

Angiol Michele Bartolotti – Prince of the Muses

Monica Hall

3. Secondo Libro di Chitarra (ca. 1656)

The music Bartolotti's **Secondo libro di chitarra** is very different in style from that of his earlier book with a more translucent, lute like texture, fewer strummed chords and elaborate passage work, ornamentation and *campenelas*. In particular, the treble strings of the fourth and fifth courses are integrated into the melodic line or used in such a way that it does not matter in which octave they fall. Bartolotti may have played some of it on the lute or theorbo as well as on the guitar and this is reflected in the way the music is notated.

The instructions at the beginning of the second book are very brief - presumably because, as he says, the music is not intended for beginners who need a lot of advice.

Al Lettore (1655)

For a long time, urged by many people, I intended to publish this my second book of sonatas for the guitar. But because of some setbacks, I have not been able to satisfy the wishes of those who asked me in vain to present it to them.

Although my manner of playing may be criticised for being too difficult, I hope nevertheless that each may find that he has more fluency in it than he would expect, provided that all the signs which are explained below are observed, because it was not for beginners that I embarked upon the present labour, but for those advanced in this profession.

It is not clear whether the setbacks he refers to were due to problems in getting the music engraved or of a more personal nature but certainly the complexity of the music and the way in which it is notated must have made the printing process even more difficult than usual.

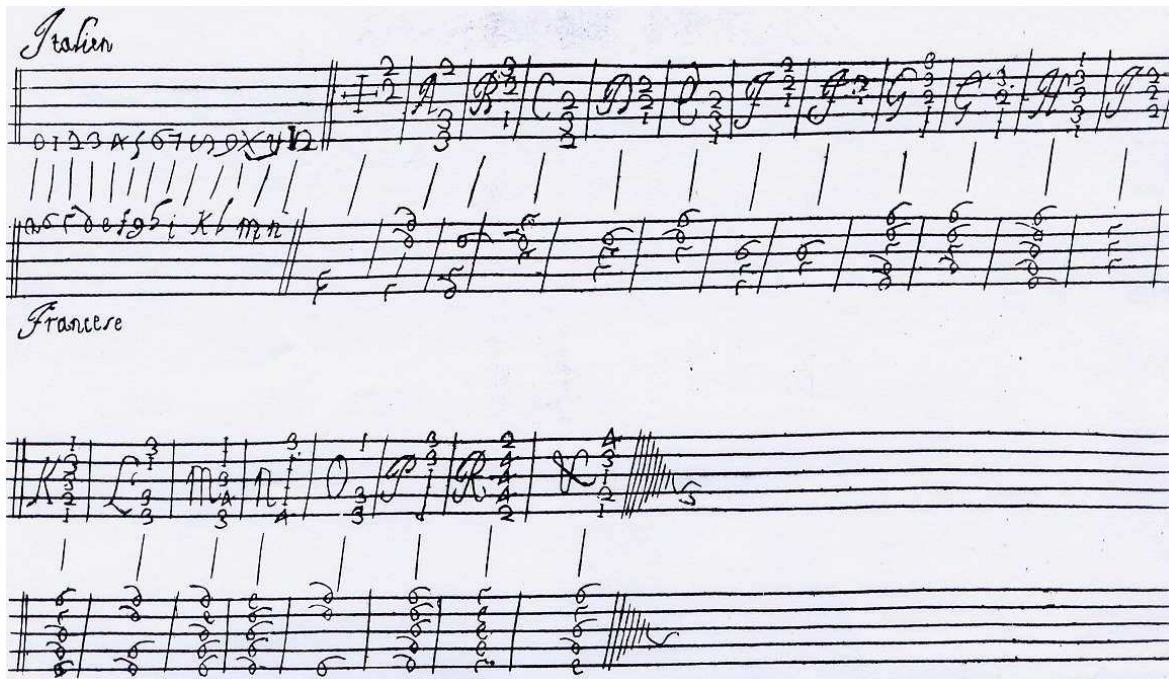
He next goes on to explain that he uses only the basic sequence of *alfabeto* letters and that these will have the appropriate fret number above them if they are to be played at a higher fret.

