

Francesco Corbetta's Missing Guitar Books

By Monica Hall

Although only five printed books of music for the five-course guitar by Francesco Corbetta survive today, he may have had printed as many as four more books which are no longer extant.

It is clear from the prefaces to *De gli Scherzi Armonici*, printed in Bologna in 1639, and *Varii Capricci*, printed in Milan in 1643, that these were his first and second books. His next surviving book, *Varii Scherzi di Sonate*, printed in Brussels in 1648, is referred to as *Libro quarto* on the title page. Presumably a third book was printed sometime between 1643 and 1648. There is then a gap of twenty three years between 1648 and 1671 when his most substantial collection, *La Guitare Royale* was printed in Paris. This includes prefaces in both French and Italian.

In the Italian preface Corbetta refers to a dispute with his pupil, Giovanni Battista Granata. It seems that Granata had included music by Corbetta in one of his books, possibly his *Capricci Armonici* printed in 1646. To pay him back Corbetta included some of Granata's music in a book which he dedicated to George William, Duke of Brunswick-Lunebergh. The Hanover Court Registers record a payment to Corbetta for the year 1652-53 and a book dedicated to the Duke may have been printed about that time.

In both the Italian and French prefaces Corbetta also refers to an incident which took place in Paris in about 1656. The printing plates of one of his books were stolen from him and used to produce another book. A few other pieces were "thrown in" and the book was dedicated to a "foreign prince." The recent discovery of what appears to be a copy of this "pirated" edition throws some light on the matter. This may be the *Guitarra española y sus diferencias de sones* attributed to "Franciscus Corbera" in the earliest edition of Nicolas Antonio's *Biblioteca Hispana*, printed in 1672.¹ It includes most of the pieces from his 1648 book, printed from the same plates. In addition there are three other pieces, a prelude in G minor and an allemande and brando in B flat major, which are certainly by Corbetta himself. The plates from which these are printed could have belonged to either the book dedicated to Duke of Brunswick-Lunebergh or to one dedicated to Louis XIV. There are also four "Spanish" pieces which were probably added by the "pirate."

Lastly Corbetta may have published a book in London. *Easie Lessons on the Guittar for young practitioners...By seignior Franciso* was printed there by John Carr in the 1670s. This is listed in the Term Catalogue (a trade journal issued three times a

year) for the Michaelmas Term, 1677.

A substantial amount of music attributed to Corbetta, which is not included in the surviving printed books, is found in manuscripts sources. In particular three manuscripts overlap in a way that suggests that the copyists all had access to one of the missing books, possibly the one dedicated to the Duke of Brunswick-Lunebergh. These are GB:Ob Ms.Mus.Sch.C94 - Henry François de Gallot "Pieces de guitare de differends auteurs," dating from the 1660s;² an untitled manuscript, B:Bl.Ms.245, copied by the Belgian clergyman Jean Baptiste de Castillion in about 1706;³ and GB:Lbl Add.Ms. 31640 - Santiago de Murcia's "Passacalles y obras," dated 1732.

The Gallot manuscript includes pieces from Corbetta's printed books of 1643, 1648, 1671, and 1674. There are also about 60 other pieces which are apparently by him. Some of these are attributed to Francisco, or fr.C, but most are identified by the letter "F" beside the title which stands for Francisco. Castillion's manuscript includes 50 pieces attributed to "F. Corbetta" or "F.C."⁴ A further twenty of the pieces which Castillion has attributed to "F.C." are actually from Granata's *Novi capricci armonici musical* (1674). This may be a mistake on Castillion's part. It is however the only source discovered to date in which music by Granata is attributed to Corbetta. None of the movements which make up the *obras* or suites in Murcia's "Passacalles y obras" are by Murcia himself, although not all have yet been identified. Four pieces previously unidentified are

found either in the Gallot or Castillion manuscripts attributed to Corbetta. It is possible that other pieces in "Passacalles y obras" still unidentified are also by Corbetta. Concordances between the three manuscripts are set out in the Table.

