

Francesco Corbetta - The Best of All

8. Dissonance in the guitar music of Francesco Corbetta¹

Introduction

The unusual dissonance which is a feature of Corbetta's music – in particular that of his most significant collection "La Guitarre royale" printed in Paris in 1671 – is controversial. Richard Pinnell commented on it briefly in his doctoral dissertation,² and suggested that in some places the dissonant notes might be omitted. More recently Lex Eisenhardt has argued that the music is not intended to be played in the way that the notation suggests and that all dissonance which does not conform to what he believes to be the norm in the 17th century, including the 2nd inversion six-four chords, should be eliminated.³ Some of Corbetta's harmony is unorthodox but it is not unique and it can be explained in the context of the baroque guitar and its repertoire. Similar chords can be found in the works of some of his contemporaries. The only difference is the extent to which Corbetta has taken what was probably a feature of the strummed repertoire, and fused it with a more formal style of writing associated with the lute to create his own personal musical language.

In early 17th century Italian music dissonance was cultivated for its affective quality; it is a characteristic of the lute music of Kapsberger and Michelagnolo Galilei and the keyboard music of Frescobaldi and Michaelangelo Rossi. Later, some of the keyboard sonatas of Domenico Scarlatti feature dissonances which are thought to have been inspired by guitar music he heard in Spain.

Dissonance in baroque guitar sources sometimes takes a different form from that found in other music of the period and even standard dissonances may not always be prepared or resolved in a conventional way. This is due in part to the limitations of a five-course instrument which, for practical reasons, often had a re-entrant tuning, and in part to the style of the music which was cultivated in Italy and France which combined lute style counterpoint with elaborate strumming. The music had its roots in popular or "folk" traditions, some of which originated outside Europe, and this is reflected in its idioms.

¹ This is a revised and extended version of an article which appeared in 'Lute : the journal of the Lute Society'. Vol. XLVII (2007).

² Richard Pinnell - The role of Francesco Corbetta in the history of music for the baroque guitar. (University of California, Los Angeles, 1976).

³ Lex Eisenhardt – The secret of Corbetta's notation – CDRom files with "The royal guitar" – Verbena, CDR 2003-1/The Italian battute-pizzicate in Lute News, 77, April 2006/Dissonance and battuto, a hidden practice...in Lute : the journal of the Lute Society. Vol. XLVII, 2007, p.38-54.

Corbetta's comments on his own music

Corbetta offers some insight into how he viewed his own music in the prefaces to both "La Guitarre royale" and in his 1674 book with the same title.⁴ In the French preface to the 1671 book he says:

As there are always envious people who complain that my style of playing is too difficult, because some of my pieces are in a similar style to that of the lute, I can reply to them truthfully that I do not know a single chord on that instrument, and that I have never had any inclination other than for the guitar alone; my style is so different from that of the lute, that people, if they are acquainted with it, realize that straightaway and if they find something difficult, this is because [my music] is over and above the ordinary, being in the best fashion of playing and the best collection of pieces which has yet appeared in public.⁵

Corbetta was unusual in that unlike several of his contemporaries who published music for guitar, including Foscarini, Bartolotti, and De Visée, he was not a lutenist. Nothing is known about his musical background but in the Italian preface he implies that he was self taught -

As the world already knows, I have never played this instrument [the lute], of which I do not know a single chord and my passion has always been for the guitar, which I play for my own pleasure. I have always had a natural talent and have never needed any help to perfect my technique.⁶

Although he must have been influenced by contemporary lute music, what he says does not suggest that his music should be reduced to a bland lute-like texture in 2 or 3 parts.

In his 1674 book he says

Two years ago [i.e. in 1671] I published a book which contained pieces in a different style. It included pieces for those who play the instrument moderately well and for those who pride themselves on playing well. Today I have the opportunity to offer again some new compositions. I want them to conform to the style which best

⁴ La Guitarre royale (Paris, 1674).

⁵ La Guitarre royale (1671) Advis au Lecteur, p.8 - Et parcequ'il y a tousiours des envieux qui pouroient dire que ma maniere de iouer est trop difficile, a cause qu'une partie de mes pieces aproche de la maniere du Luth, je leur pourrois respondre avec verité que ie ne scay pas un seul accord sur cet instrument, et que je n'ay iamais eu d'autre inclination que pour la Guitare seule, ma maniere est si differente de celle du Luth, que les personnes qui sy connoissent le verront d'abord, et si l'on y trouve quelque chose difficile, c'est parcequ'il est au dessus du commun, étant la meilleure façon de iouer et la mieux fournie qui ayt encore paru en public.

⁶ La Guitarre royale (1671) Curioso Lettore, p.4 - gia il mondo sa che non ho'mai praticato tal instrumento dove non ne so pur un accordo, che per piacer a me stesso la Chitarra sola n'e statto sempre il mio genio non hauendo mai hautto bisogno d'agiuto per perfectionarla;

*pleases his Majesty [i.e. Louis XIV to whom the book is dedicated], which, among other things, is the most chromatic/colourful (cromatique), the most delicate, and the least complicated.*⁷

Here he is commenting specifically on the kind of music which appealed to the king which is predominantly strummed. It is not clear from the context whether he is using the term “cromatique” with its specific musical meaning or in a more general sense; the rest of the statement is open to almost any interpretation.

Baroque guitar notation

Baroque guitar notation is more complex than ordinary lute tablature because it needs to include much more detailed information about what the right hand should do. This is because in the seventeenth century, guitar right-hand technique was different from that of the lute in at least one respect - chords were often (but not always) strummed. Instead of using separate fingers for each note of the chord in lute style, all the notes of the chord were struck with the thumb or fingers in a single stroke, up or down.

At very least it must indicate

- a. whether chords are to be strummed or plucked
- b. if strummed, whether the strokes are down and up
- c. the rhythmic pattern of the strokes

It is therefore labour intensive to copy by hand and difficult to print accurately. A number of shorthand devices were used and inevitably these lead to some uncertainty today and probably did so in the 17th century too.

The earliest music for baroque guitar consists of sequences of strummed 5-part major or minor common chords. In Italian sources these are represented by single upper-case letters and a few other symbols – known as *alfabeto*. Subsequently *alfabeto* was used for the standard 5-part chords in combination with Italian tablature when notating more complex music - a form of notation usually referred to today as *mixed tablature*. *Alfabeto* is not used in combination with French tablature in printed books, but the same basic chords appear regularly in the music notated in tablature. There are two areas in particular where the fact that the notation is abbreviated may cause problems.

⁷La Guitarre royale (1674), Aux Amateurs de la Guitarre, p. 4 – Il y a deux ans que le fis prestre un Liure quei contenoit differentes sortes de manieres. Il y auoit des pieces pour ceux qui jouoient mediocrement de cet Instrument et pour ceux quise piquent d’en bien iouer. Auiourd’huy que l’occasion se presente de donner encore quelques ouuelles compositions. l’ay uoulu me conformer a la maniere qui plaist le mieux a sa Maiesté, ueuque parmi les autres elle est la plus cromatique, la plus delicate, et la moins embarassante.

- a. the unfretted or open courses to be included in strummed chords are not always indicated in the tablature. Instead of putting in the “0”s or “a”s, the tablature lines are left blank. The player has to decide which open courses to include – or if you wish – which to leave out. This is fairly straightforward although there are occasionally situations in which it is impossible to arrive at a definitive solution.

It does not follow from this that the player has also to decide whether notes represented by figures or letters in the tablature should be left out. Including figures or letters which serve no useful purpose would not save anyone any time or trouble!

The obvious way of making it clear what both the left and right hand should be doing would have been to include the “0”s or “a”s, and the more carefully produced sources do tend to do that where there may be some doubt, although they do not always do so consistently.

