

The performance practice of Baroque guitar music on the modern classical guitar, based on historical treatises

Performing music on the modern classical guitar that has been transcribed from tablature and facsimiles for early instruments such as the lute, renaissance vihuela and the Baroque guitar can be a challenge to the twenty-first century musician. Achieving convincing performances can be done through careful study of original treatises together with listening to historically informed live performances and recordings. This essay will focus on the baroque guitar repertoire and analyse musical approaches that allow for an effective and historically informed performance. The works of early guitar masters such as Gaspar Sanz, Francesco Corbetta and Santiago de Murcia will be discussed. Performance issues such as right and left hand technique, the use of flesh verses nail as well as correct tuning and stringing will be addressed alongside musical interpretation of ornaments and tablature.

As the Baroque guitar and its repertoire in Spain (1600-1750) will be the focus of this essay it is important to understand its evolution and the early history of the guitar and guitar-like instruments in Spain and Europe. Although there is only a very small amount of information relating directly to instruments such as the Spanish vihuela (1475- early 1600`s) there are numerous historical links to the Moorish culture and the vihuela Documents from 1463 recently found in Zaragoza, Spain, refer to Juce and Lope de Albariel as master builders of vihuelas and lutes. It is assumed that there was a decline in the lute in Spain around this time and musicians such as Rodrigo Castello who was known as lutenists in the 1480`s was by 1500 referred to as a vihuelists.

The vihuela was strung with six courses, and the other popular instrument of the day was the four-course guitar. The transition to the five-course guitar seems to be the result of experimentation and the modification of the existing four and six stringed instruments. The earliest surviving publication for the five-course vihuela was Miguel Fuenllana`s book *Orphencia Lyra* in 1554. Although the term vihuela continued to be used, by the mid seventeenth century it was no longer referring to the lute-like instruments of the Renaissance, but solely to the five course guitar and the use of this terminology continued into the eighteenth century .

In 1586 Spaniard Joan Carles Amat published a method book for the five course guitar, *Guittarra española y vandola* and this book can take credit for the rise in popularity of the rasgueado or strummed technique. This

popularity indicates a clear shift away from the horizontal or single melodic line approach of the lute, to a vertical or harmonic way of playing that quickly became fashionable. Amat devised a system of identifying chords with numbers called cifras and this latter became known as the alfabeto system. Both methods made playing popular music of the day relatively easy and soon the five-course guitar was being played by amateurs in this simple strummed fashion. The popularity of the instrument spread throughout Europe and the five-course guitar soon became known as the Spanish guitar.

It is during the early to mid 1600`s that a number of virtuoso players emerged and developed a repertoire and system of instruction that helped elevate the five-course Baroque guitar from its amateur status to a virtuoso level that was soon heard in courts throughout Europe. In 1674 the Spanish priest and musician Gaspar Sanz published the first collection of Spanish guitar music in Spain. His book *Instruccion de musica sobre la guitarra española* included repertoire along with detailed instructions on tuning, chords, right and left hand technique and a section on accompanying using figured-bass. Remarkably he engraved all the music plates for printing his book himself.

Sanz had previously studied music in Italy prior to returning to Spain to publish his *Instruccion de musica*, and it was an Italian, Francesco Corbetta who published the book *Varii caprici per la ghitarra spagnola* in Milan in 1643. This book brings together the rasgudo technique used on the guitar up to that point and the *punteado* or plucked and contrapuntal techniques of the lute and its repertoire. Corbetta had studied with Giovanni Paolo Foscarini who is credited with having laid the foundations to this new way of playing the five-course guitar. This combination of techniques and mixed tablature was then refined and perfected by masters such as Sanz and Santiago de Murcia in Spain, Ludovico Roncalli in Italy and Robert de Visèe in France.

There are three main tunings of the Baroque guitar, the Spanish the French and the Italian. In all three systems each string is grouped together in pairs, this is known as courses or in Spanish órdenes. The pairs are usually tuned in octaves or unisons and it is these different combinations that give us the three tuning variations. For example in Spain the fourth and fifth string pairs were tuned in octaves, in French tuning only the fourth string pair was in octaves and the fifth was a unison pair in the upper octave and the Italian tuning used unisons at the upper octave on both the fourth and fifth string pairs, this third approach is known as re-entrant tuning. These three tuning variations are notated in example 1.

Ex 1.

Spanish Tuning

French Tuning

Italian Tuning

In his method book *Instruccion de musica*, Gaspar Sanz writes that both the Spanish and Italian tunings are suitable but serve different purposes. He describes the Spanish tuning with its lower fourth and fifth string octave as suited to noisier rasgueado playing and the unison upper octave tuning of the Italians as being appropriate for the *punteado* style which used *campanellas*. The term *campanella* refers to the cascading scales that momentarily overlap when groups of stepwise notes are divided up across the entire course creating a harp or bell like effect. This effect can only be created when playing in re-entrant tuning, such as the Italian system.

Playing *campanella* passages is an aspect of performance practice that the modern player must be especially aware of. It is important to determine, by observing original tablature editions 'whether notes found on the lower courses should be interpreted and transcribed as bass notes, melody notes, or both.' This may sometimes lead to octave displacements and curious voice leadings and the modern player needs to decide case by case as how to best transcribe and perform these passages so as to make musical sense on the modern classical guitar.

