Giovanni Battista Granata: Baroque Guitar Master in Bologna

by Craig H. Russell

In the last issue of Soundboard, I began to explore the music of neglected baroque guitar composers by presenting a pair of works by the Belgian composer François Le Coq. This issue continues the journey into this seldom-heard repertoiire by looking at the music of Giovanni Battista Granata.¹

Although Granata was prolific and widely published during his lifetime—releasing seven major works for the baroque guitar between 1646 and 1684—very little is known of his life today. He greatly expanded the range of the baroque guitar and wrote several works for the "theorboed-guitar," a rare instrument that had the top five courses of a standard baroque guitar with an additional seven low bass riders. Some of Granata's intabulations explore scordatura tunings.

Granata's relationship to other Italian guitarists is a fascinating and complex one. He became embroiled in a series of accusations and counter-charges between himself and his guitar-teacher, the renowned Francesco Corbetta. In his preface to the Soavi concenti di sonata musicale per la chitarra spagnuola (1659) (Opus 4), Granata openly insulted "certain professors"—a thinly disguised jab at his old mentor, Corbetta then turned the tables and claimed that Granata had published in Venice some of Corbetta's compositions claiming them as his own. In addition, Granata relies heavily upon Foscarini, quoting and paraphrasing Foscarini's prefaces as the prefaces to his own books². His compositional style is somewhat inconsistent; some pieces are rather unspectacular or repetitive, but others rival in elegance and melodic invention the best works of de Visée, Bartolotti, or Roncallì. The two balletti included in this edition of Soundboard are drawn from his Soavi concenti di sonata musicale. They are both in A-minor, one of Granata's favorite keys, and make a nice pair when played together even though they were not initially conceived of as a unit. In these two gems, Granata displays a consummate mastery of counterpoint. He constructs the phrases so that they unfold and increase in energy as the composition proceeds. Such beauty, sophistication, and compositional craft is rarely surpassed by his contemporaries.

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2. See Pinnell, Francesco Corbetta, p. 103, 106-7; Strizich, "Granata," p. 629; and Tyler, intro. to Granata's Soavi concenti, p. iv.
Balletto al Signor Giorgio  
Costa Piacentino (1659)  
arranged by C. H. Russell

G. B. Granata
Balletto (1659)  
G. B. Granata  
arranged by Craig H. Russell

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