



# GRESHAM COLLEGE

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## THE GUITAR AT THE RESTORATION COURT

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Perhaps you know the wide stretch of beach at Deal in Kent. Even if you do not, you will readily be able to imagine the scene in the late Spring of 1660 as sailors and servants unload the baggage of King Charles II, returning for the restoration of the monarchy. Everything is bustle and confusion, and amidst it all is the most famous diarist in the English language Samuel Pepys. In many ways he is flattered to be there, but he is also exasperated because he has been changed to look after a particularly annoying piece of luggage: it is the king's own guitar.

Those of you who heard my last lecture in this series may remember that Charles purchased a guitar and some tennis rackets in Paris a few months before his return and had them sent on to Brussels where he was staying. He had spent much of his exile in places where the guitar was widely cultivated, notably the French royal court, and he clearly decided that it was time for him to try *his* hand at this *gallant* and yet accommodating instrument. You can imagine what it meant to have a royal guitarist at the centre of the Whitehall court; every courtier has an interest in pleasing the king, and as one commentator wrote in 1675: 'a courtier becomes ridiculous, when he avoids the divertissements, of which the whole Court approves'. Very soon the whole court did approve, and we now enter on a period when the guitar enjoyed immense favour and high prestige.

Now it would be an exaggeration to claim that the king single-handedly created the guitar fashion. The instrument was well known in Oliver Cromwell's day, and indeed before. The first page of your handout shows a page from an issue of *The Publick Adviser* for July 1657:

( 1 2 2 )  
ry, And one that is able to manage a Cellar to the best  
advantage; and who is able to give good caution for his  
undertakings; let them repair to the Office of *Publick*  
*Advice* in *White-Friers*, where they shall receive better  
satisfaction. I\*  
Any Gentleman whatsoever that wants a tractable  
young man about 18 years of age to wait on him in his  
Chamber, who never was yet in service, or to employ  
him other ways as he shall think fit; let them repair to the  
Office of *Publick Advice* in *White-Friers*, where they  
may be satisfied of the party. I\*  
Any Gentleman desirous to entertain a Frenchman  
into his service, who hath very good skill in Trimming  
and cutting of hair, and playing on the Guittarre, may  
please to enquire for one *Denis Fromentine* at the Green  
man near *Somerset* house. I  
If there be any Brewer, Wood-monger or Timber Mer-  
chant, or any others, that would be desirous to employ  
and entertain a sufficient able man to be his Clark, one that



The French barber had been an established stereotype of English comic and satirical writing since at least the sixteenth century; it was one of the things that gave the French a reputation for being 'excellent fellows for Toys, very perfect at Toothpicks, Beard-brushes, and Gentle womens Fans'. This advertisement would have led some to suppose that Fromentine was offering two forms of continental elegance for the English gentleman's home, the guitar and French hairstyling; others perhaps preferred to conclude that he was pedalling the trifling instrument, and encouraging the even more trifling vanity, of a nation addicted to such fripperies.

Yet there *were* major new departures at the court of Charles II, for which earlier developments do not prepare us. The light and easy guitar suited the infamously light and easy morality of his court. All the contemporary English portraits of courtiers and others playing the guitar show women, often with bedroom clothes and indeed bedroom eyes. What is more, King Charles employed a great guitar virtuoso, Francesco Corbetta, from the moment he returned to England; as a result, some of the finest guitar playing to be enjoyed anywhere in Europe was heard in Whitehall. You have a portrait of this master, Corbetta, on the second page of the handout. Charles encountered him in the Low Countries where Corbetta swiftly spotted that here was a king whose fortunes, after a long period of penury and exile, were now rising high. Money was coming to Charles from the British parliament and from loans made to him by rich merchants of the Low Countries. This was a prince worth following.



Since I have *two* players of the baroque guitar here today, I have been unable to resist choosing one of Corbetta's duets, which these days are rarely played. Here is a Prelude and Sarabande from his collection of 1674.