In the first place I have not used all the letters of alfabeto, because it is intended that they [i.e. those which are used] should be made at the fret which the number above the letter indicates.

The *Alfabeto* is set out on the preceding page in both Italian and French tablature and includes Chord + followed by Chords A-P, Chord R, which is used as an alternative to H2, and Chord &. Two of his *lettere tagliate* from the earlier book - F and G – are placed next to their standard letter, but P is not included. The chords are preceded by the

notes at each fret from the 1st to the 12th in Italian and French tablature. Clearly Bartolotti had both Italian and French guitarists in his sights.

Bartolotti's Table of Chords in Libro Secondo



On the opposite page he has set out in tablature the *lettere tagliate* G and P and given sample chords with fret numbers above them without the corresponding tablature. He has however included the tablature for one additional chord, - M+, not included in the table. (See illustration below).

Bartolotti is unusual in that instead of placing stroke marks on the lowest line of the tablature to indicate the direction of the strummed chords as in other Italian tablatures, including his **Libro primo**, in this book he uses what appears to be a unique system of his own. The note values for the strummed chords are placed on the tablature stave rather than above it and the note heads are placed on the line representing the course on which the strum should start, which may be the third, fourth or fifth course depending on whether the lowest note of the chord is on the third, fourth or fifth course. The stem of the note is down for a down-stroke (bass to treble) and up for an up-stroke.

He explains this briefly as follows

The down- and up-strokes are represented by musical notes. If these are found on the fifth line, all the strings are struck; otherwise they are only struck from where the stroke starts as is shown in the example below, playing them quickly or slowly

according to the value of the note, and when the note is not on the line, [i.e. is above the stave] the strings are plucked.

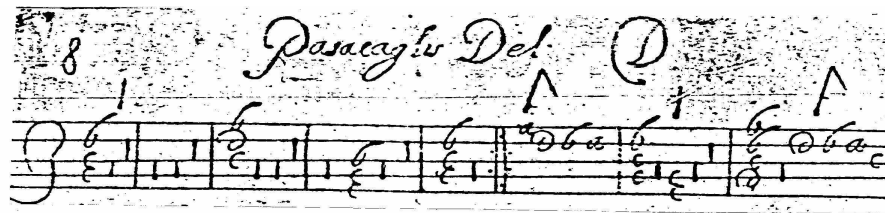
Bartolotti may have adapted this idea from earlier French guitar sources although in the absence of any surviving printed guitar books in French tablature earlier than François Martin's **Pieces de Guitairre** (Paris, 1663) this is difficult to establish. Mersenne credits a Monsieur Martin (probably not the same person as François Martin) with the idea of placing the note values above the stave with the stems up or down depending on the direction of the strokes, as in the following illustration

Monsieur Martin – Sarabande



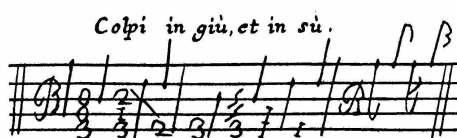
but the credit for actually placing the stroke marks on the stave must go to an Italian, Antonio Carbonchi. In order to achieve wider recognition for his work, the music in his first book, **Sonate de Chitarra Spagnola** (Florence, 1640) is in French tablature with stroke marks on the stave as in the following illustration

Carbonchi - Pasacaglia



Following Bartolotti's instructions there is a short example in tablature of how his system works, reproduced in Mus. ex.13

A musical score for the song "The Rose Tree". The score is written for a single melodic line and a piano accompaniment. The melodic line is on a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The piano accompaniment is on a single staff with a bass clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody begins with a B-flat note, followed by a series of eighth and quarter notes. The piano accompaniment consists of chords, including a B-flat major triad and a B-flat major dyad. The score ends with a double bar line.



Open courses – to include or not to include?

In Mus. ex. 14 he has put in the zeros on fifth course at [a] (and incidentally the fourth course at [b]) although the position of the note value makes it clear that these should be included anyway. The player is left to deduce from this that the open first course should be omitted as there is no zero.