Suite in G major

All five movements reproduced here are included in Castillion's manuscript - B:Bl.Ms.245. The allemande (p.60), first courante (p.60), and sarabande (p.61) are found only in this source. The second courante (p.66) is also found in Murcia (f.109v)⁵ and the gigue (p.62) in Gallot (f.10v) with the title "Allemande francisco."⁶ It is not clear whether both courantes belong to the same suite but they are rather similar. Both are in 3/2-6/4 in the French manner typical of the mid-seventeenth century. Examples of the French courante are also found in Corbetta's book of 1648 which suggests that it was a form which he



Vermeer - The Guitar Player

embraced in his “middle period.” The gigue is in common time, a variant sometimes referred to as an *allemande gigue* which is particularly associated with French lute music of the first half of the seventeenth century. This probably explains why it has the title “allemande” in Gallot. The only other example of a gigue in common time by Corbetta is also found in his 1648 book. Although none of the sources include a prelude in G major which can be attributed to Corbetta with certainty, Murcia does include a prelude in G major (f.108v) so far unidentified. I have not included this, but it would make a suitable introduction. Murcia’s prelude to the G minor suite on f.73 is attributed to Corbetta by both Gallot and Castillion.

Notation

Tablature software at present readily available is not particularly “baroque guitar” friendly and some compromises have been necessary in notating the music. This does have the advantage of making it easier to read!

In French tablature the note values for strummed chords are placed on the stave following the chords to which they apply, with the tail downwards for a down stroke (bass to treble) and upwards for an up stroke (treble to bass). As my software does not support this feature, all the note values have been placed above the stave with directional arrows indicating the direction of the strums. An arrow pointing upwards indicates a strum from bass to treble; pointing downwards – from treble to bass. The time signatures of the Allemande and Gigue should be \mathbb{C} .

In guitar tablature the open courses to be included in each strummed chord are not usually notated. I have filled these in where it seemed appropriate.

Castillion uses only two ornaments:

- “trill” which should start on the upper auxiliary note - represented here with the conventional sign tr.
- “vibrato” to emphasize notes - represented here as *

Stringing

Corbetta’s earlier books have only brief introductions and none of them mention the method of stringing he preferred. In both the French and Italian prefaces to *La Guitare Royale* (1671) he emphasizes the need for a low octave string on the fourth course because, as he says, “the two in unison do not make the harmony which my sonatas call for.” From this it is usually inferred that the fifth course should be tuned in unison in the upper octave. It is sometimes suggested that this method of stringing was a recent innovation and that Corbetta had previously used low octave strings on both the 4th and 5th courses. However there is no real reason why he should not have always have preferred the method of stringing described in *La Guitare Royale* and it seems very suitable for music from his “middle period” which is similar in style to that of his two later books.

Table — Concordances between Gallot,
Castillion, Murcia

C major			
Sarabande	Gallot	f.19v	
	Castillion	p.41	
C minor			
Courante	Murcia	f.120v	
	Castillion	p.125	
D major			
Sarabande	Gallot	f.48	
	Castillion	p.45	
F major			
Courante	Gallot	f.40v	
	Castillion	p.40	
Sarabande	Gallot	f.41	
	Castillion	p.41	
G major			
Gigue	Gallot	f.10v	
	Castillion	p.62	
Courante	Castillion	p.66	
	Murcia	f.109v	
G minor			
Prelude	Gallot	f.75v	
	Castillion	p.123	
	Murcia	f73	
Sarabande	Gallot	f.64v/2	
	Castillion	p.80	
Sarabande	Gallot	f64v/1	
	Castillion	p.106	
A major			
Allemande	Gallot	f.51v	
	Castillion	p.85	
B flat major			
Allemande	Gallot	f.46v	
	Castillion	p.90	
Courante	Gallot	f.46	
	Castillion	p.92	
Sarabande	Gallot	f.46v	
	Castillion	p.92	
Allemande	Gallot	f.44	
Brand	Gallot	f.44	
	Castillion	p.93	
B minor			
Sarabande	Gallot	f.59v	
	Murcia	f.125	

Footnotes:

¹Antonio, Nicolas, *Biblioteca Hispana sive Hispanorum qui usquam unquam, sive Latinā, sive populari, sive alia quāvis lingua scripto aliud consignaverunt...* Rome ex Officina Nicolae Angeli Tinassii, 1672. Vol. 1, p.318. A facsimile edition is available from the German Lute Society.

