

Introduction

A young woman poses for her portrait with a guitar (Figure 1). A contemporary brushwork inscription identifies her as Ann Raynsford, the wife of Richard Raynsford MP whom she married in 1667; her father was Richard Neville, a colonel in the Royalist army and Gentleman of the Privy Chamber to Charles I. Seated in a garden, she sweeps the strings of the guitar with her right hand and rests it on the arm of her seat, as much to enhance its volume, perhaps, as to give support. Swathed in silk, she maintains a posture that even the strictest governess would approve, her face burnished with cosmetics, her hair falling in ringlets to her opulent bosom.

This portrait reveals a consolidated and elite interest in the guitar. So it is all the more surprising that there has never been a sustained study of the guitar in seventeenth-century England, simultaneously ‘an imperfect Instrument’ and one improved ‘to so great a Perfection’, as Nicola Matteis declared in the early 1680s.¹ Household accounts, mostly unpublished, show that the guitar was widely cultivated by noble families from at least the 1640s, and therefore in a time of civil war, while the sexualised associations so apparent in Figure 1 commended the guitar to Charles II and his famously *galant* court after the Restoration of 1660. Charles owned a guitar himself, and his taste for the instrument gave his entourage a vested interest in learning to play, for it is always prudent to please a prince. He employed ‘the seventeenth century’s greatest promoter of the guitar’ and its prime virtuoso, Francisco Corbetta of Pavia, for some twenty years.² The finest guitar playing of the 1660s and 70s in Western Europe was therefore to be heard in London, not Milan or Madrid, and only reached Paris in those years when Corbetta was on loan from Whitehall.

Yet this is not just a story of the guitar as played by the elite, whose devotion to the instrument in Restoration England is now widely known and accepted (though the source base of documents and images used to make the point has often been rather narrow).³ Beyond the confines of the court, the guitar swiftly became the preferred instrument of the boarding schools where young gentlewomen, and those who aspired to that title, acquired the accomplishments that helped to make them marriageable. These schools, many of them in private houses, were often evanescent, yet



Figure 1. Portrait of Ann Raynsford, née Neville, after 1667. Unsigned, but commonly attributed to John Michael Wright. The guitar has four double courses and a single *chanterelle*, a standard arrangement for the period. There are ten pegs and eight visible frets. From the private collection of Lord Braybrooke, on display at Audley End House, Essex.

they are often mentioned in the illustrative dialogues that Paul Festeau, Claude Mauger and others compiled to illustrate their manuals of the French tongue. These writers, eager to give their compatriots a publicity that is sometimes quite explicit, often mention the place of the guitar in the boarding establishments of Hackney, Marylebone and elsewhere. In quite different milieux, an advanced continuo practice for the guitar had

developed by 1680 whose principal monuments are the two versions of *The false consonances of musick* by Nicola Matteis, arguably the most sophisticated manual of continuo for the guitar ever produced in the baroque era. Matteis describes a sophisticated practice indeed, but his book was advertised in a newssheet, *The Observator in Dialogue*, which reached ‘harassed parish clergy, embattled magistrates, churchwardens and vestrymen’.⁴

The five-course guitar has become more familiar during the last thirty years in Britain, as elsewhere, with players of replicas or reconditioned originals often achieving a high and even a virtuosic standard of performance. The level of historical and practical knowledge to be found in the guitar community, often exchanged through dedicated websites, has mounted steadily, feeding into musicological work whose findings have in turn been published and ploughed back. Scholars such as Bruce Wood and Peter Holman have seriously considered the possibility that guitars were used as continuo instruments in some parts of the first English operas, for example, which might have seemed an eccentric suggestion thirty years ago, while Monica Hall has laid the groundwork for understanding the tablature sources copied in England and the twenty-year residency of Corbetta.⁵ Editions of music in guitar tablature from English sources have begun to appear and facsimiles of several manuscript sources are now available online.⁶ Databases such as *Early English Books Online (EEBO)*, *Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO)* and sites accounting for many thousands of pages of newsprint currently ensure that sources for the social and musical history of the guitar in early modern England can be explored to a degree currently without parallel for any other country.

