

## DAVID GUION "Cowboy Composer"

Born in 1892 on a west Texas ranch near the town of Ballinger, David Guion represented an unusual mixture of elements which exercised a profound and abiding influence over both his life and his art. Guion was born into a ranching family with parents who were both artistic and educated, and while his early years certainly included the typical west Texas trappings of horses, cowboys and life on the range, it also included music, singing and piano lessons from an early age. His mother, an amateur pianist and soprano, filled the home with music, and the nursery tunes, cowboy songs and frontier ballads he heard from her all found their way into his later works. He also loved his "Mammy Neppie", the nurse from whom he heard the Negro spirituals and other songs of the black people, to whom he paid homage in his many ethnic compositions.

His mother was insistent that David be given as fine a musical education as possible, and every week his parents carted the youngster to the train bound for San Angelo, placed a sign around his neck proclaiming his destination, and sent him

for lessons with the best teacher in the area, a certain Mr. Charles Stringer. A delightful and original storyteller, Guion described him as a mysterious Englishman who had moved to San Angelo from London. As he said, "When anybody came to Texas in those days, you never asked questions about their past."

This colorful upbringing nurtured Guion's passionate interest in the musical culture of the American west and led him to collect and arrange the songs and dances which became the cornerstone of his tremendous popularity in the early and mid decades of this century. While Guion was an adept composer of wholly original works, he was also dedicated to preserving this national birthright, and his settings of some American folk songs became as familiar as the originals themselves. Guion was always careful to differentiate between the original tune and his additions, but some songs, like the very famous "Home on the Range", were so closely associated with him, that many attributed its origins to Guion himself.

In 1911, while still in his late teens, Guion journeyed to Vienna, the mecca of

serious musicians, to study piano with the world renowned pianist and teacher, Leopold Godowsky. Lacking introduction or advance notice whatsoever, he nervously presented himself at Godowsky's studio and requested to become his pupil. After listening to Guion play, the revered pedagogue enquired why Guion thought he would be inclined to accept him for study. Guion, perhaps naively but in obvious candor, recalls telling him that his father said "any teacher would accept me if I paid enough for my lessons." Fortunately, Godowsky was enormously amused and laughed that "I am to be bought, like your father buys a fine bull." Although he did not take Guion immediately as his own pupil, he assigned him to a very talented assistant to prepare him in his studies. This was the beginning of three years in the great city which were deeply treasured by Guion and which gave him an urbanity and sophistication which were immediately apparent to anyone who met him. He would assuredly have continued on in Vienna, if not for the outbreak of World War I. Forced home by the great war, he returned to Texas and his first copyrighted work, "*Texas Fox Trot*", was published there in 1915.

In 1917, Guion ventured east again, this time to New York City, with the inten-

tion of bringing his works to the notice of music publishers and noted performers. The timing was excellent, his popularity skyrocketed quickly, and his Greenwich Village apartment became home from 1918 to 1939. A man of increasingly varied interests, he furnished his New York apartment with furniture which he designed in a Southwestern style and personally supervised the construction of each piece. In the ensuing years, he became a collector of other objects of "Americana", including primitive furniture, art glass, china, paintings, books and even collections of oil-burning lamps and pewter.

His first major exposure came in 1918 when the famed singer, Nora Bayes, sang his second published composition, "*Old Maid Blues*", in a George M. Cohan revue. Guion had met Miss Bayes shortly after moving to New York and she was so taken with his compositions, that she asked him to write a song for her use in the revue. He also met Rudolph Schirmer, of the famous music publishing firm of G. Schirmer, Inc., and began a friendship which was to last throughout his life. Schirmer published the greatest portion of Guion's music, and his lively and heartfelt compositions became popular with a host of noted personalities of the day. Guion's collection contains signed photographs of many of them,

including John Charles Thomas, Mabel Garrison, Edwin Hughes, Elliott Griffes, Chief Hosken Wood, Lawrence Tibbett, Florence Foster Jenkins, Sophia Braslau and Percy Grainger. Guion's arrangement of *"Turkey in the Straw"*, which he had written at his home in Ballinger in 1919, had its first orchestral performance at Carnegie Hall and was conducted by Arturo Toscanini.

