

The Five-Course Guitar and Seventeenth-Century Harmony: Alfabeto and Italian Song

by

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Curriculum Vitae

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the repertory of printed Italian song with the chord-symbol notation for five-course guitar known as *alfabeto*. This repertory spans the first half of the seventeenth century, representing the notated trace of a widespread unwritten tradition of semi-improvised song and dance that influenced both the performance and composition of printed Italian song in the seventeenth century. An examination of the relationship between the alfabeto symbols and the notated music reveals varied approaches to alfabeto notation in these songbooks. In some, particularly the Roman and Neapolitan editions from the 1610s and 20s, the alfabeto symbols are incompletely integrated into the music, and are set with little or no attention to their practical value for the guitarist. But in later prints, particularly from Venice in the 1620s-1650s, the alfabeto suggests a new understanding of and influence from the dance-song tradition.

This division between “non-practical” and “practical” alfabeto sources allows a more detailed discussion of the guitar and song accompaniment than has heretofore been possible, including a more specific description of guitaristic harmonies that are not commonly found in standard continuo treatises. The influence of the five-course guitar on the development of functional harmonic tonality, a topic that has been broached but never fully investigated by scholars, is also given a renewed examination. This study confirms the importance of the performance practice associated with the five-course guitar, which influenced performance, composition, and musical thought at a vital formative period in the history of music.

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A Note on Transcriptions

The transcription of music for the five-course guitar offers unique challenges. The tuning and stringing described for the instrument varies from one source to another, and in most cases no information is given at all. The most obvious challenge concerns the use of *bourdons*, or octave bass strings on the fourth and fifth courses. In my transcriptions of music written using alfabeto notation exclusively I have assumed an instrument with *bourdons* on both courses. In cases where there is reason to believe an instrument with a different tuning was intended I have indicated this.

A related issue involves the relationship between the original notation and the transcription. In this repertory the original notation is often the best way to transmit the music. Modern notation forces the transcriber to make choices that are often better left to the performer. For this reason, any modern transcription of alfabeto tablature necessarily becomes an arrangement rather than an exact reproduction. Given that the intent of this project is to provide scholarly analysis rather than modern performance editions, I have chosen to include as much information as possible in my transcriptions of guitar tablature. My aim is to provide a close representation of the original notation, rather than to make choices about which aspects of that notation are the most important to the music.

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation uses the printed repertory of Italian song with alfabeto notation to address a general lack of information on seventeenth-century harmonic practices, especially in relation to unwritten traditions.¹ The turn of the seventeenth century offers a peculiar challenge to the historian of harmony. Accompaniment using basso continuo notation, arguably the area of greatest innovation in harmonic practice, offers the least information for modern scholars. Although appearing at a time of experimentation and flux in harmonic practice, the notational convention of continuo bass leaves scarce evidence of these developments. Surviving seventeenth-century basso continuo treatises tend to reformulate sixteenth-century contrapuntal theory rather than providing insight into new practices. The resulting gap between theory and practice obscures those aspects of instrumental performance most important to the new style, and therefore to the development of Baroque music in general.

While orally transmitted practices would seem to offer evidence of an independent harmonic tradition, such practices are by their nature difficult to describe specifically. By the time an oral tradition leaves a written record it tends to have become amalgamated with other harmonic practices. There remains, therefore, a scarcity of criteria with which to gauge the influence of oral traditions on seventeenth-century harmony. This dissertation focuses on a pertinent and

¹ “Harmony” is used here in its broadest sense, meaning any system of structural principles governing the combination of notes. In context of the seventeenth century, this term can cover various overlapping systems, from the octenary “Gregorian” modes through functional major/minor tonality.

insufficiently explored source of such information; namely, the repertory of printed Italian song with alfabeto symbols for the strummed five-course guitar. As a partial solution to the challenges faced by scholars of harmony in this period I offer the following hypothesis: that the harmonic language of the seventeenth century was influenced in specific ways by an oral tradition, which gave rise to and was propagated by alfabeto symbols for the five-course guitar.

This dissertation consists of five chapters. In Chapter 1 I review the current state of knowledge on the five-course guitar and its relationship to performance practice and harmonic language. Chapter 2 focuses on the earliest printed alfabeto songbooks, which appeared in Rome and Naples in the second and third decades of the century. In this chapter I outline the problems that repertory presents for the existing scholarship, and I suggest a new approach for understanding these prints, one that takes account of the disparate traditions that inform them. In chapter 3, which focuses on alfabeto songbooks printed in Northern Italy between c.1620-1650, I give evidence for a renewed interest in oral traditions, affecting both the performance and composition of Italian song. Chapter 4 details certain specific harmonic idioms, derived from strummed guitar performance, that became part of the general seventeenth-century harmonic language. In Chapter 5 I situate the five-course guitar tradition in terms of the development of functional harmonic tonality.

This study covers a period in which the major genres of western classical musical were being developed, and it provides new information for anyone interested

in harmonic practice, performance practice, or the interaction between oral and written traditions.

CHAPTER ONE
EARLY SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ITALIAN SECULAR SONG AND
UNWRITTEN SPANISH TRADITIONS.

ALFABETO NOTATION AND THE STRUMMED FIVE-COURSE GUITAR
TRADITION

“Ah, my donkey, how I remember . . . when you breathed in, you gave a gracious syllable, answered by a low G from your hindquarters, which made damned better music than did my village barber’s guitar as he sang *passacalles* by night!” Thus, in an unauthorized sequel to *Don Quixote*, does Sancho Panza sum up the Spanish *rasgueado* tradition.² Associated with barbers, taverns, and immoral dances such as the sarabanda and chacona, the five-course guitar in sixteenth-century Spain occupied a social sphere largely obscured from modern view. It is mainly in seventeenth-century Italian publications that the strummed guitar repertory entered the printed record, taking the form of the chord-symbol notation known as alfabeto. By means of this notation the five-course guitar ascended from the streets and barbershops of Spain to the courts of Italy, France, and England. When combined with mensural notation in Italian songbooks, alfabeto notation offers us tangible evidence of the interplay between written and unwritten traditions in the seventeenth

² “¡Ay, asno mio, y cómo tengo en la memoria que cuando te iba á echar de comer á la caballeriza, en viendo cerner la cebada, rebuznabas y reias con una gracia como si fueras persona; y cuando respirabas hácia dentro, dabas un gracioso silbo, respondiendo por el órgano trasero con un gamaut, que ¡mal año! para la guitarra del barbero de mi lugar que mejor música haga cuando canta ei pasacalle de noche!” Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda, *Segundo tomo del ingenioso hidalgo Don Quixote de la Mancha* (Tarragona, 1614) ch. 6; modern edition in *Biblioteca de autores españoles* (Madrid: Hernando, 1898), 18:19-20; cited in Maurice Esses, *Dance and Instrumental Diferencias in Spain During the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1992), 687.

century. Although simple in appearance and execution, alfabeto notation and the performance practice associated with it represent a complex and vital area of research: the adoption and adaptation of oral traditions in seventeenth century Italy.

An association between the five-course guitar and Spanish oral traditions has long been understood. Indeed, seventeenth-century sources take this for granted, almost unanimously designating the five-course instrument as “spagnola.” An unwritten tradition of accompanying dance and song with strummed guitar, which appears to have developed in Spain during the sixteenth century, spread throughout Italy and beyond in the seventeenth century. The strummed style of performance in which all five courses sound simultaneously, often referred to as *rasgueado* or *battuto*, is associated with a primarily unwritten repertory of songs and dances, which I will refer to as the “dance-song” repertory. The most common notation for these dance-songs, when they were notated at all, were alfabeto symbols, either appearing alone, with stroke marks for rhythm, or above song texts. These dance-songs will be examined in more detail below, with representative examples as well as a discussion of previous scholarship.

