina's ninth birthday that January 14.

Along with baubles and trinkets and a set of exquisitely painted wooden Matryoshka dolls, she received a special gift that the family had managed to conceal in plain sight in a corner of the music room, albeit hidden under a paint-spattered tarpaulin, which they had passed off as some kind of 'construction project'—a little white lie that had thrown her completely off the scent.

Now they threw off this camouflage cover, unveiling a magnificent double-pedal harp of polished mahogany, built by leading harp-maker Sébastien Érard himself, a three-quarter-size study model, suited to the limbs of children. Fernando and Félicité had made inquiries, and discovered it collecting dust in the apartment of Anastasia Lebedev, harpist of the Bolshoi orchestra, and former student of the Frenchman who had brought the classical harp to Russia, namely Jean-Baptiste Cardon. Anastasia had learned on this instrument herself, before growing into a full-size concert model, and naturally her students—girls of the nobility—had their own harps. So she gladly sold it to the Sors, and moreover agreed to give Carolina lessons.

Carolina jumped for joy, and happily hugged everyone, saving her father for best and last.

"You remembered, Daddy!" she exclaimed in Catalan, her voice full of love and gratitude at his promise fulfilled, a promise made in Paris, a world away and seemingly eons ago in time.

"My beloved child," he said in Catalan, "No promise to you will ever be broken, so long as your father lives and breathes."

Their father-daughter bond, already one of unsunderable love, was now bound even tighter, as if by every string of this gift of a promise remembered and kept, which touched the girl's heart more than the harp itself. That said, she took to the instrument at once, and would never tire of playing it. To no-one's surprise, Anastasia Lebedev soon discovered that Carolina possessed an additional gift, namely that of playing it surpassingly well. After all, her name was Sor; so if she plucked strings, sweet sounds were bound to emanate from her fingers.

Carolina's days were full of learning. Emma guided her deeper into French language and literature, never neglecting English either. They both decided to learn Russian, out of curiosity and for fun, so

they poured over primers of the Cyrillic alphabet and basic grammar, and could soon communicate, albeit in rudimentary fashion, with Olga and the other servants. In addition to her weekly harp and piano lessons, she also sang regularly, coached by her father, who now introduced her to *solfège*. And in very short order, thanks to Fernando's mounting invitations to concertize in the urban mansions of Moscow's nobility, Carolina would be welcomed into a social circle of young ladies her age, while Emma would eagerly compare notes with their French, Swiss, and Russian governesses.

For his part, Joseph Richard had now entered his prime as a dashing French *danseur noble*, over whom young Russian ballerinas of the Bolshoi were ready to swoon if he cast them so much as a sideways glance. So while his days were full of rehearsals, with numerous evenings devoted to performances, his nights were often busier. He was like a proverbial kid in a candy store, only this store never closed, and the supply was more than sufficient even to satisfy the abundant cravings of his exceptionally sweet tooth.

Félicité too became busier than ever, not only as prima ballerina but also as a choreographer. Having studied under Albert, it turned out that she had a gift for choreography, which now found an opportunity to express itself. The Bolshoi's first Russian ballet master, Adam Glushkovskiy, was more than happy to allow Félicité ample scope to demonstrate what she had learned from Albert, and moreover what she herself could contribute. She gladly accepted this additional role, even though it made for longer days in the theatre.

The Sor family thus found itself well occupied, and Fernando was no exception. He continued to compose a rainbow of new works, of every instrumental hue: studies for guitar, a *pas de deux* and *pas de trois*, society pieces for his upcoming concerts, and an expansion of *L'Amant Peintre* from one act to three, to be choreographed by Félicité and premiered later that year. In the back of his relentlessly creative mind, Fernando was also gestating the theme for a whole new ballet, for the full Bolshoi company and complete orchestra.

In contrast to their months of constant companionship on the Grand Tour, Félicité and Fernando now saw little enough of each other during

the day. So their togetherness blossomed at night, when the bustling household finally fell silent and slept, as the crackling fire in the stove reduced itself to glowing embers, while the frigid January air fingered crevices in the window sills, and the stars twinkled coldly in the clear winter sky. Then they snuggled tenderly under their goose-down duvet, fueling their body heat with the fire of love, transporting each other to heights of ecstasy unknown except to those rare partners who are able, by day, to inspire each other to immortal artistry, and thus by night to reciprocate and reflect their mutual admiration and undying gratitude. Then they too slept deeply, immersed in reveries of sweetness and light, embracing each other even more lovingly than they were embraced by Mother Russia.

Chapter 37. Moscow and Saint Petersburg: Sad Tidings and Glad Welcome

That February, Félicité and Joseph's encore performance of *Cendrillon* had sold out, and was received with even greater acclaim than its January premiere. Ballet critics fired off fresh broadsides of superlatives, and the Bolshoi's reputation soared. At the same time Fernando's Moscow debut, a private concert in the Golitsyn Mansion, similarly exceeded its promise. The mansion was in plain fact a palace, furnished with art treasures galore, but the Golitsyn family, notwithstanding their enormous wealth and power, dared not call it such for fear of offending the ruling Romanovs.

Fernando's host, Prince Dmitry Vladimirovich Golitsyn, Governor of Moscow, as well as his extended family, were fascinated by his guitar-playing. They were all familiar with the Russian guitar, both classical and gypsy versions, a seven-stringed instrument tuned to an open G-chord, easy to play but restricted to vocal accompaniment. They had never before heard a six-string Spanish guitar, whose tuning demanded far more proficient technique, but expanded the instrument's role beyond all imagined horizons. In Fernando's gifted hands, this noble audience swiftly realized, the guitar metamorphosed into a portable orchestra. One of the Governor's cousins, namely Prince Nikolai Borisovich Golitsyn, was an amateur cellist who had just commissioned Beethoven to compose what would become his final string quartets, sometimes called the 'Golitzin