In 1924, Guion persuaded the Roxy Theater in New York to present a musical production which would be centered around a cowboy theme. The musical, *"Prairie Echoes"*, included some of the enormous favorites which were to make him famous throughout America. *"Turkey in the Straw"* was there, along with *"The Arkansas Traveler"*, his own *"The Harmonica Player"*, and, of course, the beloved *"Home on the Range"*. The last was widely known to be Franklin Delano Roosevelt's favorite song, and the President invited Guion to perform it at a concert in the White House. A prized possession of Guion's was an original steel engraving, inscribed by the President. An early recording of the song by Bing Crosby was a tremendous success.

Following the marvelous reception of this stage show, his programs were heard on radio WOR in a production called *"Hearing America with Guion"*, and later

ran for 38 weeks on NBC. Guion wrote, arranged, directed and played for all of his radio broadcasts, and in addition, a November 17, 1934 program for Carnegie Hall describes a concert by "David Guion, Interpreter of Cowboy Songs, best known through the famous song, *Home on the Range*, with his Singing Cowboys, presenting thrilling stories and songs of their own experiences ... in a setting of the Wild West."

It was indicative of his nature that these stories were, indeed, "from their own experience". Even during his musical heyday, Guion never totally abandoned the life of the West and actually rode as a competitor in the summer rodeo circuits of the 1920's. Guion was extremely proud of his rodeo prizes, and one of his fondest memories occurred in 1923, when he won the bronc-busting championship at the Frontier Days Rodeo in Cheyenne, Wyoming. His horse for the occasion was a mare affectionately, or otherwise, known as "Hell-Raisin' Molly."

In the late 1930's, Guion became more and more closely involved with the musical life of his native Texas. In 1936 he was commissioned to write the *"Cavalcade of America"* for the Texas Centennial and *"My Cowboy Love Song"* was the "Official Theme Song of the Cavalcade of Texas of the

Texas Centennial 1936." In honor of the one hundredth birthday of the State, he published the "Brazos Boat Song" and "The Yellow Rose of Texas", which was dedicated to Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

In 1938, Guion acquired property in the Pocono Valley of Pennsylvania and redesigned and restored an old three-story Dutch farmhouse. His architectural plans for the house were meticulous, even indicating specific locations for the placement of the furniture. He became an avid gardener and created beautiful lawns and sweeping vistas which nearly transformed the ranch into a formal landscape garden. He named his farm "Home on the Range" and spent many wonderful years there, content with composing, collecting and gardening. In the mid-60's, the farm was most regrettably chosen for a dam sight, and, after a bitter fight, Guion was forced to leave the land whereupon he returned to Dallas, his home until his death.

Guion was a composer who loved the music of his origins and passionately worked to keep it alive, as well as move it into the realm of the concert stage. His transcriptions are marked with style, wit, invention and, most of all, heartfelt love for this legacy. If, in the meantime, the change of current tastes has advanced other styles of music to the forefront, the music

of the American West is forever established in the national identity, and Guion's name will always be linked to this touching inheritance of a burgeoning land.

## THE MUSIC

David Guion's piano transcriptions of **Turkey in the Straw, Sheep and Goat** and **The Arkansas Traveler** were some of his most successful works and emerged from a lifelong familiarity, not only with the tunes themselves, but with the situations and locales in which they would most frequently have been heard. In a short forward to **Turkey in the Straw**, he wrote that "every American, of course, knows [it], but not as I do, for I have danced to it thousands of times out here at the cowboy dances until I was almost ready to drop. I do not know why, where, when or by whom it was written, but the cowboys and old fiddlers rather look on it as their 'national hymn'. In this concert transcription I have tried to write it just as I have so often heard it whistled and played by our funny old fiddlers, the cow-punchers and cowboys."

The same could be said for the other two pieces and Guion exploits the piano to the fullest in order to create the rambunctious, energetic style of the originals. His

use of full chords and handfuls of notes jumping around the keyboard lend the impression of a player piano, and in **Turkey in the Straw** he directs the pianist to play the concluding pages "terribly choppy", achieving much the same effect. Another device Guion used extensively was to place the melody in the inner voice of the texture and surround it with numerous other lines, giving the sensation of a player with practically unlimited fingers. **The Arkansas Traveler** runs riot with this type of pianistic writing.

The **Alley Tunes** are two of Guion's original pieces and were featured in the Broadway show "*Prairie Echoes*". **The Harmonica Player** represents a southern man inspiring children to dance to his rhythmic tune and **The Lonesome Whistler** is a character piece, much in the style of the descriptive piano works of Grieg, Mendelssohn, or the American composer, Edward MacDowell.

**Home on the Range** is one of the best-known songs in the American culture and Guion's setting for voice and piano was certainly his most famous work. Guion is faithful to the tune, but adds a few bars of original music in the middle of the song, retaining the style of the melody so as to be virtually unnoticed as an addition. The version on this recording is a transcription

of Guion's vocal arrangement.