Ann Raynsford was not the only elite woman drawn to the guitar. Others who made the same choice included a princess who later became a queen, a Scottish duchess who married an English nobleman, several countesses (one of whom was reputed to have the finest guitar in all England), two royal mistresses, two ladies with high appointments in royal households and a woman of the gentry whose exertions on the part of her family in the 1640s stand out even among the records of female courage during that tumultuous decade.⁷ The abundance of female guitarists, however, did not deter men from taking up the guitar at court and elsewhere. In 1678 the Huguenot Jean Gailhard, ‘Tutor Abroad to several of the [English] Nobility’, compiled a treatise on the education of gentlemen which shows that masculine pursuits such as vaulting or ‘Trailing the Pike’ consorted easily with the lute, guitar and violin if a gentleman had a mind to them.⁸ According to Rémy Médard, whose *Pieces de guitarre* appeared at Paris in 1676, the guitar possessed a *cavalier* and *degagé* air which was entirely its own, and these French court values were well understood in Whitehall where Charles II presided over the most

Francophile court since the fourteenth century.⁹ *Cavalier* denoted the status and cultivated taste of the mounted nobleman, while *dégagé* conveyed (as it still does in modern French) a sense of ease and freedom from encumbrance: in seventeenth-century terms, the airiness and nonchalance of the courtier.¹⁰ Both Charles II and his brother James, the heir to the throne, cultivated the guitar despite being at the zenith of the political nation and therefore, in a sense, at the summit of British manhood. They were joined by young men of gentry or noble family who studied the guitar abroad and by amateurs of the middling sort, such as Samuel Pepys.¹¹

Whatever the gender of the player, the guitar had a unique relation to the musical amateurism of the seventeenth century. Many never tried their hand at the lute or viol, for example, either because those instruments were deemed too difficult or because they had strong associations with the musical profession. Few among the elite after 1650 wished to be seen with the barber's cittern or the bandora, which serves for a London jibe at the expense of provincial waits in Shadwell's play *Bury fair* of 1689, set in the Suffolk town of Bury St Edmunds.¹² The guitar, however, being light and fashionable, was a different matter, and had the great advantage of employing two techniques that were commonly associated with markedly different levels of technical demand. They may be loosely termed *strumming*, where the player draws one or more fingers across all or most of the strings, and *plucking*, where he or she sounds one or more strings individually with the fingertips, the nails or both. In a survey of instrumental practice published in 1683, Edward Chamberlayne called these two techniques 'the brushing way' and 'the pinching way' respectively.¹³ In Figure 1, Ann Raynsford positions her right hand for the brushing way; the sense of an action that is relaxed, perhaps languid, is part of the guitar's contribution to the sensuality of the portrait.

The interplay between plucking and strumming shaped the history of music for the guitar in England between 1550 and 1700 as it did in Western Europe more generally. Plucking or performance in the 'pinching way' orientated the guitar towards the lute, a more capacious instrument with a much more consolidated reputation as a vehicle for composed and serious music. From the late 1630s, plucking was widely combined with strumming to create the mixed style that became the international language of the seventeenth-century guitar among proficient players. The strummed element not only allowed the guitarist to sound a chord using all five courses but also allowed him or her to do so with a discerning inexactitude, spreading and thus in a sense ornamenting the beat.

