

Angiol Michele Bartolotti – Prince of the Muses

Monica Hall

2. Libro Primo di Chitarra Spagnola (1640)

The music in Bartolotti's "**Libro primo di chitarra spagnola**" comprises a series of passacaglie which start in the key of B flat minor and proceed in a circle of 5ths through all the intervening keys back to B flat minor. These are followed by a ciaccona and six suites in C major, A minor, G minor, D major, B minor and D minor, each of which includes an allemanda, 2 corrente and a sarabanda. At the end there is a Follia. The music is notated in Italian tablature with *alfabeto* and both the music and the notation are still firmly rooted in *alfabeto* and its conventions. It is however barred regularly and the time signatures and note values accurately indicated throughout. It therefore presents fewer problems than many guitar tablatures. Although there are occasionally ungainly sequences of chords and crude changes in harmony, the music overall is of a high standard and sadly has been almost entirely neglected in favour of that in the second book.

Compared to Foscari, Bartolotti's instructions are brief, if not always to the point.

A LETTORI (1640)

The first point which he makes is quite clear -

Note that when performing the present works, all that which is described below should be observed; that is - whenever a letter of Alfabeto is found, its stroke mark will be beside it. And the strokes are on the bottom line;

What he hasn't mentioned is that there are also other chords notated in tablature with stroke marks beside them. But perhaps this is splitting hairs! Whether the chords are represented by *alfabeto* or notated in tablature, if they have a stroke mark beside them they are strummed. If there is no stroke mark, which only occurs with chords notated in tablature, the chords will be played in lute style.

Bartolotti then goes on to say

And when a letter is followed by a number, and then the stroke, the hand must be held firm if this is possible, so as to make the said number and to give its stroke, or if more than one in the form which it is written.

This is somewhat ambiguous because Bartolotti has not made it clear whether the numbers which follow the chords are to be played as single notes, or whether they are to be incorporated into the chord. However, if this is read in conjunction with the next part of the instructions in which he explains how single notes, or chords which are not to be

strummed are notated, it does seem that they should be, or at least may be, included in the chord if this is practicable.

And if there are no stroke marks, pluck in the manner indicated by the dots below the numbers. That is, where there is one dot, it must be played upwards with the first finger, and where there are two, it must be played upwards with the second. Where there is no dot, the stroke is played downwards with the thumb and where two numbers are found with the dots beside them they must be given upwards with the two fingers, the first and second.

This is self-explanatory. Presumably where there are two numbers without dots beside them they are played with the thumb and a finger.

One thing which Bartolotti has failed to mention altogether - perhaps because he thought it was self-evident - is that notes are often inserted into standard *alfabeto* chords [rather than between them] to form 4-3 suspensions or other dissonances – a situation covered by Foscarini in his fifth rule. We can perhaps forgive him for that, as it is indeed fairly obvious how the following, and similar passages, should be played.

Mus. ex. 1 - Corrente, Book 1, p.65, b.21-23

This example is interesting because as well as inserting a 4-3 suspension into Chord H at the cadence, Bartolotti has also indicated that an F sharp (played at the 2nd fret) should be substituted for the open first course in Chord D, converting it from a standard A minor chord to a diminished 7th chord on the second degree of the scale as the music modulates to E major. He amends *alfabeto* chords in this way in a number of places – saving himself the trouble of notating altered chords fully in tablature. This is both ingenious and backward looking. The tendency from then onwards is to use *alfabeto* only for the standard chords.

Bartolotti seems to have been particularly interested in different types of right-hand technique and in theory he has a system in place which allows him to indicate very precisely what the right hand should be doing most of the time. In practice, being an ordinary mortal, he is not entirely consistent in the way that he uses it.

The most obvious problem is the inconsistent way in which he notates notes between chords which can only be played as single notes.

In Mus. ex. 2 he has notated the same thing differently at (a) and (b).

Mus. ex. 2 - Allemanda, Book 1, p. 59, b.3-4/12-13

The image displays three systems of musical notation for a piece titled 'Mus. ex. 2 - Allemanda, Book 1, p. 59, b.3-4/12-13'. Each system consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The first system (bars 3-4) shows a treble clef staff with notes C, H, D, and O. The second system (bars 12-13) shows a treble clef staff with notes C, H, K, and C. The third system shows two staves with notes and fingerings. Labels [a] and [b] point to specific notes in the first and second systems respectively.

It is not possible to hold all the notes in Chord H and fret the auxiliary note at the 3rd fret on the first course. At [a] Bartolotti has indicated that this is to be played as a single note with the 1st finger. At [b] he has put a stroke mark beside the note although, presumably, it will be played in exactly the same way. Chord K3 which follows cannot be held whilst the note fretted at the 5th fret on the first course is played – and Bartolotti has correctly indicated that it should be played single note with the 1st finger.

[As a matter of interest he has also introduced auxiliary notes into Chord D in bar 3 converting it in this context into a diminished 7th on the leading note].

In Mus. ex. 3 the note at the 3rd fret on the first course following Chord M3 could be included as the chord is repeated but that at the 6th fret in the next bar cannot. And of course Bartolotti hasn't made it clear that Chord M3 should be repeated on the first beat of the second full bar.