- b. if the same chord is to be repeated, the notes to be fretted will be shown once followed by the note values/stroke symbols only. This feature of the notation is complicated by the fact that when auxiliary notes are inserted into or between the chords, these may be shown as if they are single notes which are to be strummed. In some situations it will not be clear whether they should be played as single notes or whether they should be included in the chord and if so whether the harmony remains the same or whether it changes.

In this context it should be emphasised that, by definition, a chord cannot consist of less than three notes. There is not much point in strumming less than three courses, although this may occasionally be what is intended. It is however a contradiction in terms to speak of strumming a single note.

The fact that single notes are sometimes notated as if they were to be strummed is a notational anomaly. Rather than indicating a lack of precision in specifying how many courses should be included in the strum, it represents a failure to distinguish between two styles of playing.

In music which is entirely in *alfabeto* the stroke marks do have more than one function. They indicate the direction of the strokes, but they also indicate how many times a chord should be repeated, how the strokes should be grouped – in threes or fours depending on whether the piece is in triple or common time – and in some instances the duration or time value of the stroke. When single notes are inserted between chords these may also be given stroke marks. It is not surprising, therefore, that there is a certain ambiguity, particularly in earlier sources, when indicating whether chords should be strummed or played in lute style. Foscarini in particular, does not always make a clear distinction between 3-part chords which are to be strummed and

those which are to be played in lute style. Corbetta rarely indicates that only two notes should be strummed; there is always a third open course which can be included.

Mus.ex. 1a illustrates the kind of problem which may occur as a result of the imprecise notation. In bars 2-3 it is not immediately obvious which open courses should accompany the quaver passing notes C# D E at the cadence. At first sight it looks as if the F# and A from the previous chord could be repeated or sustained. However this does not result in a satisfactory cadential progression; the bass line should more stepwise F# G A D. It has been argued that the open fourth course should not be included and the passage reduced to only two parts.⁸ However there is no justification for omitting it. It belongs in the upper octave of the octave strung course; the note in the lower octave (shown with a lozenge shaped head in the example) is superfluous. The passage is a standard cadential formula, II⁷b – V – I. The example highlights the way in which notes on the fourth and fifth course do not always belong in the lower octave. If the fourth course is omitted, the accented passing note C# is less effective as it does not sound with its note of resolution and the underlying harmony is ambiguous. The open fifth course should not be included as it does not belong to the chord.

Mus.ex.1a-b – Sarabande, p.69, b.21/Chacone, p.69 b.19

a.



b.




A similar progression occurs at the end of the Chacone which follows. Here the open third course, G should be included although Corbetta has left the line blank as shown in Mus.ex.1b. The accented passing note F# will sound with the G on the third course in a simple IV – V – I cadence.

⁸ Lex Eisenhardt - Dissonance and battuto, a hidden practice...in Lute : the journal of the Lute Society. Vol. XLVII, 2007, p.38-54.

Some insight into the printing process is essential in order to understand why the notation developed in the way that it did. There were two ways of printing music in the 17th century – from moveable type or from engraved copper plates. Printing from moveable type is a mechanical process but it is limited to the number of characters available in the font of type. Engraved plates are more versatile as anything that can be written out by hand can be engraved. Baroque guitar tablature is too complex to print satisfactorily from moveable type and most guitar tablatures were printed from engraved plates. The notation is therefore based on manuscript practices. Producing the plates was however more expensive and more time consuming than type-setting. The composer would have to produce a manuscript copy of the whole work, which he would probably have done guitar in hand. The music was first drawn on the plates using a steel point pen and then engraved with a burin. Both processes involve working with a mirror image. This is the equivalent of hand copying the whole work twice; there is plenty of scope for making mistakes.

In the tables of *alfabeto* chords printed from tablature type found in the earliest guitar books, the “0”s are usually included. The earliest known source not to include them is Foscari’s “Il primo, secondo e terzo libro della chitarra spagnola” (ca.1630). As far as we know, this is also the earliest book to have been engraved, and the earliest to include music in mixed tablature. In Illustration 1 from his earlier book, “Intavolatura di chitarra spagnola. Libro secondo” (1629), printed from moveable type, the “0”s are included.

Illustration 1 – Foscari’s Alfabeto – 1629



In Illustration 2 from a later edition, printed from engraved plates, the zeros are omitted.

Illustration 2 – Foscari's Alfabeto – ca.1630



Illustration 3 – Foscari's Table of Chords



In both tables it is clear that the open courses are to be included in the chords.⁹ The one exception is the chord represented by B⁹ which is a dissonance. In the type-set table there is no zero on the 5th course because it should be omitted. In the engraved table this is not clear – the player has to decide whether to include it.¹⁰

Whichever method of stringing is used, if all five courses are included in the strum some of the chords will be six-four chords. Some modern players who prefer to use octave stringing on both the 4th and 5th courses find these unacceptable. They argue that players would have omitted the 5th course.¹¹ There is no evidence that this was considered necessary in the 17th century. In the engraved table, Foscarini has included the left hand fingering using the standard system of one to four dots; this clearly indicates that fretted notes on the 5th course should be included in the chords represented by + F G and P which will be six-fours with the octave stringing which his tuning instructions imply. There is no reason therefore to leave the open courses out of chords C or E or the 5th course which is stopped only by the barré from chord M/M⁺.

Foscarini himself makes it clear in his Introduction that the *alfabeto* chords are to be strummed in full -

Note that all the strokes notated either downwards or upwards are strummed in full [battute piene – that is including all five courses]. And when any letter of Alfabeto is found, the chord which that letter represents is strummed, striking it as many times, down or up as there are signs which are down or up. Note above all that each chord is played thus, distinctly and clearly, so that each string renders its true effect.¹²

⁹ Pesori mentions this specifically in “La galeria musicale” (1648), p.3 - It must be noted that in this tablature all the strings are strummed with sonority although only one or two may be given numbers; but where there are no strum strokes below you must pluck only those numbers and that string without strumming. - Si doverà avertire in questa Intavolatura di battere con sonuita tutte le corde benche non fosse occupate che uno o due da numeri, ma picigar poi solo senza battere, quei numeri et quelle corde ove non saranno sotto le battute.

¹⁰ Foscarini’s 1629 book is substantially a plagiarised version of Colonna’s Intavolatura di chitarra alla Spagnuola (Milan 1620). It includes most of Colonna’s introduction, the same table of chords and many of the same *alfabeto* pieces. In Colonna’s book B9 is represented by *.

¹¹ Leaving out the 5th course is not an option when using re-entrant tunings as the lowest sounding note will fall on the 3rd or 4th course. However without a low octave string on the 5th course the inversions are less intrusive and this may have been why re-entrant tunings were often preferred.

¹² Si deue auuertire, che tutte le botte notate ò in sù ò in giù, tutte vanno battute piene; E doue si trouerà qualche Lettera del Alfabeto, si sonerà quella botta, che mostrerà detta lettera, battendola tante volte in sù, ò in giù quanti saranno i Segni, che haurà ò in sù, ò in giù. Si auuerti però sopra tutto di sonar qual si sia botta, così ben distinta, e chiara, ch’ogni corda renda il suo vero effeto.

Dissonance in early Italian guitar books

Chord L

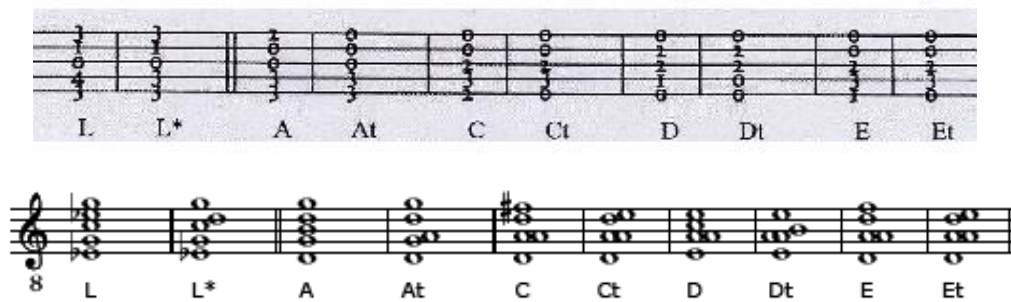
The basic sequence of *alfabeto* chords includes one, the C minor chord represented by the letter L, which is particularly awkward to play. A dissonant note “D” on the 2nd course was therefore often substituted for the E flat. (See Table 1 below). Other altered standard chords are found in some sources. Ruiz de Ribayaz for example includes a dissonant form of the G major chord in which the 5th course is left unfretted.¹³ Foscarini’s dissonant chord is used to introduce a passing note between two chords.