As Girolamo Montesardo explains in his *Nuova inventione d'intavolatura per sonare li balletti sopra la Chitarra Spagniuola* of 1606, it took practice to strum the guitar gracefully:

Chi vorrà hauer una bella, e leggiadra mano su la Chitarra, è necessario prima, e principalmente tener la mano relassa dall'attaccatura di essa, quanto sia possibile, tanto che diventi leggiera; che così sarà molto leggiadra al sonare, e poi batter le corde dolcemente con tre, o quattro dite in modo di arpeggiare, e non tutte insieme, che così farebbono un gran fracasso, & oltre che il suono serebbe crudo, darebbe gran noia all'udito.¹⁴

For anyone who wishes to have a fair and beautiful hand on the guitar, it is first and principally necessary to keep the hand relaxed at the point of attachment, as far as may be possible, so that your touch becomes light, for in that way the sound will be very beautiful, and then to strike the strings sweetly with three or four fingers in the manner of an arpeggio, and not all together, for that would make a great din and the sound would also be coarse, which would greatly weary the listener.

Since, as Montesardo implies, it was easy to strum crudely, the technique was widely associated with players of modest gifts or little repute. In 1644, when Kenelm Digby heard that a baboon had recently learned to produce music from a guitar (which did not greatly surprise him), he observed that 'there is no comparison, between the difficulty of a guitarre and of a lute' because the guitar is an instrument where 'all the stringes may be stricken with one blow'.¹⁵ The Cambridge Platonist Henry More recorded in 1668 that he brushed the guitar sometimes 'with a careless stroak' allowing him to enjoy a 'more easie Melody' than the theorbo,¹⁶ while in 1683 Edward Chamberlayne believed that playing in the brushing way was a practice 'soon gained'. Near the century's end, Thomas D'Urfey has a French nobleman evoke some 'Guittar-Thrasher' with his 'Thrum, thrum, thrum' in Act 1 of his play *The intrigues at Versailles, or, A jilt in all humours*. The word 'thrum', plainly imitative, was generally used in mockery and was commonly employed as a sexual euphemism.¹⁷ Thus although the guitar was in many quarters highly regarded, it was not necessarily respected. A guitar offered a brief respite from the rigours of better established instruments: the chance to spend time with a frisky companion whose appeal was impossible to defend if a musician were determined to be pedantic or a moralist high-minded. In the following chapters, it will sometimes be necessary to illustrate the limitations of the guitar even while emphasizing the illustrious company it kept.

In 1721 a duchess of Orléans recalled that King Louis XIV of France 'did not know a note of music, but he had a good ear and played the guitar better than a master, disposing anything he wished on that instrument'.¹⁸ It was quite within the idiom of the guitar, even at the highest level, to be guided entirely by *l'oreille juste* in this fashion, and as a result the vogue for it has left fewer traces than we would wish. The guitar was not a hiring instrument at the English court before 1660, for with the exception of trumpeters and drummers only the players of instruments associated with a sophisticated musical literacy were appointed to such posts. A blind boy came before Queen Anne of Denmark with a 'Gittron' in 1618,¹⁹ but otherwise no musician playing anything that might be a guitar is listed in

the financial records of the court until the 1660s and the employment of Corbetta. Some of the royal lutenists and viol players may have cultivated the guitar as a sideline well before that date, but these salaried musicians were not paid to be guitarists so there was no reason for any expense on that count to be authorised and then recorded.

With the exception of the tablature in the commonplace book of Lady Ann Blount, and two songs by Henry Lawes (see Frontispiece), the guitar is never explicitly called for in the English songbooks of the seventeenth century.²⁰ Yet the two lyrics for the guitar by Lawes are of some significance. Lawes was one of the royal musicians who lost his post in the 1640s. During the War of the Three Kingdoms (or the English Civil War as it used to be known), the apparatus of royal patronage for musicians gradually became impossible to maintain in due order; by the time Charles I was executed in January 1649 it had been abolished on principle. Musicians such as Lawes, formerly in royal service, were therefore compelled to seek alternative employment by playing in private houses and giving lessons; in Roger North's phrase, they were dispersed around the country to play and sing 'for the consolation of the cavalier gentlemen'.²¹ This happened at precisely the time when the account books of the nobility and upper gentry, most of them unpublished and new to the discussion, begin to reveal payments for guitars, lessons and an accompanying 'booke'. Lawes's light and appealing works for voice and guitar are notated as treble and bass in score, without tablature, like a great many other English songs of the period; they presuppose guitarists who are capable of creating a continuo part (whether strummed, plucked or both) from two parts in stave notation, or who have access to masters who can do the work for them. Well before 1660, in other words, the song repertoire of the Stuart guitar was perhaps quite rich and extensive.

