

# Cross-Cultural Music: Integrating Thai Music And Western Guitar For Learning And Sustainability: A Case Study Of Stephen Goss's Sonata Capriccioso

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## Abstract

*This study examines how Stephen Goss's Sonata Capriccioso (2015) for solo guitar establishes a cross-cultural dialogue between Western classical guitar techniques and Thai musical aesthetics. Using detailed score analysis and the composer's program notes, the research identifies key integrative mechanisms: character-based formal innovation in the first movement (Allegro scherzando), the incorporation of Thai instrumental techniques such as uean and sa-bat with pentatonic scales in the second movement (Idyll), and perceived temporal changes in the finale (Moto perpetuo) achieved through frequent meter shifts, reflecting Thai concepts of augmentation and diminution. This study further situates this cross-cultural approach within the framework of sustainable development. It supports SDG 4: Quality Education by fostering creative skills and cultural knowledge, SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth by promoting opportunities in performing arts and music production, and SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities by preserving cultural heritage and strengthening community identity. The findings demonstrate that music and culture are not only expressions of national identity but also practical tools for advancing sustainability across educational, economic, and social domains.*

**Keywords:** Stephen Goss, Classical Guitar, Thai Music, Cross-cultural Analysis, SDG

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## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the development of educational information systems has become increasingly important, with an emphasis on creating new roles and work styles, integrating global knowledge with traditional models, and fostering new identities. Crucial factors for educational development include promoting collaboration, modernizing infrastructure, ensuring the value of learning content, fostering career competencies, and supporting sustainable development (Tkalic, Gorbachev, & Silkovich, 2022; Smith, 2021). The focus on creating new learning formats and using knowledge to generate innovations for the benefit of the community, society, and nation is a direct response to the diverse needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Watcharinrat et al., 2024; Williams, 2019). The development and growth of social innovation, social identity, and knowledge sharing are key social capital factors that influence the development of social innovation. Goal orientation, information seeking, and opportunity seeking are also key factors that directly influence the development of cultural innovation (Pansuwong, Photchanachan & Thechatakerng, 2023).

In this context, the researchers are interested in studying and developing a process for integrating cross-cultural music, using Stephen Goss's Sonata Capriccioso as a case study. The piece exemplifies the application of cultural concepts and musical creation in a modern educational setting. Thai music and culture can also reflect sustainable development in various ways. Specifically, it aligns with SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth by creating quality jobs in performing arts, cultural tourism, and production. It supports SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities by preserving cultural heritage and fostering pride in local identity. Finally, it contributes to SDG 4: Quality Education by promoting creative skills and cultural knowledge. In essence, music and culture are not just national identities but also vital tools for driving sustainable development across economic, social, and educational sectors.

Stephen Goss (b. 1964) is a Welsh composer, guitarist, and educator who has made significant contributions to contemporary guitar literature. His compositions often transcend traditional boundaries by merging elements of transcription, composition, arrangement, improvisation, and interpretation. Goss has a remarkable understanding of the guitar's polyphonic capabilities and timbral colors, which allows him to create nuanced textures and distinct sonorities that vividly showcase complex musical images in a solo context (International Record Review, as cited in Productions d'Oz, 2016).

This study focuses on Goss's *Sonata Capriccioso* (2015), which is known for its deliberate fusion of Western classical guitar techniques with musical elements from Thai traditions. Commissioned by Thai guitarist Ekachai Jearakul, the piece premiered at Carnegie Hall on November 6, 2015. The three-movement sonata includes: *Allegro scherzando*, which features contrasting, playful musical ideas; *Idyll*, a reflective and sentimental movement that incorporates Thai folk music; and the *Moto perpetuo* finale, a virtuosic piece with frequent meter shifts (Goss, 2016).

The cultural dialogue is most evident in the second movement, *Idyll*, where Goss draws inspiration from Thai melodic gestures and instrumental techniques that evoke Thai folk music. The piece's technical requirements, such as *campanella* and sustained resonance, offer guitarists an opportunity to explore how Western technique and Thai cultural concepts can be fused.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The cross-cultural integration of Western and Eastern musical traditions has long fascinated Western composers, resulting in a significant number of works that blend diverse cultural elements (Chung, 2022). For instance, Debussy's exposure to Indonesian gamelan music at the 1889 Paris Exposition Universelle was a pivotal moment, inspiring him to incorporate Asian sounds and structures, notably through the use of whole-tone scales and modal harmonics (Hay, 1980). Debussy's techniques set the stage for later composers like Béla Bartók and Benjamin Britten, who expanded cross-cultural integration by exploring melodic and rhythmic structures from various Asian traditions more deeply (Premananda & Phrom-indra, 2024).