Lettere tagliate

Another kind of dissonant chord, in which one course (not necessarily the 5th) of a standard chord is left unfretted, is described in several collections of *alfabeto* music. These are referred to as *lettere tagliate*. In printed sources they are notated with a “t” following the letter, probably because the printers did not possess a font of “strike through” letters; in manuscript sources a slash is put through the letter. Although it is not entirely clear, the dissonant note seems to be a type of appoggiatura which resolves onto the complete chord. The clearest description is found in a relatively late source, Ricci’s “Scuola d’intavolatura” (1677). He includes four *lettere tagliate*

- At the 5th course is unfretted
- Ct the 1st course is unfretted
- Dt the 2nd course is unfretted
- Et the 1st course is unfretted

Table 1 – Chord L/Ricci’s Lettere Tagliate



Ricci explains that “They are called *lettere tagliate* because one course is left unfretted”.¹⁴ Although the *alfabeto* pieces in these books may seem trivial today, they

¹³ Ruiz de Ribayaz – *Luz y norte musical* (Madrid, 1677), p. 5. The chord is represented by the figure 1 in the Castilian notation he uses which is the equivalent of Chord A in *alfabeto*.

¹⁴ Ricci - *Delle lettere tagliate* – Si chiamo *lettere tagliate*, poiche si lascia di tasteggiare una corda.

would have formed the basis of elaborate improvisation which in the hands of an accomplished player would have sounded impressive.

The information which they contain highlights a practice of creating dissonance by leaving unfretted one course in a chord. This has implications when considering the dissonance found in more sophisticated sources.

The term *lettere tagliate* is also used to refer more generally to non-standard chords represented by symbols in other sources – not necessarily ones from which a course is omitted .

Alfabeto falso

Both Foscarini, and Corbetta in his 1639 book,¹⁵ include additional sequences of chords which they refer to as ***alfabeto dissonante*** and ***alfabeto falso*** respectively. Most of these are either chords needed to introduce a 4-3 suspension at a cadence or chords of the 7th but some of them have a different note in the treble and are used to create a continuous melodic line. Corbetta uses these only in his 1639 book. In his later books he notates all but the basic *alfabeto* chords in tablature.

La guitarre royale (1671)

“La Guitarre royale” was, as far as we know, the first of Corbetta’s guitar books to be notated in French tablature rather than in mixed tablature. Although it was printed in Paris, it is dedicated to the English king, Charles II and the music in it would have been composed when Corbetta was settled in England – something which is usually overlooked. It has prefaces in Italian and French which are not identical. Presumably Corbetta wrote the Italian preface himself; the French version is abbreviated and it is not possible to say whether the translation was made by Corbetta himself. From what he says in both prefaces it seems that he engraved the plates for the book himself. It is very untidy and there are numerous misprints. Because it is in French tablature, all the chords are notated in full rather than represented by *alfabeto* symbols. The Italian preface includes a table of *alfabeto* chords set out in French and Italian tablature, perhaps so that Italian players would more easily recognise the chord shapes. In the both prefaces Corbetta describes his notation in detail, giving examples in tablature. These clearly indicate that

- a. dots are placed on the lines to indicate which courses are to be omitted from strummed chords, whether open or stopped by the *barré*.

The purpose of the dots is described briefly in the French preface and examples of their use given in the accompanying tablature examples on p9. The relevant passage is

¹⁵ De gli Scherzi armonici (Milan, 1639).

omitted from the Italian preface although Corbetta has included an example of their use with the examples in Italian tablature on p.5 at the end of stave 7. This system of dots is never used with Italian tablature and Corbetta seems to have added them as an afterthought.

For a more detailed discussion of Corbetta's dots see Postscript below.

- b. wavy lines are drawn below the tablature stave to indicate when a *barré* is to be used, both for chordal passages, and for single melodic lines.

These are mentioned briefly in both prefaces and illustrated in both sets of tablature examples.

Corbetta does also indicate when open courses are to be included in strummed chords by placing "a"s on the line, if this might otherwise be unclear. In practice he is rather haphazard in the way that he actually notates the music. However since he had a system for indicating both when a *barré* should be used, and when courses should be omitted, there is no obvious reason why he should simultaneously be using a different method for this purpose – placing letters in the tablature which are not to be played - which he has not mentioned in the introduction. If he had such a system, one would expect him to use it in a similarly random way. Although he is not entirely consistent in the way he notates them, the dissonant chords are stereotypical and occur in specific contexts – usually at a cadence. However, it is possible that in some instances he has put in a letter on the fifth course unintentionally because the chord is played with a *barré*.

In his preface he also makes it clear that he expected his music to be played with a low octave string only on the 4th course, with the strings of the 5th course tuned in unison in the upper octave. This has some implications when considering the dissonance since most of the dissonant notes fall on the 5th course and will therefore sound only in the upper octave. Those on the 4th course will be doubled at the octave, but because of the way that the guitar is strung, the high octave string will tend to sound more prominently than the lower.

A few pieces from "La Guitarre royale" also survive in other sources. Of these, the Gallot manuscript¹⁶ and Antoine Carré's "Livre de pieces de guitarre" printed ca. 1677¹⁷ are of particular interest because they date from same period in Corbetta's career – the 1660s and 1670s. The Gallot manuscript is considered separately below. Of all his contemporaries, Carré is the person most obviously influenced by Corbetta, and certainly knew him personally. Two sarabandes from "La guitarre royale" are included in his 1677 book and some of the same dissonant chords occur in the other pieces –

¹⁶ GB:Ob Ms.Mus.Sch.C94

¹⁷ Carré - Livre de pieces de guitarre (ca.1677).

which may indeed be by Corbetta.¹⁸ Comparing these with Corbetta's own versions sheds some light on how one of his contemporaries viewed his dissonance.

In his dissertation Pinnell¹⁹ refers to two frequently used progressions which include what he refers to as "unwanted" notes; these result in what he feels is a "strident anticipation" of the key note. Both occur in conjunction with a perfect cadence. He suggests that as these "unwanted" notes occur in strummed chords which are preceded and followed by sonorities requiring the use of a *barré*, the notes on the 5th course are only included "for convenience" and should be omitted from the strum.

This begs the question – for whose convenience are they included?

It is not convenient for the player to have the score littered with superfluous letters and it would make the task of the engraver and printer needlessly complicated. It is usually obvious that a *barré* must be used, as the chords cannot be played otherwise and the "unwanted" notes do not always fall on the 5th course.

One of the progressions which Pinnell mentions is set out in the Mus.ex.2.

Mus. Ex.2 – Gigue, p.51, b. 32-34



All that Corbetta has done here is to double the suspended 4th in unison. The objection to this is academic (provided a low octave string is not being used on the 5th course). In theory the chord will be sustained whilst the note on the 3rd course resolves, but because the sustaining power of the guitar is limited, the whole chord effectively resolves onto the single leading note with the appoggiatura and trill. Whether the note on the 5th course spoils the downward resolution of the appoggiatura, as Pinnell claims, is a matter of personal taste. As Corbetta does this repeatedly, presumably he did not think so. There is no reason to omit the 5th course. The final chord is probably a misprint as Pinnell has assumed. The letter on the second course should be E flat – the chord is a C minor chord (K3 in *alfabeto*). Corbetta may however have notated it in this way

¹⁸ The prelude on p.1 is also from La Guitarre royale p. 67.