Although some regional and individual variation appears in alfabeto usage, the basic system can be illustrated with a single example. Figure 1.1A reproduces the alfabeto chart from the first Italian alfabeto print, Girolamo Montesaro’s 1606 *Nouva inventione*.³ Such charts, which appear in many but not all alfabeto sources, provide

³ Girolamo Montesardo, *Nouva inventione d’intavolatura per sonare li balletti sopra la chitarra spagniola senza numeri, e note; per mezzo della quale da se stesso ogn’uno senza maestro potrà imparare* (Florence: Christofano Marescotti, 1606).

A) Original chart



B) Chart with modern chord-symbol equivalents

A	B	C	D	E	F	+	G	H	I
G	C	D	Am	Dm	E	Em	F	B \flat	A
K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T
B \flat m	Cm	E \flat m	A \flat m	Gm	Fm	F#	B	E	A
V	X	Y	Z	&	9	R \times			
F#m	Bm	G	C	E \flat m	Em	F			

Figure 1.1: Alfabeto Chart from Monteverdi, *Nuova inventione d'intavolatura* (Florence: 1606). Note: Monteverdi's "R" reads B-F#-A#-C#-F#: I have corrected this to conform to general usage.

left-hand shapes in Italian lute tablature for each alfabeto symbol. The performer needs no prior knowledge of mensural notation or harmony, but can proceed directly

from counting frets and courses to playing chords. Figure 1.1B translates the chord shapes into modern chord symbol notation. This alphabetical system was preceded in print by one Spanish source, now lost, the first edition of Joan Carles Amat's *Guitarra española*, which used numbers, rather than letters, to designate chords.⁴ The use of numbers seems to have been a Spanish tradition, also used, for example, in Luis de Briceño's 1626 print, although Briceño's numbers are arranged differently from Amat's.⁵ However, the songbooks investigated in this study all use the Italian alphabetical system.

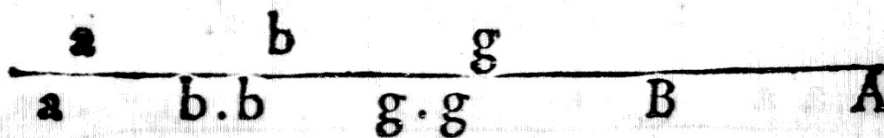
Alfabeto symbols appear in three main types of music: alfabeto solo dances, alfabeto-text songbooks, and alfabeto songbooks with staff notation. Figure 1.2 gives an example of each. I use the term "alfabeto solo" to refer to music using only alfabeto symbols, sometimes in connection with marks to indicate stroke direction, to notate music for solo guitar. Montesardo's tutor is the first printed source of the alfabeto dance-song repertory. He notates dances and grounds such as the Villano di Spagna, Ruggiero, Bergamasca, Ciaccona, Pavaniglia, Mattacino, Ballo di Napoli, Ballo del Gan Duca, etc., and these chord progressions might serve as

⁴ Joan Carles y Amat, *Guitarra española, y vándola, en dos maneras de guitarra, castellana y valenciana de cinco órdenes* (Lérida: Anglada & Llorens, 1626 [1596]); for information on dating of the first edition see the introduction to the facsimile edition by Monica Hall (Monaco: Chanterelle, 1980).

⁵ Luis de Briceño, *Metodo mui facilissimo para aprender a tañer la guitarra a lo español* (Paris: Pierre Ballard, 1626); for a comparison of the various Spanish chord symbol notations, see Esses, *Dance and Instrumental Diferencias*, 148-72.

A) Alfabeto solo dance from Montesardo's *Nuova inventione* (Florence: 1606)

Sarabanda sopra l'A.



B) Alfabeto-text from Remigio Romano's *Prima raccolta di bellissime canzonette* (Venice: Angelo Salvadori, 1618)

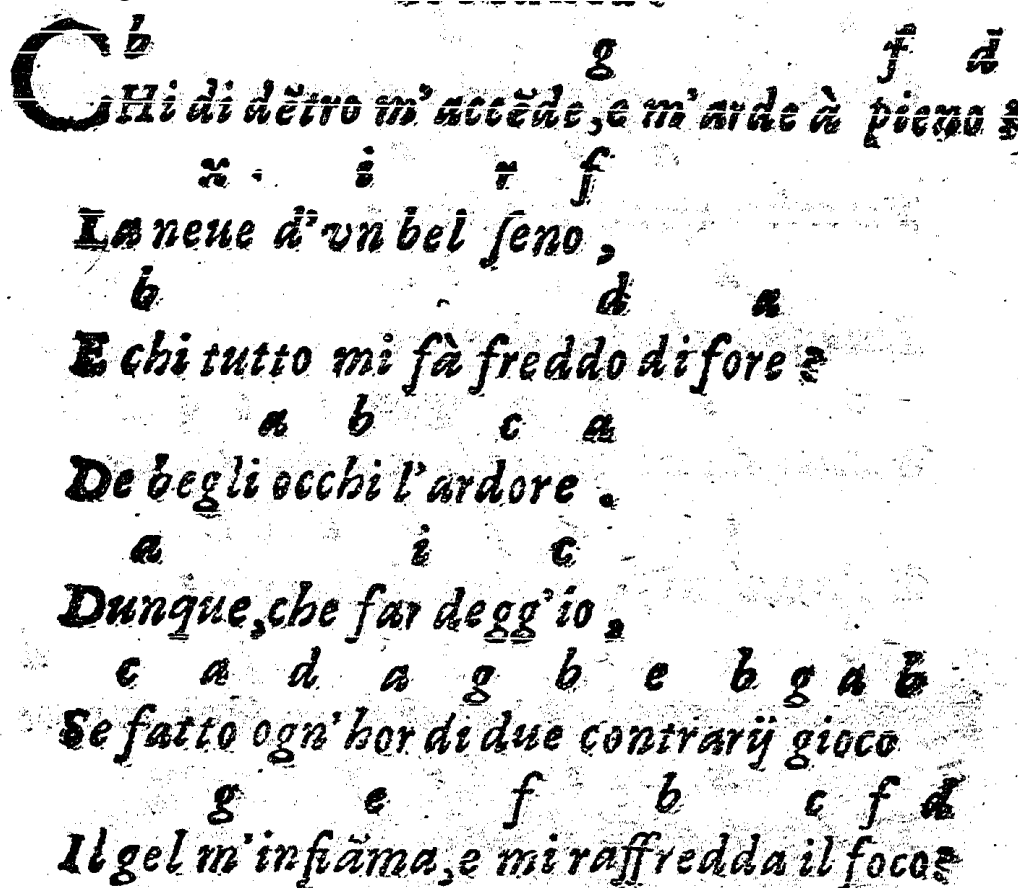


Figure 1.2: Three Types of Music Containing Alfabeto Notation (cont. on next page).

C) Alfabeto songbook with staff notation: “Rubinetti lascivetti” from Carlo Milanuzzi, *Primo scherzo delle arie vaghezze* (Giacomo Vincenti, 1620).

Labri Di. O.

Vbinetti I alci netti ch'adornate l'odo.

rate Dolci labbia amorose Che danfuore si ca nore voci va ghepie.

rofe che dan fuore si canore voci va ghe pieto fe.

Figure 1.2: Three Types of Music Containing Alfabeto Notation (cont.)

accompaniment for dance and song, as guitar solos, or as accompaniment to ensembles.⁶

⁶ See James Tyler and Paul Sparks, *The Guitar and Its Music: From the Renaissance to the Classical Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 52-55, and Gary Boye, “The Baroque Guitar: Printed Music from 1606-1737,” <http://www.library.appstate.edu/music/guitar/1606montesardo.html>.