Before his work with Thai music, Stephen Goss had already demonstrated his engagement with East Asian musical traditions in pieces like the four-movement solo guitar suite *The Chinese Garden* (2007) and *Illustrations of The Book of Songs* (2014), both commissioned by Chinese guitarist Xuefei Yang. These compositions employ a similar cultural approach to that found in *Sonata Capriccioso*, establishing Goss's consistent methodology for integrating Eastern musical concepts. A unifying characteristic of both works is the incorporation of melodies representative of their respective cultures. For example, *The Chinese Garden* uses the traditional Chinese folk songs "Mo Li Hua" and "Lan Hua Hua," while *Illustrations of The Book of Songs* utilizes "Flowers and Youth" as its primary Chinese musical element.

Thailand's adoption of Western musical practices began in the nineteenth century as part of a modernization strategy to enhance national prestige and demonstrate cultural sophistication. This fusion aesthetic promotes a contemporary musical language while preserving Thai cultural identity amid increasing globalization (Ware, 2011). This cross-cultural exchange continued throughout the twentieth century, leading to the development of hybrid genres like "Dontri Thai Prayuk" (modernized Thai music), which fuses Western musical language with native Thai melodies. The saxophone, for example, has become a crucial instrument in modern Molam performances, adding unique vitality alongside traditional instruments like the khaen (Laokhonka, 2025).

However, such fusion presents a key challenge: explaining Thai music through Western concepts can disconnect it from indigenous musical knowledge (Garzoli & Hin-on, 2023). Contemporary Thai composer Narong Prangcharoen provides an example of this fusion approach, systematically incorporating traditional Thai musical elements into Western compositional structures to gain international recognition for his distinct cross-cultural aesthetic (Chucherdwatanasak, 2014).

## METHODOLOGY

This study uses a musical-cultural analysis methodology that combines score analysis with cultural interpretation to examine the integration of Thai musical elements within Stephen Goss's Sonata Capriccioso. The analysis uses the published score as the primary analytical source, which provides detailed notation, performance markings, and structural indications. Goss's program and performance notes also provide essential insights into the composer's intentions regarding the cross-cultural concepts.

The score analysis focuses on identifying musical elements that show Thai influence. This includes:  
1) Examining scale patterns, particularly the use of pentatonic scales common in Asian musical traditions.  
2) Investigating meter changes and their relationship to Thai musical concepts of time and pulse.  
3) Analyzing specific guitar techniques, such as ulean and sa-bat, which serve as a means for Thai musical expression.

## Findings

The analysis reveals how Stephen Goss achieves cross-cultural integration in the first movement of Sonata Capriccioso. This movement demonstrates a unique approach to sonata form, where traditional key-based structures are replaced by expressive characters.

### Movement I - Allegro scherzando

The analysis of Movement I shows that the composer's markings—"In the groove," "Dreamy, with freedom," and "Gently flowing"—function not merely as expressive indications but as a structural formal design. These markings illustrate Goss's approach to sonata form, where formal organization is driven by expressive characters rather than traditional harmonic structures.

The character marking "In the groove" ( $\text{♩} = 116$ ) (figure 1) consistently appears throughout the movement, serving as the primary theme. This marking establishes what Goss describes as "groove-based material" and dominates the exposition's opening (mm. 1-11). It frequently returns to establish formal boundaries (mm. 15-20, 45-51, 57-73,

85-88) (figure 2-1, 2-2, 2-3, 2-4), and concludes the recapitulation section (mm. 93-114) (figure 3). The consistent return to this groove-based character creates a cohesive and unified structure.



Figure 1



Figure 2-1

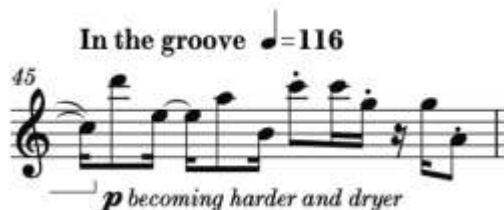


Figure 2-2



Figure 2-3



Figure 2-4



Figure 3

The marking “Dreamy, with freedom” ( $J=ca\ 84$ ) (figure 4) acts as the contrasting material, appearing in sections that would traditionally correspond to the secondary theme. This marking appears in transitional passages (mm. 11-14), extends into the development section (mm. 33-44, 67-73) (figure 5-1, 5-2), and briefly interrupts the recapitulation

(mm. 89-92) (figure 6). The significant tempo reduction and expressive freedom indicated by this marking create the “more dreamy and impressionistic music” that drives the sectional transitions.

