



# GRESHAM COLLEGE

16 MAY 2018

## SAMUEL PEPYS THE GUITARIST

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In the 1660s a traveller who had made his home in England visited Italy. Like many before him, and many after, he fell in love with what he saw. 'That must needs be a Rare Country', he wrote, 'which is pleasant and plentifull, watered with many Rivers...where the eye is delighted with most sumptuous buildings, recreated with variety of Pictures and Statues, the ear pleased with as great a variety of harmonious Musick as can be upon earth...'. During his time in that 'Rare Country' this visitor heard many kinds of music, including the singing of the papal choir in Rome; but when he reflected on everything that he had heard only the guitar caught his ear. 'Italians', he wrote,

'both men and women have a general and a natural inclination to play upon the Gittar; and I admired sometimes to hear those play who never learned at all; the very inferiour sort of people without any direction, onely with a constant application do get it, and they are so taken with it, that as they travel upon the high way from town to town they play upon it, and at the same time to play, to sing and to dance is usual with them.'

By 1657, and therefore in the late years of the English republic, it was so common for English travellers to seek guitar lessons in Italy that a master of the Italian language named Giovanni Torriano provided the necessary vocabulary in his *Choyce Italian dialogues*, published that year. One of the model conversations in the book shows a traveller seeking a music master in Rome. You have it on the second page of your handout.

<p>78 Dialoghi.</p> <p><b>DIALOGO III.</b></p> <p>Il Forastiero discorre con un Maestro di Musica.</p> <p>S. 1. <i>Signor Maestro fimo che V. S. impari di Musica al mio fratel Cugino.</i></p> <p>I. 2. <i>Io gli son Maestro per gratia sua.</i></p> <p>3. <i>Di che stromento suona?</i></p> <p>4. <i>Di Tiorba.</i></p> <p>5. <i>Vorrei imparar anch' Io un poco, amando Io la Musica talmente che quando la sento, trasfocolo.</i></p> <p>6. <i>Havrà già principiato?</i></p> <p>7. <i>Un tantino di Ghitarra, ma non è cosa che vaglia.</i></p> <p>8. <i>Paul V. S. seguitave; ò pure comminciate sulla Tiorba?</i></p> <p>9. <i>Quando sul'una, quando sull' altra.</i></p>	<p>Dialogues.</p> <p><b>DIALOGUE III.</b></p> <p>A stranger discourses with an Italian Musick-Master.</p> <p>S. 1. Sir, I think you are the man who teaches my Cousin-german Musick.</p> <p>I. 2. I do teach him by his good pleasure.</p> <p>3. What Instrument doth he play upon?</p> <p>4. On the Theorbo.</p> <p>5. I would learn too a little, I loving Musick so, as that when I hear it, I am in an extasie.</p> <p>6. Y. u have already begun?</p> <p>7. A little upon the Ghitarre, but nothing that's ought.</p> <p>8. Will you go on upon that, or will you begin upon the Theorbo?</p> <p>9. Sometimes upon the one, sometimes upon the other.</p>	<p>Dialoghi.</p> <p>10. <i>Mi faccia gratia di suonar che lo la senta-- La pizzicata è buona, e la bastuta pure, se attende farà una riufoita stupenda.</i></p> <p>11. <i>Quando mi ci metto.</i></p> <p>12. <i>Lei si accordar la Ghitarra quando è scordata?</i></p> <p>13. <i>Si bene.</i></p> <p>14. <i>Siamo à mezza strada.</i></p> <p>15. <i>Se ne promette troppe cose de' fatti miei.</i></p> <p>16. <i>L'è che si scuopre in lei genio, e gran disposizione alla Musica, volta à volta si sentono certe bottarelle da Maestro.</i></p> <p>17. <i>Manco male che mi date animo.</i></p> <p>18. <i>Havrei torto à nullo favore.</i></p> <p>19. <i>Vorrei anche accompagnar lo stromento colla voca.</i></p>	<p>Dialogues.</p> <p>79</p> <p>10. Do me the favor to play, that I may hear you— The pinching is good, and the battery to, if you minde it, you will come off wondrous well.</p> <p>11. When I do set on't.--</p> <p>12. Can you tune your Ghitarre when it is out of tune.</p> <p>13. Yes, yes.</p> <p>14. We are half way.</p> <p>15. You presume too much of my abilities.</p> <p>16. The business is, that there is discover'd in you a genius, and a great disposition to Musick; ever and anon I hear certaintouches like a Master.</p> <p>17. Its some comfort that you encourage me.</p> <p>18. I should be too blame if I should not.</p> <p>19. I would also accompany the instrument with the voyce.</p>
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Just a few years after that text was written, the most famous diarist in the English language began his journal. You all know him: Samuel Pepys. He was in every way, like Geoffrey Chaucer whom he admired, one of history's great Londoners. He was born in 1633, not very far from here in a court off Fleet Street; his father was a tailor and his mother were the daughter of a Whitechapel butcher. Pepys began his famous diary on 1 January 1660 when he was a very hard working young man on the make as an administrator, and he continued it, in six modest looking manuscript volumes, until 31 May 1669. By that time he feared he might losing his sight, so he abandoned the work. (The good news is that Pepys never did go blind). By then he had begun what was to become a successful career as an administrator in the naval office. The diary as we have it is a fair copy, written up in shorthand every few days from a draft, compared with various private papers and other sources he had by him. The complete journal runs to approximately one and a quarter million words and is the prime source for the social and even at times the political history of Restoration London in the 1660s. The diary is on exhibition in the Pepys library in Magdalene College Cambridge, which is open to the public and I have been encouraged by the librarian to tell you all that you are very welcome to go and see it.