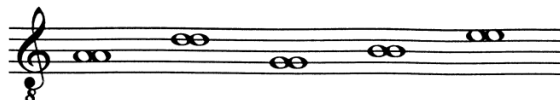
In Montesardo's book, as seen in Figure 1.2A, a horizontal line divides downstrokes (represented by symbols below the line) from upstrokes (represented by symbols above the line). Montesardo also uses upper- and lower-case letters to indicate relative duration, but no one else seems to have adopted that particular notational device.

In fact, no single system for indicating duration and rhythm is used uniformly in alfabeto solo sources. "Alfabeto-text" songbooks consist of lyrics with alfabeto symbols above the text but no other form of musical notation. Figure 1.2B gives a printed example, although manuscript sources of this notation outnumber those in print. Figure 1.2C shows a typical printed alfabeto song. Constituting the bulk of the printed repertory, songbooks combining alfabeto with staff notation vary in their layouts, and these variations will be examined thoroughly over the course of this study.

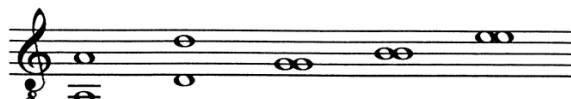
To "translate" the alfabeto chart into familiar musical notation, one must understand the stringing and tuning of the five-course instrument. Seventeenth-century sources describe three different string arrangements, involving the use of *bourdons*, or octaves, on the fourth and fifth courses. Figure 1.3 shows the pitches that result from each arrangement. It should be remembered that pitch was often relative, with many tutors advising that the first course be tuned as tight as it could stand and the remainder tuned from there. The question of which string arrangement is appropriate for any given source is not simple, and has been the subject of some

A Completely re-entrant

(course): 5 4 3 2 1



B Bourdons on the fifth and fourth courses



C Bourdon on the fourth course only



Figure 1.3: Stringing Arrangements for the Five-Course Guitar, Arranged by Frequency in Contemporary Descriptions.

research.⁷ But for the most part this question arises in the later repertory, in which *punteado* notation (which uses lute tablature to designate single plucked notes) creates issues of voice leading that do not arise in simple alfabeto notation. Therefore the alfabeto transcriptions in my study will assume an instrument strung with *bourdons* on both lower courses (see Fig. 1.3B), as advised by two early alfabeto solo sources.⁸

⁷ Gary Boye, “Performing Seventeenth-Century Italian Guitar Music: The Question of Appropriate Stringing,” in *Performance on Lute, Guitar, and Vihuela*, edited by Victor Anand Coelho (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Monica Hall, *Baroque Guitar Stringing: A Survey of the Evidence* (Guildford: Lute Society, 2003); Hall, “The Stringing of the Five-Course Guitar,” <http://monicahall.co.uk/pdf/Stringing.pdf>; Tyler, *Guitar and Its Music*, 184-86.

⁸ Montesardo, *Nuova inventione*, and Benedetto Sanseverino, *Intavolatura facile. . . opera terza* (Milan: Filippo Lomazzo, 1620).

ALFABETO AND HARMONY IN EARLY SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ITALY

The five-course guitar, its repertory, and the unique notation associated with it were an ideal match for the experimental milieu of early seventeenth-century Italy, in which practical innovation was outstripping existing theoretical structures. Existing scholarship demonstrates that no single theoretical scheme such as modal counterpoint or functional harmonic tonality is adequate for the description of seventeenth-century harmony. The concept of a change from modality to tonality around the year 1600 was deconstructed by Dahlhaus in 1968. His landmark *Studies on the Origin of Harmonic Tonality* appeared in English translation in 1991, adding impetus to the developing research into pre-tonal harmonic systems that inhabit the boundaries between modality and tonality.⁹ For example, the *tuoni ecclesiastici* used by Banchieri in 1605 have been described in terms of both tonality and modality.¹⁰ Joel Lester, who translated the term as “church keys,” gives a somewhat confusing account of their derivation from the original eight modes.¹¹ Harold Powers portrays the confusion in Lester’s account as a symptom of an underlying confusion between the modes and the psalm tones.¹² Powers’s study combines evidence from theoretical treatises with examples from the repertory, making a convincing case that the “church

⁹ Carl Dahlhaus, *Studies on the Origin of Harmonic Tonality*, trans. Robert O. Gjerdingen (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

¹⁰ Adriano Banchieri, *Cartella musicale nel canto figurato, fermo, et contrapunto* (Venice: Giacomo Vincenti, 1614).

¹¹ Joel Lester, *Between Modes and Keys: German Theory, 1592-1802* (Stuyvesant, N.Y.: Pendragon Press, 1989), 77-82.

¹² Harold Powers, “From Psalmody to Tonality,” *Tonal Structures and Early Music*, ed. Cristle Collins Judd, 275-340 (New York: Garland, 1998).

keys” represent the transposition of psalm tones, used to facilitate vocal performance in a liturgical setting. Michael Dodds has developed a practical model for understanding the use of these tonal categories, which he calls “church tones,” in seventeenth-century repertoires.¹³ Gregory Barnett demonstrates the use of “church keys” in instrumental sonatas.¹⁴ His 1998 article shows that although Lester may have confused psalm tone and mode, it was a confusion shared by seventeenth-century theorists such as Bononcini, who devoted a chapter of his 1605 treatise to explaining the “church keys” in terms of Glarean’s dodecachordal modal scheme. The example of the *tuoni ecclesiastici* serves to demonstrate the ambiguity of harmonic concepts in this period, and the willingness of seventeenth-century composers to adopt new forms of harmonic organization.

A new approach to lyrical form contributed to compositional developments in this unstable environment. The first two decades of the seventeenth century were an experimental period involving mutual influence between poetic forms and the music to which they were set. Silke Leopold, who surveyed secular solo chamber song in seventeenth-century Italy, has convincingly described the relationship between verse form and compositional technique.¹⁵ The changes in lyrical form were part of the “Chiabreran reform,” initiated by Gabriello Chiabrera’s 1599 *Maniere de’ versi*

¹³ Michael Dodds, “The Baroque Church Tones in Theory and Practice” (Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, Eastman School of Music, 1999).

¹⁴ Gregory Barnett, “Modal Theory, Church Keys, and the Sonata at the End of the Seventeenth Century,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51 (1998): 245-81.

¹⁵ Silke Leopold, *Al modo d’Orfeo: Dichtung und Musik im italienischen Sologesang des frühen 17. Jahrhunderts* (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1995).

toscani, which proposed and demonstrated a new, strictly accented poetry.¹⁶ Chiabrera's reform opened a path in high art poetry for verse forms that had previously been used only in popular poems.¹⁷ Leopold draws a stark contrast between sixteenth- and seventeenth-century composition, posing lyrical form as the defining factor in the newer compositional style: "At the same time that the rules of polyphony were declared null, and the system of harmony was overturned, the text offered itself as the guide for composition."¹⁸ After 1620, this period of experimentation gave way, in Leopold's analysis, to a new emphasis on strongly defined short-term periodic musical structures, and these structures were largely created by short cadential progressions.

As I will demonstrate in this dissertation, the oral strummed guitar tradition has its own harmonic language based on short-term cadential patterns. Italian song composers, who were experimenting with musical structures based on cadential progressions, were quick to adopt this harmonic language. In fact, the influence between verse form and musical form posited by Leopold also ran in the other direction. Roark Miller has found evidence that composers of the 1620s and 1630s were creating texts appropriate for these new, small-scale periodic musical structures;

¹⁶ Gabriello Chiabrera, *Manieri de versi toscani* (Genoa: Giuseppe Pavoni, 1599).

