

## 6. Pietro Millioni

### Introduction

Pietro Millioni's little "teach yourself" guitar books seem to have put everyone else in the shade. They were reprinted and plagiarized throughout the seventeenth and into the eighteenth centuries.

The earliest surviving version of his work is the **Quarta impressione del primo, secondo, et terzo libro d'intavolatura** printed in Rome by Guglielmo Facciotti in 1627. The title indicates that this is the fourth reprint of his first, second and third books.

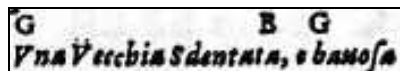
The title page reads as follows

*Fourth printing of the first, second and third book of tablature with which anyone will be able to teach himself to play the Spanish guitar, to tune it, play trilli and repicci and also to transpose pieces from one key to another; by Pietro Millioni, newly published by the same.*

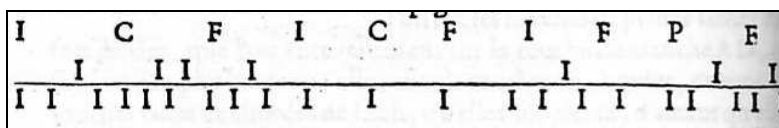
Presumably there had been three earlier printings of this compilation and the three books were probably printed as separate items even earlier. Mersenne refers to a book which he says was printed in 1624, mentioning that it includes a chanson "Una Vecchia s'dentata e bassosa" on p. 61 and a Galliard on p. 20, both of which he reproduces.

#### Mersenne/Millioni

#### Lyrics with *alfabeto*



#### Gaillarde



These are not included in the surviving compilation which probably includes only a selection of pieces from the earlier books. In the same year, 1627, two more collections of pieces for guitar were printed in Rome by Guglielmo Facciotti - **Seconda impressione del quarto libro d'intavolatura di chitarra spagnola** and **Prima impressione del quinto libro d'intavolatura di chitarra spagnola**. The latter has a dedication to Il Signor Lodovico Aragazio dated 22 January 1627. Mersenne's *Gaillarde* is included in

**Quarto libro** Book 4 on p. 17. In Millionsi's version the penultimate Chord P is correctly represented as P2 [F sharp minor rather than F minor]; it is impossible to say whether Mersenne has made a mistake when reproducing the piece or whether it was printed wrongly in his source. None of these three books has been published in facsimile. Millionsi also compiled at least one collection of lyrics with *alfabeto* - **Prima scielta di villanelle** – which was printed by Facciotti in 1627 and is dedicated to Cavaliere Baldassar De Nobili.

## Millionsi's Instructions to the Player

Without any preliminaries Millionsi starts by explaining his *alfabeto* table of chords. These are set out on the following page in Italian tablature, starting with +, followed by A-P. These are the same as Colonna. [As a matter of interest in the copy in the Bibliothèque nationale de France the chords have apparently been re-written by hand in French tablature].

### Instructions

*Anyone wishing to learn the guitar needs to learn the tablature which follows. This consists of [upper case] letters and beneath them you will see 5 lines representing the courses of the guitar. On the lines are numbers which represent frets and beside them dots indicating the fingers to be used to stop the strings.*

### Millionsi's table of *alfabeto* chords [from *Quarto Libro* ]

4																	
		A	A <sub>t</sub>	B	B <sub>3</sub>	C	C <sub>5</sub>	D	D <sub>t</sub>								
5	2..	1.	o	3...	3...	o	o	o	o								
4	2...	o	o	2..	2..	o	o	2..	2..								
3	o	o	o	o	o	2.	2.	2..	2..								
2	o	3...	3...	1.	1.	3...	3...	1.	o								
1	o	3...	3...	o	3...	2..	5...	o	o								
		E	F	G	G <sub>3</sub>	G <sub>5</sub>	H	H <sub>2</sub>	H <sub>3</sub>	H <sub>5</sub>							
5	o	1.	3...	5...	7...	1.	2.	3.	5.								
4	o	2..	3...	5...	7...	3..	4..	5..	7..								
3	2..	1.	3..	4..	6..	3...	4...	5...	7...								
2	3...	o	1.	3.	5.	3...	4...	5...	7...								
1	1.	o	1.	3.	5.	1.	2.	3.	5.								
		I	K	K <sub>2</sub>	K <sub>4</sub>	k <sub>5</sub>	L	M	M <sub>2</sub>	M <sub>3</sub>							
5	o	1.	2.	4.	5.	3..	1.	2.	3.								
4	2.	3...	4..	6..	7...	1.	1.	2.	3.								
3	2.	3...	4...	6...	7...	o	3.	4.	5.								
2	2..	2..	3..	5..	6..	3...	4...	5...	6...								
1	o	1.	2.	4.	5.	3...	3...	4...	5...								
		M <sub>5</sub>	N	N <sub>2</sub>	N <sub>3</sub>	N <sub>5</sub>	O	P	P <sub>2</sub>	P <sub>5</sub>							
5	5.	3..	4..	5..	7..	1.	2...	4..	7..								
4	5.	1.	2.	3.	5.	o	3...	4...	7...								
3	7..	1.	2.	3.	5.	o	1.	2.	5.								
2	8...	1.	2.	3.	5.	3...	1.	2.	5.								
1	7..	4...	5...	6...	8...	3...	1.	2.	5.								