¹⁹ Pinnell, op. cit. p.226

because he intended an ascending appoggiatura to be played; he usually includes an ornament of some kind in final chords, and this is the only type which would be practical here. There is no reason why the 1st and 2nd courses should be omitted from the chord, as Eisenhardt has suggested.

A more ambiguous version of this cadential formula is illustrated in Mus.ex.3. Because of the way it is notated, it is not clear whether the 5th course should be included as the suspended 4th on the 3rd course resolves or in the following chord. The curved line - a *tenue* sign - indicates that the harmony should be sustained but the movement of the lowest part suggests that the B flat should be omitted from the third chord which is a 6/3 on F natural. Although Corbetta has not indicated it, the *barré* will be established in the previous bar so that there is no need to include the B flat if it is not to be played at least in the first chord.

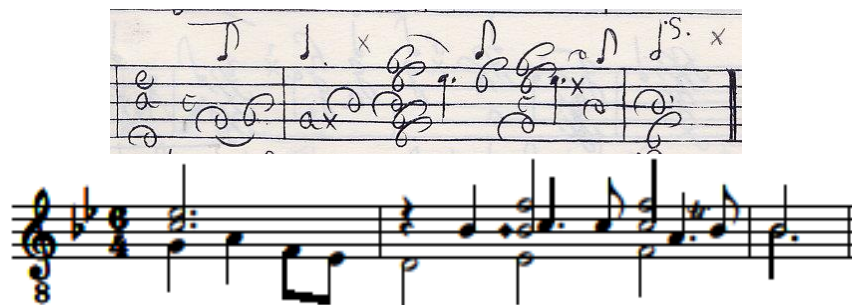
Mus. Ex. 3 - Prelude, p.54, b.11-13



Elsewhere it seems clear that the 4th may sound simultaneously with its resolution as shown in Mus.ex. 6 below.

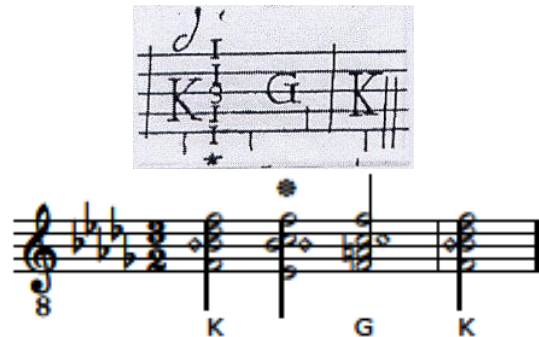
Corbetta often combines the double suspended 4th with what is in effect the dominant 7th in the lowest part combined with a 4-3 suspension as in Mus.ex.4.

Mus.Ex. 4 – Sarabande, p.48 b.22-24



The same progression is found in Mus.ex.5 from Bartolotti's "Libro primo".²⁰

Mus. Ex. 5 – Bartolotti, Libro primo, Passacaglia, p.1, b. 40.



In the progression illustrated in Pinnell's second example, Mus.ex.6 below, the suspended 4th does sound simultaneously with the 3rd of the chord onto which it should resolve, an occurrence not unknown in Italian music of the early seventeenth century.

Mus. Ex. 6 – Courante, p. 23, b. 25-27



Here the "unwanted" note falls on the 4th course, so that both the 4th and 5th courses would have to be omitted to eliminate it. However, a *barré* at the 5th fret will have been established at the beginning of the previous bar, well before the first 4-part chord in the example and it moves to the 3rd fret for the next two chords. Corbetta has indicated that the 5th course is to be omitted from all four chords by placing dots on the line. The line beneath the tablature indicates that the *barré* at the 3rd fret is to be held throughout the bar. There is no reason why Corbetta should have included the notes on the 4th and 5th courses in the final chord if they are not to be played. The correct note on the 4th course should be "G", stopped at the 5th fret; the "unwanted" note is there because the chord, represented by H3 in *alfabeto*, cannot be fully fretted if the ornament is to be played on the 1st course. Many of the dissonant chords occur in

²⁰ Bartolotti – Libro primo di chitarra spagnola (Florence, 1640).

conjunction with ornaments or auxiliary notes which make it impossible to fret the correct chords in full. There is a precedent for this kind of alteration in Chord L in the sequence of standard *alfabeto* chords described above. (See Table 1 above). The note “F” forms a pedal note on the key note sounding in both the treble and bass registers, which rather than resolving at the cadence sounds simultaneously with its resolution – an effect similar to the ellipsis found in some early Italian monody.

The same cadence occurs at the half way mark in the “Sarabande la Stuarde” on p.71. In the “Double” which follows, the chord has been reduced to three parts, leaving out the 3rd and 4th courses rather than the 4th and 5th, and it is intended to be plucked not strummed, as shown in Mus.ex.7a-b. The whole point of the Double is to create a contrast in texture which would be dissipated if the dissonance was omitted in the first version. These examples illustrate harmonic progressions which Corbetta uses throughout the book and in his other books.

Mus. Ex. 7a-b – Sarabande/Double, p. 71, b.11-12

a.



b.



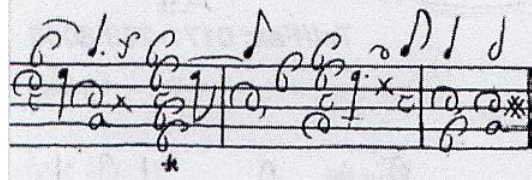
A less acceptable (to modern ears) version of this progression occurs when the suspended 4th sounds simultaneously with its resolution when combined with the dominant 7th as in Mus.ex.8a-b. This Sarabande is also included by Carré. Corbetta has indicated that the chord is to be strummed, but in Carré’s version the chord has been reduced to two parts to be plucked. The only “unwanted” note here is on the 5th course; there is no reason why the 1st and 2nd courses should also be omitted. It is absurd to suggest – as Eisenhardt has done²¹ – that Corbetta has included three

²¹ Eisenhardt -Dissonance and battuto, a hidden practice...in Lute : the journal of the Lute Society. Vol. XLVII, 2007, p.50.

superfluous letters in the chord in order to indicate that it should be played with a *barré*. Corbetta uses the same chord placed at the 3rd fret in b.17 of the piece and Carré has reproduced this unaltered.

Mus. Ex. 8a-b – Sarabande, p.65, b. 8-10/Carré, p.17, b. 8-10

a. Corbetta



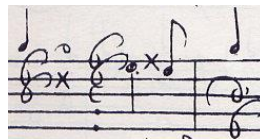
b. Carré



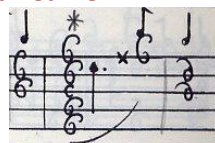
Corbetta himself offers a different alternative. In the other Sarabande which Carré has purloined (“La Guitarre royale”, p. 8/Carré, p.54, b.5-6), he has notated the dissonant form of the chord, whereas Corbetta has omitted the 4th and 5th courses as in Mus.ex.8c-d. The variants imply nothing more than that the two men did not always play the music in the same way.

Mus.ex.8c-d – Sarabande p. 8/Carré p.54, b.5-6

c. Corbetta



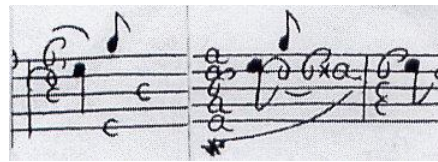
d. Carré





This particular dissonant chord is another of Corbetta's standards. In the "Gavotte aymée du Duc de Monmouth", p.12, there is a clearly notated example of it with open courses, as in Mus.ex.9.