Perhaps you think I am now going to tell you that Pepys loved the guitar, was a great devotee, could not get enough of it, and that the evidence is on every page of his diary? Alas, not at all. During the years covered by the journal Pepys was either indifferent to the guitar or held it in disdain. One Sunday in 1666, for example, he was at Cranborne Lodge, near Windsor, where he spent the late afternoon with some young ladies and gentlemen who 'played on the guittarr and mighty merry'; he last saw them that evening 'flinging of cushions' and enjoying other 'mad sports'. Perhaps Pepys is on the verge of approval in that passage, although he seems a little censorious: an adult looking askance at the follies of the young. On several occasions the diary shows that he heard the guitar played by a gentleman attending upon a great man of the royal administration, including Sir Philip Howard, Captain of the King's Lifeguard; yet the diary gives no sign that Pepys imitated those courtiers by hiring a servant of his own who could play the guitar while he was getting dressed in the morning, for example, or while preparing for bed.

But perhaps the most striking encounter with a guitar in the diary is one we heard in my last lecture, but which must now be given a rather unfortunate twist. 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, who was the Lord High Admiral. 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'. This, you may remember if you were here last time, is the guitar virtuoso Francesco Corbetta, a player of European fame in his day; Pepys admired Corbetta's talent but was 'mightily troubled' to see him playing 'so bad an instrument'. In the summer of 1661 Pepys heard a French servant of Edward Montagu, Master of the Queen's Horse, playing the guitar and was struck by the same discrepancy between the virtues of the musician, who played 'most extreme well', in Pepys's judgement, and the quality of his instrument. The servant's guitar seemed to him a mere 'bawble', a word Pepys employs elsewhere for fancy goods such as perfumed gloves. The sense is of something small, manufactured and trivial.

So how does it come about that, within a few years of writing in the diary for the last time, Pepys commissioned the largest repertoire of guitar-accompanied song to survive from baroque Europe? We find it in carefully written manuscripts that are also on show, with the rest of Pepys's books, in the Pepys library in Cambridge. Let us have a taste of it straightaway. Pepys was a bass, or in modern terms a baritone, and many of the songs in his manuscripts are transposed downwards to suit his voice; the guitar accompaniments are mostly, but not entirely, for Pepys to strum, and in many pieces, there is a figured bass line that would have allowed him to be joined by a harpsichord, a theorbo or indeed both together with a bass viol – a small Restoration house band of the kind we have with us here today.