¹⁷ Leopold, *Modo d'Orfeo*, 48.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

obviously, factors other than verse form were affecting harmonic structure in the song repertory.¹⁹

More than one scholar has suggested a connection between chord progressions from the strummed guitar repertory and functional harmonic cadences. Richard Hudson was one of the first to investigate the repertory of strummed dance music for guitar. He recognized that many early dances had a decidedly tonal, triadic orientation, including repeated examples of the I-IV-V harmonic framework. These *passacaglias* were being notated in the late sixteenth century, over a century prior to theoretical recognition of the tonic, subdominant, and dominant as functional aspects of harmonic language. Although he compiled an indispensable anthology of the guitar-based dance forms,²⁰ Hudson concluded somewhat simplistically “the Spanish guitar gave to art music . . . a concept of mode that led eventually to fully developed major-minor tonality.”²¹

Thomas Christensen has also taken up the concept of incipient tonality in the guitar repertory.²² While Hudson’s work is restricted to strummed dance accompaniment, Christensen expands the discussion to include the relationships

¹⁹ Roark Miller, “The Composers of San Marco and Santo Stefano and the Development of Venetian Monody” (Ph.D. diss, University of Michigan, 1993), 100-106.

²⁰ Richard Hudson, *The Folia, the Sarabande, the Passacaglia, and the Chaconne: The Historical Evolution of Four Forms That Originated in Music for the Five-course Spanish Guitar* (Neuhausen-Stuttgart: American Institute of Musicology, Hänssler-Verlag, 1982).

²¹ Richard Hudson, “The Concept of Mode in Italian Guitar Music during the First Half of the 17th Century,” *Acta musicologica* 43 (1970): 163.

²² Thomas Christensen, “The Spanish Baroque Guitar and Seventeenth-Century Triadic Theory,” *Journal of Music Theory*, 36 (1992): 1-42.

between alfabeto, basso continuo realization on the guitar, and early eighteenth-century theories of harmonic tonality. His work, therefore, is very close to my own topic. However, in the limited space of one article covering over a century of music, Christensen has no time for a systematic survey of the repertory. Also, his scope exceeds mine in that he details the connection between guitar technique and the functional harmonic theories of Rameau. The lynchpin of that connection is François Champion's "Règle de l'octave," a shorthand continuo realization technique described in Champion's guitar treatise of 1716. Rameau knew Champion's treatise well, and the "Règle de l'octave" clearly implies the concepts made explicit by Rameau. The problem with the Champion example is that by 1716 the process of assimilation was working both ways; that is, by 1716 Champion must have been influenced as much by other seventeenth-century harmonic systems as by the older guitar tradition. To distinguish specifically guitaristic idioms, work must be done on an earlier stage of the process.

Published in the same year as Christensen's article, Maurice Esses's book on Spanish instrumental music amounts to a comprehensive study of the repertory from which the Italian five-course guitar emerged.²³ Esses covers the background and history of his topic, which includes harp, keyboard, and vihuela repertoires as well as the guitar. The book includes bibliographies of sources, discussions of historical and cultural context, and extensive transcriptions. Esses borrows the term "harmonic-metric scheme" from Helga Spohr as a way of describing the four elements

²³ Esses, *Dance and Instrumental Diferencias*.

incorporated by any given dance type: meter, phrase length, harmonic rhythm, and harmonic progression. This allows for a more nuanced reading of the harmonic schemata developed by Hudson. For example, Esses points out that there is no reason to assume direct causal relationships between similar harmonic-metric schemes, and that the concept of a “harmonic-metric” scheme itself was foreign to contemporary musical treatises. Esses also makes a point regarding the relationship between Spanish vernacular and Italian written music that points directly towards my hypothesis. Noting that many of the surviving sources for guitar are meant for the beginner, and therefore contain simplified versions of traditional musical techniques, he suggests “that this simplification and modification of traditional ideas contributed, although often inadvertently, to the formulation of more modern ideas of tuning, pitch organization, metric notation, and rhythmic structure.”²⁴ Esses’s “harmonic-metric schemes” are the basis for what I have labeled as the dance-song repertory, in which generally understood rhythmic and harmonic patterns were matched to well-known melodies and dances.

STRUMMED GUITAR PERFORMANCE AND MONODY


In addition to these specifically guitar-based studies, research oriented towards the development of monody in Florence and Rome gives strong evidence that the guitar exerted more influence than had previously been imagined. These more recent discussions of *alfabeto* often appear in the context of historical inquiries into the origins of the continuo bass, which are themselves informed by studies linking

²⁴ Esses, *Dance and Instrumental Diferencias*, 71.

Florentine monody to semi-improvised solo song traditions from the sixteenth century. Common to these studies is an understanding of an orally transmitted repertory, in the sixteenth century, of dance and song accompanied by the five-course guitar. The guitar is therefore a likely suspect, although a shadowy one, when sixteenth-century oral traditions are considered. Although substantial musical notation for the four-course guitar survives from this period, there seems to be a distinction between the repertoires of the four- and five-course guitar, with the five-course instrument used primarily for strummed dance and song. The four-course instrument is generally accepted as the predecessor to the five-course guitar; the four courses were tuned to the same interval pattern as the upper four courses of the larger instrument, but in a higher range. Tunings for the four-course instrument are given in Juan Bermudo's *Declaración de Instrumentos musicales* (1555) (see Fig. 1.4). The four-course instrument has a substantial repertory of solo music in lute tablature dating back to the middle of the sixteenth century: the first printed music for the four-

Tuning for the four-course guitar (as described by Juan Bermudo)

a las nuevos



IV III II I

a las viejos




Figure 1.4: Tunings for the Four-Course Guitar. Bermudo's "a las nuevos" tuning predominates in the four-course repertory.

course guitar is found in Alonso Mudarra's *Tres libros de musica*, a vihuela collection from 1546.²⁵ Although one might expect an overlap in repertory between the two instruments, the four-course guitar, at least in the surviving sources, is given music in lute tablature that demands a *punteado* (that is, plucked) technique, in which the notation specifies individual strings.²⁶ Such five-course sources as survive, however, beginning with Montesardo's 1606 tutor, were restricted to *alfabeto* (that is, exclusively strummed) notation until 1630, when Giovanni Foscarini introduced a mixture of *punteado* and *alfabeto* tablature.²⁷ Therefore, although the five-course guitar was probably cultivated in the sixteenth century at the same time that *punteado* tablature was provided for the four-course instrument, the five-course guitar repertory seems to have been distinct, only incorporating *punteado* notation in the next century, long after the four-course instrument had fallen out of favor. We must conclude that the five-course instrument occupied a specific place in sixteenth-century Spanish culture, one restricted to an unwritten tradition.

Two early versions of "Guardame las vacas," one for the four-course and one for the five-course instrument, provide an example of how differently the two systems of notation function (see Fig. 1.5). Mudarra's version is basically a short set of variations on pre-existing material, but these variations represent an independent

²⁵ Alonso Mudarra, *Tres libros de musica en cifras para vihuela* (Seville: DeLeo, 1546; Monaco: Chantarelle, 1980).

²⁶ For a description of the four-course guitar repertory see Tyler, *Guitar and Its Music*, 7-36.

²⁷ Giovanni Paolo Foscarini, *Il primo, secondo, e terzo libro della chitarra spagnola* (n.p.: publisher unknown, [1630]); see Boye, "The Baroque Guitar," <http://www.library.appstate.edu/music/guitar/1630foscarini.html>.

A) Alonso Mudarra, "Guardama las vacas," *Tres libros de musica* (Seville: 1546)

LIBRO I. GUITARRA. AL TEMPLO NVEVO. FOL. XXIII

Romanes
ca:ogua
rdame las
vacas. Pro:
porcion tres
semibreues
alcompas.

(C. Fin del primer libro.