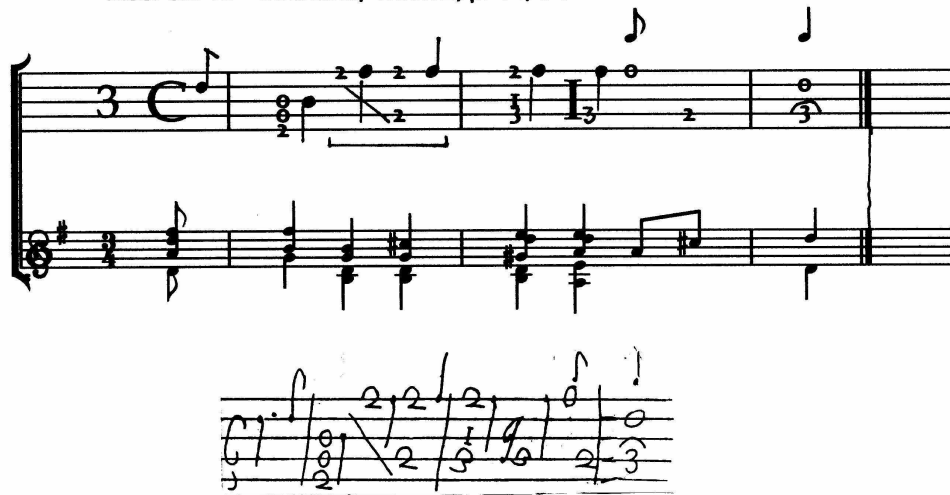
Mus. ex. 14 - Sarabande, Book 2, p.90, b. 9-14

In this example it is fairly obvious that it must be omitted in both places, as it will be dissonant but sometimes the player is left to second guess. In Mus. ex. 15 it is not clear whether the open first and second courses should be included in the chord marked with an asterisk, although most players would probably assume that they should be. The *tenute* sign indicates that the chord should be sustained whilst the passing note on the third course is played.

Mus. ex. 15 - Ciaccona, Book 2, p.38, b. 28-30

Mus. ex. 16 is more ambiguous as it is not clear that the open first course should be omitted from the bracketted passage, although it could be included in the chord preceding Chord I in the following bar.

Mus. ex. 16 - Courante, Book 2, p. 12, b.9-11



Another situation which he has not explained is illustrated in Mus. ex. 17. Here the *tenute* marks are intended to indicate that the standard chord should be repeated as the passing notes are played, but the fifth course is to be omitted.

Mus. ex. 17 - Ciaccona, Book 2, p.38, b. 56-60



[Strictly speaking, there is no need to include the zeros in the last [G major] chord of each sequence since the note heads on the fourth course alone indicate that the open fourth, third and second courses should be included.]

Aside from these anomalies, the note values are sometimes placed on the wrong line altogether – one of the hazards of using such an complex system. In Mus. ex. 18 it

doesn't make much sense to include the open fourth and fifth courses in the bracketed passage.

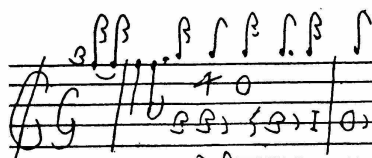
Mus. ex. 18 - Sarabanda, Book 2, p.8, b.17-20

As far as the chords represented by *alfabeto* symbols are concerned, it is obvious in most cases that all five courses should be included without the added complication of the note heads. However, Bartolotti does rather frequently indicate that the fifth course should be omitted from Chords C and E, something which will be examined in the section on his *lettere tagliate*.

Bartolotti does seem to have had a problem in notating his music in a clear and unambiguous way! The obvious thing to do (as a lutenist!) would have been to put in the zeros consistently, especially as he frequently puts them in anyway, and indeed, to have notated more of the chords in full; this would have been no more time-consuming or difficult to engrave than the system he has adopted. But this idea doesn't seem to have occurred to him and he doesn't seem to have had any clear purpose in mind when devising such an accident prone notational device. For better or worse, none of his successors saw fit to copy his idea and the two later sources which include pieces by him have made no attempt to reproduce this feature of his notation although both have been transcribed into French tablature.