Here's an example: *Amanti fuggite*. The text is by the Italian poetess Margherita Costa, an older contemporary of Pepys. 'Lovers, flee from transient beauty...the fruit that falls is not sweet anymore'. The setting is by Pepys's house musician, Cesare Morelli, whom we shall soon hear of again.

So I repeat my question: why did Pepys take up what he had once regarded as 'so bad an instrument'? Well, the guitar became very fashionable at court after the Restoration of 1660; you may remember that King Charles II himself owned a guitar, and that it was none other than Samuel Pepys who was lumbered with the task of seeing



it safely from the coast to Whitehall. Pepys made appearances at court, but he was not a courtier in the strict sense, so his want of interest in this particular court diversion was not necessarily of much account. In the wider world, however, which Pepys inhabited much more often, young gentlemen of the gentry and nobility often sought guitar lessons when they travelled abroad. When two grandsons of Richard Lord Dacre were sent to France for their education in 1670, for example, their musical studies encompassed the guitar, lute, viol and castanets, as their accounts reveal. You have an excerpt on the second page of your handout:

To the master of the Guitarre and the Viol for five months and a half a. 20 l.	110 0
Twoe months upon the Lute a. 14 l	28 0
playing on the castaniettes	11 0
for musick books	2 10
for twoe payr of Castaniettes	11 0
at Paris for hiring a Viol, and Guitarre, and mending the Viol broken, for 3 months, whilst they learnt upon the Lute	9 0
hired a Viol and Guitarre at Orleans a. 4 months	

We might compare Charles Livingston, Earl of Newburgh, as he is represented in a satirical portrait of October 1685, implying an affected pronunciation imitating French *guiterre*. This is on the third page of your handout:

Of all our traveled youth, non dare  
 With Newburgh vie for the bel air.  
 He is so French in all his ways,  
 Loves, dresses, swears a-la-Francaise,  
 Sings to the spinet and guitar,  
 Those genteel ways to charm the fair...

In the mid-1660s Pepys heard an especially influential advocate sing and play the guitar. This was his cousin and patron Edward Montagu, earl of Sandwich. The patronage of this magnate, a great naval commander, was of great importance to Pepys' career, for though Pepys prospered through sheer diligence and native wit, he needed a powerful protector – everybody did at this time – and in his cousin he found one. The diary shows that on 17 November 1665 Pepys found the earl aboard his flagship, playing the guitar and praising it (I quote) 'above all Musique in the world, because it is bass enough for a single voice, and is so portable, and manageable without much trouble'. There is the universal commendation of the guitar that we have met again and again: it is excellent for accompanying the voice, is wonderfully portable and is not difficult to manage. That verdict sounds down through the ages. Montagu was an esteemed musician, so this was a prudent as well as a princely commendation, and even in the privacy of his shorthand journal Pepys did not presume to question it.

Although Pepys certainly wished to be respected as a gentleman by the kind of gentlemen he respected, he was too shrewd to value the guitar *purely* because it might confer a cosmopolitan or gentlemanly air. Pepys constantly behaved, in his private life, in a way that was often out of accord with what I take to be an essentially reserved and even a Puritanical streak in his character, but he knew his own mind, and was always self-critical when he did choose to emulate those greater than himself. He was well aware, for example, that his cousin the earl of Sandwich had a senior place in a royal court where (and I quote) 'those are most favoured...that conform to the French manners and fashions in all things'. The earl's interest in the guitar was of a piece with his decision to hire French servants and to take other steps which left Pepys bemused, even mildly censorious. Here is Pepys in a brief passage from the diary where he records having dinner with the earl and his wife:

'I dined with my Lord and Lady; where he was very merry and did talk very high how he would have a French Cooke and a Master of his Horse...which methought was strange, but he is become a perfect Courtier...'

In the end, Pepys's main route to the guitar lay rather through his articulate interest in song than noble or even royal example. He was a fairly accomplished singer and he sang whenever the opportunity arose: in boats on the Thames, in echoing and unfurnished rooms, on the leads of his house by moonshine. *Italian* song made a



deepening impression upon him during the diary years, as it did upon so many, shaping the course of music in later Restoration England. In the summer of 1661 Pepys hired a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal, John Goodgroome, to be his singing master, and their first exercise was the light Italian song, *La cruda la bella*. Some two years later Pepys was present in the earl of Sandwich's lodgings when the Master of the Chapel Royal choristers and some of his boys sang Italian works that Pepys, with a characteristic warmth of feeling, judged to be 'fully the best Musique that I ever yet heard in all my life'. The development of his Italianate taste was gradual, however, and at times halting; when he heard a work by Carissimi in the summer of 1664 his response was guarded and possibly ironic: 'Fine it was ended, and too fine for me to judge of'.

What Pepys really wanted to hear, I think, was *English* song marked by an Italianate concern for the sense of the text, the rhetorical movement and the spoken enunciation of the words. He therefore became increasingly dissatisfied with English part-songs, for the manner of setting obscured the clarity of the text. He writes:

'I am more and more confirmed that singing with many voices is not singing, but a sort of Instrumentall music, the sense of the words being lost by not being heard, and especially as they set them with Fugues of words, one after another; whereas singing properly, I think, should be but with one or two voices at most...'

Pepys was ready to cultivate an art of accompanied solo song where the music 'humours' the conceit of the words. For this the guitar, laying a discreet carpet of harmony for the voice, was ideal.

So by the early months of 1671, when Pepys was no longer keeping his diary for fear it should ruin his eyesight, he had decided to obtain a guitar from Italy; for someone who once considered ordering a little harpsichord because it 'will do my business as to finding out of Chords' this was a wise, almost an inevitable step. How did he go about it? Pepys had a useful contact in Thomas Clutterbuck, the English consul at Livorno, who regularly sent shipments of fine goods home to London as those with government postings in foreign countries commonly did, both at the request of others and for their own financial interest. Clutterbuck was ideal for Pepys's purpose since he was also a navy contractor and therefore had much to gain from doing Pepys a service, even from offering him a bribe. On 27 March, Pepys accordingly wrote to him, and although the outward letter is lost Clutterbuck's reply of 1 May survives, and includes this assurance:

'By Captain Bowen you may expect one of the best Chitarres this Country affoards. As Likewise some of our best Compositions, and Aires and other Trifles.'

Events took a new turn later that same year of 1671 when Pepys decided to send abroad 'for a man of learning, and a good Musician'. He wrote to his old friend Thomas Hill, a merchant then residing in Lisbon, and on 14 April Hill replied commending a young musician named Cesare Morelli who was now keen to find employment in England. Born 'in Flanders but breed at Rome', Morelli could sing to plucked instruments with great skill; he also spoke Latin, Italian, French and Spanish, all of which was certain to please Pepys. In October, Hill wrote again praising Morelli for his manner of singing 'most perfectly in the Italian manner', or *alla Italiana di tutta perfettione*, a slight affectation of phrase (Hill breaking into Italian) that says much about the tastes and interests he shared with Pepys. Enclosed with this second letter was another from Morelli himself expressing an eagerness to enter Pepys's service. All went well, and by June 1675 Morelli was installed among the other servants in Pepys's lodgings at Derby House, the new Admiralty headquarters between Whitehall and Westminster. He was to remain with his new master for just over a decade, and one of his principal tasks was to make the arrangements and guitar accompaniments for Pepys, then copy them out.

It is high time we had another example from the Pepys songbooks. The composer is Cesare Morelli, but this time the words are by Sir Francis Bacon. Once again, the tone of the poetry is admonitory and dark. The title is *The world's a bubble*, and you have the full text beginning on page 3 of the handout.