These signs of activity in the 1640s and 50s show that the level of court interest in the guitar after the Restoration of 1660, though considerable and seemingly led by the king, was not an entirely a new departure. Monarchs such as Charles II 'became centres of fashion not just by being monarchs but by deliberately working hard to stay up with fashion trends and by consciously (and expensively) intervening in a fashion process they could never fully control'.²² The vogue for the guitar at court after 1660 built on what families such as the Manners, Bouchiers, Grevilles and Verneys had been doing for decades; the difference was that Charles II was equipped to foster the guitar in an exceptionally prestigious and influential manner.

Francisco Corbetta's two collections entitled *La guitarre royalle* of 1671 and 1674 were both published in Paris, but they contain a significant amount of music played at Whitehall. The 1671 volume is dedicated to Charles II and contains pieces whose titles name members of his family and court including his brother James, Duke of Monmouth and the French

ambassador Gaston Jean Baptiste de Comminges. From this period come the guitar books of Pietro Reggio, Henry François de Gallot (a French collection with strong English connections), Elizabeth Cromwell and Princess Anne (for these sources and others mentioned, see Appendix A). Taken together, these collections preserve a wide range of music including minuets, gavottes, gigue and courantes, arrangements of common ballad tunes, dance melodies, and masque and theatre songs, including the setting of music by Henry Purcell. Pietro Reggio's compilation of the 1660s shows him devising arrangements of Italian *canzoni* by Cavalli, Carissimi, Strozzi and Rossi for his own performances with voice and guitar, and offers a glimpse into the workshop of a guitarist in Stuart London. For accompanied song, however, the glittering prizes are the four substantial books copied for Samuel Pepys, the most celebrated diarist in the English language. With their arrangements of airs from Lully operas and their settings of works by various Classical and English poets, a surprisingly large number of liturgical texts and even a massive litany, these guitar books preserve the largest manuscript repertoire of guitar-accompanied song from seventeenth-century Europe.²³ They all deserve to be better known.

Nothing was published for the guitar in England between *An instruction to the Gitterne* (1569) and *Easie lessons on the guittar for young practitioners* (1677). The former survives only in fragments and no copy of the latter has ever been found.²⁴ The 1680s, however, bring a revelatory book by the Italian immigrant Nicola Matteis: an advanced treatise on the use of the guitar as a continuo instrument and arguably the most important tract of its kind. Matteis issued the first version of this treatise under the title *Le False Consonanse della Musica*, with an entirely Italian text, in 1680 or thereabouts; he then re-arranged the material (not always helpfully) and published it again a few years later as *The False Consonances of Musick*. For this edition the pedagogical material, but not much else, was mostly turned into English.²⁵ The book presupposes advanced guitarists in London who have much the same literate competence, within the scope of their instrument, as theorbo players, organists and harpsichordists. What is more, John Carr, the seller of *The False Consonances of Musick*, anticipated some breadth of interest in the book for he advertised it in *The Observator in Dialogue*, a Tory newspaper that reached the middling sort in addition to the denizens of the Westminster village.²⁶ As if in response, the great Dutch-British woodcarver Grinling Gibbons copied a page of Matteis's book for a panel commissioned by Charles II as a gift for Duke Cosimo of the Medici (Figures 2a and 2b). This astonishing work, which has been fittingly said to show 'the most extreme naturalism of which Gibbons was capable',²⁷ says much about the position of the guitar in Charles's court, for it gathers objects that represent human art and ingenuity for a high purpose of state.