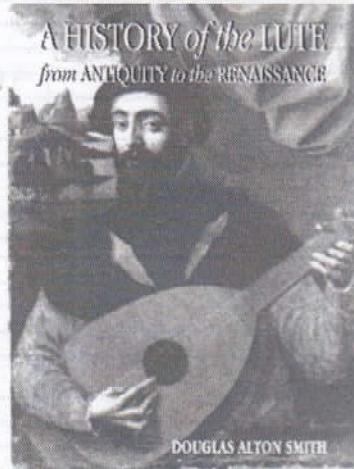
²For a description of the manuscript see Gill, Donald, "The de Gallot Guitar Books," *Early Music*, vol. 6/1, January 1978, p.79-87.

³For a description of the manuscript, see Hall, Monica, "Recovering a Lost Book of Guitar Music by Corbetta," *Consort*, vol. 61, 2005, p.43-58.

⁴In 1630 Castillion re-copied thirteen of the pieces into B:Be.Ms.S5615, the well known manuscript of music by François Le Cocq and other composers.

⁵The folio numbers used are those in the original manuscript, not those in the facsimile published by Editions Chantereille which were pencilled into the manuscript at a later date.

⁶Castillion re-copied the gigue into B:Be.Ms.S5615.



Member price - \$75.00, Non-Members - \$85
plus \$14.95 S&H

Order from: Lute Society of America
P.O. Box 100182
Fort Worth, TX 76185-0182
or order on our website at

A History of the Lute is a complete history of the instrument, its players and composers, its music and its cultural significance from Greek antiquity to the end of the Renaissance. It includes the author's evaluation and synthesis of previous lute scholarship by hundreds of writers as well as new research.

Boston Catlines

Supplier of gut, nylon, carbon fiber & nylgut strings for early instruments

plain, overspun & catline strings
— custom fit to your instrument —

We carry **Pyramid, Savarez & Aquila** strings,
plain gut & fretgut from **Sofracob**,
& both silver & silverplated overspun strings
from **Pirastro & Savarez**
for viols, lutes, violins, etc.

Boston Catlines

Olav Chris Henriksen

34 Newberry Street, Somerville, MA 02144 USA

Tel. & Fax (617) 776-8688

E-MAIL: CATLINES@AOL.COM

Aquila
corde armoniche
Italia

AquilaUSA is the U.S. representative
for Aquila Corde Armoniche,
manufacturers of the finest quality gut
strings for musical performance

Curtis Daily • AquilaUSA
503-788-5029
P.O. Box 82761 • Portland, OR 97282-0761
website: www.aquilausa.com
email: info@aquilausa.com

Suite in G Major

By Francesco Corbetta

Allemande

[B:Lc. Ms.245]

1 C

3 B

6 A

9 G

12 F

15 E

<http://LuteSocietyofAmerica.org> Edited by Monica Hall
 Thanks are due to Alain Veylit, Django software designer, for his help in formatting the music <http://webpages.charter.net/django/>

Courante 1

3

4

5

10

13



*Courante 2**Suite in G Major*

By Francesco Corbetta

3

4

7

10

13

16

Coda

Sarabande

2006 LSA Lute Seminar — Cleveland, OH

3 5 9 13 19

Handwritten lute tablature for Sarabande, featuring five staves of music. The notation uses a standard lute tablature system with five horizontal lines representing the strings. The music consists of various notes (open circles, filled circles, and stems) and rests, with specific fingerings indicated by letters (a, b, r, f, h, i) and tracings. The piece begins with a 3/4 time signature and transitions to a common time signature. The music concludes with a decorative flourish.



Gigue