

Lecture Recital  
The Music of  
David Wendell Guion

Arkansas Traveler	1929
Harmonica Player	1926
Lonesome Whistler	1926
Minuet	1923
Valse Arabesque	1927
Mother Goose Suite	1937
1. Hey, Diddle, Diddle	
2. Jack and Jill	
3. Little Tommy Tucker	
4. The North Wind Doth Blow	
5. Ride A Cock-Horse to Banbury Cross	
6. Three Little Mice	
7. Pussy-Cat, Pussy-Cat	
8. See-Saw, Margery Daw	
9. The Man In The Moon	
10. I Love Little Pussy	
11. Ding, Dong, Bell, Pussy's In The Well	
12. Little Bo-Peep	
13. Hickory, Dickory, Dock	
14. Sing A Song of Sixpence	
15. Curly Locks	
16. Six Little Snails	
17. Tom, Tom, The Piper's Son	

## NOTES

In the art music world, *Arkansas Traveler*, *Harmonica Player* and *The Lonesome Whistler* could be labeled as nationalistic music, because they draw upon the music of the American West and the African-American Spiritual for their inspiration. Pieces like these, along with a *Turkey in The Straw* transcription and *Home on the Range*, made David Guion famous. Guion's moment of fame occurred between World War I and II. America had entered an isolationist period—a time of searching for what it meant to be an American and Guion's music spoke to the need to return to cultural roots. *Arkansas Traveler* is a transcription of a fiddle “breakdown,” based on a folk tune from Guion's childhood that he undoubtedly heard sung and fiddled at family and community gatherings. Both *Harmonica Player* and *The Lonesome Whistler* are original compositions and are part of a suite entitled *Alley Tunes, Three Scenes from the South*.

David Wendell Guion was born December 15, 1892 in Ballinger, Texas. His mother, who was a talented amateur pianist and singer, was his first piano teacher, but as his musical talents surfaced, his mother made arrangements for lessons from an Englishman named Charles Finger who was living in San Angelo. Every Saturday, young David boarded the train in Ballinger with a placard around his neck that contained his name and destination for the thirty-mile ride to San Angelo. Finger would meet him, give him a lesson, and put him back on the train the next morning. Guion had additional musical training from Wilbur McDonald in Fort Worth, Texas. The final element in his musical training came during his time in Vienna. After hearing Leopold Godowsky, pianist and prominent member of the Vienna musical scene in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, David convinced his father that he should be allowed to go to Vienna to study with the eminent teacher. In the forward to a 1983 publication of Guion's music by G. Schirmer, Olin Chism tells the following story of young Guion's arrival in Vienna.

A young man fresh from the prairies of West Texas had arrived at his [Godowsky's] doorstep at the Vienna Royal Conservatory virtually unannounced. David Guion, age nineteen, had come to take lessons, but fearing rejection, had neglected to write in advance for an appointment. Godowsky surveyed with curiosity Guion's tan, buttoned shoes and his western hat, elicited from him the information that he was the son of a lawyer and rancher, then asked HIM to play the piano. The young American did—“very badly. I was frightened out of my wits,” Guion recalls in his memoirs. And what made Guion think Godowsky would take him as a student, the great pianist wanted to know. “My father told me any teacher would accept me if I paid enough for my lessons,” Guion replied. Godowsky laughed uproariously. “So I am to be bought, like your father buys a fine bull.” And the amused virtuoso assigned David to an assistant, to prepare him for lessons with Godowsky himself.

Guion's *Minuet* and *Valse Arabesque* are reminiscent of the kind of concert music popular in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and illustrate the influence of his time in Vienna. Guion might have remained in Vienna indefinitely, but the rumblings of World War I forced him to return to America. Reluctant to leave, he waited until the last ship was due to depart for America, just before the war broke out in Europe. In *Valse Arabesque*, the listener can sense Guion's love of Vienna.

The *Mother Goose Suite* contains some of Guion's most delightful music, bringing the listener into the magic world of nursely rhymes. As a small boy, David's mother sang nursery rhymes to him, and one of the earliest indications of his musical abilities surfaced when he surprised his mother by singing the rhymes back to her. Some of the pieces in the suite are based on original tunes written by Guion, while others use the traditional tunes of J.W. Elliott. Guion included the words of each nursery rhyme in the suite to remind the listener of the subject matter. However, the pieces were not intended to be played by children. In the score, the composer commented that many of the pieces require "the technical skill and artistic finish of the concert pianist." Guion wrote interesting notes in the score to the pianist. For example, in piece #4, the tempo indication includes the admonition to play "Slowly and with deep sympathy for Robin," and in #11 instructions to play "bashfully," "with great sternness," "reluctantly," "reproachfully," "sobbingly," and "churchy." Examples of Guion's humor include his use of glissandos, bi-tonality, and his vivid portrayal of scampering mice, barking dogs, and the wild chase for the piper's son.

After World War II, the demand for David Guion's music waned, as the art music world once again returned to a more cultivated tradition. Almost as quickly as it had been relished by both the common man and art music composers and audiences, it was abandoned. The art music world considered it too lowbrow for their cultivated traditions, and the pop world rejected it as too old fashioned. It is possible that David Guion never understood why his music was no longer popular or why much of it went out of print. Until the end, he viewed his music as an excellent and important representation of the American folk music scene.