## CORBETTA: Prelude and Sarabande

By employing Corbetta, Charles obtained more than a renowned guitarist; he also acquired an emissary who could travel between England and France without arousing suspicion. The key figure in this design was Henriette-Anne, the sister whom Charles especially loved. Spirited away from England in 1646 when she was only two years old, Henriette-Anne was commonly called Henriette d'Angleterre in France (as by her admirer Jean Racine) but she was essentially a Frenchwoman, bearing the title 'Madame' by right of her marriage to the brother of the French king, Louis XIV. While Corbetta was in London, his connections with her were sustained by the passage of his compositions abroad using the royal network of correspondence. In 1665 Charles sent her some new pieces so that she could enjoy the Corbetta's latest work and offered to dispatch more. You have this relevant part of this letter, in Charles's own hand, on the third page of the handout:

in two or three days, and then I believe a  
Bubble will follow very quickly. I have been  
sent you some lessons for the guitar, which  
I hope will please you, the Comte de Gramont  
did carry over with him others, which it may  
be you have, and as Francisco makes any, that  
pleases me, I will send them to you, I  
have no more to say at present but that  
I am intirely Yours. J.

In 1664, or thereabouts, Henriette-Anne summoned Corbetta to Paris. A document hitherto unnoticed among the Secret Service accounts of the royal court suggests that Charles was employing him as an agent. I will not say as a spy, though if I were feeling daring I might. The Secret Service accounts were sometimes used as a means to bypass the cumbersome procedures of the Exchequer and note rewards to private persons, but they also recorded payments to informers. There is a note of 22 March 1663 that a sum of £100 was set aside 'To Mr John Quinn for Seig.<sup>r</sup> Francisco'. Quinn, granted a pension by Charles that fell into arrears, is an obscure figure but Seig.<sup>r</sup> Francisco' is almost certainly Corbetta.

For all these services, musical and perhaps political, Charles held his court guitarist in high esteem. Corbetta died in 1681 and his obituary, published in the French monthly journal of news, fashion and civility *Mercure Galant*, emphasises the favour he enjoyed. Since it is probably the work of Corbetta's pupil, Rémy Médard, it may represent the master's own version of events. It records how he became a *Gentilhomme de la Reyne* and received a key to the royal bedchamber. Court records confirm that Corbetta was made a Groom of Queen Catherine's Privy Chamber, and while it was no very great honour to receive keys to royal apartments (Charles later complained about the number of keys to his bedchamber in circulation) it was quite without precedent in England for a musician who played only the guitar to be given them. The obituary also mentions the grant of a substantial pension and the gift of a portrait, *enrichy de Diamans*. That was probably the work of the miniaturist



Samuel Cooper, an artist much in demand during the 1660s. Cooper's workshop produced many miniatures of Charles; one of the more modest examples, encircled with glass 'diamonds', appears on page 3 of your handout and may represent the kind of gift that Corbetta received. It was a mark of considerable favour to receive such a reminder of the royal presence, worn on a chain around the neck.



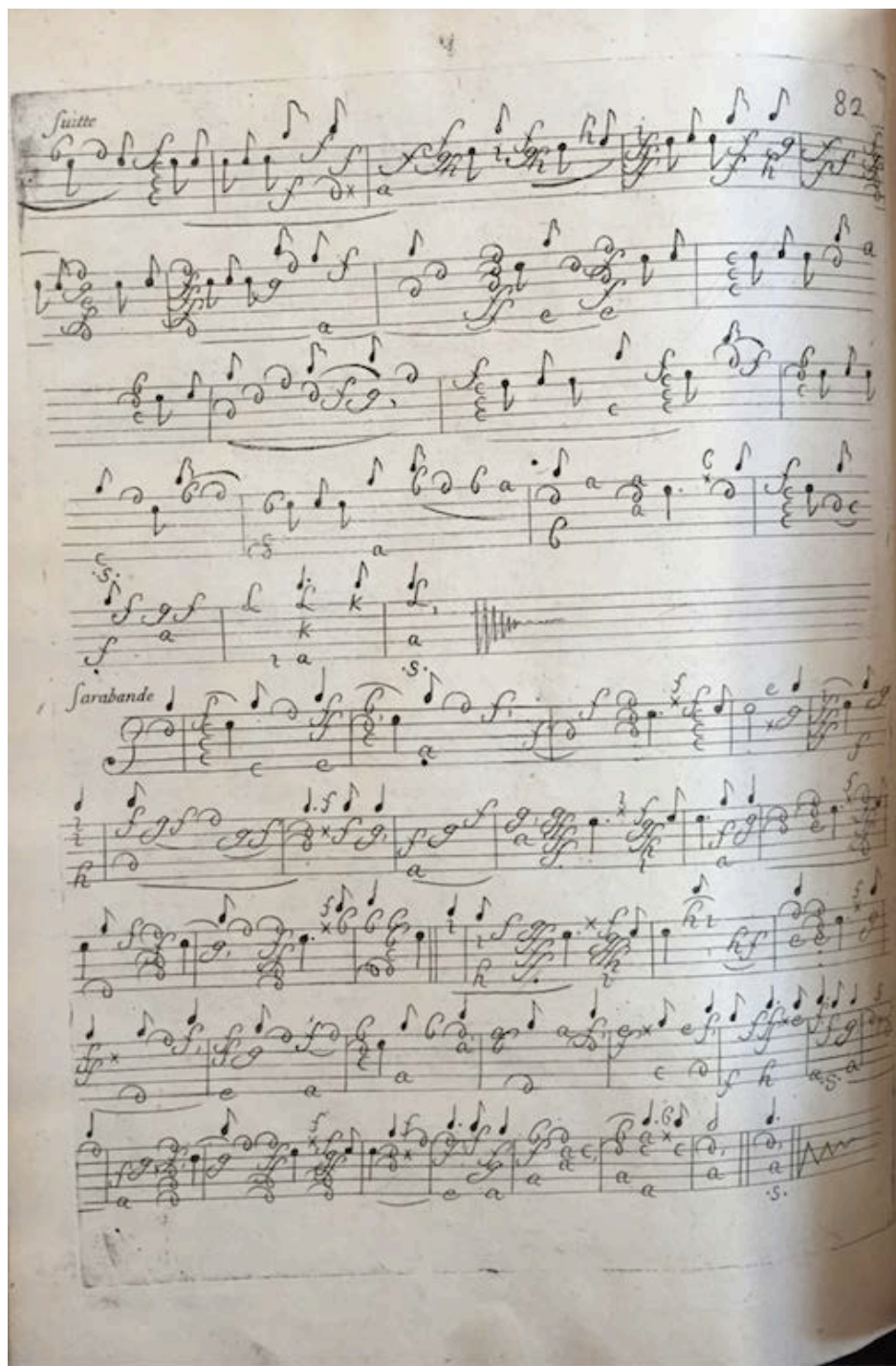
Miniature of King Charles II. Circle of Samuel Cooper. Private Collection.

There is another sign of Corbetta's closeness to the king, but I don't think anyone has ever spotted it. Look again at the mezzotint portrait on page 2. Below is an inscription including the words *H. gascar Pinxit* standing for 'pinxit' or 'painted'. The term *pinxit* in a print of the Stuart period indicates that the original was a panel painting, for if the source were a drawing the term would be *delineavit*, *designavit* or something similar. The inscription therefore attests to a portrait of Corbetta in oils, a considerably more prestigious and costly medium than mezzotint. A survey of the surviving works in this medium bearing Gascar's name shows Corbetta admitted to some very select company. Of the known examples, three show mistresses of the king, including the one we have all heard of, 'Nell' Gwyn, while three more show the king's illegitimate sons. So there was once in existence – there may still be – a panel portrait of Corbetta by a court artist whose other known subjects, transferred from oils to mezzotint, all had a close personal connection to the king.