Instead of using all the letters in the alphabet, those from **Q** onwards began to be discarded. This is because they are the same as other chords played with a *barré* earlier in the sequence but placed at a higher fret. So the same letter could be used with a number above to indicate the fret. Fewer to remember!

## Left hand fingering

Millioni's book is the earliest surviving Italian printed source to indicate the left-hand fingering of the chords using dots – a single dot for the first finger, two for the second, three for the third and four for the little finger.

*Note that when a single dot is found this indicates the first finger, which is called the index finger; that is to say the one next the thumb, commonly called the large finger. When there are two dots they indicate the second finger, which is the middle finger. When there are three dots they indicate the third finger called the ring finger. And when there are four, they indicate the fourth finger, which is commonly called the little finger.*

He then explains two of the chords in detail - + and **A**.

### Chord +

*For Chord + there are two 2s, one on the fourth course with 3 dots where the 3<sup>rd</sup> finger should be used to stop the fourth course at the second fret and the other on the fifth course with 2 dots where the second finger should be used stop the fifth course at the second fret.*

### Chord A

*For Chord A there are two 3s and a 2. There is one 3 on the first course with 4 dots beside it where it is necessary to use the fourth finger on the first course at the third fret and another 3 on the second course with three dots beside it where the third finger stops the second course at the third fret. The 2 is on the fifth course with one dot beside it which indicates that the fifth course must be stopped at the second fret with the first finger. The letters that follow have dots beside the fret numbers.*

The fingering is quite logical although it should be noted that Chord I is played with the third and fourth courses stopped at the 2<sup>nd</sup> fret with a half or hinge *barré* rather than with three separate fingers.

Ruiz de Ribayaz in **Luz y norte musical (1677)** mentions an alternative – using the third (ring) finger on the second course, presumably with the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> fingers used for the third and fourth courses, (although he hasn't actually said so), and in some circumstances this may be a more convenient fingering. Curiously, Sanz in his table of chords in **Instruccion de musica**, has indicated that the fourth course should be stopped with the

1<sup>st</sup> finger and the third and second with a 2<sup>nd</sup> finger half *barré* which is not the most convenient way of doing it! In the illustration of the chord being played on the fingerboard the standard fingering is shown. This suggests that the fingering in the table has been misprinted. Nevertheless the same rather awkward fingering is the one indicated in the table of chords in Murcia's **Resumen de acompañar** (1714). Beware of taking everything in the original sources at face value! In the past as well as today there was a tendency to copy what other people had said without checking whether it was accurate!

## Right hand technique

Millioni then gives some brief instructions about the right hand.

*Once the letters have been committed to memory it is possible to begin to play the sonatas. These will give more pleasure if played with three or four fingers of the right hand, holding them separately one from another, sounding all the strings together and playing close to the rose and the neck; in this way the music will be rendered more sweetly Take care to give all the strokes which are below the line downwards and those which are above upwards as they are found.*

This is straight forward although he hasn't actually explained or illustrated the stroke marks placed below and above the line to indicate the direction of the strokes. These are the same as those used by Colonna. In **Quarto libro** the following paragraph which explains the *trillo* has been inserted.

## Trilli

The *trillo* is just a way of strumming the chords in a more elaborate and interesting way. As far as Millioni is concerned this seems to consist of nothing more than simply repeating the same chord up and down with the first finger only, as many times as can be fitted into the basic stroke (note) value.