Mus. Ex. 9 – Gavotte, p. 12, b. 6-7



The Sarabande on p.56 is followed by a short Passacaille which is intended to be played as an interlude before the Sarabande is played a second time. The Passacaille consists of two sections each four bars long. The first section is a sequence of strummed chords, including several dissonances; the second is a single melodic line ending with a simple cadence. Clearly there is intended to be a contrast between the two sections. Eisenhardt however proposes that in the first section, not only the dissonant chords, but also those which will be six-fours, should be reduced to three or four parts. According to his theory there are twelve "unwanted" notes in four bars of music. Corbetta has made it clear that a *barré* is to be used for the first bar and the 5th course omitted from the first chord. There is no justification for omitting the 4th course as well simply because the chord will be a six-four. Common sense suggests that if Corbetta intended the rest of the passage to be in three parts he would have left the fourth and fifth lines blank; it is self evident that a *barré* must be used throughout and it is in nobody's interest to clutter up the score with so many superfluous letters.

As can be seen in Mus.ex.10, the passing notes and appoggiaturas form a clear melodic line. Without a low octave string on the 5th course, the dissonant notes will be heard only in the upper octave so that the notes form tone clusters rather like the extremely dissonant chords found in some of Scarlatti's keyboard sonatas which are sometimes referred to (rightly or wrongly) as *acciaccature*.

Mus. Ex. 10 – Passacaille, p. 56, b. 1-4



On paper the passage looks bizarre. However when played on the guitar, because of the ambiguous instrument of the guitar it is quite effective .

The passage includes three chord shapes which Corbetta uses frequently.

The first of these is a *barré* across the upper four or all five courses with no additional fretted notes - marked (a) in example. The strings of the guitar omitting the 5th course produce a minor 7th chord with the 7th on the 4th course, as in the opening chord here. This is a very common chord in guitar sources which is resolved in various ways. It occurs with open courses as well as with a *barré*. Including the 5th course which is dissonant may seem odd, but it actually sounds effective and may be regarded as idiomatic to the guitar. Corbetta sometimes uses the chord independently of other chords played with a *barré* as in Mus.ex.11.

Mus. Ex. 11 - Gigue, p.34, b.15-17.



The *barré* has been established in the preceding bar and Corbetta has put in the line below the staff to indicate this. There is no logical reason why he should have included the notes on the 4th and 5th courses if what he intended was a 3-part chord. An

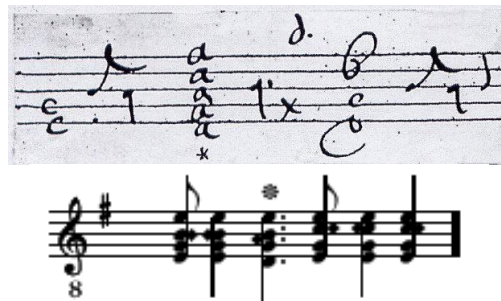
interesting example of this chord shape is found in an unmeasured Toccata in Granata's "Nvovi sovavi concerti" (1680)²² where the dissonant notes resolve upwards.

Mus. Ex. 12 – Granata (1680), p. 2, Toccata, p. 4 stave 2



The manuscript F:Pn F.C.Ms.R.1402 includes seven pieces – four Sarabandes, two Passacailles and a Vacas - which feature a 5-part chord comprising all five open courses; the chord occurs twelve times in all and is therefore unlikely to be an error. Although the manuscript is in French tablature, the music is intended to be strummed. Many of the pieces are of Spanish provenance. Perhaps these were some of the pieces Scarlatti heard in Spain!

Mus. Ex. 13 – F:Pn. Ms. Rés.1402, Passacaille espagnol, p.112, opening bars



The chords marked (b) in Mus. Ex. 10 above are a dissonant form of chord N. The note on the 5th course is the 9th of the chord. Like chord L, Chord N is awkward to play because it involves a wide stretch and the fifth course is fretted with the 2nd finger. The 5th course was therefore sometimes omitted.²³ (See Table 2). In this instance the 5th course cannot be fretted because of the appoggiatura on the first chord and the single note following the second. It is possible that the note on the 5th course has been included in error. However the chord does occur in two other pieces, both of which are

²² Granata – Nvovi sovavi concerti (Bologna, 1680).

²³ Without a bourdon on the 5th course, Chord N will sound the same whether or not the 5th course is included.

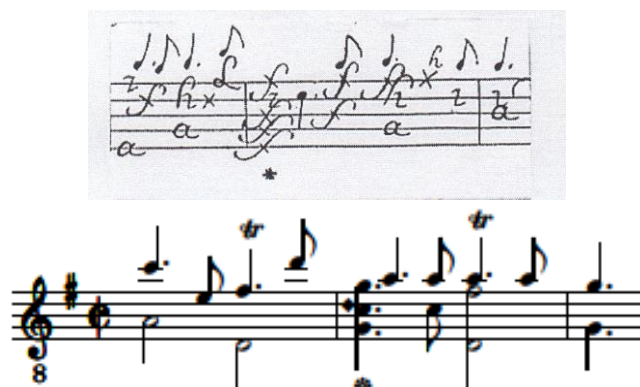
characterised by unusual dissonance – the Passacaille (p. 18), and Tanbour de Suisse (p.78). It may have been regarded as acceptable when strumming.²⁴ In Tanbour de Suisse, the 7th is introduced as a passing note on the 1st course which makes it impossible to fret the correct note on the 5th course. Corbetta has omitted the 5th course the third time around just to confound us all!

Mus. Ex. 14 – Tanbour de Suisse, p.77, b. 24-26



The chord marked (c) immediately preceding the cadence in Mus. Ex. 10, is a minor 7th chord on the second degree of the scale. The 7th is doubled on the 4th course and the dissonant note on the 5th course anticipates not the key note, but the root of the dominant which follows it. This often occurs in circumstances where a full bar would be unnecessary if the 4th and 5th courses were omitted. In Mus.ex.15 it would be more convenient to use a half *barré* as the chord is preceded and followed by the open 4th course.

Mus. Ex. 15 – Prelude, p.59, b. 16-18.



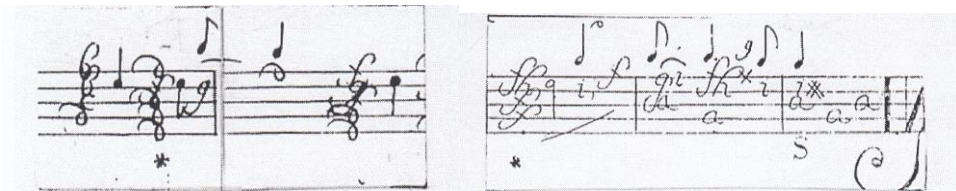
²⁴ The same chord shape occurs in the “Tanbour de France Fifre” in La Guitarre royale (1674), p.2. This forms part of a longer piece for 2 guitars commemorating the taking of Maastricht by the French in 1673. This features some extremely dissonant chords which are probably intended to depict the chaos of war.

In some instances leaving out the 5th course may subtly alter nature of the harmonic progression. In Mus.ex.16a the chord in the extract from the Allemande is a dominant 7th with an “unwanted” note on the 4th course; omitting both the 4th and 5th courses will convert the chord to a diminished triad on the leading note. Corbetta has done just that at the end of the Sarabande to create a different effect. (Mus.ex.16b). The dot on the 5th course indicates that it should be omitted; the note on the 4th course should be included. Leaving out courses can have implications beyond the elimination of “unwanted” notes.

Mus. Ex. 16 – Allemande, p.54, b.24-24/Sarabande, p.56, b. 27-28

a.

b.



The same progression occurs three times in a Sarabande in Grenerin’s “Livre de gitarre”.²⁵ In the Mus.ex.17 the 5th course is omitted from the chord on the upbeat but the dissonant note is included in all three chords.

Mus. Ex. 17 – Grenerin, Sarabande p.48, b. 3-5



²⁵ Grenerin – Livre de gitarre (Paris, 1680).

There are two further instances where the dissonance occurs because the correct chord cannot be fully fretted. In Mus.ex.18 – a catch phrase which Corbetta is rather fond of - the correct chord should be K3; the 4th course should be fretted at the 5th fret with the 3rd finger. (Table 2). This does not leave a finger free for the passing notes inserted between the chords so it is left unfretted. As Corbetta has indicated that the 5th course is to be omitted from the next chord, once again there is no reason why he should have included the letters on the 4th and 5th courses if they are not to be played.