Although Corbetta naturally dominates any account of the guitar at the restoration court – and we are not done with him yet - it is worth remembering that there is anonymous music from the period which more closely reflects the kind of thing that amateurs could hope to play. Here is one of the best-known melodies of the period as it appears in the guitar book of a young girl named Elizabeth Cromwell, who played from her book, and scribbled all over it, in the early 1680s:

### **ANONYMOUS Sany**

Returning now to Corbetta: the two greatest monuments to his talent are the printed collections of 1671 and 1674, both entitled *La Guitarre Royale* and published in Paris. The former is dedicated to Charles II, 'Roy de la Grande Bretagne' and the latter to Louis XIV. On page 4 of your handout you have a page of the book for Charles, and as you can see the notation is very intricate.



If you look at page 5, you will see the titles of some works in the British volume that mention members of the court; they give some idea of how closely Corbetta and his guitar were woven into royal circles.

- 1-5 Allemande du Roy et sa suite
- 6 Allemande en f ut fa cherie de son Altesse le Duc de York  
with la mesme en musique at 89
- 7-9 Allemande sur la mort du Duc de Clocester et sa suite
- 12 Gauotte aymée du Duc de Montmouth  
with la mesme en musique at 86



13-17 Allemande sur l'emprisonnement du Duc de Bouquengam

21 Sarabande la Cominge

We also have an account of Corbetta at court written by one who was there, though he recorded his memories long after the event. I quote:

*There was at Court a certain Italian, famous for the Guitar; he had a Genius for Musick, and was the only Man who could make any thing of a Guitar; but his Composition was so graceful and so tender, that he would have given Harmony to the most stubborn of all Instruments. The truth is, nothing was more difficult than to reach his way of Playing, but the King's relish for his Compositions had given that Instrument such a Vogue, that every Body play'd on it, well or ill; and one was as sure to see a Guitar on the Toilets [dressing tables] of the Fair, as either Red [rouge] or Patches. The D[uke] of Y[ork] play'd upon it tolerably well, and the Earl of A[rra]n like Francisco himself. This Francisco had lately compos'd a Saraband, which either charm'd or made mad, every Body, for all the Guitar-mongers at Court fell to practising it; and God knows what an universal Thumming and Humming and Scraping there was...*

Thanks to Samuel Pepys, with whom I began, we have another eyewitness record of Corbetta at work. On 5 August 1667 Pepys went to St. James's palace with William Batten of the Navy Office to conduct business with the duke of York, the Lord High Admiral. When such meetings were held at an early hour Pepys might find the duke still wearing his nightclothes (in which he appeared 'a very plain man') or might keep him company while the duke was being dressed. Once the interview came to an end on this particular occasion Pepys and Batten left through the duke's dressing room and found 'Corbetta tuning his Gittar'. Though brief, this report is rich in implication for Corbetta's position in the domestic routine of the palace. Pepys found him waiting with Monsieur Du Puy, Yeoman of the Robes to the duke; the episode took place early enough in the morning to be Pepys's first appointment of the day after rising, so York was apparently receiving Pepys and Batten before he was dressed. Corbetta would therefore have been preparing to play in the bedchamber while the duke was dressed for the day's affairs.

While in exile, Charles II had observed the formal *levée* and *couchée* of Louis XIV, and although he probably did not institute formal ceremonies on the French model his first waking hours could be a populous affair in the bedchamber. He refashioned his main bedroom in accord with French practice, placing the bed behind a railed-off canopy and laying a marquetry floor in the French manner. At both the beginning and the end of the day the king had the company of those whom he wished to invite, together with such persons as the Pages of the Backstairs thought judicious to admit. It is likely that Corbetta was sometimes summoned to be present on such occasions.