There is one further refinement to Bartolotti's system which is not explained at all. Whenever there are two strokes in equal note values to be played in the same direction – two up- or down-strokes – these are almost invariably tied together. This occurs frequently on the pick up beats at the outset and midpoint of the allemandes as in Mus. ex. 19.

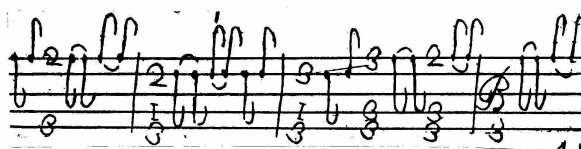
Mus. ex. 19 - Allemande, Book 2, p. 11, b.1



In the few concordant pieces in the Gallot manuscript the notes are not tied together. In the 18th century manuscript (reproduced in Section 1) two semiquavers are replaced by a quaver up-stroke.

This device also occurs in Bartolotti's version of the famous *repicco* variation in the ciaccona on p.38.

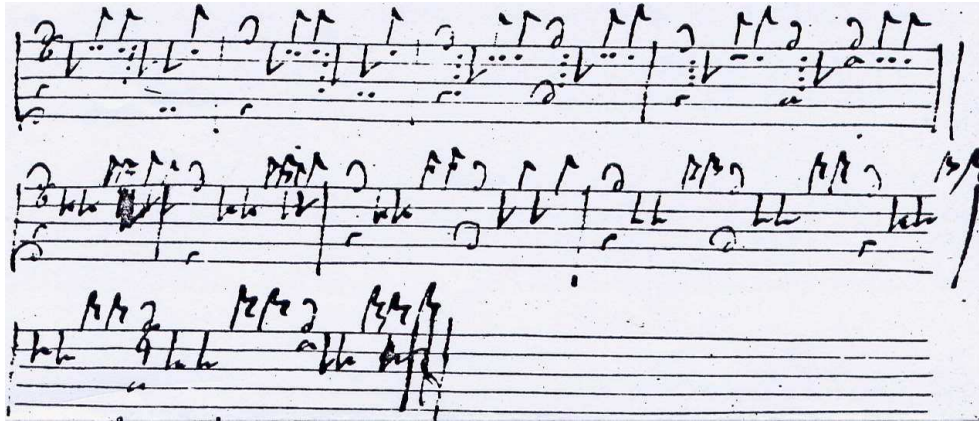
Mus. ex. 20 - Ciaccona, Book 2, p. 38, b.175-178



Presumably it is intended to indicate the way in which the chords should be strummed. This particular variation occurs in various forms in *chaconas* attributed to Corbetta in the Gallot manuscript which may have been copied in the 1660s. A particularly interesting example is found at the end of the Chaconne on f.21v. Dots are placed beside the note values to indicate the different fingers which should be used – second finger followed by

the first finger for the tied quavers, followed by presumably four fingers for the down-stroke and so on.

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Chaconna francisco f.21v (begins f.15)



The variation is also incorporated into the Caprice de chacone on p.72 of Corbetta's own printed book **La Guitarre royale** (1671). Here he has tied together groups of four notes which are to be played as two down-strokes and two up-strokes with similar dots beside them. A longer stem indicates that the thumb should be used.

Corbetta – Caprice de chacone



His instructions in the separate Italian and French prefaces vary slightly but it is reasonably clear what he means-

You will see an example of a repicco placed in a ciaccona, where the longer stem to the note signifies the thumb; having already begun with the fingers [i.e. played the chord once with all four fingers], then do the same, [downwards and] upwards with the thumb. Observe that the four tied notes indicate that one must play first with the

second finger and then with the first finger close together, and the same again as down-strokes very quickly, and continue thus with the fingers and thumb. [Italian preface]

You will see the example of a batterie placed in a caprice de chacone where the note with the longer stem indicates that the thumb should be used for both up and down strokes; and observe that when you see four notes tied together, you must use the second finger downwards, and then the first finger and then you will do the same upwards very quickly; and you will continue always with the fingers and the thumb following the example which you will see here [i.e. in the tablature examples on the next page. [French preface]

The rest of Bartolotti's tablature examples illustrate with varying degrees of clarity some of the other complications in his notation.