6

11

15

20

25

Figure 1.5: Two Versions of "Guardame las vacas" (cont. on next page).

B) “Guardame las vacas” in chord-symbol notation from Amat, *Guitarra española* (Lerida: 1596), with suggested transcription.

Vacas.

1	-12	10	9	1	12	10	9	10
2	1	11	10	2	1	11	10	11
3	2	12	11	3	2	12	11	12
4	3	1	12	4	3	1	12	1
5	4	2	1	5	4	2	1	2
6	5	3	2	6	5	3	2	3
7	6	4	3	7	6	4	3	4
8	7	5	4	8	7	5	4	5
9	8	6	5	9	8	6	5	6
10	9	7	6	10	9	7	6	7
11	10	8	7	11	10	8	7	8
12	11	9	8	12	11	9	8	9

Figure 1.5: Two Versions of “Guardame las vacas” (cont.).

artistic creation, and the tablature provides all the necessary information to realize Mudarra's piece. By contrast, Joan Carles Amat's "version" of "Guardame las vacas" functions as an example of how an existing piece should be transposed rather than as a new composition. Amat's use of numbers for chord-shapes allows transposition to be done by addition or subtraction. Using the fingering chart, a performer can apply Amat's numbers to any strummed guitar piece. Transposition can then be accomplished by adding or subtracting the same amount from each number, and referring back to the fingering chart to find the new chords. In other words, Amat's numerical chord-symbols are not intended to notate new compositions, but are to be applied to dance-songs already known by the performer. Amat has set up his system so that the guitarist can proceed directly from left-hand shapes to numbers with no need for staff notation. His book, therefore, is tailored to performers of an orally transmitted dance-song repertory. When alfabeto symbols were later combined with other forms of notation, two disparate traditions, represented here by Amat (chord-symbols as tools for performance of an oral repertory) and Mudarra (the notation of new compositions) would be connected in practice. The mechanics of that connection had repercussions for the performance and the composition of seventeenth-century song.

A note of caution is in order about rasgueado practice in the sixteenth century. Although early five-course guitar sources transmit chord-symbol notation exclusively, full chords also appear in the four-course guitar punteado sources, suggesting that the unwritten tradition may have included both instruments. Likewise,

the purely strummed notation for the five-course instrument does not preclude a more sophisticated performance technique that may have incorporated some plucked notes. In fact, later notational modifications to alfabeto sources reflect this practice. Nevertheless, the unique notation of the five-course guitar repertory does tie the instrument to a specific cultural space, that of strummed accompaniment to popular song and dance styles.

Scholars generally accept a Spanish unwritten guitar tradition transmitted to Italy via Naples. Richard Hudson's work, as previously cited, assumes a Spanish heritage in the five-course guitar for four of the most common Italian dance forms. Maurice Esses writes: "The five-course guitar emerged in Spain during the late 16th century. It was extremely popular among the lower classes and was frequently associated with barbers. The guitar was often employed to accompany the dances which were given during various *fiestas*."²⁸ James Tyler, in what is now the standard reference source for the guitar, refers to the Spain-Naples-Italy connection: "That Naples was a province of Spain during the sixteenth century and ruled by viceroys on behalf of the Spanish crown fuels the notion that the Spanish guitar was introduced in Rome by way of Naples."²⁹ Neil Pennington, in his book on the Spanish Baroque guitar, goes so far as to refer to the guitar as a substitute for the lute in Spain: "Thus, the guitar had little competition from other plucked instruments in Spain during this

²⁸ Esses, *Dance and Instrumental Diferencias*, 114.

²⁹ Tyler, *Guitar and Its Music*, 42.

period and began to flourish earlier there than in the other European centers, where interest in the baroque lute remained strong.”³⁰

These authors unite in referring to the five-course guitar as a Spanish instrument. Indeed, this designation goes back to the early Italian sources, which uniformly designate the five-course instrument as the “chitarra spagnola.” Giustiniani, for instance, writing in 1628, observes: “At the same time the Spanish Guitar (*chitarra alla spagnola*) was introduced throughout Italy, especially in Naples,” and “Performance on the Neapolitan Chitarra (*chitarra napolitana*) has been entirely given up in Rome, and almost given up in Naples.”³¹ The title pages of the Italian songbooks are also consistent in using the adjective “spagnola.”

Sixteenth-century references to the five-course guitar also support the Spanish origins of the instrument. Juan Bermudo, for instance, recounts that in Spain he has seen guitars with five courses played, although the stringing information provided by Bermudo does not seem to match that of the five-course guitar as we understand it. Bermudo says that if one puts on another string, it will be a fourth above the first string.³² It is true that the five-course guitar does have the interval of a fourth

³⁰ Neil Douglas Pennington, *The Development of Baroque Guitar Music in Spain, Including a Commentary on and Transcription of Santiago de Murcia's "Passacalles y obras"* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981), 27.

³¹ Vincenzo Giustiniani, *Discorso sopra la musica*, trans. Carol MacClintock (n.p.: American Institute of Musicology, 1962), 79; see also Nigel Fortune, “Giustiniani on Instruments,” *The Galpin Society Journal* 5 (1952), 50-51.

³² Juan Bermudo, *El libro llamado Declaration de instrumentos musicales libro segundo* (Osuna: publisher unknown, 1555; facsimile edition edited by Macario Santiago Kastner [Kassel: Bärenreiter-Verlag, 1957]), ch. 32: “Guitarra avemos visto en España de cinco ordenes de cuerdas. En este instrumento se puede poner la sobre dicha quinta cuerda; para la Musica que andaviere en diez y siete puntos, o en mas.

between the first and second courses. But following Bermudo's directions to the letter (that is, beginning with a four-course guitar and adding a string a fourth above the first course) would result in an instrument with a major third between the third and fourth courses, rather than between the second and third. Bermudo, however, does not seem familiar with this five-course instrument, and mentions it only in passing; perhaps his experience as an educated Franciscan did not encompass the culture of the *rasgueado* guitar tradition. In any case, Bermudo's 1555 reference provides a good starting point for the Spain-Naples-Italy connection. Spanish provenance is reinforced by Joan Amat's 1596 guitar tutor, in which he assumes a knowledge of strummed dances on the part of his amateur readership.³³ Spain and Naples were linked in 1606 when Girolamo Montesardo, a Neapolitan, brought out a book of *alfabeto solos* for the "chitarra spagnuola [sic]."³⁴ Then, in 1610, clinching the connection between Naples and Rome, Girolamo Kapsperger created an elaborate collection of *villanellas*, a standard Neapolitan genre, including both theorbo tablature and guitar *alfabeto*.³⁵ The *napoletana* or *alla Romana* style was referred to in contemporary Venetian printings such as Bernadino Borlasca's *Canzonette...libro secondo*, and the *alfabeto* itself was incorporated into the burgeoning genre of solo

Facilmente esta Musica se puede tañer en guitarra: si le ponen otra cuerda, que esta sobre la prima un diatesseron."

³³ Amat, *Guitarra española*, facsimile edition edited by Monica Hall (Monaco: Chanterelle, 1980).

³⁴ Montesardo, *Nuova inventione*.

