
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 Cocq. This issue continues the journey into this seldom-heard repertoire by looking at the music of Giovanni Battista Granata.¹

Although Granata was prolific and widely published during his lifetime—releasing seven major books for the baroque guitar between 1646 and 1684—very little is known of his life today. He greatly expanded the upwards 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 concerti 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 books.²

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 Roncalli. The two balletti included in this edition of *Soundboard* are drawn from his *Soavi concerti 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.

California Polytechnic State University

1. For a discussion of Granata and his works see Richard Pinnell, *Francesco Corbetta and the Baroque Guitar*, 2 vols. (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1980), p. 103-10; Robert Strizich, “Granata, Giovanni Battista,” *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. by Stanley Sadie, vol. 7 (New York: Macmillan), pp. 629-30; and the introduction by James Tyler to the facsimile edition of Granata’s *Soavi concerti di sonate musicali per la chitarra spagnuola* (1659) (Monaco: Editions Chantarelle, 1979).

2. See Pinnell, *Francesco Corbetta*, p. 103, 106-7; Strizich, “Granata,” p. 629; and Tyler, intro. to Granata’s *Soavi concerti*, p. iv.

Balletto al Signor Giorgio Costa Piacentino (1659)

G. B. Granata
arranged by C. H. Russell

p. 52

The musical score is written for guitar and consists of seven staves. The notation includes a treble clef, a common time signature (C), and a guitar-specific '8' below the staff. The melody is primarily in the treble clef, with various ornaments such as trills (tr) and grace notes. The bass line provides harmonic support with chords and fingerings. The piece includes dynamic markings like 'p' (piano) and 'tr' (trill). The score is labeled 'p. 52' at the beginning.

Balletto (1659)

G. B. Granata

arranged by Craig H. Russell

p. 62

m i m i a m i a m i

m i m i m i m a i m

p *p* *p* *p*