**Antoine Carré de la Grange  
Prelude & Chaconne (after Corbetta?)**

**(Livre de guitare contenant plusieurs pieces, Paris, 1671)**

Let us look more closely now at one of the court amateurs, and here I hope you share my taste for grubbing in the archives. Our player is Anna Scott, duchess of Buccleuch, who married the king's illegitimate son James duke of Monmouth in 1663, when she was barely a teenager. The National Records of Scotland hold accounts of her London expenditure for various months between December 1662 and May 1663 when efforts were being made to prepare her for life at the Whitehall court. She was then living with her mother on The Strand attending plays, visiting the London Parks and scouring the shops to buy clothes, cosmetics and a wealth of haberdashery. The accounts for those months contain various payments for lessons on the guitar, for strings and for the purchase of a 'Roman' guitar. These are on page 5 of the handout:

NRS GD224/906/59/5/2  
December 1662



Imprimis to the gittar master	04 00 00
For a romon [sic] gittar	02 00 00

NRS GD224/906/59/7/1  
January 1663

Item to the gittar master for a moneth	02 00 00
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NRS GD224/906/59/7/2  
February 1663

Item to the gittar master	02 00 00
Item for gittar strings	00 12 00

By the summer of 1664 Anna was installed in a house in Chiswick, being deemed too young to live with her new husband or to join the court. The next year, however, Charles II commanded one of the tennis courts at Whitehall Palace to be converted for the couple and they lived together (seemingly with no great affection) from February 1665 in these new lodgings by the Privy Garden. Various account books from this period show that Anna was still playing the guitar in 1668. They also give the name of her teacher revealing that his name was M<sup>r</sup>. Janvier.

Now Mr. Janvier was one of the most prominent guitarists of the Restoration period, but since the guitar could function so well within its own musical ecology, so to speak, his name is unknown to any musical source and therefore to any musical history. At the top of page 6 you have a brief passage relating to him from an edition of Edward Chamberlayne's remarkable work, *The Present state of England* (1683):

*But the fine easie Ghittar, whose performance is soon gain'd, at least after the brushing way, hath at this present over-topt the nobler Lute. Nor is it to be denied, but that after some good Work may be made of the Ghittar by such as Sir Francesco Corbetta, Mr. Janvier...and the like.*

A Treasury minute of 29 March 1677 shows that Anna was still playing the guitar nearly fifteen years after her first recorded lessons, and sheds light on the way court guitarists might obtain their instruments. The minute reveals a small consignment of imported goods that was being held at Dover for Anna, or for the duke her husband, comprising gloves, combs and a guitar. Signed by Danby as Lord High Treasurer, it is addressed to the Controller of Customs. This is the last item on your handout.

*TNA PRO 30/32/38, p. 274*

*After [my hearty commendations] etc. Whereas there are remaining in the Custome house warehouse at Dover one dozen paire of gloves, 18 douzen of combes and a Guittarre directed to his or her Grace the Duke or Dutchesse of Monmouth. These are to pray and desire you to cause the same to be delivered Custome free for which etc. 29 March 77. To the Controller of Customes.*

To import goods such as wine and pistols 'custom free' was a royal and ambassadorial privilege (though it could be extended by warrant) here being claimed for the duke and duchess in relation to their guitar and other personal imports.

This seems the right moment to hear more of the music that amateurs would and could play. Here is an air for guitar that appears in a manuscript in the Bodleian Library in Oxford; it has never been published, and I'm not aware that it has been performed in public since the seventeenth century:



**Air**  
**(Oxford Ms.)**

We're going to end, as all good shows do, by getting all our musicians on stage together. Here is a piece from *The False Consonances of Musick* by Nicola Matteis, probably the most sophisticated book on the art of the guitar that was ever published during the seventeenth century, and I am delighted to say it was issued in London twice, once entirely in Italian, and once in Italian and English, in 1680 and 1682.

**Nicola Matteis Aria**  
***The False Consonances of Musick* (London, 1682)**

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