Figure 2a. The 'Cosimo' panel, by Grinling Gibbons, commissioned in 1682 by Charles II, showing a page from *The false consonances of musick* by Nicola Matteis (39 in the Italian version, 43 in the English). © Museo degli Argenti, Palazzo Pitti, Florence, Italy/De Agostini Picture Library/Bridgeman Images.

Henry Purcell's call for one or more guitars in *Dido and Aeneas*, performed at a Chelsea boarding school, should come as no great surprise, for the guitar was widely taught in such establishments. Tradesmen who had grown rich as drapers, goldsmiths or mercers in the City of London sent their daughters to the rural villages of Hackney, Chelsea and Marylebone where they might learn the guitar at a boarding school, together with needlework, handwriting and French. Many of these institutions were ephemeral, and some were no doubt founded by opportunists rather than by idealists, but



Figure 2b. Detail of Figure 2a.

they went some way to meeting a need, by now widely recognised, for the education of those who were (or aspired to be) gentlewomen. Whatever power the guitar might add to the attractions of an accomplished young woman such as Ann Raynsford (Figure 1), the daughter of a prosperous London grocer, draper or goldsmith could wield it just as effectively. Many young men of the higher gentry or nobility, with expensive estates to run, preferred to seek their wives among the daughters of such tradesmen who could offer substantial dowries, rather than among their peers who might be no better off than themselves. They expected a woman to be finished, but did not look for too much, and it was not the purpose of guitar teachers in boarding schools to turn out musical prodigies.

During the fifty years between 1675 and 1725, the guitar was engulfed by social and musical changes that finally left it almost entirely submerged. We shall find signs around 1700 of a London trade in the continental printed collections of Robert de Visée, Nicholas Derosiers and Rémy Médard, perhaps largely conducted by Huguenot booksellers but peripherally involving the firm of Playford. Generally speaking,

however, the decline of interest in the early eighteenth century was rapid. The substantial manuscript of guitar tablature that a French scribe prepared for Princess Anne in the 1690s, and two other sources produced by the same copyist, perhaps at much the same time, are the last compilations known to have circulated in England for the five-course guitar before the 1760s and the imported publications of Giacomo Merchi.²⁸ In effect, therefore, the last person of exalted station known to have played the instrument in England is the last of the Stuarts: Princess Anne, crowned Queen Anne of Great Britain in 1702.

The guitar, considered a seductive accomplishment for a woman, and a *cavalier* or *dégagée* accoutrement for a man, was mostly deprived of a place in professional consort music. It could not long survive when grander fretted instruments such as the lute and viol were either finding new roles for themselves or passing slowly into oblivion as the orchestra began to emerge in the decades around 1700.²⁹ Large and loud, configured around a core of violins, the nascent European orchestra had no consistent place for the sound of the finger-plucked string and little place for fretted instruments. As a result, sources for the history of the guitar in England under the last Stuart and the first Hanoverians begin to dissipate after 1700 into a picturesque miscellany of tapestries, satirical pamphlets and Watteau portraits.

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The history of musical instruments commonly entails problems of terminology that may often prove intractable. Counterparts to the word ‘guitar’ in seventeenth-century English documents include *guitarra*, *guitarre*, *gittar*, *gitter*, *gittir*, *ghittarr*, *getar* and *kittar*. Do these words all denote a fretted and plucked instrument with a figure-of-eight shaped body, a central sound-hole and a fixed bridge – in other words a true guitar? The question is impossible to answer in a manner that removes all doubt, for most speakers of a language generally refer to specialised objects of no personal or professional moment to themselves in a casual and relatively uninformed manner, and the names borne by musical instruments are always to some extent terms of art. Nonetheless, while the meaning of any text cited in this book may be called into question at any moment, it is reasonable to suppose that the names cited above denote a guitar unless there is good reason to suppose otherwise.

A NOTE ON MUSICAL EXAMPLES

In preparing the transcriptions for this book I have assumed that the safest path through what has become a contentious field lies in implying only the tunings explicitly recorded in English sources, unless there is some special reason to depart from them.³⁰ They are: