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# François Le Cocq:

## Belgian Master of the Baroque Guitar

by Craig H. Russell

In spite of the growing interest in "early music" in recent years, most of the fine composers for the baroque guitar remain relatively unknown in the modern concert world. There are, of course, a handful of "chestnuts" by Gaspar Sanz and Robert de Visée that get played over and over by classical guitarists. And nearly every aspiring guitarist delves into the enormous corpus of transcriptions and arrangements; lute suites, keyboard sonatas, and chamber music arrangements have all entered the classical guitarist's standard repertoire. Oddly enough, though, most of the literature for baroque guitar remains uncharted territory. It is a rare day indeed, when one hears a concert performance or recording of a piece by Bartolotti, Campion, Guerau, or Le Cocq.<sup>1</sup>

It is my intention, then, to whet the appetite of my guitar-playing colleagues by presenting a series of arrangements for six-string guitar of some of my favorite baroque guitar works. In this issue I will present a pair of works by the Belgian composer François Le Cocq, and in the forthcoming edition I will offer a couple of neglected gems by the Italian master Giovanni Battista Granata.

### François Le Cocq and the "Recueil des pièces de guitare"

What little we know about the life of François Le Cocq is chiefly gleaned from the preface to the "Recueil des pièces de guitare" in the Library of the Royal Conservatory of Music in Brussels.<sup>2</sup> The preface to this

1. Major exceptions to this generalization are seen in artists such as Gérard Rébours, Michael Lorimer, Robert Strizich, Nigel North and Rafael Andía, all of whom frequently perform major works from this repertoire.

2. "Recueil des pièces de guitare [sic] composées par Mr. François Le Cocq, Musicien Jubilaire de la Chapelle Royale, a Bruxelles & présentées par l'Auteur en 1729 a Monsieur de Castillion, Prevot de Sre. Pharaïlde &c. A Gand," manuscript 5.615 in the Library of the Royal Conservatory of Music in Brussels. Facsimile edition available entitled: *François Le Cocq: Recueil de pièces de guitare, 1729*, publ. under the direction of Paul Raspe, Thesaurus Musicus Nova Series,

Série A: Manuscrits, no. 1 (Brussels: Editions Culture et Civilisation, 1979). A less comprehensive version of this manuscript—also entitled "Recueil des pièces de guitare"—is found as Ms. II. 5551.D, in the Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, Albert 1er. Département de la Musique, Brussels. For a discussion of Le Cocq and this manuscript consult Monica Hall's excellent "The Guitar Anthologies of Santiago de Murcia," Ph.D. diss., The Open University [England], 1984; Richard T. Pinnell, *Francesco Corbetta and the Baroque Guitar*, 2 vols. (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980); and Craig H. Russell, "Santiago de Murcia: Spanish Theorist and Guitarist of the Early Eighteenth Century," Ph.D. diss., 2 vols., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1981.

manuscript tells us that by 1729 Le Cocq was a retired musician who previously had been the guitar teacher to the Electress of Bavaria. He is lauded by Jean Baptiste Ludovico de Castillion—the author of the preface and compiler of the manuscript—as the best guitarist of the era. As de Castillion states in his words:

The famous François Corbetta had been discovered in the Low Countries [Belgium]—and after he had dedicated his book to the Archduke Albert and Isabelle, then all the nobles in Brussels took up playing [the guitar]. And at the end of the last century [17th] and the beginning of the present one, I have also seen that the guitar alone was fashionable: the Electress of Bavaria had herself taught by Mr. François Le Cocq, presently a retired musician of the Royal Chapel and the Court. The manner and easy turns that he gives his pieces, composed in the musical taste of the era and raised to such a high perfection, caused him to be judged the most able master that has been found up to the present. It is after having heard him play the guitar several times with an accuracy and surprising delicacy, that I have again taken up this noble and melodious instrument that I had abandoned after more than twenty years, occupied by my employ with most serious affairs. And I have tried to play these same airs with which on more than one occasion he had the honor of amusing the most high and serene Archduchess, daughter of the Emperor Charles VI, our august sovereign and king, Governor of the Low Countries in the Cabinet of this illustrious Princess.

Some small favors that I occasionally rendered him and our longtime acquaintance have brought him to the point that he has graciously presented these pieces to me, copied in his own hand and authenticated by his signature. Similarly, I have copied them in my own hand into this book that I myself have prepared and arranged for my own usage. After the airs of Mr. Le Cocq in this collection, I join some pieces by other masters who excelled in the previous century.

[He then briefly talks of Francesco Corbetta, Lelio Colista (the teacher of Gaspar Sanz), Miguel Pérez de Závala (the guitar teacher of Castillion's own father before the year 1690), Gaspar Sanz, Giovanni Battista Granata, Robert de Visée, and Nicolas Derosièr—all of whom are included in the musical portion of this manuscript.]

...

Done in Ghent during the course of the year 1730.

Apparently, de Castillion came from a family of guitarists, for his preface states that the Spaniard Miguel Pérez de Závala taught guitar to Castillion's father around the year 1690. In addition, he mentions that he had played guitar for some time but had to abandon it when his duties at court became too demanding. It was Le Cocq that inspired him to take up the instrument again.

As de Castillion states, this document is a large and elegant anthology of compositions for the baroque guitar with the first half of the volume containing one-hundred seventeen works by François Le Cocq;<sup>3</sup> the second half of the volume is a compilation of seventy-six works by other composers. Of great interest are the compositions attributed to Le Cocq in this manuscript that also appear in the Santiago de Murcia's "Passacalles y obras (1732)."<sup>4</sup>

Pinpointing the chronology of composition for the Le Cocq works and their compilation into this manuscript is a thorny task. As the preface states, de Castillion heard Le Cocq perform on several occasions and was so inspired that he took up the guitar again after a twenty-year hiatus. This information is insufficient in ascertaining when de Castillion first had the opportunity to hear Le Cocq; and of course, it offers no assistance in telling us when Le Cocq actually conceived the works. But we do know from the title page that our composer is old enough to be retired from the Royal Chapel by 1729, and we can reasonably surmise from this that Le Cocq was probably composing and playing for the previous four decades. The date of composition for any given piece could thus be c.1689-

3. Although the first half of the volume is supposedly all by Le Cocq, in truth the "2. Menuet" on p. 63 of the "Recueil de pièces de guitare" is Robert de Visée's "Menuet" found in his *Pièces pour la guitarrre dédié au Roy* (Paris, 1686), p. 16.

4. For a discussion of the relationship between Murcia's and Le Cocq's pieces, see Monica Hall "The Guitar Anthologies of Santiago de Murcia"; Hall, "Santiago de Murcia and François Le Cocq," *Journal of the Lute Society of America* 16 (1983), 3-6; and Hall, "Communications" section in the *Journal of the Lute Society of America* 17 & 18 (1984 & 1985), 139-41. See also Craig H. Russell, "Santiago de Murcia: Spanish Theorist and Guitarist," vol. 1, pp. 240-53; Russell, "Santiago de Murcia: the French Connection in Baroque Spain," *Journal of the Lute Society of America* 15 (1982), 40-51; "François Le Cocq's Influence on Santiago de Murcia: Problems With Dates, Sources, and Recomposition," *Journal of the Lute Society of America* 16 (1983), 7-11; Russell, "Communications" section in the *Journal of the Lute Society of America* 17 & 18 (1984 & 1985), 141-2; and Craig H. and Astrid K.T. Russell, "El arte de recomposición en la música española para la guitarra barroca," *Revista de Musicología* 5 (1982), 5-23.

c.1729. The manuscript itself was prepared between 1729 and 1739. The title page gives the date "1729." Both the manuscript's preface and the heading that begins the *Le Cocq* section are dated 1730. F. Pilsen's engraved portrait of de Castillion—which immediately follows the title page—is dated 1739.

### Notes on Performance

The baroque guitar, with its preponderance of treble strings and its re-entrant tunings, necessitates that a modern performer either play on an authentic replica or make an arrangement for the modern six-string guitar. Playing directly from the tablature on a six-string guitar is clumsy, comical, or even unworkable.<sup>5</sup> To introduce *Le Cocq* to the modern guitarist, then, I have chosen to "arrange" the tablature rather than meticulously "transcribe."

I would like to offer a few comments regarding performance style. Since most of the full chords in the original tablature are strummed, the performer should feel free to strum a chord whenever he or she chooses: be very careful, however, not to let the strum sound heavy and overpower the phrase. The performer should remember that on a gut-strung baroque guitar the difference in "weight" between a strummed or plucked chord is not nearly so great as it is on a modern six-string guitar.

Trills and mordents can be played in a variety of ways: I give one sample realization of each immediately after the "Air Allegro."<sup>6</sup> The trills, in general, should be "prepared" by striking the upper neighbor first and only later falling to the main written note with the ensuing "repercussion." (See my notated example.) The mordents and trills should be light and graceful. Try to assure that the melodic flow is not jarred in any way by the introduction of ornaments—they should

5. See Richard Jensen and Don Rowe's "Baroque Guitar for the Modern Performer: A Practical Compromise," *The Guitar Review* 49 (autumn 1981), 22-5. For a thorough explanation of the various tuning, stringing, and tablature systems for the baroque guitar see James Tyler's *The Early Guitar: A History and Handbook*, Early Music Series, No. 4 (London: Oxford University Press, 1980).

6. For thorough discussions of baroque ornamentation see Tyler's *The Early Guitar*, esp. pp. 83-102 and Robert Donington's *The Interpretation of Early Music*, new ver. (London & Boston: Faber & Faber, 1977).

7. See Donington, *The Interpretation of Early Music*, pp. 452-63.

adorn the melody, not scramble it. I have supplied left-hand fingerings that facilitate the clear execution of the ornaments.

With respect to tempos, be careful not to play the "Menuet" too slowly. Nearly every modern recording of early eighteenth-century minuets is too slow to accommodate the minuet's dance steps. I suggest the metronome marking of "quarter note = c.144." I further suggest that the eighth-note runs in the "Menuet" be played using "notes inégales" in which the rhythms are "swung": the first eighth-note of every pair should be slightly longer than the eighth-note that immediately follows.<sup>7</sup>

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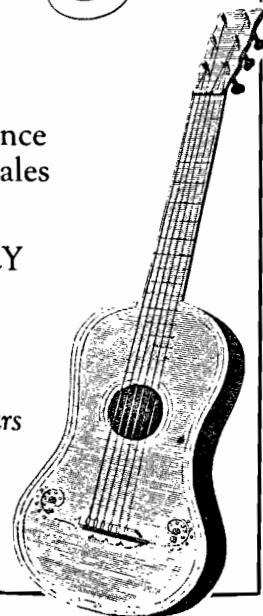
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# Menuet (c.1730)

François Le Cocq  
arranged by Craig H. Russell

p. 33

The musical score is written for guitar and consists of seven systems. Each system contains a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The time signature is 3/4. The melody is written in the treble clef, and the bass line is in the bass clef. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4 above notes. Trills are marked with 'tr'. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings like 'p' (piano). The piece is in a simple, elegant style characteristic of the 18th-century minuet.



m i m i m i m a l m l

8 p 1 0 3 0 1 0 2 3

m i m i m l m l m

8 0 2 2 2 3 1 1 3 4 tr 1 m 1 0 3

♯5

8 4 3 4 2 1 2 4 1 4 1 0

p i m i m p i m i p m

8 1 0 3 4 3 1 1 1 1 1 1

8 2 2 0 2 1 2 0 1 3

Fine

mordent

tr

trill