Mus. Ex. 18 – Allemande, p. 63, b. 8-10



The chord in Mus.ex.19 does not have an *alfabeto* symbol although it can be regarded as a variant of Chord P with a different note in the treble. (Table 2). It occurs frequently throughout the book and illustrates a similar problem. The 5th course should be fretted at the 5th fret to supply the correct note; this is impossible because of the appoggiatura on the 1st course.

Mus. Ex. 19 – Gigue 2, p.57, b.10-13.



The *barré* has been established in the first bar of the example and Corbetta has omitted the 5th course from the chord in the next bar although he could have included it as it would simply double the dominant 7th on the 3rd course in unison. He has also

indicated that the 5th course should be omitted from the following chord by placing a dot on the line. The dissonance is therefore probably intentional; the dissonant note could however be omitted when the chord is repeated on the upbeat. As with chord N, the dissonance may have been acceptable when strumming. The chord does also occur occasionally with the 5th course omitted.

The same progression is found in the unmeasured Pasaglio by Granata.

Mus. Ex. 20 – Granata (1680), Pasaglio, p.14, stave 3



Table 2 – Corbetta’s altered chords

Leaving aside the chords which are idiomatic to the guitar, Corbetta’s dissonance is quite straight forward and can be summarized as follows -

- a. The dissonant 4th and 7th are often doubled in 5-part chords. This is unavoidable because the notes of the chord have to be distributed across the fingerboard in a

way that they can conveniently be played. This is quite common in other 5-course guitar sources.

- b. The dissonant 4th often sounds simultaneously with the 3rd on to which it resolves. This is a characteristic of 17th century music more generally.
- c. Anticipation of the keynote at cadences is pervasive. This is also characteristic of the period – epitomised in the 4-3 suspension, trills which start with the upper auxiliary note and the short upbeat note which sometimes precedes the final chord.

Corbetta would not have thought of the music in these terms or used modern terminology to justify it. He would have done instinctively what was practical and sounded effective on his instrument. The standard *alfabeto* chords and their variants form the bedrock of his music. Because most of the dissonance occurs in conjunction with passage work the underlying harmony is often ambiguous. It is this ambiguity which makes the music endlessly fascinating.

GB:Ob Ms.Mus.Sch.C94 – “Pieces de guitarrre de differends auteurs recueillis par Henry François de Gallot”

The Gallot manuscript is a complex document which consists of two separate manuscripts, a large one bound inside a smaller one. The title page indicates that it was copied for Gallot by his servant, a certain Monnier. Although the manuscript is dated Nantes, 18th September 1661, the manuscript must have been copied over a period of time as some pieces are individually dated much later. The larger manuscript includes nearly all the pieces from Corbetta’s “*Varii capricii*” (1643), and a substantial number from his “*Varii scherzi*” (1648). Although these have been transcribed into French tablature they adhere closely to the printed versions, reproducing Corbetta’s dissonance unaltered.²⁶

In addition the manuscript includes six pieces from “*La Guitarrre royale*” in versions which may have originated before they were included in the printed book.

The music in “*La Guitarrre royale*” was composed over a considerable period of time. It includes an Allemande commemorating the death of the Duke of Gloucester, Charles II’s youngest brother, who died in 1660 and another commemorating the death of his sister, Madame d’Orleans, in 1670. Some of the pieces may have circulated in manuscript before they appeared in print. In a letter to his sister dated 1665 Charles II mentions that he is sending her some of Corbetta’s pieces and will send more as he composes them.

²⁶ The smaller manuscript also includes pieces from Corbetta’s *La Guitarrre royale* (Paris, 1674).

The concordances are as follows

	Corbetta	Gallot
Allemande du Roy	p.1	f.58v
Allemande sur la mort du duc de Gloucester	p.7	f.56v
Sarabande	p.8	f.57
Allemande faite sur l'Emprisonnement Du Duc de Bouquingam	p.13	f.98v
Sarabande la Victoire	p.30	f.60
Sarabande la Stuarde	p.71	f.37v

Four pieces are clearly associated with individuals at the Restoration Court in the 1660s. In 1666 the Duke of Buckingham was involved in the notorious divorce case of Lady Anne Roos and was sent to the Tower after a fight with Lord Dorchester during which Dorchester's periwig was pulled off and Buckingham had a handful of hair pulled out. La Stuarde probably refers to Francis Teresa Stuart, known as "La Belle Stuart", one of the few women that Charles II failed to seduce.

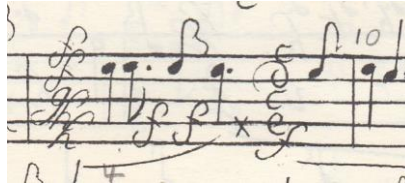
The two sources cannot be compared in detail here but there are many obvious differences.

- In the "Allemande du Roy" and "Allemande...du Duc de Bouquingam" Gallot has halved the note values fitting two bars into one.
- Two bars are omitted from the second half of the "Allemande...du duc de Gloucester" and the closing bars are different.
- In the Sarabande (p.8/f.57) Gallot has ignored the anacrusis so that the dotted crotchet falls on the first beat of the bar; the second half of the piece varies considerably from the printed version.
- The "Sarabande la Stuarde" does not include the Double, but Gallot has reduced several of the standard 5-part chords to three parts.

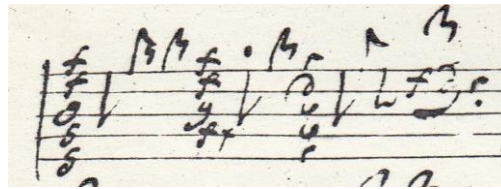
In places the music has been simplified. Throughout the "Allemande du Duc de Bouquingam" Gallot has left out the 5th course from chord N, presumably because it is easier to play that way, although Corbetta has included it. There are some places where the underlying harmony has been altered – not always for the better. In Mus.ex.21 from "Allemande du Roy" (La Guitarre royale p.1, b.9-10/ Gallot f.58v, b.5) a B minor chord, which is easier to play, has been substituted for Corbetta's D major chord.

Mus.ex.21 – Allemande, p.1, b.9-10/Gallot f.58v, b. 5

a. Corbetta



b. Gallot



In the original this version of the D major chord is the one represented by the symbol “&” in *alfabeto* - played at the 2nd fret. After chord L, this chord is the most awkward to play if the 5th course is included as this is fretted with the little finger. Gallot invariably leaves out the 5th course whenever this particular chord occurs, or substitutes a simpler chord. (Table 2).

Because some of the dissonant chords have been altered, Eisenhardt has suggested that this “uncover[s] a practice of strumming where the right hand does not always play all the courses which are suggested by the left hand fingering and that this raises the question as to which letters in the pieces in “La Guitarre royale” are only there for reasons of fingering.” However it is just as likely that Gallot eliminated the dissonance because he disliked it, rather than because he had the key to Corbetta’s secret system of notation. Rather than omitting courses from strummed chords, he often eliminates them altogether, reducing the music to 2 or 3 parts to be played in lute style. At the middle cadence in the “Sarabande la Stuarde” illustrated in Mus. Ex.6 above, he has

substituted the 3-part plucked chord from the Double for the strummed dissonant chord, rather than omitted the 4th and 5th courses.

The progression illustrated in Mus. Ex. 7 above also occurs in the “Allemande...du duc de Glocester” at bar 12 and like Carré, Gallot has reduced it to two parts to be plucked rather than strummed. If Corbetta was in the habit of not only including superfluous letters in the tablature, but also of indicating that the chords were to be strummed when he intended the music to be reduced to 2 or 3-part counterpoint and played in lute style he was perverse indeed! Gallot does not omit the note on the 5th course when this simply duplicates the suspended 4th as in Mus. Ex. 1 above. Whether by accident or design he or his copiest has introduced some unusual dissonance of his own!