“The skittish Allegro scherzando jumps between contrasting playful musical ideas, never settling in any one place for long. The opening groove-based material is frequently interrupted by more dreamy and impressionistic music. Idyll is the sentimental core of the sonata, an oasis of repose and reflection. It evokes an Arcadian landscape, colored with elements from Thai folk music. The finale, Moto perpetuo, is a virtuosic tour de force: a roller-coaster ride for the soloist that navigates frequent shifts in metre” (Goss, 2016).

The cultural dialogue is most evident in the second movement, Idyll, where Goss incorporates Thai traditional music, drawing inspiration from melodic gestures and instrumental techniques that recall Thai folk music. The technical requirements of the piece, including campanella and sustained resonance, offer guitarists an opportunity to explore how Western technique and Thai cultural concepts can fuse.



Figure



Figure 5-1



Figure 5-2



Figure 6

The third character marking, "Gently flowing" ( $\text{♩}=106$ ) (figure 7), holds a unique structural position as transitional material, appearing primarily in the development section. This marking bridges the two contrasting characters (figure 7), and mm. 52-56, 74-84 (figure 8-1, 8-2), creating smooth connections between the rhythmically driven "groove" sections and the flexible "dreamy" passages.



Figure 7



Figure 8-1



Figure 8-2

## Movement II - Idyll

Goss (2016) describes the second movement in his program notes: "Idyll is the sentimental core of the sonata, an oasis of repose and reflection. It evokes an Arcadian landscape, colored with elements from Thai folk music." This movement represents the cross-cultural dialogue that defines this sonata's concept, where Western classical guitar techniques are used to imitate Thai string instrument performance styles.

The movement's Thai character is achieved through compositional strategies that reflect Thai musical aesthetics. Goss uses uean and sa-bat to shape the melodies and drive their development. Uean (mm. 1, 5, 47, 51) (figure 9-1, 9-2, 9-3, 9-4) is a vocal practice characterized by melismatic, non-vibrato delivery with portamento-like slides. Sa-bat (mm. 19, 21, 24, 25, 49) (figure 10-1, 10-2, 10-3, 10-4) is an instrumental technique that adds a thirty-second note to a sixteenth-note pattern, though it is also applied to other rhythmic figures. These techniques function as ornaments that allow the music to carry a Thai accent across a wide range of musical material (Chucherdwatanasak, 2014).



Figure 9-1

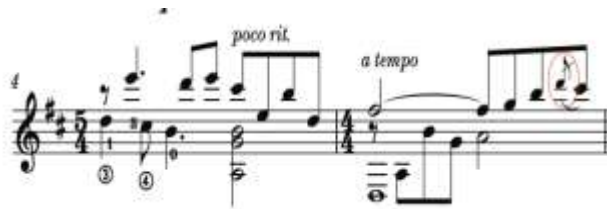


Figure 9-2

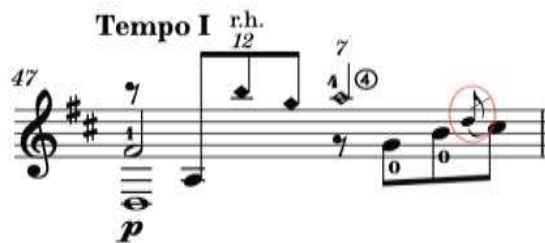


Figure 9-3



Figure 9-4



Figure 10-1



Figure 10-2



Figure 10-3

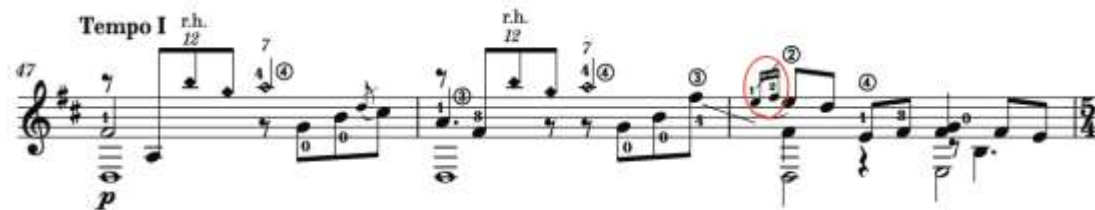


Figure 10-4

The opening (mm. 1-14) establishes a calm, lyrical theme. A short transition (mm. 14-18) introduces rhythmic looseness by mixing triplets and sixteenth notes, leading to the folk song section. The "Like a folk song" section (mm. 19-27) employs the pentatonic scale, which is highly representative of Asian music. The five notes in this passage are D-E-F#-A-B (figure 11). The sa-bat technique appears in every phrase that uses the pentatonic scale, reinforcing the Thai musical character through both pitch and ornamental content. A subsequent passage (mm. 28-34) shares a strong rhythmic likeness to the earlier transition (mm. 14-18) and is also followed by a Thai melody with a pentatonic scale (mm. 35-42). A compact transition (mm. 42-46) again mixes triplets with sixteenths, after which the opening theme returns (m. 47).

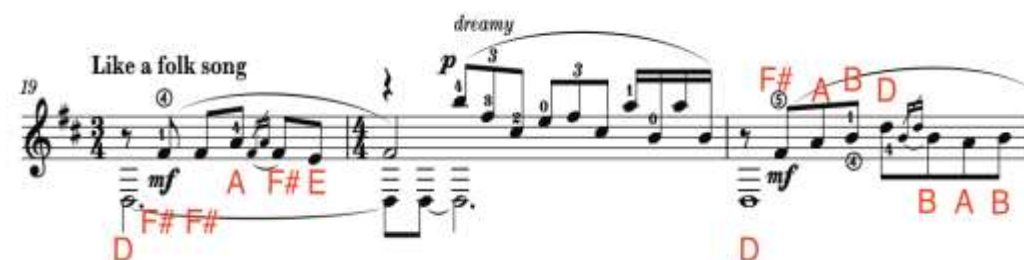


Figure 11

The Thai color of this movement is constructed by: (1) Pentatonic scales in the folk song melodies, (2) Uean and sa-bat techniques that shape the linear melody and evoke a sense of "Thainess.". These elements realize the "Arcadian, Thai-colored" musical idea mentioned in the program notes while remaining idiomatic to the classical guitar.

**Movement III - Moto perpetuo** Goss's finale maintains a single pulse while projecting a strong rhythmic drive. The program note describes it as "a virtuosic tour de force... that navigates frequent shifts in metre" (Goss, 2016), which increases density through meter changes rather than traditional accelerando markings. This approach aligns with Thai musical concepts. From a Thai musicological perspective, a perceived "faster or slower" effect can arise from a systematic process of augmentation and diminution. Morton (1970) notes that the interval between successive ching articulations is doubled when moving from 2-chan to 3-chan and halved from 2-chan to chan diao, thereby expanding or compressing the melodic content while preserving the metrical framework. Goss applies this Thai concept through frequent time signature changes, which create a perceived acceleration without requiring written accelerando markings.

## CONCLUSION

This study examines how Stephen Goss's *Sonata Capriccioso* (2015) for solo guitar constructs a cross-cultural dialogue between Western classical guitar techniques and Thai musical aesthetics. Using score analysis, supported by academic sources and the composer's program and performance notes, the article identifies the musical elements associated with the Thai musical aesthetic. The first movement, *Allegro scherzando*, organizes its formal structure through character markings like "In the groove," "Dreamy, with freedom," and "Gently flowing." These markings function as structural divisions that replace the traditional key-centered sonata form. The second movement, *Idyll*, showcases Thai folk music through the use of specific techniques. The vocal practice of uean—prolonging sounds or composing words with rhythm and high and low tones—and the instrumental skill of sa-bat—the rapid, continuous plucking of strings—are used alongside a pentatonic scale to add style and beauty to the music, similar to Thai musical patterns. The finale, *Moto perpetuo*, maintains a single pulse but creates a perceived change in speed through frequent meter shifts. This aligns with Thai concepts of augmentation and diminution, which can create acceleration without a notated tempo change. Collectively, the findings demonstrate how Goss integrates Thai musical concepts within a Western instrument, and this study contributes a new case study to the contemporary practices of cultural analysis.

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