*When the sonatas are found notated with trilli, note that the long stroke marks are full strokes, and the ts are strokes played as trilli, because to play a trillo, four strokes are given, one down, one up, one down and another up quickly. So when there are four ts, one down, one up, one down and another up serves for one trillo. When there are eight ts, two trilli should be played, and when there are twelve ts, three trilli must be played. Note that these trilli are played with the index finger, sounding all the strings up and down in groups of four quickly as said above.*

### Mus. Ex. 1 - Aria di Fiorenza, *Quarto libro*, p. 47

Aria di Fiorenza con Trilli. 47

t.t.t. tt tt

1 t.t.t. 1 1 1 tt 1 1 1 tt 1 1

A tt B tt A D B G tt

1 tt 1 1 1 tt 1 1 1 tt 1 1 1 tt 1

A C + A B D C A Etc

### Dots in tablature

Millioni hasn't really explained the purpose of the two dots following the ts in the first group of ts. He also uses a system of dots to indicate a kind of *ritardando* although what he says is not very clear.

*When any dots are found, the hand should be held back, going more slowly than usual. When there are two dots, it is necessary to pause a little if the sonatas are played à tempo.*

The two dots clearly mark off the ends of phrases as can be seen in Mus. ex. 2 below. The single dots are invariably placed below up-strokes as can be seen in Mus. ex. 4 below. They may be intended to indicate dotted rhythm, i.e. a dotted crotchet followed by a quaver although because there are no bar lines or note values it is difficult to be sure.

### Repeat signs

As he doesn't use bar lines Millioni has adopted a rather quaint way of indicating when sections of the music should be repeated – two little hands indicate the beginning and end of the repeated passage. These can be seen in Mus. ex. 1 above.

*When two hands are found, one pointing towards the other, that part of the sonata between the hands must be played twice.*

### Additional chords

As well as the basic chords from +, A-P and their transpositions, Millioni has included several other chords in his table.

Two of these, **B3** and **C5** involve introducing a different note on the first course, and two, **At** and **Dt** are what are known as *lettere tagliate*. Here they are.

**Mus. Ex. 2**



**Chords B3, C5**

When a *B* is found with a 3 beside it like this – *B3* – Chord *B* must be played with the first course stopped at the third course [instead of left unstopped]; in the same way when a *C* is found with a 5 beside it like this - *C5* - the first course should be stopped at the fifth fret [instead of at the second] giving as many strokes as are indicated under the letter.

By altering the chords in this way it is possible to create something in the way of a continuous melodic line. Unfortunately the lack of time signatures and note values makes it very difficult to decipher the music.

**Mus. Ex 3 – Girumetta, Libro quarto, p.65**  
**[Two dots in line 2 indicate a pause at the end of a phrase]**

Girumetta .							65
C5	C	C5	At.	C	Ct.	C5	
I	I	I	I	I	I	I	
I I	I	I	I	I	I	I	
At.	C	I	C	C	Ct.	C	
I			.		I	I	
At.	C	Ct.	C5	At.	C	C	
I	I	I	I	I	I	I	
I	I	I	I	I	I	I	Fine.



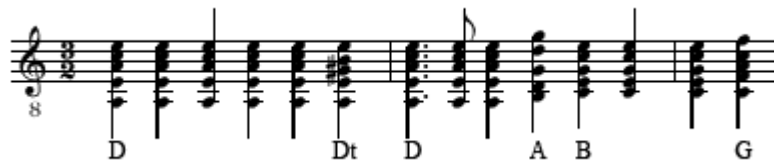
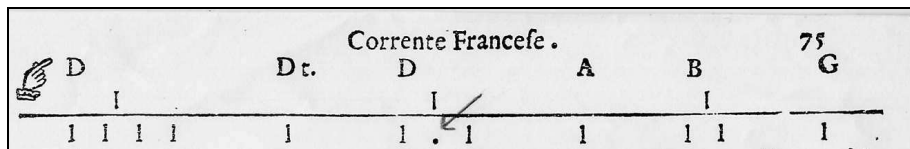
## Lettere tagliate

At and Dt are known as “*lettere tagliate*” – a kind of dissonance in which one course of a standard chord is left unfretted. Millioni doesn’t explain what these are for. Both are used in the music as well as **Ct** which he hasn’t included in the table but which is found in other sources. An example of At and Ct can be seen in Mus. ex 3 above and Dt in Mus. ex. 4 below.

*When any letter is found with a t beside it, the letter t indicates a lettera tagliata and the tablature indicates how to play these letters and the others.*

### Mus. ex. 4 – Corrente Francese, Libro quarto, p.75

[The single dot may indicate that the previous note is a dotted crotchet]



## Transposed chords

The remaining are just standard chords transposed to a higher fret. All the chords played with a *barré* can be played up to and including the 5<sup>th</sup> fret.