In a vein similar to the fiddle tunes which Guion transcribed, the **Two Country Jigs** have their roots in the dances and gatherings of the Old West. They are original pieces filled with humor, wit and general high spirits, and the inspiration is unmistakably revealed in the opening bars of the second jig, depicting an old fiddler tuning up at a country dance.

Interestingly, the form of the second *Country Jig* and the **Pastoral** are nearly identical. Both are primarily variations on a theme, yet their impressions could hardly be more different. The **Pastoral** haunts us with the lonesome quality of the solitary individual in vast expanses of nature, and was dedicated to Guion's close friend, the brilliant and eccentric pianist, Percy Grainger.

**Southern Nights** is a setting of four different waltzes, combined in the form of a rondo. The primary theme is a slow waltz named "*Sleepy Valley*" and it alternates, in turn, with "*Mockingbird Lane*", "*Blue Bonnet Way*" and "*Swanee Shore*". Guion also arranged this work for orchestra and it was used as part of the score for the famous film, "*Grand Hotel*".

**Nocturne in Blue** and **Valse Arabesque** are both full-throated and uninhibited excursions into two very different

genres. In each case, however, the chosen "style" of the work seems to play a retiring role to an unabashed revelry in luxurious textures, ripe harmonies and heart-on-the-sleeve emotionalism. While emulating dated models, they exude the spirit of one of Guion's best attributes — improvisation.

David Guion's wit, sophistication and wry humor were put to best advantage in the **Mother Goose Suite**. With the exception of "*Hey, Diddle, Diddle*", the set is based on the nursery tunes of J. W. Elliott and becomes the object of a delightful musical and dramatic bag of tricks. Filled with theatrical directions, like "mice scamper off in fright", "dogs bark", "in see-sawing motion", "cats scam!", emotional hints, such as "with deep sympathy", "quite shyly", "churchy" and "with great dignity and extreme sorrow" and musical effects of bi-tonality in "*Pussy-Cat, Pussy-Cat*", abrupt harmonic modulations in "*Sing a Song of Sixpence*" and the mechanical texture of "*Hickory, Dickory, Dock*", the short pieces depict a grown-up's fond, if irreverent, view of childhood. While their genesis is in children's poems, the pieces were not composed for children to play and Guion notes that many of them require the "technical skill and artistic finish of the concert pianist."

- Notes by Eugene Rowley

## "Mother Goose Suite"

### **Hey, Diddle, Diddle**

Hey, diddle, diddle,  
The cat and the fiddle,  
The cow jumped over the moon;  
The little dog laughed  
To see such sport —  
The dish ran away with the spoon.

### **Jack and Jill**

Jack and Jill went up the hill,  
To fetch a pail of water;  
Jack fell down and broke his crown,  
And Jill came tumbling after.

Up Jack got and home did trot,  
As fast as he could caper;  
He went to bed to mend his head,  
With vinegar and brown paper.

### **Little Tommy Tucker**

Little Tommy Tucker, sing for your  
supper.  
What shall he sing for? White bread and  
butter.  
How can he cut it without any knife?  
How can he marry without any wife?

### **The North Wind Doth Blow**

The North Wind doth blow,  
And we shall have snow,  
And what will poor Robin do then?

He'll sit in the barn,  
And keep himself warm,  
And tuck his head under his wing.  
    Poor thing!

### **Ride a Cock-Horse to Banbury Cross**

Ride a cock-horse to Banbury Cross,  
To see a fine lady upon a white horse;  
Rings on her fingers and bells on her  
    toes,  
She shall have music wherever she goes.

### **Three Little Mice**

Three little mice crept out to see,  
What they could find to have for tea,  
For they were dainty, saucy mice,  
And liked to nibble something nice.  
But Pussy's eyes, so big and bright,  
Soon sent them scampering off in fright.

Three tabby cats went forth to mouse,  
And said, "Let's have a gay carouse".  
For they were handsome, active cats,  
And famed for catching mice and rats.  
But soon savage dogs, disposed to bite,  
These cats declined to encounter in  
    fight.

### **Pussy-Cat, Pussy-Cat**

Pussy-Cat, Pussy-Cat, where have you  
    been?

I've been to London to visit the Queen.  
Pussy-Cat, Pussy-Cat, what did you  
    there?

I frightened a little mouse under her  
    chair.