³⁵ Girolamo Montesardo, *I lieti giorni di Napoli* (Naples: Gargano and Nucci, 1612); Giovanni Girolamo Kapsperger, *Libro primo di villanelle* (Rome: publisher unknown, 1610).

chamber song printed in such quantity in Venice in the first half of the sixteenth century.³⁶

Verbal descriptions of accompaniment to song and dance provide some of the earliest references to the five-course guitar. Such accounts are, by and large, our only source of information on a thriving unwritten tradition that preceded printed seventeenth-century sources for the five-course guitar repertory. The Spanish nobleman Vicente Espinel (1550-1624) recounts episodes of singing and strumming the guitar in a semi-autobiographical novel.³⁷ Originally published in 1618, the book describes scenes dating back to the late sixteenth century. Espinel has been credited, in various sources, with adding the fifth course to the instrument. These sources all stem from the dramatist Lope de Vega, whose authority on the issue is dubious.³⁸ We may, however, take Espinel's account as evidence of a five-course guitar being strummed in informal Spanish settings during the late sixteenth century. The practice of accompanying lyrical poetry *a lo rasgo* (that is, by strumming a guitar) was cited by Miguel Sánchez de Lima in 1580.³⁹ Further references to dance-songs come from late sixteenth-century philosophical sources, which refer to the *ciaccona* and

³⁶ Bernadino Borlasca, *Canzonette a tre voci di bernardino Borlasca, nobil di Gavio Genovese, appropriate per canter nel chitarrone, lira doppia, cembalo, arpone, chitariglia alla Spagnuola; ò altro simile strumento da concerto; com'hoggi di si costuma nella Corte di Roma, novamente composte, & date in luce, Libro Secondo* (Venice: Giacomo Vincenti, 1611).

³⁷ Vicente Espinel, *Vida de Marcos de Obregón*, ed. Samuel Gili Gaya in *Clásicos Castellanos* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1940).

³⁸ For a thorough discussion, see Isabel Pope Conant, "Vicente Espinel as a Musician," *Studies in the Renaissance* 5 (1958): 133-44.

³⁹ Miguel Sánchez de Lima, *El arte poética en romance castellano* (Alcalá de Henares: Diego Martinez, 1580), cited in Esses, *Dance and Instrumental Diferencias*, 115.

sarabande to condemn them on moral grounds. In 1596, López Pinciano describes a *zarabanda* performance in such terms:

Both of them got up from the table. The young girl with her *vihuela* danced and sang, and the old woman with her guitar sang and danced. They uttered a thousand obscenities from those foul mouths, reinforcing them with the instruments and unchaste movements of their bodies. The dissoluteness was such that the three men, who were alone, were abashed and affronted. . . .

Pinciano: 'Is this the *zarabanda* which they are uttering?'

Fabrique: 'Call it *zarabanda* or *dithiramba*.'⁴⁰

A Spanish publication from 1616 includes texts for “three famous *chaconas* for singing”; one of these contains the refrain “Así vida, vida bona / vida vámanos a Chacona” (“Such is life, a good life, let us go to *Chacona*”).⁴¹ The same refrain appears in a seventeenth-century manuscript with the standard ciaccona chord progression in alfabeto symbols above the text.⁴² These sources suggest an unwritten dance-song tradition, in which generally understood rhythmic and harmonic progressions might be used either as dance or song interchangeably.

This Spanish/Neapolitan background of “popular” music connects the guitar to investigations of the origins of Florentine monody, which began with references to solo performance of light songs such as villanellas and canzonettas. Claude Palisca,

⁴⁰ Alonso López Pinciano, *Philosophía antigua poetica* (Madrid: Thomas Iunti, 1596), 418-420, translated in Esses, *Dance and Instrumental Diferencias*, 743-44.

⁴¹ Esses, *Dance and Instrumental Diferencias*, 613.

⁴² Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale de France, Ms espanol 390, f. 36-36v. This manuscript has been dated to c.1610-1620; see Esses, *Dance and Instrumental Diferencias*, 169; and Tyler, *Guitar and Its Music*, 90.

for instance, was one of the first to question the novelty of Caccini's "new" music. Discussing the writings of Florentine Camerata member Vincenzo Galilei, Palisca proposed popular song forms such as the villote and frottola as models for monody. He described Galilei's arrangements of such pieces for solo voice and lute, using these "psuedo-monodies" as evidence for a practical connection between popular song and the ideas of the Camerata.⁴³ This thread has been followed by later historians, especially in the investigations of manuscript sources by John Walter Hill, Tim Carter, and Victor Anand Coelho.⁴⁴ Hill's 1983 article drew attention to the lute or theorbo as the primary accompanimental instrument for Florentine monody, countering the earlier tendency among researchers and editors, who implied keyboard harmonizations as typical. The chordal texture of these intabulated lute accompaniments prompted Hill to connect them to rasgueado guitar practice.⁴⁵ Both Carter and Coelho have found similar manuscript sources with chordal intabulations, making it increasingly obvious that the works of Caccini were performed with a chordal style of accompaniment, and that this style was also common to solo performance of polyphonic song in the late sixteenth century.

⁴³ Claude Palisca, "Vincenzo Galilei and Some Links between 'Pseudo-Monody' and 'Monody'," *The Musical Quarterly* 46 (1960): 344-360.

⁴⁴ John Walter Hill, "Realized Continuo Accompaniments from Florence c.1600," *Early Music* 11 (1983): 194-208; Tim Carter, "Caccini's 'Amarilli, mia bella:' Some Questions (and a Few Answers)," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 113 (1988): 250-73; Victor Anand Coelho, "The Players of Florentine Monody in Context and History, and a Newly Recognized Source for Le Nuove Musiche," *Journal of Seventeenth-Century Music* 9, no.1, <http://www.sscm-jscm/v9/no1/Coelho.html>.

⁴⁵ Hill, "Realized Continuo Accompaniments," 202.

The discovery of connections between Naples and Florentine monody has added fuel to scholarship on the five-course guitar and early Italian song. In 1982 Howard Mayer Brown pointed out the connection between Caccini and Neapolitan songs such as the villanella via his teacher Scipione della Palla.⁴⁶ More recently John Walter Hill has reemphasized the southern Italian influence on early seventeenth-century monody, including a discussion of the five-course guitar in Naples and Rome.⁴⁷ Hill's work is the most persuasive in linking strummed five-course guitar and monody, and has set the stage for the current scholarly thinking on the subject. Referring to an anthology collected by Rocco Rodio in 1577, Hill writes, "Following the usual practice established for frottole early in the sixteenth century and continued for canzoni villanesche alla napolitana and related 'lighter' genres in the middle of the century and for villanelle and canzonetti in the later 1500s, Rodio's *arie* were provided to the public in settings for three and four voices, although their primary and, in many cases, original medium was solo voice accompanied by a chord-playing instrument such as lute, guitar, or harpsichord."⁴⁸ Here, Hill is referring to a Neapolitan practice, the solo performance of *villanesche*, which is described by Donna Cardamone, who uses the term "self-accompanied popular singer."⁴⁹ Hill relies on this Neapolitan semi-improvised practice, which resembles Spanish

⁴⁶ Howard Mayer Brown, "The Geography of Florentine Monody: Caccini at Home and Abroad," *Early Music* 9/2 (1981): 147-68.

⁴⁷ John Walter Hill, *Roman Monody, Cantata, and Opera from the Circles around Cardinal Montalto* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

⁴⁸ Hill, *Roman Monody*, 61.

⁴⁹ Donna Cardamone, *The canzone villanesca alla napolitana and Related Forms, 1537-1570* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981), 58.

strummed guitar practice, in connecting the five-course guitar to the Neapolitan villanella.

Other scholars have followed Hill in linking Spain to Naples by means of a semi-improvised performance practice common to both areas. Since alfabeto symbols leave so much information unnotated they are taken as evidence of a recitational, semi-improvised style, which fits well with what is known about early monody performance. Hill is explicit about the role of the guitar, citing “another type of accompaniment that would seem more suitable [than the lute] and another kind of tablature that goes with it: chordal accompaniment on the five-course Spanish guitar and the alphabet tablature devised to transmit that practice.”⁵⁰ Dinko Fabris also connects the Spanish guitar to a tradition reaching back to the roots of Neapolitan solo song: “From Rome was carried to Florence . . . a Roman-Neapolitan style . . . that originally was a prerogative of Neapolitan singers.” This Roman-Neapolitan style, in Fabris’s summary, is of a piece with the Spanish *rasgueado* style represented by alfabeto notation.⁵¹ Hill restates and refines his case in a later article, in which he accepts that although many Spanish song traditions do not fit the Italian recitative style, the primary characteristics of monody can still be found in certain Spanish sources.⁵² An oral tradition, common to both Spain and Naples, which primarily survives in alfabeto notation, is thus firmly fixed in modern scholarship.