Three years later Pepys and Morelli were engulfed by the greatest catastrophe of Pepys's career. Paradoxical as it may seem, it was this disaster that prompted Pepys to begin (or to accelerate) the work of compiling his collection of guitar-accompanied songs. On 13 August 1678 Charles II was informed of a Catholic conspiracy to



murder him, to impose arbitrary government and to return England to popery. The secret agents of this new insurgency were to be Jesuit assassins carrying daggers under their cloaks and more broadly Catholic sympathisers of the heir to the throne, James duke of York. Pepys was immediately implicated in this supposed conspiracy, not least because his servant Morelli was both a foreigner and a Catholic. A former butler whom Pepys had dismissed, John James, and some more exalted enemies now charged Pepys with being a Catholic traitor. He was in danger of being charged with the capital crime of treason. Much time and some lives were lost before the so-called Popish Plot was exposed as a fraud.

When that conspiracy was alleged, Catholics were forbidden to remain within a thirty-mile radius of London; since Morelli refused to renounce his Catholicism, despite attempts to convert him initiated by Pepys, his master sent him to Brentwood on the coaching (and therefore the postal) route from London to Yarmouth. Master and servant were henceforth compelled to communicate by letter, and since Pepys kept the papers from this turbulent period of his life there survives an epistolary record of a Restoration gentleman's dealings with his guitar master. One of these letters, dated 25 September 1679, reveals why Pepys turned to the guitar at this time and may therefore may be said to frame the entire correspondence, indeed the whole enterprise of collecting this library of songs: 'The little knowledge in musick which I have', he wrote, 'never was of more use to me than it is now, under the molestations of mind which I have at this time, more than ordinary, to contend with'. They also show Pepys giving instructions: These are at the end of the handout.

- 1<sup>st</sup> To doe it in as legible a letter of note as you can for y<sup>e</sup> ease of my Eyes.
- 2 To take care that y<sup>e</sup> words doe stand as just under their proper Notes as may be, out of y<sup>e</sup> same regard to y<sup>e</sup> ease of my Eyes.
- 3 To begin every Severall piece upon a particular Paper & upon y<sup>e</sup> left side of y<sup>e</sup> Sheet when it is open'd according as you have done in your Song NO NO 'TIS IN VAIN that I may have as much in view at once as I can before I am obliged to turn over y<sup>e</sup> leaf.

These are the commands of an exacting patron accustomed to working late into the night with documents produced to a high standard of penmanship by his clerks.

In circumstances far from ideal, with master and servant separated, Morelli composed or arranged a substantial repertoire of guitar-accompanied song for Pepys. He then produced fair copies on folio-size sheets of good quality paper that Pepys posted to him from London. The pieces in these manuscripts are either new compositions by Morelli, made with Pepys's voice in mind, or they are Morelli's arrangements of works transposed to accommodate his master's vocal range. There are songs in French, including arrangements of airs from two operas by Lully, together with Italian pieces by Stradella and Carissimi, among others. The settings of English poets, mostly in a declamatory style, include verse by Davenant, Ben Jonson and Shakespeare, among others, with even a setting of Hamlet's principal soliloquy 'To be, or not to be': a difficult libretto for any composer but one to which Morelli responds in a spirited fashion as we shall see. There is a substantial amount of music for Latin and English psalms, settings of texts from Divine Service (including a Creed, a colossal litany and an arrangement of an anthem by Gibbons), in addition to sombre penitential items such as 'Lord, I have sinn'd'. There is even a small handful of pieces in Spanish. In the words of his now departed patron, the earl of Sandwich, this is Pepys discovering that the guitar 'is bass enough for a single voice, and is so portable, and manageable without much trouble'.

So I end this lecture, end this series, and indeed end my term as Gresham Professor of Music with what is perhaps the most unexpected of all the materials I have put before you: Morelli's setting, for voice and guitar of Hamlet's soliloquy 'To be or not to be', to be strummed by a Restoration gentleman in his house. I have made many friends in the course of these twenty-four lectures, so I say to you: may you never suffer 'The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune', or experience any of 'the thousand natural shocks/That flesh is heir to'.