### **See-Saw, Margery Daw**

See-saw, Margery Daw,  
Jack shall have a new master.  
He shall have but a penny a day,  
Because he won't work any faster.

### **The Man in the Moon**

The Man in the Moon came down too  
    soon,  
And asked his way to Norwich;  
He went by the south, and burned his  
    mouth,  
With eating cold plum-porridge.

### **I Love Little Pussy**

I love little Pussy, her coat is so warm,  
And if I don't hurt her she'll do me no  
    harm;  
I'll sit by the fire and give her some food,  
And Pussy will love me, because I'm so  
    good.

### **Ding, Dong, Bell, Pussy's in the Well**

Ding, dong, bell, Pussy's in the well;  
Who put her in? Little Johnny Green.

Who pulled her out? Little Tommy  
Trout.

What a naughty boy was that, to drown  
poor Pussy-cat.

### **Little Bo-Peep**

Little Bo-Peep has lost her sheep,  
And can't tell where to find them.  
Leave them alone, and they'll come  
home,  
Wagging their tails behind them.

Little Bo-Peep fell fast asleep,  
And dreamt she heard them bleating.  
When she awoke, 'twas all a joke —  
Ah, cruel vision so fleeting.

Then up she took her little crook,  
Determined for to find them.  
What was her joy to behold them nigh,  
Wagging their tails behind them!

### **Hickory, Dickory, Dock**

Hickory, dickory, dock!  
The mouse ran up the clock;  
The clock struck three,  
The mouse did flee;  
Hickory, dickory, dock.

### **Sing a Song of Sixpence**

Sing a song of sixpence, a pocket full of  
rye;  
Four-and-twenty blackbirds baked in a  
pie;

When the pie was opened, the birds  
began to sing;  
Wasn't that a dainty dish to set before  
the King?

The King was in the counting-house,  
counting out his money;  
The Queen was in the parlour, eating  
bread and honey;  
The maid was in the garden, hanging  
out the clothes;  
When down came a dickey-bird, and  
snipped off her nose.

### **Curly Locks**

Curly Locks, Curly Locks, wilt thou be  
mine?  
Thou shalt not wash dishes nor yet feed  
the swine.  
But sit on a cushion and sew a fine seam,  
And feast upon strawberries, sugar, and  
cream.

### **Six Little Snails**

Six little Snails,  
Lived in a tree;  
Johnny threw a big stone —  
Down came Three.

### **Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son**

Tom, Tom, the piper's son,  
Stole a pig, and away he run.  
The pig was eat, and Tom was beat —  
Tom went howling down the street.



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"PRAIRIE ECHOES" — PIANO MUSIC OF DAVID GUION

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*"PRAIRIE ECHOES"**Piano Music of david guion (1892 - 1981)**eugene rowley, pianist*File Under:  
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"PRAIRIE ECHOES" — PIANO MUSIC OF DAVID GUION

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## THREE FIDDLE TUNES

- [1] Turkey in the Straw 3:09  
 [2] Sheep and Goat 2:46  
 ("Walkin' to the Pasture")  
 [3] The Arkansas Traveler 3:13

## TWO ALLEY TUNES

- [4] The Lonesome Whistler 2:33  
 [5] The Harmonica Player 2:39  
 [6] HOME ON THE RANGE (arr. Rowley) 3:40

## TWO COUNTRY JIGS

- [7] No. 1 in C Major 2:46  
 [8] No. 2 in D Major 3:41  
 [9] PASTORAL 4:35

- [10] SOUTHERN NIGHTS 3:58

## MOTHER GOOSE SUITE

- [11] Hey, Diddle, Diddle 1:41  
 [12] Jack and Jill 1:31  
 [13] Little Tommy Tucker :52  
 [14] The North Wind Doth Blow 2:26  
 [15] Ride a Cock-Horse to Banbury  
 Cross :23  
 [16] Three Little Mice 1:17  
 [17] Pussy-Cat, Pussy-Cat :39  
 [18] See-Saw, Margery Daw 1:18  
 [19] The Man in the Moon :27  
 [20] I Love Little Puss 1:27  
 [21] Ding, Dong, Bell 2:12  
 [22] Little Bo-Peep 1:28  
 [23] Hickory, Dickory, Dock :49  
 [24] Sing a Song of Sixpence :26  
 [25] Curly Locks 1:22  
 [26] Six Little Snails 1:27  
 [27] Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son 2:11  
 [28] NOCTURNE IN BLUE 6:42  
 [29] VALSE ARABESQUE 6:34

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 69:55

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