For modern classical guitarists wishing to perform Baroque guitar music in an authentic style the ability to read and understand tablature is essential. Firstly it gives the modern player direct access to original scores and secondly it allows them to investigate, read and transcribe the vast amount of Baroque guitar music, not to mention earlier Renaissance music yet to be transcribed into standard modern guitar notation. It is interesting to note that from the seventeenth century alone, the total number of manuscripts and books for the guitar, now preserved in libraries around the world, is much larger than that for the lute or keyboard and many of these manuscripts are yet to be examined let alone transcribed. Although editions of transcriptions from original tablatures exist, many are revised in an attempt to improve on the originals and this removes it from being a true transcription, and on the other hand some editions are so true to the original that modern technical concerns are not addressed; despite this, having the ability to read tablature will allow the modern player the opportunity to make their own decisions as to how best approach an original manuscript.

In some respects the topic of right and left hand technique is difficult to address, as there was no standard approach to either and virtually nothing written on the left hand other than fingerings for the *cifras* and *alfabeto* chords. Tablature from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries indicate that the right hand thumb and index finger were meant to alternate on single line phrases and the fingering is carefully indicated to emphasise the natural rhythm of the phrases. By 1554 when Miguel Fuenllana published his *Libro de Musica para Vihuela* the use of the thumb playing independent bass parts while the index and middle fingers played the treble parts, the modern classical guitar right hand technique was in its developmental stage.

A final significant point of interest to the modern performer is the use, or non-use, of right hand fingernails. Fuenllana in 1554 states that '... it is best by far to pluck the string using neither nail nor any other device. Only the finger, the living thing, can communicate the intention of the spirit.' Lutenist Alessandro Piccinini in his 1623 lute book recommends the use of short nails and suggest to place the flesh of the finger tip onto the string and let the nail glide across the double courses. The Baroque guitar virtuosi such as Sanz, De Murcia and Corbetta don't mention the use or non-use of nails, however there is a reference from the memoirs of Adam Ebert to Corbetta being unable to perform at a festival in Turin due to a broken finger nail.

Contemporary guitar virtuoso Manuel Barrueco performs stylistically convincing performances of Robert De Visée Baroque guitar music playing with right hand finger nails on a modern guitar. Baroque guitar master Paul O`Dette performed works by Santiago de Murcia (1685-1732) on Baroque guitar at the New York Guitar Festival in 2006 and appears to be playing without right hand fingernails. The use of fingernails seems to come down to personal preference, taking into consideration the type of instrument being played.

Ornamentation on the Baroque guitar is highly stylized and detailed. Individual differences and national styles must be taken into consideration by the modern guitarist. Santiago de Murcia does not address ornamentation but instead refers the reader to the treatise of his own teacher, Francisco Guerau, who outlines all the important ornaments found in Spanish baroque guitar music such as the trill, mordent, slur, arpeggio and vibrato and each of these types of ornamentation appear in De Murcia's original tablature editions. Sanz on the other hand is less detailed in his instruction and indicates the mordent and ascending and descending appoggiaturas using only one sign in his tablature. A crucial detail left out by Spanish guitar composers including Guerau is the main

note trill. It is unclear whether the trill starts on the main note or the note above. Spanish tradition of the day suggests the main note trill was predominantly used; however it seems De Murcia used the upper-note trill, an indication of his French influences. De Murcia broke the long standing Spanish guitar tradition of main note trill, and unlike Sanz, Ribayaz and Guerau, De Murcia was not a priest and he seemed free to break from conservative traditions.

The modern day classical guitarist has the luxury of a huge repertoire spanning centuries of various styles and genres at their disposal. The Baroque guitar repertoire is one area guitarist can explore and specialize in due to the growing number of instructional books, dissertations and audio recordings available. Musicians and audiences have come to expect convincing and historically informed performances and the original treatises by the Baroque guitar masters should be the starting point for all guitarists who wish to successfully interpret and perform Baroque guitar music.

Bibliography

Barrueco, Manuel, *Overter de la Grotte de Versailles (de Lully) Suite No 11*, Bach and DeVisée, EMI Classics, D-50825, 1990

Griffiths, John. 'The vihuela: performance practice, style, and context'. In *Performance on Lute, Guitar, and Vihula*, ed. Victor Anand Coelho, 158-79. Cambridge: CUP, 1997.

Koonce, Frank. *The Baroque Guitar in Spain and the New World*. Missouri: Mel Bay Publications, 2006.

Pennington, Neil D. *The Spanish Baroque guitar with a transcription of De Murcia's Passacalles y obras VIm 1*. Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1981.

O'Dette, Paul. *Works by Santiago de Murcia*, video clip. 2006.
www.youtube.com, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i4xVXZQFuhQ&feature=mh_lolz&list=FL6fbACrKtVe-lwWCUkfENxA
(accessed on 1 September 2011)

Russell, Craig H. 'Radical innovations, social revolution, and the baroque guitar'. In *The Cambridge Companion to the Guitar*, ed. Victor Anand Coelho, 153-80. Cambridge: CUP, 2003.

Tyler, James and Paul Sparks. *The guitar and its music from the renaissance to the classical era*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Tyler, James. *The early guitar, a history and handbook*. London: Oxford University Press, 1980.

