

Six Harpsichord Sonatas from 18th century Spain, paraphrased for Six-Course Guitar by Clive Titmuss

Foreword

The history of the guitar and its music is like a boom and bust economy--periods of efflorescence followed by fallow. The guitar began its current world domination with a raging start in the 17th century. After a slow beginning in the 1450-1550 period, a series of publications in Italy, Spain, France and England set the guitar on a par with other instruments pursued by connoisseurs, amateurs and professionals.

Raised to the level of high art by Guerau, Corbetta and De Visée et al., by the end of the 17th century the guitar began to be seen in all strata of society, depicted as the must-have accessory for almost anyone who claimed to be educated or literate, entirely replacing the lute except in Germany by the mid-18th century. But in the latter half of 18th century there was a period of retrenchment. The picture of the young Mozart at the keyboard, with the opera superstar Farinelli strumming a guitar, says everything we need to know. In this image the guitar is fit primarily to accompany the voice, having lost its own.

Especially in Spain, where we would expect a large repertoire of printed music, there is very little. This comes as a surprise, since there are plenty of pictures, especially the paintings and drawings of Goya, and many extant instruments. What is puzzling is the shadowy transition from an alto-pitched instrument of five courses to a baritone instrument of six, and thence to an early guitar of the 19th century with six single strings. Eventually this path led to an instrument and a tradition that made international stars of Sor, Giuliani, Aguado and others. But what was the substance of the repertoire of the transitional six-course guitar, and what was the stylistic substance of the transition from five to six-course repertoire?

This lacuna of evidence in printed music is partly explained by the effects of war and the decline in the economy of Spain. Inflation and de-population, agrarian collapse and weak and ineffective government made the country a laggard in a period of industrialization as it was experienced in Northern Europe. Perhaps the publishing of music, the teaching of students and even the manufacture of guitars and other instruments may have suffered. Some of the guitar's impetus migrated, with the last of the Spanish diaspora, to the new world. Santiago de Murcia's Mexican book, for example, is a notable late flowering of five-course guitar music consisting mainly of variation forms based on dance rhythms and harmonies but with an unmistakable guitar idiom.

A checklist of published Spanish works that are not primarily intended as tutors, and/or including substantial compositions is very short, and furthermore it is music which is rarely played by today's performers: Antonio Ballester--*Obra para guitarra de seis ordenes...* (1799), Antonio Abreu--*Escuela para tocar...la guitarra de cinco e seis ordenes* (1799), Fernando Ferandière--*Arte de tocar...*

Federico Moretti figures prominently, but despite having published methods and a notable book of songs, one of the latest occurrences of the phrase "seis ordenes", he left little solo music. Undated sources from the late 18th century, largely French or Italian in origin, include sonatas and instrumental music with guitar by Amon, Calejari, Doisy, Gragnani, L'Hoyer, Merchi, Molino, Pleyel, Porro and Sheidler.

The style of this late 18th century guitar music derives more from piano and violin music, rather than a native guitar idiom. In this later repertoire the Boccherini quintets with guitar are exceptional in their originality and interest. These pieces are connected with a powerful figure in the guitar's history in the 18th century--Padre Basilio (Don Miguel Garcia). He was Aguado and Sor's teacher, and is remembered in a telling and much-quoted passage in Aguado's method (1825):

"In all this time there have doubtless been good players who, captivated by the sweetness of its voices and the effect reproduced by the combining of its sounds, became aficionados; but they were not successfully able to write down what they played. They can be seen in the compositions of Laporta, Arizpacochaga, Abreu, my teacher the so-called Padre Basilio and others; because of these works it is known that these composers went on to be competent performers, and even recognize in part the genius of this instrument, but they were not so successful at putting on paper what they practised with their hands."

This passage is often cited as a manifestation of Aguado's quest to reform the pedagogy and notation of guitar music. It may equally well be cited as an inference of the paucity of elaboration and compositional sophistication in late 18th century guitar music.