⁵⁰ Hill, *Roman Monody*, 66.

⁵¹ Dinko Fabris, “Le notti a Firenze i giorni a Napoli,” in *Rime e suoni alla Spagnola*, edited by Giulia Veneziano (Florence: Alinea Editrice, 2003), 26.

⁵² John Walter Hill, “L’Accompagnamento *rasgueado* di chitarra: Un possibile modello per il basso continuo dello stile recitativo?” in *Rime e suoni*, 48-50.

In linking strummed guitar to monody, scholars have also begun to uncover a complex relationship between alfabeto and the continuo bass. Much of the complexity stems from the nature of the strummed dance-song repertory, in which harmony and texture are treated very differently than in the printed Italian song tradition. For example, the *romanesca* and *Ruggiero* appear as basso continuo lines in seventeenth-century printed songs. But Palisca's investigation into the origins of these bass lines raises questions as to whether they were originally melodies, bass lines, or harmonic patterns. He points out that Vincenzo Galilei used the term "aria" to describe the *Ruggiero* and *romanesca*. In this usage the term "aria" seems to refer to a melody, even though the melodies found above these patterns appear in so many variations that no one exemplar can be identified. Nino Pirrotta has argued that "aria" was used at the turn of the seventeenth-century to encompass more than simply the pitches of the melody, but also those aspects that define a melody by "tradition, repetition, and habit," which would include characteristic harmonic patterns.⁵³ The use of the term "aria" in relationship to recitational poetry has been investigated by James Haar, who stresses the ambiguity between bass and melody in early settings of the *Ruggiero*.⁵⁴ As Palisca notes: "While the *arie di Romanesca* and *Ruggiero* must have been discant formulas, this did not prevent composers from writing pieces on the

⁵³ Nino Pirrotta, "Early Opera and Aria," in *New Looks at Italian Opera: Essays in Honor of Donald J. Grout*, edited by William W. Austin (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1968), 57.

⁵⁴ James Haar, "Arie per cantar stanze," in *L'Ariosto: la musica i musicisti*, edited by Maria Antonella Balsano (Florence: Olschki, 1981), 31-46.

harmonic patterns derived from them and ignoring the melodies themselves.”⁵⁵ In other words, the distinction between melody and accompaniment quickly becomes ambiguous in the context of oral traditions.

Maurice Esses has also explored this ambiguity, extending the discussion to other patterns, such as the passamezzo, ciaccona, and folia. Esses describes all of these with the term “harmonic-metric scheme,” which emphasizes their independence from the stereotypical bass lines to which they were set in the seventeenth century. Instead of a standard bass line, Esses’s “harmonic-metric scheme” depends on phrase length, harmonic rhythm, and harmonic progression. Esses speculates that such schemes may have originated in oral melodies to which homophonic accompaniments were added. The instrumental settings that survive from sixteenth-century Spain can be explained, then, as arrangements of those accompaniments, arrangements that do not necessarily incorporate the original melody.⁵⁶ The final steps in creating the seventeenth-century version would then be a reduction of the harmonies to a continuo line and the composition of a new melody above that line.

Many of these patterns have been surveyed comprehensively by Richard Hudson, who demonstrates both their origins as harmonic progressions and their roots in the Spanish strummed guitar tradition. The subtitle of his four-volume study on these dances, *Four Forms that Originated in Music for the Five-Course Spanish Guitar*, makes his conclusion clear.⁵⁷ The development of these dances predates their

⁵⁵ Palisca, “Vincenzo Galilei,” 355.

⁵⁶ Esses, *Dance and Instrumental Diferencias*, 569-86.

⁵⁷ Richard Hudson, *Folia, the Saraband, the Passacaglia, and the Chaconne*.

first printed appearance, Montesardo's previously mentioned 1606 volume.⁵⁸ Echoing Palisca and Esses, Hudson states, "At the time the Spanish guitar was imported into Italy, a special style of popular social music had been developing for over a century, involving a process of composition based on chordal frameworks and methods by which they could be varied."⁵⁹ Like Esses, Hudson has chosen terminology ("special style of popular music") that emphasizes the idiosyncrasies of the strummed guitar repertory. All the studies mentioned above connect the strummed performance style to a dance-song repertory. While this repertory contains genres that also appear in other instrumentations and styles, the five-course guitar represents a specific approach to this repertory, with its own, unique performance tradition.

Any discussion of alfabeto and continuo will run into complications regarding basic musical concepts, as seen in the above discussion of harmony and texture. Further complications arise from the unique status of alfabeto notation, which, although appearing roughly contemporaneously with continuo notation, originated independently from continuo notation and retained that independence over the course of the century. Thus, the earliest sources for five-course guitar do not contain continuo lines, and some alfabeto sources may predate the use of continuo notation anywhere. For example, the earliest surviving copy of Joan Carles Amat's *Guitarra española*, a 1626 reprint in the Newberry Library, Chicago, contains the date 1596 on

⁵⁸ Montesardo, *Nuova inventione*.

⁵⁹ Hudson, *Folia, the Saraband, the Passacaglia, and the Chaconne*, vol. 1, *The Folia*, xi.

the bishop's imprimatur and the dedication page.⁶⁰ Amat includes two musical examples: one is the numerical transcription of the chords for "Guardame las vacas" (which are identical to those of the *romanesca*) shown above as Figure 1.5B, and the other is a three-part polyphonic vocal piece in the style of the Spanish *romance*. Neither piece employs continuo bass, although Amat suggests using the lowest voice of the vocal piece when assigning guitar chords as an accompaniment.

Alfabeto notation *per se*, that is, using the alphabetical characters of the Italian system, is first found in manuscripts of Neapolitan provenance from the end of the sixteenth century. The earliest securely dateable appearance of *alfabeto* is a manuscript which belonged to Isabella Gonzaga, duchess of Traetta, which contains the date 1599 on its title page. The famous Neapolitan singer Adriana Basile, who performed monody throughout Italy and who often accompanied herself on the Spanish guitar, almost certainly knew this manuscript.⁶¹ A similar manuscript, now in Bologna, also contains alfabeto and text for Spanish and Italian songs. From an analysis of text concordances, James Tyler suggests a date of circa 1585-1600 for this source, and concludes: "Hence, this manuscript, and not Girolamo's *Nuova inventione . . .* contains the earliest manifestation of guitar *alfabeto*, and guitar *alfabeto* pre-dates any other type of continuo notation found to date."⁶² Coming, as it

⁶⁰ Amat, *Guitarra española*.

⁶¹ Rome Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Chigi Cod. L.VI.200. See Hill, *Roman Monody*, 70; and John H. Baron, "Secular Spanish Solo Song in Non-Spanish Sources," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 30 (1977): 20-42.

⁶² James Tyler, "The Role of the Guitar in the Rise of Monody: The Earliest Manuscripts," *The Journal of Seventeenth-century Music* 9/1 (2003), par. 2.3,

does, from a tradition that precedes continuo notation, alfabeto cannot be explained simply as another type of continuo notation. While the two may be connected, the relationship is by no means straightforward.