Mus. ex. 3 - Corente, Book 1, p. 60, b.12-15

The image shows two systems of musical notation for a guitar piece. The first system consists of a standard staff with a treble clef and a guitar staff with a G-clef. The second system is similar but with a different key signature. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and chords, along with guitar-specific notation like fret numbers and fingerings.

However it is reasonable to assume that single notes should be played on both upstrokes as shown in the transcription.

In other places he is more precise in indicating how the music should be played. In Mus. ex. 4 neither of the auxiliary notes which follow Chord K2 can be included in the chord and he has clearly indicated that they should be played as single notes. He has also put in Chord K2 again on the second downbeat. It is therefore reasonable to assume that same motif in the previous example and that which occurs with Chord M5+ in Mus. ex. 5 which follows could also be played in this way.

It is noteworthy that, unlike Foscari, Bartolotti never notates single notes on the upper courses between chords in a way that suggests that they should be played as downstrokes with the thumb.

Mus. ex. 4 - Corrente, Book 1, p.64, b.2-3



It is important to recognize that single notes are sometimes marked to be played as single notes and sometimes marked as if they were to be strummed. This is a notational inconsistency. Rather than indicating a lack of precision in specifying how many courses should be included in the strum, it represents a failure to distinguish clearly between the two styles of playing which occurs throughout the book and is common in other early guitar books. This does have further implications – it is possible that in some places Bartolotti is also inconsistent when notating passages in two parts which should be played in lute style - as we shall see.

Open courses – to include or not to include?

Like Foscarini, Bartolotti also says that the chords should only include the notes indicated by numbers in the tablature -

In each and every place it should be noted that the stroke should only include those strings indicated by the numbers

and like Foscarini he doesn't mention the fact that the open courses which will have to be included if the chord is strummed may not always be indicated. In practice Bartolotti does often, although not always, put in the zeros except in places where it is obvious that the open courses must be included if the chord is to be strummed. In Mus. ex. 5 he has put in the zeros in the chords marked (a) because otherwise it would not be clear that the open fifth course should be included, but not in the one marked (b) where it would not be possible to strum the chord unless the open second, third and fourth courses were included.

Mus. ex. 5 - Corente, Book 1, p.52, b.2-6

Nevertheless he doesn't seem to have had a clear policy on this matter. In the second bar of Mus. ex. 6 he has put in the zeros in the first chord, omitted them from the second and included the zero on the first course in the third chord where it would not be obvious that it should be included, but omitted it from the fourth course which must be included if the chord is strummed. In the next bar he has included all the zeros in the chord following Chord D.

Mus. ex. 6 - Passacaglia, C major, Book 1, p.19, b.48-51

There are places which are more ambiguous – because he hasn't put in the zeros at all! In Mus. ex. 7 there is a stroke mark under the 7 on the first course – marked with an asterisk. It is unlikely that this is intended to be played as a single note.

The second, third and fourth open courses could be included, as shown the second time around, but it is more likely that the stopped notes on the second and third courses in the

previous chord should be repeated as this makes better harmonic sense. Situations like this call for a certain amount of harmonic analysis!

Mus. ex. 7 - Passacaglie, C major, Book 1, p.19, b.10-12

Unlike Foscarini, Bartolotti never puts stroke marks in places where including open courses would result in inexplicable dissonances. In Mus. ex. 8 the whole passage is marked to be strummed except for the chord in bar 2 – marked with an asterisk - where the open third course would be dissonant.

Mus. ex.8 - Passacaglie, B flat minor, Book 1, p.1, b.8-10

In the two preceding examples there are places (marked with a ?) where Bartolotti has indicated that only two notes should be included in the strum. In Mus. ex. 7 the third course could be included in the first bar and the first course could be included in the third, although this seems a bit unnecessary! In Mus. ex. 8 it is not possible to include any open courses other than the one Bartolotti has indicated. As already noted in the section dealing with Foscari, there is not much point in strumming less than three courses. Bartolotti is unusual in that, in Book 1, he does very frequently put strum marks in passages which are apparently in two parts. In Mus. ex. 9 it would be feasible to include the open third course in the bracketted passage although it is uncertain whether that is what Bartolotti intended.

Mus. ex. 9 - Corente Book 1, p.72, b.29-31

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a guitar piece. The first system consists of a treble staff and a bass staff, both in 3/4 time. The treble staff begins with a '3' and a 'M' (likely indicating a measure or a specific technique). The bass staff shows a series of notes and rests. The second system also consists of a treble staff and a bass staff, both in 3/4 time. The treble staff shows a series of notes and rests, and the bass staff shows a series of notes and rests. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and strum marks.

In a similar passage in Mus. ex. 10 it doesn't really make very good harmonic sense to include the open courses at all except where Bartolotti has indicated.