As a general rule, unless a manuscript has a proven connection with the composer himself, variations in the text can only be regarded as a matter of personal preference on the part of the compiler. Players often learnt pieces by ear and later wrote out a rough sketch as an *aide memoire*. Because of the way that music circulated in the 17th century, pieces often survive in different versions. Although some of the variant readings may have originated with Corbetta, Gallot’s versions cannot be regarded as more authoritative than those which Corbetta himself prepared for printing. There are obvious errors in many of the other pieces in the manuscript.

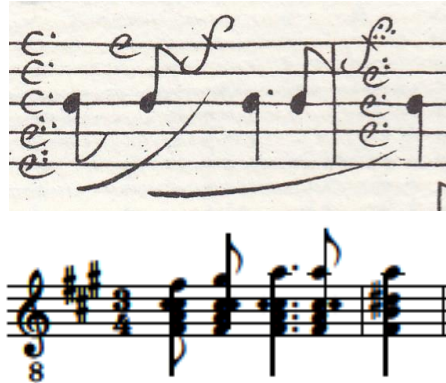
Corbetta’s six-four chords

As a corollary to his theory about Corbetta’s dissonance and the method of stringing he preferred, Eisenhardt has suggested that Corbetta also includes letters on the 5th course when notating standard *alfabeto* chords which will be six-four chords although these are not intended to be played. Because six-fours were regarded as dissonant in the 17th century, the 5th course should also be omitted from the strum.²⁷ It is difficult to follow the logic of this argument. As we have seen in Foscarini’s Tables, two of the chords which will be six-fours with octave stringing, the standard E major and E minor chords (F and + in *alfabeto*) are not played with a *barré* but have the 5th of the chord on the 5th course stopped at the 2nd fret, and the standard F major and F minor chords (G and P in *alfabeto*), although played with a *barré*, have the 5th course fretted at the 3rd fret with the 3rd finger. There is no reason why Corbetta should have

²⁷ Theorists of the period disagreed as to whether the interval of the 4th from the bass was a dissonance. Doisi de Velasco surveys some of the arguments in “Nuevo modo de cifra” (ca. 1640). Although he considered octave stringing preferable when accompanying a bass line (he says nothing about solo music) he also says (p.16) “Whichever way [the guitar] is strung, some chords will have 4ths between the lowest voices [i.e. will be six-four chords]. This will not matter when they are played *rasgado* (...Que aun que de una, o de otra manera no se libran algunas consonancias de las quartas en las bozes bajas, esto se puedo suplir, quando se tañen de rasgado) implying that when the chords are strummed the inversions are acceptable. In his tables of chords he includes the standard *alfabeto* chords as an option for the initial root position chords regardless of their inversions, although he offers alternatives with the root as the lowest note when the standard chord is either in 1st or 2nd inversion.

gone to the trouble of including the letter on the 5th course in these chords - which he does - if the note is not to be played. In his 1674 book he occasionally gives the left-hand fingering using the same system of dots as Foscari. Specifically he gives the alternative fingering for chord P, fretting the 5th course with the 2nd finger and the 4th course with the 3rd when it is necessary to free the 4th finger for a passing note as in Mus.ex.22.

Mus.ex.22 – La Guitarre royale (1674) – Passacaille, p. 56, b.25-6



There would be no point in this if the notes on the fifth course were to be omitted. He also sometimes indicates that the open 5th course (A) should be included in a D major chord which would make it a six-four. Without octave stringing on the 5th course these chords will all be in root position. Corbetta often omits 5th course from the standard F major chord because it is necessary to re-finger it to accommodate auxiliary notes.

Conclusion

How do we decide whether the dissonance in Corbetta's music, and that of some of his contemporaries, is so uncharacteristic of the period that it cannot be accepted at face value? Comparing the repertoire with that of other instruments such as the lute or keyboard is only helpful in so far as it confirms that experimenting with dissonance was a preoccupation of 17th century composers, particularly in the earlier part century when different instruments began develop repertoires which reflected their individual characteristics. The guitar occupied a niche in society which set it apart from more formal music making. As a 5-course instrument, it could do some things – strumming and playing elaborately ornamented melodic lines - which are less effective on more "main stream" instruments. It was popular because it was different from the lute, not because it was a poor substitute for it. On the other hand it is clear that many people disliked the guitar and this is probably because there is something inherently unsatisfactory about the instrument and its music.

There was a standard method of indicating left hand fingering used by both guitarists (including Corbetta himself) and lutenists, and Corbetta has devised a simple way of

indicating when a *barré* should be used. It is impossible to prove that he did not also have a secret notational device for this purpose, but he had no need of one, unless he set out to deliberately to confuse anyone who tried to play his music. This does raise one other question – how seriously did he intend the dissonance to be taken? The music in “La Guitarre royale” was composed whilst he was based at the court of Charles II which was notorious for its decadence. It may have been his intention to amuse or shock his audience, or simply to attract their attention when he was playing as they probably did not sit listening in silence as we do today! If this was so he may sometimes have left out some of the dissonance. He would not have played his own music from the printed book and would probably never have played it the same way twice. Whether or not he cared about the way in which his music was played, once it had appeared in print he had no way of preventing people from playing it in any way they liked, or even from re-printing it unattributed as Carré has done.

It is a widely held view that we can prove that the composer preferred one method of stringing rather than another, and that by editing out anything which we dislike, we can create a “definitive” version of the music. The problem with this idea is that everyone who analyses the music arrives at a different conclusion because they start with a different set of priorities. Most baroque guitar music is not intabulated in such a way that one method of stringing is clearly intended and ironing out its idiosyncracies is not as easy as is often suggested. Arguments about whether the music conforms to rules of music theory, whatever these may be, miss the point – there is no reason why it should. Today more importance seems to be attached to how the music looks on paper, than to how it sounds when played, as it would have been, with the guitar strung with plain gut. What we have is a framework which can be interpreted in a number of ways. Perhaps the time has come to admit that what we are really arguing about is our own personal preferences.

All musical examples are transcribed with notes on the 5th course only in the upper octave. In chords where the note on the 5th course duplicates a note on one of the upper courses in unison it is shown with a lozenge shaped head as far as possible (It is not always practical to do this with the soft ware being used). Notes on the 4th course are transcribed in the upper or lower octave, occasionally in both, depending on the context.

Postscript

Corbetta’s Dots

As we have already noted Corbetta sometimes places dots on the tablature lines to indicate courses that should be omitted from strummed chords. In the French preface he comments as follows

Esuitez [i.e. Et suivez] le plus que uous pourrez les points marquez ainsi [illustration] que uous uerrez sur les cordes, afin desuiter les dissonances, et choisissez avec le pouce les lettres precisement noties;



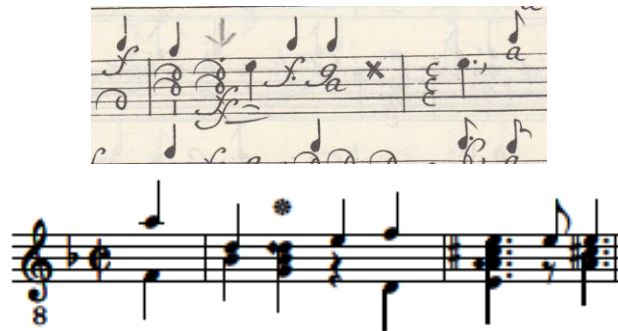
Follow as much as you can the dots marked thus which you will see on the strings so that you avoid the dissonances, and choose with the thumb precisely the letters notated;

In the Italian preface he has not mentioned them at all although they are illustrated at the end of the seventh tablature line of examples on p.5.

Corbetta has not said that they are only used to indicate open courses which are to be omitted; what he says may apply equally to courses whether stopped or open.