*And when other letters are found with a 2, a 3 or a 4 beside them as for example a G with a 2 beside it, Chord G must be played one fret further down the fingerboard; in the same way with a 3 beside it, it must be played two frets further down the fingerboard. The other letters are played in the same way.*

After explaining the chords Millioni mentions left-hand technique briefly and finishes with not altogether illuminating descriptions of the *trillo* and *repicco*.

## Left hand technique

*The left hand has to be placed on the fingerboard with great care, with the fingers close to the frets.*

A fairly obvious remark!

## The Trillo

*The trillo is made with the index finger playing all the chords up or down quickly in groups of four with four strokes.*

The more detailed description from **Libro quarto** is given above.

## The Repicco

*The repicco is made with three fingers, that is to say with the middle finger and the thumb playing all the strings going down and turning for the up-stroke the thumb with the index finger, playing however only the first course or cantino.*

This description of the **repicco** is not particularly helpful – it doesn't make a great deal of sense to use both the thumb and the index finger to play the single first course. The passage may have been abbreviated by mistake. A later source – Tomasso Marchetti's **Il primo libro d'intavolatura** (Rome, 1660) is rather more explicit –

*The repicco is made giving four strokes, that is two down and two up. The first stroke is played downwards with the middle finger and the second down with the thumb; the third stroke is played upwards with the thumb and the fourth up with the index finger playing however [with the index finger] only the cantino, or first course. One repicco equals two strokes.*

Marchetti's book is a plagiarized version of earlier books by Millioni.

*Quarto libro* includes a second more detailed description of how to play **trilli**. This really consists of nothing more than splitting each stroke into two.

*If anyone wishes to learn to play all the sonatas with trilli, the following rule must be observed.*

*When a single down stroke mark is found – like this -  $\tau$  a trillo can be played like this  $\tau^{\perp}$ .*

*When two downstrokes are found like this  $\tau\tau$  two trilli can be played. If there are three like this  $\tau\tau^{\perp}$  three can be played and  $\tau^{\perp}\tau^{\perp}$  four.*

*When there are two down, one up and another down like this  $\tau\tau^{\perp}\tau$  three trilli can be played; five when it is like this  $\tau\tau^{\perp}\tau^{\perp}$  and six when it is like this  $\tau^{\perp}\tau^{\perp}\tau^{\perp}$ .*

*When there are two down, one up and another two down like this  $\tau\tau^{\perp}\tau\tau$  four trilli can be played; five when it is like this  $\tau\tau^{\perp}\tau^{\perp}$  and seven when it is like this  $\tau\tau^{\perp}\tau^{\perp}\tau^{\perp}$ .*



## Tuning instructions

Millioni's book is the earliest surviving source to include what were to become the standard Italian instructions for checking that the guitar is in tune.

**He starts by saying that the fifth course is tuned to the third stopped at the 2<sup>nd</sup> fret. This implies that the third course, which should be in unison (although Millioni hasn't said so!), is to be tuned first.**

Although Millioni has said that the strings are tuned "to the same note" it is obvious that in the first check at least one interval must be an octave. If using bourdons, the player would need to tune that on the fifth course an octave lower than the third course stopped at the 2<sup>nd</sup> fret. If using the re-entrant tuning, on reaching the third course (which in any case he has already tuned) he would need to check that this is an octave lower than the fourth course stopped at the fifth fret. This is no more difficult than any other octave check. Millioni himself has not made it clear whether the fourth and fifth courses are octave strung or said which (if any) method of stringing the instructions are meant to refer to. In later versions of the book and in most other sources the first sentence is omitted and the instructions start with the fifth course. Taken literally these imply that the instrument is to be tuned in unison throughout without high octave strings on the fourth and fifth courses.

***[The fifth course is tuned to the third stopped at the second fret.]***

*In later editions -*

***The fifth course may be tuned as you wish***

***The fourth course is tuned to the fifth stopped at the fifth fret***

***The third course is tuned to the fourth stopped at the fifth fret***

***The second course is tuned with the third stopped at the fourth fret***

***The first course is stopped with the second stopped at the fifth fret.***

***To the same notes (A voce eguali)***

The first check is followed by a second. Here presumably the first course stopped at the 3<sup>rd</sup> fret is an octave above the open third (although if the third course was octave strung, as is fashionable today, it could be in unison!); otherwise the intervals may be either octaves or unisons depending on the method of stringing preferred. The instructions are then given in tablature.