Another aspect in the quest for the repertoire of the six-course guitar is the success with which the Iberian school of harpsichord composers including Scarlatti, Martin y Soler, Albeniz, Cantallos, Rodriguez and the Portuguese, Carlos Seixas, mined its style and idiom for folkloric or rustic effects in their keyboard music. In a pioneering work in English (*The Music of Spain*, 1941) on the subject of the influence of the guitar in Scarlatti's harpsichord music, Gilbert Chase noted:

"The influence of the guitar upon Scarlatti's style is manifested in many details of his music. One of the most prominent of these is the internal pedal point, derived from the practice...of steadying the player's hands by dwelling on one or two notes while the other notes of the harmony are changed. Throughout Scarlatti's sonatas there are passages that are strongly reminiscent of the style of the early Spanish guitarists..."

This passage may equally well apply to any composers for harpsichord, as many others besides Scarlatti were attracted to the vitality of Spanish dance as way of evoking the immediacy of *al fresco* music performance.

In searching for music to play on a newly-constructed six-course guitar which I made after Juan Pages, Cádiz, 1792 (shown here), my curiosity naturally settled on a now-commonplace practice--the transcription of cognate keyboard music of the period as a way of filling out rather thin pickings in the repertoire. Many sonatas by Scarlatti have found a new home on the guitar since Chase's observation (and in comments made by Ralph Kirkpatrick in his study *Domenico Scarlatti*), partly as a result of the championing of his music by Vladimir Horowitz, Violet Woodhouse, Wanda Landowska, and Kirkpatrick himself in the 1940's and 50's.

Many of the keyboard sonatas of the period provide excellent fodder for transcription, and in many ways they illuminate the question of just exactly how the style and music of the early 18th century guitar was carried into the latter half of the century. But I

quickly discovered that transcriptions of the material for modern six string guitar do not reflect either the



properties of the six-course instrument or the historical values and idioms as they are observed in the existing repertoire.

Modern transcriptions can be too literal in their transcription of harpsichord texture. What comes easily to two hands, ten fingers, easily ranging over the five octave range of the harpsichord in use in 18th century Spain is suggested on the guitar only with the greatest effort. Passages involving typical feature of the keyboard style such as trills with moving lower voices, *acciacature* (simultaneous sounding of seconds), pedal points (repetition of dominant or tonic as mentioned in the Chase quote above), freely ranging arpeggios, three-handed effects (figuration of the left hand while the right strikes above and below), rapid toccata-style scales, and characteristic keyboard idioms and effects found in the typical Neapolitan binary sonata form do not necessarily make sense on the guitar, even when they have been conceived as imitative of it. Transcription is in itself an art form which proceeds from making the right selection of what to transcribe, so it quickly became apparent that many pieces which might have settled well on the six-course in fact did not. The comparative ease heard in the music of the five course guitar is an elusive ideal when transcribing music for the six-course, even with an amplification of resources.

Though its resources are considerably greater, I found that simply playing modern transcription left me feeling that I was working far too hard for the effect which is achieved. The modern guitar, partly due to its internal construction and thick overlaid fingerboard, is very even in its voicing along a particular string; its bass and treble are well balanced; its dynamic range is wide. The six-course guitar is, like the contemporary harpsichord and the five-course, highly registered in its colour; the pairing of its (gut) strings means that notes sounded at in a low, medium and very high position sound very different, and the higher you play on any string, the greater the chance of string inharmonicity and inaccurate intonation. The dynamic range is not as wide, but strumming and plucking are more homogenous. Anyone who has heard the blend of *batteries* and plucked or *punteado* and *rasgueado* playing on a baroque period guitar in music by De Visee or Corbetta (late 17th century composers), for example will not be surprised to find that this effect is not necessarily pleasing when exactly duplicated on a modern six string guitar. The thinness of texture of the early guitar is usually not duplicated in modern transcriptions of the music. Normally the cadential chords are filled, the profusion of ornaments, easily executed on the low-tension strings of the baroque instrument, is reduced when playing a modern guitar.

The properties of the six-course lie somewhere between these extremes, and it became a challenge for me to discover exactly what texture, ornaments and techniques of chordal playing might translate onto a transitional instrument and sound convincingly as if they genuinely belonged to the idiom of the instrument--all in the absence of really satisfactory models, as I discussed above.