Mus. ex. 10 - Passacaglie, D minor, Book 1, p.17, b.24-28

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled 'Mus. ex. 10 - Passacaglie, D minor, Book 1, p.17, b.24-28'. The score is written for guitar and consists of three systems. The first system is labeled [a] and the second [b]. Both systems show a treble and bass staff with complex rhythmic patterns and fingerings. The notation includes various accidentals, fingerings (e.g., 5, 6, 7, 8), and dynamic markings (e.g., K, G, 7, 6). The third system is a continuation of the piece. The notation includes various accidentals, fingerings (e.g., 5, 6, 7, 8), and dynamic markings (e.g., K, G, 7, 6).

This raises an interesting question. Does Bartolotti intend passages like this to be played with down- and up-strokes of one or two fingers - and was this a recognised feature of right-hand technique in the guitar repertoire? Passages like this are sometimes found in music for the cittern, played with a plectrum.

Or is Bartolotti simply being inconsistent in the way he uses his notation? It is not difficult to play the first two groups of crotchets in this way because they fall on the first and second courses, but it is rather less effective to do so when they fall on the second and third.

There are similar passages in Antonio Carbonchi's **Sonate di chitarra spagnola** (1640) in which he indicates that only the intervening 5-part chords should be strummed. (Carbonchi uses French tablature and places the stroke marks on, rather than below the staff).

Mus. ex. 11 - Carbonchi (1640) - Pasacaglia, p.11, b.43-46



It may of course be that the two men had different ideas about the best way to play passages like these, and both of them are typical of seventeenth century practice. However Corbetta – our loadstar – never indicates that only two notes should be included in the strum; there is always a third open course which could be included. It is less trouble to put in stroke marks than it is to put dots beside each pair of notes and it is possible that Bartolotti, like Foscarini, is making a rather random distinction between passages in 2- or 3-part counterpoint which should be strummed and those which should be played in lute style especially as, in his second book, he does use a variety of signs and symbols to indicate different right-hand effects.

The rest of Bartolotti's introduction.

Bartolotti then goes on to explain a particular kind of right-hand strumming effect in his Ciaccona (p.49)

In the ciaccona it can be seen that there are two variations where the stroke marks are not attached to the first [lowest] line; these strokes are played downwards with the first two fingers.

Mus. ex. 12^a Ciaccona, Book 1, p.49, b. 16-22

This is self explanatory. The only complication here is that he has put a dot beside the slash under the second chord. This consists of only two notes on the second and third courses - marked with an question mark in the example. This is awkward to play in the way Bartolotti suggests even if the open fourth course is included and he has not indicated that it should be. The dot may be intended to indicate that only the first finger should be used in this instance. All the other chords consist of three notes on the first, second and first courses and can comfortably be played as indicated.

The Ciaccona also includes a variation, b.68-71 in which a running passage on the fourth and fifth courses is apparently intended to be played with the thumb and first finger alternating in lute style.

Mus. ex. 12^b Ciaccona, Book 1, p.49, b. 68-72

The whole piece is an interesting exercise in different right-hand techniques.

Bartolotti concludes by mentioning briefly the signs used for ornaments without giving any information as to how these should be executed. The first of these is the *trillo*.

This is the sign for the Trillo ∕. When it is found crossing a line, that string must be trilled, and if it is found otherwise, the string which is nearest is trilled.

By this he means that the *trillo* sign will be placed on the line next to the note to be ornamented if this is convenient; otherwise wherever he can fit it in. In practice if there isn't space for it, it is usually placed immediately below the stave. It is not always entirely clear which note the trill belongs to, but in the music a simple trill starting on the main note is probably what is intended in most places although this may vary according to context..

This is followed by the signs for the *trillo sforzato* or vibrato and *strascico* (or *strascino*) or slur.

This is the sign for a forced Trill #

This is the one for the Strascico ∪

Finally he says

And the symbols described here can be seen beside the Alfabeto [set out on the next page].

On the following page Bartolotti has set out the table of *alfabeto* chords together with the signs for ornaments with the heading

Alfabeto and lettere tagliate, with other symbols in the tablature of the present book for use when playing the present works.

and a note which is self explanatory

I have not included all the letters of the Alfabeto because they are not all necessary. Note that the letters should be played where the number above the letter indicates.

In other words, chords which are played with a *barré* should be played at the fret indicated by the number - H3, M3 etc. will be played at the third fret.

Bartolotti's Table of Chords and ornaments in Libro Primo



Summary and Conclusion

Bartolotti is clearly inconsistent in the way that he notates single notes inserted between strummed chords, sometimes putting a stroke mark and sometimes the dot indicating a single finger. This is not a serious problem. Whether or not the passing notes are included in the chord as it is repeated (where practical) or played as single notes is largely a matter of taste.

As far as the passages in 2-part counterpoint are concerned, it can't be said with certainty whether he does actually mean these to be "strummed" or whether the stroke marks are used simply as a convenient way of separating the notes from one another and making the music easier to read as with Foscari.

In music which is entirely in *alfabeto* the stroke marks do actually 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. It is not surprising, therefore, that there is a certain ambiguity, particularly in earlier sources, when indicating whether chords or passages like that in Mus. ex. 10 should be strummed or played in lute style. There is no reason why, when we play the music, we shouldn't use whichever right-hand technique works best for us.