***When tuned in this manner it is possible to play***

***The first stopped at the third fret with the open third***

***The second stopped at the third fret with the open fourth***

***The third stopped at the second fret with the open fifth***

***The fourth stopped at the second fret with the open first***

***The fifth stopped at the second fret with the second open.***

***As can be seen in the example below in which the lines represent the courses of the guitar and the numbers the frets.***

## Modo di accordare



Because *Millioni's* books were enormously popular and were reprinted and plagiarized over and over again in other *alfabeto* books, the tuning method he describes and/or the tablature chart are included in some of the later more ambitious books. Most of these, including *Foscarini* (1629), *Corbetta* (1639), *Carbonchi* (1640&1643), *Calvi* (1646 - a plagiarized edition of *Corbetta's* 1639 book), *Banfi* (1653), and *Pesori* (all) are primarily collections of music in *alfabeto*.

Most people today seem happy with the idea that the instructions are suitable for any method of stringing. Tuning the five-course guitar is not rocket science and mixing octaves and unisons not really a problem even to a beginner. The fact that the intervals are usually referred to as "*voce eguali*" or something similar suggests that the difference between a unison and an octave was not clearly perceived or taken into account.

At the end there is a table showing which chords played at higher frets correspond with the basic sequence. [The table is not included in **Libro Quarto** and the relevant page is missing from Royal Academy of Music copy of **Primo, secondo, et terzo libro d'intavolatura** available for examination but different versions of it are found in other *alfabeto* books].

**Table of the corresponding letters which anyone can use to transpose sonatas [From Tomasso Marchetti – *Il primo libro d'intavolatvra* (1660)].**

Lettere, che corrispondono insieme per B Quadro.				Lettere, che corrispondono insieme per B Molle .			
A	Q <sub>2</sub>	M <sub>5</sub>	corrispondono	O	V <sub>2</sub>	S <sub>5</sub>	corrispondono
B	R <sub>2</sub>	N <sub>5</sub>	corrispondono	L	K <sub>2</sub>	T <sub>5</sub>	corrispondono
C	& <sub>2</sub>	R <sub>4</sub>	corrispondono	E	Z <sub>2</sub>	K <sub>4</sub>	corrispondono
F	M <sub>2</sub>	& <sub>4</sub>	corrispondono	†	S <sub>2</sub>	Z <sub>4</sub>	corrispondono
G	M <sub>3</sub>	& <sub>5</sub>	corrispondono	P	S <sub>3</sub>	Z <sub>5</sub>	corrispondono
H	N <sub>3</sub>	Q <sub>5</sub>	corrispondono	K	T <sub>3</sub>	V <sub>5</sub>	corrispondono
I	N <sub>2</sub>	Q <sub>4</sub>	corrispondono	D	T <sub>2</sub>	V <sub>4</sub>	corrispondono
M	& <sub>3</sub>	R <sub>5</sub>	corrispondono	S	Z <sub>3</sub>	X <sub>5</sub>	corrispondono
N	Q <sub>3</sub>	M <sub>6</sub>	corrispondono	T	V <sub>3</sub>	S <sub>6</sub>	corrispondono
Q	M <sub>4</sub>	& <sub>6</sub>	corrispondono	V	S <sub>4</sub>	Z <sub>6</sub>	corrispondono
R	N <sub>4</sub>	Q <sub>6</sub>	corrispondono	X	T <sub>4</sub>	V <sub>6</sub>	corrispondono
&	R <sub>3</sub>	N <sub>6</sub>	corrispondono	Z	X <sub>3</sub>	T <sub>6</sub>	corrispondono

The first chord, Chord A, a G major chord is the same as Chord Q played one fret higher than usual and Chord M played at the 5<sup>th</sup> fret. Chord Q is actually the same as Chord G but played one fret higher at the 2<sup>nd</sup> fret so that in this context Chord Q2 will actually be played at the 3<sup>rd</sup> fret. As Chord M is played at the 1<sup>st</sup> fret, Chord M5 will be played at the 5<sup>th</sup> fret.



The purpose of the different chords is not to ensure that they are in the correct inversions – both Q2 and M5 are 6/4 chords with octave stringing on the fifth course. In the context of *alfabeto* music they are used to transpose pieces to higher positions on the fingerboard. When used in music in mixed tablature they are used to place the appropriate chords in a convenient position *vis-à-vis* the surrounding passage work.

### Conclusion

The music is notated without time signatures or bar lines and Millioni has no way of indicating note values. Most of the later and plagiarized versions are printed in the same way. As a result the music is difficult to interpret. This would not necessarily have been a problem in the seventeenth century when players would be able to seek advice elsewhere.

**The copies which have survived today are of course only reprints and it is quite possible that the original versions included more detailed information. What we have is never the whole story.**