Bartolotti's Tablature Examples in Libro Secondo



The first of these illustrates the *Arpeggio disteso* also referred to as *Lettere con segni per l'arpeggio*. The sign %, under a chord indicates that it should be arpeggiated rather than strummed. Bartolotti gives one example of how this might be done. This is straightforward.

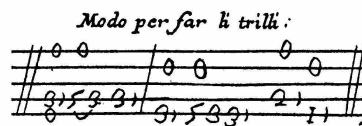
The *Tenute* sign – a slash above or below a group of notes - indicates that the first note(s) should be held whilst subsequent ones are played, in theory at least enabling the underlying counterpoint to be re-constructed. Given the limited sustaining power of the instrument this is to some extent academic. The only problem is the occasionally imprecise way in which they are used in the tablature so that it is not always clear which notes should be sustained. Bartolotti does also use a slash as a shorthand way of indicating that some notes should be repeated in strummed chords against a moving part as in Mus. ex. 13. above. In some instances he may simply be using them to separate out long sequences of small note values.

These are followed by the symbols used for ornaments.

The first is the **trillo** represented by a comma , which, in the tablature examples appears to indicate an upper auxiliary note or descending appoggiatura. In the absence of any accompanying written explanation, the correct interpretation of the lute tablature does however raise some questions.

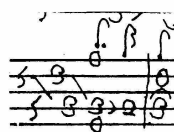
In the first two examples it is not clear why the main note is repeated with a trillo sign attached to it, but as the note makes the interval of a 4th with the bass it is presumably intended that it should resolve downwards a semitone at some point as partially illustrated in the last two examples.

Mus. ex. 21a - Book 2, Modo per far li trilli



In the music itself the sign occurs both in single melodic lines and attached to one note in a chord, particularly at a cadence. Depending on the context, either a simple descending appoggiatura or possibly a more extended trill starting with the upper auxiliary note could be played. Instances of both of Bartolotti's examples occur frequently in the music and the 3rd of the chord onto which the ornamented note should resolve is usually notated as a separate note. Examples from the music are shown in Mus. ex. 21b/c.

Mus.ex.21b - Book 2, Allemande, p.67, b17-18



Mus. ex. 21c - Book 2, Brando, p.66, b.15-16



The **mordente**, represented by **x** indicates that a lower auxiliary note should be inserted between two notes at the same pitch.

Strascini are straightforward - downward and upward slurs.

A slur over a figure indicates an **ascending appoggiatura**. Bartolotti gives three examples. The only problem here is that the tablature realization of the first and last of these is given before the example of how it is actually notated; there is no written realization for the second.

Mus. ex. 22 - Book 2, Modo per appoggiar le corde

ti. Modo per appoggiar le corde.

At the end Bartolotti illustrates one final feature in his notation. When writing 2-part counterpoint the notes are to be played simultaneously if joined by a straight line [**Corde insieme**] or separately if joined by a slash [**Corde separate**].

In practice this is unnecessary refinement. If the notes are not to be arpeggiated then it is fairly obvious that they should be played simultaneously. It would have been sufficient

to indicate one or the other. Bartolotti actually uses the *corde separate* device rather infrequently; an example can be seen in the Ciacona on p.17

Conclusion

Perhaps because some of his admirers had complained that his music was too difficult, Bartolotti seems to have gone out of his way to include a lot more information about how it should be played than was customary. In doing so he has set himself an almost impossible task and as a result his notation is inconsistent and sometimes ambiguous. There is a lot to be said for keeping things simple! Some of the refinements in his notation are not really necessary, especially if the music is intended for those “advanced in this profession”, whilst other vital information – for example about which open courses to include or how to execute the *trillo* - is lacking. However although it is sometimes difficult to decide which are the right notes to play, most of the problems can be solved with a bit of common sense. It is reasonable to assume that players were allowed to exercise their own discretion to a considerable degree and that the welter of information is meant to be helpful but not prescriptive. Bartolotti won't turn in his grave if we do something slightly different from what he had originally intended!