Another contributing factor to the peculiarity of alfabeto notation is its specificity to the guitar. In order to understand the chart and play alfabeto, one needs only a guitar, no other musical terminology or notation. And the strummed performance practice transmitted by this notation is at least partly a product of the physical design of the instrument. The simplification of contrapuntal textures into vertical harmonies on the guitar was commonplace in the sixteenth century and continues today. In the meantime, the entire edifice of functional harmonic tonality has been developed and deconstructed. The basic setup of the guitar, however, remains the same, and it is this setup that encouraged chordal notation for the five-course guitar. The flat bridge creates an even plane, well suited for strumming. Five courses allow for an easier manipulation of triadic harmonies than is possible on the lute or viol, since the more courses there are, the more left-hand fingers are potentially needed to ensure that every course is sounding a member of the triad. Also, the lack of bass strings on the guitar discourages a full realization of polyphonic textures. The practical, instrument-based approach to chordal harmony represented by alfabeto notation predates any theoretical formulation of the chord as an

independent harmonic unit.⁶³ In fact, just as many of these physical traits persist on modern guitars, chord-symbol notation quite similar to alfabeto persists in modern music printing.

GENRES OF EARLY ALFABETO SONG

The early Italian sources of vocal music with alfabeto transmit a mixture of genres: Spanish dance-songs, Spanish partsongs such as romances and villancicos, dramatic recitative with continuo, and Neapolitan canzonettas. Each of these has its own relationship to earlier traditions, and the early sources are thus a mixture of styles. The oral dance-song repertory described above is at once the most obvious and the most elusive predecessor to the alfabeto tradition. Dance-songs appear in alfabeto songbooks primarily as songs using the ciaccona or folia as a bass, although the influence of the dance-song tradition is apparent in the style of many alfabeto songs even in the absence of a specific dance. The passacaglia is a unique case. Hudson devoted one volume of his four-part work to this form, which undoubtedly originated with the five-course guitar in Spanish song and dance.⁶⁴ Its function in Italian guitar sources, however, was not only as a dance genre but also a pedagogical tool and a method of creating ritornelli appropriate to any final pitch. These pedagogical passacaglias play a specific role in the development of functional

⁶³ For a general discussion of the chord as a theoretical concept see Lester, *Between Modes and Keys*; and Dahlhaus, *Studies on the Origin of Harmonic Tonality*. For a discussion specific to the guitar, see Thomas Christensen, "The Spanish Baroque Guitar and Seventeenth-Century Triadic Theory," *Journal of Music Theory* 36 (1992): 1-42.

⁶⁴ Hudson, *Folia, the Saraband, the Passacaglia, and the Chaconne*, vol. 3, *The Passacaglia*.

harmonic tonality; their influence and importance will be discussed in Chapter 5.⁶⁵

Further connections between Italian canzonettas and dance forms will be explored in detail over the course of this study.

Secular Spanish songs such as the romance and villancico also appear in the earliest alfabeto sources. Earlier examples of these genres survive in various formats. Many are preserved in manuscript settings for three or four voices.⁶⁶ They also appear as songs for solo voice in the music of the Spanish vihuela composers (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1

Printed Sources for Spanish Solo Song with Vihuela Tablature

Luis Milán (*El Maestro*, 1536)

Luis de Narvaez (*El seys libros del Delphin*, 1538)

Alonso Mudarra (*Tres libros de musica*, 1546)

Enrique Enriquez de Valderrabano (*Silva de Sirenas*, 1547)

Diego Pisador (*Libro de Musica*, 1552)

Miguel de Fuenllana (*Orphenica lyra*, 1554)

Esteban Daza (*El Parnaso*, 1576).

These vihuela sources give a single vocal line and an intabulated vihuela accompaniment, but the relationship between the voice and accompaniment varies. In some, the vocal line also appears as an inner voice in the intabulation, while in others the vocal line is doubled as the top voice of the intabulation, and in one case

⁶⁵ For more on the relationship between the guitar passacaglia and seventeenth-century tonality, see Margaret Murata, "Guitar *Passacagli* and Vocal *Arie*," in *La monodia in Toscana alle soglie del XVII secolo*, ed. Francesca Menchelli-Buttini (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2007), 81-116.

⁶⁶ For example, the *Cancionero musico de palacio*, c. 1505-1520, in *Monumentos de la Musica Española*, vols. 5 and 10, ed. Higinio Anglés, and vol. 14, ed. José Romeu Figueras (Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto Español de Musicología, 1944, 1951, and 1965).

(Mudarra) the voice is not doubled in the accompaniment at all.⁶⁷ John Baron has surveyed some Italian sources of Spanish song, consisting of alfabeto texts in manuscript.⁶⁸ Most of these manuscripts include both Italian and Spanish alfabeto texts as well as alfabeto solo dances.⁶⁹ Spanish songs also appear in later seventeenth-century Italian prints, such as Giovanni Stefani's *Affetti musicali* (Venice: Vincenti, 1618) and Juan Aranyes's *Libro segundo de tonos y villancicos* (Rome: Robletti, 1624). Of the sources mentioned so far, these last are the only ones to contain basso continuo; again, continuo lines make a late appearance in this repertory.

The villanella, ostensibly a Neapolitan genre, is the most frequently designated in early alfabeto prints. By the end of the sixteenth century, however, it had merged with the canzonetta and balletto, so that any direct link to Neapolitan song was obscured. Northern Italian composers adopted the terms "alla napolitana" and "villanella" in the late sixteenth century, so that no definite distinction can be made between "villanella" and "canzonetta" after 1570 or so. Donna Cardamone describes the relationship between the earlier "villanesca alla napolitana" and the later "villanella" this way: "During the 1560s Neapolitan idioms were gradually replaced by stereotyped conceits in the Petrarchan or Arcadian vein, giving rise to the gentler designations 'villanella' and 'napolitana'. After 1580 the term 'canzonetta' became

⁶⁷ Glenda Simpson and Barry Mason, "The Sixteenth-Century Spanish Romance: A Survey of the Spanish Ballad as Found in the Music of the Vihuelistas," *Early Music* 5 (1977): 53.

⁶⁸ Baron, "Secular Spanish Solo Song."

⁶⁹ See Tyler, "Role of the Guitar in the Rise of Monody," and Murata, "Guitar *Passacaglie* and Vocal *Arie*."

standard for non-Neapolitan songs descended from the villanella. The villanella, in turn, was affected by the lively declamation, short imitative motifs and high tessitura of the canzonetta and gradually came to be called ‘canzonetta’ as often as ‘villanella’. During the 17th century solo songs as well as partsongs were sometimes described as villanellas.”⁷⁰ Alfred Einstein views the late sixteenth-century “villanella” in much the same way, going so far as to provide snapshots of the process in the form of contemporary publications.⁷¹ Cory Gavito’s recent dissertation on alfabeto songbooks echoes Cardamone’s reference to Arcadian imagery. He describes the continuing references to Naples in the alfabeto repertory as a culturally constructed ideal of pastoral simplicity.⁷²

When seen in light of these multiple influences, this seemingly innocuous canzonetta repertory takes on a new luster. Rather than a depository for historically insignificant material, the early seventeenth-century canzonetta is a crucible in which oral and written traditions were combined by cultural forces. Although these combinations can sometimes be awkward, they contain, in various formative stages, many elements vital to later Italian composition. The next chapter will analyze the early alfabeto repertory, with attention to how these multiple influences interact and the traces they leave on the printed page.

⁷⁰ Donna Cardamone, “Villanella,” *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., 628.

⁷¹ Alfred Einstein, *The Italian Madrigal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 584-603.

⁷² Cory Gavito, “The *Alfabeto* Song in Print, 1610-ca. 1665: Neapolitan Roots, Roman Codification, and ‘Il gusto popolare’” (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2006), 145-67.