Since so many transcriptions of the music of Scarlatti have appeared, I decided to work on fairly well-known harpsichord pieces that appeared to have more in common with the native speech of the guitar, less in the keyboard idiom of Scarlatti, and to convincingly demonstrate by repatriation the obvious features of early guitar music, including typical (Italian alfabeto) chord voicings and plucking technique, thinness of texture, and characteristic ornamentation in order to produce a small series of pieces which might form the germ of a conjectural repertoire, a set of six sonatas notated and presented as if they had been composed (or arranged by a contemporary player) for the instrument.

In this series of paraphrases specifically designed for six-course guitar, I have followed certain principles of transcription which may briefly be stated thusly:

- The notation is in (modern upright) guitar tablature. (This is now a standard format for music of every period. The continuation of the tablature tradition gives the transcriber greater freedom and reduced orthography in notating idiomatic string figures.)
- A simple solution for the fingering of any chord follows the traditional form of the Italian alphabet (below).
- The re-iteration of notes or triads based on them, a common feature of keyboard music, is generally reduced.
- The ornamentation is designed to reflect the guitar's natural idiom. (vertical cross from upper mordent, comma for trill or appoggiatura from above, though it is also correct to begin trills on the main note occasionally.)
- The fingering of stepwise passages will normally be on a single string, rather than a single position.
- Open chord voicing without thirds or doubling is chosen when it's convenient.
- Any opportunity to strum with the downward index stroke—rather than plucking with multiple fingers—is more usual. (indicated by thumb stroke notation and by direction caretets). Three or four-note chords are usually played by using the thumb and one or two fingers: The annular finger was not in common use until the mid- to late 19th century.
- Slurring, which is endemic on the modern instrument, will be generally confined to passages which are executed in the *ligado* or *strascino* style (strascinare: to pull or drag), i.e. to passages where this feature predominates. A single slur or phrasing mark will indicate this.
- Extended passages of parallel thirds or sixths will be reduced to a single voice with an occasional third or sixth.
- The thumb may be used in alternation with the index or alone without indication in scale passages (suggested by Sor's *Methode*); in the upper voices.

Clive Titmuss, Kelowna, January 2010

The Italian Alphabet as depicted (in "inverted" Italian tablature) in *Intavolatura...* Carlo Calvi (1647). Many books published this form of the tablature, even into the 18th century. Calvi is notable for his notation of the transposed chord forms and the *alfabeto falso*.

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Lo Stampatore a chi fuona.

MI fono capitate le seguenti Suonate di Chitarra, e Chitarriglia, e per essere parti di due valenthuomini, non hò voluto perder questa occasione di compiacerne il tuo orecchio. Sappile aggradire, finche ne puoi prendere, accioche non le habbi à defiderare, quando non ci faranno. E vogli mi bene.

Alfabeto.

+	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	V	X	Y	Z	
2	2	3					2	3	1		1	3	1	3	1	3	4	2	2	4	4	2	5	3
2		2		2		2	3	3	2	3	1	1	1		3	4	4	2	2	4	4	5	5	
	3	1	3	1	3		1	3	2	2	3	4	1	3	1	3	4	4	2	2	4	4	5	
	3		2		1		1	1		1	3	3	4	3	1	2	2	4	5	2	2	3	3	

Alfabeto falso.

³ G	³ H	⁵ H	³ M	⁵ M	³ N	⁵ N	³ P	À	♯B	♯C	♯D	♯E	♯F	♯G	♯H	♯I	♯L	♯N	♯O	♯P
5	3	5	3	5	5	7	5	3						1	3	1		3		
5	5	7	3	5	3	5	5	3		2	2	2	3	3	2	1	1		1	
4	5	7	5	7	3	5	3	0	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	3	2		
4	5	7	6	8	3	5	3	0	1	1	3		1	4	3	4	1	3	1	
3	3	5	5	7	6	8	3	3	2				1	3	3	3	1			