As a matter of interest De Visée also uses dots to indicate that the first course should be omitted for melodic reasons. In Mus.ex.23 from the Allemande on p. 18-19 of "Livre de guitarre (1682) he has indicated the first course should be omitted from Chord H3. It will be stopped by the *barré* at the third fret and is not dissonant.

Mus.ex. 23 – De Visée (1682), Allemande p. 18-19



Having overlooked the dots in his previous writings, Eisenhardt has now devoted a section of Chapter 7 in his recent book²⁸ trying to prove that Corbetta had some other purpose in using them; it is not entirely clear what this purpose might be.²⁹

He argues that in at least **some** of the chords, **some** of the time, the **open** fifth course will not be dissonant.

²⁸ Lex Eisenhardt – Italian guitar music of the seventeenth century. University of Rochester Press, 2015, p. 164-6.

²⁹ He has not mentioned that Corbetta had a perfectly good way of indicating when a barré should be used – a wavy line under the tablature stave.

This may be the case, but in practice whether the fifth course is included in the strum or not, **it will still be stopped with the barré unless the barré is placed across only four courses.** This is an unnecessary complication especially as it would occur in some placements of some of the chords but not others.

In Example 7.18 on p.167 Eisenhardt gives examples of Chords N and & with the fifth course omitted and the open course included. What he has illustrated in this example is irrelevant; he has wrongly assumed that Corbetta is referring only to open courses.

The first of his examples is Chord N2 which is an A major chord. This is played with a *barré* at the second fret and the fifth course should be stopped at the fourth fret with the second finger; if the fifth course is left unfretted it will sound **B natural not A natural.**

Exactly the same thing applies to his second example of Chord &5, an F major chord. If the fifth course is unfretted it will sound the note **D instead of F.**

The third example is of Chord N7 which is another D major chord; the note on the fifth course will be **E not A.**

Mus.ex.24 – 3 Variants of Chords N2, &5 and N7



The other chords which are often reduced to four instead of five notes are Chords G and Chord P.

What Eisenhardt has not pointed out is that omitting the fifth course from all these chords simplifies the left hand fingering and this is often essential to accommodate passing notes and ornamentation.

After Chord L, Chord & is the most awkward to finger because the fifth course is stopped with the fourth finger. Corbetta has not even included it in his *alfabeto* table on p. 5 although he does sometimes write it out in full in tablature.³⁰

In Chord N the note on the fifth course is fretted with the second finger. It must be left unfretted if passing notes are to be included.

³⁰ He has not included in the table in his 1648 book either.

Chords G and P without the fifth course are the equivalent of Bartolotti's *lettere tagliate* and are used in the same way – to introduce passing notes and suspensions.

Chord G is played with a *barré*. The fifth course is stopped with the 3rd finger, the fourth course with the 4th finger and third course with the 2nd finger. By leaving out the fifth course it is possible to re-finger the chord, using the 3rd finger on the fourth course, freeing the 4th finger. The fifth course will still be stopped with the *barré*.

Chord P is also played with a *barré*; the fifth course is usually stopped with the 3rd finger, the fourth course with the 4th finger. It is however possible to re-finger it using the 2nd and 3rd fingers so that the 4th finger is free; the chord can then usually be sustained whilst most auxiliary notes are played. Any which way the fifth course will still be stopped with the *barré*.

The fact that these chords are not always combined with passage work does not invalidate this explanation. The more convenient form gradually takes precedence over less convenient form. Because the four-part chords are more useful this form becomes standard. Corbetta and Bartolotti may have been accomplished players but there is no reason why they should have gone to a lot of trouble to include notes on the fifth course when there is nothing to be gained by doing so.

Eisenhardt observes that Chords N and G often appear as dotless four-part chords “to which the open fifth course can be added with little consequence for the harmony. In these situations **the dot would give ambiguous information** as it can be understood as an indication that the right hand should omit the fifth course, **but also that the placement of a finger of the left hand (belonging to a former *alfabeto* chord) is redundant”(!)**

This is disingenious. Corbetta has clearly stated in his introduction what the dots are there for. There is no reason to assume that they have any other purpose.³¹

³¹ Eisenhardt's comment on Doisi de Velasco (p.166) is equally disingenious and irrelevant. Doisi explains the purpose of the x in his notation as follows –

In tablature notation with which playing in punteado style is generally shown, it is usual to put a zero on the string which has to be played open, and no sign on that string which is not to be played at all. However it has not been possible to follow this general rule because when playing chords in their more accurate form it is necessary in some of them not to pluck a string even though it may be stopped. Thus the string on which there is an x will not be played, even though some finger may be stopping it. And that string which does not have it [an x] or any other number, is played open.

(En la cifra con que generalmente se enseña a tañer por punteado se usa poner un çero en la cuerda, que se a de tocar en vano, y en la que no sea tocar, ninguna señal. Mas como en el modo de tañer por consonancias, para su mayor perfeccion conviene en algunas no tocar alguna cuerda aunque se pise, no he podido seguir esta Regla general. Y asi en la cuerda, que estuviere, una, x, no se tocara, aunque de algun dedo sea pisada, y la que no la tuviere, ni otro qualquier numero, se tocarà en vano). Nuevo modo de cifra, p.35.

Eisenhardt also observes that chords N, G, P and &

“sometimes have dots and sometimes do not, and presumably Corbetta was not completely convinced of the necessity of providing information of this kind. It shows his **indecision** with respect to the notation of battuto chords **in general** which is often far from accurate”.

It shows no such thing. What it shows is **not** that Corbetta had not made up his mind which notes should be included in the chords; this is usually a matter of common sense, dots or no dots. It shows that he is **inconsistent in the way he uses his system of dots to indicate which courses should be omitted**. Most the time he simply does not bother to put them in at all because they are not really necessary. His notation of battuto chords is reasonably accurate and in most cases represents his intentions quite clearly.

Turning to chords K and H Eisenhardt observes that these are treated differently in so far as Corbetta never uses dots to indicate that the fifth course should be omitted. He then remarks

“A possible explanation for the different treatment of K and H could be that these two chords require the fifth course to be fingered with a *barré*, a *quantité négligeable* ...It has a function comparable to the nut in first position”.

But this is equally true of the other chords. The *barré* does not cease to act as a nut in Chords N, &, G and P just because the fifth course is stopped at another fret above it.

The point about Chord K is that it cannot accommodate passing notes at all even if the fifth course is omitted; the fingering cannot be altered. Chord H can sometimes do so without omitting the fifth course. However both K and H are regularly used with the fourth course unfretted so that passing notes can be introduced in a progression which is characteristic of Corbetta’s style. The fourth course cannot be omitted if the chord is strummed; this results in a dissonance which is clearly intentional as illustrated above.

There is no possible reason why Corbetta should regularly notate these two chords as five-part chords if three- part chords are what is intended. And if the fourth and fifth courses are omitted they can be played with a half *barré*. There is no need for any *quantité négligeable*. This is true of the other chords as well.

Corbetta does often reduce the chords to only three notes. But this is because they are being used in the context of three part writing in which the dots are not really necessary. If he intended his music to be reduced to bland, sometimes inept, three-part counterpoint throughout he could have written out all the chords in this way.

Eisenhardt (p.169) concludes by observing

“First, open courses that are not indicated may have to be included in strummed chords for reasons of harmony or voice leading....Second in the case of the *barré* notation of Corbetta (...and others.....) simplification of what is notated...may be called for. Thus, the **inaccurate** notational practice of the seventeenth-century guitarist gives rise to persistent uncertainty about how the music should be played”.

The problem with baroque guitar notation is that it is **abbreviated** not that it is **inaccurate**. To suggest that Corbetta has included literally hundreds of letters in the tablature which are not to be played and serve only as an indication of left hand fingering; that Corbetta has deliberately misused tablature notation to write out his music in a way that makes no sense, flies in the face of all reason. An ill-considered remark in a dissertation written forty years ago, when much less was known about the baroque guitar, has been made the basis of an elaborate fantasy.

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