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Strumming in the void: a new look at the guitar and rhythm in early 17th-century canzonettas

The five-course guitar came into being sometime in the 16th century and was gradually supplanted by the six-string guitar in the 18th century. This lightweight instrument has become entangled in some fairly heavy scholarly issues at both ends of its short lifespan. Scholars of early Italian song have suggested that a primarily Spanish tradition of singing to a freely strummed (rasgueado) accompaniment contributed to the development of the stile recitativo in Italy. This viewpoint, however, hinges largely on the assumption that rhythmically imprecise notation implies a rhythmically free performance, an assumption I call into question in this study. Granted, the most persuasive proponent of this, John Walter Hill, does not rest his case solely on the guitar notation. But this emphasis on the stile recitativo has perhaps obscured the most prevalent aspect of five-course guitar performance at the turn of the 17th century: regular, recurring rhythmic patterns that bear little resemblance to the flowing style of recitational song, and which must also be subsumed under the label rasgueado. A mid-17th-century guitar manuscript, now in Florence at the Biblioteca del Conservatorio, forms the basis of the present study and suggests that these strum patterns were commonly added in performance regardless of the existing notation. As for the latter end of the five-course guitar’s life span, the late 17th and early 18th centuries, modern scholarship points to the same imprecise notation as evidence of a harmonic practice that adumbrates the periodic structures of functional harmonic tonality. However, the relationship between notation and practice in this period is still open to question, especially in terms of rhythm, which is completely and definitively described neither by the guitar nor the continuo notation. In addition, Silke Leopold’s study of solo song in this period finds evidence for structured rhythmic and harmonic periods in early to mid-17th century Italian canzonettas, the very repertory most closely associated with guitar accompaniment, although she does not discuss the role of the guitar in this development. There is a disconnect, therefore, between two types of guitar notation: the chord symbols that, in the song manuscripts, seemingly float above poetic lines, free from the encumbrances of metre or bass, and the multitudes of solo guitar dances, often in the same manuscripts, in which page after page of notated strumming patterns display a cultural predilection for repetitive rhythm that borders on the obsessive.

I propose that a close examination of the relationship between chord symbols for the guitar and mensural notation will show these repetitive rhythmic patterns, which were retained from the 16th century, continuing to have an impact on accompanimental performance practice into the mid-17th century, a period in which the harmonic structures of the 18th century were already being formed. The earliest sources of music for the five-course guitar transmit two basic genres: strummed dances for solo guitar and songs for one to three voices accompanied by strummed guitar. The guitar notation in both cases consists of alphabetical symbols designating left-hand shapes on the fretboard, a system known as alfabeto, which is often explained in a chart provided for the performer. The earliest known printed source of guitar chord notation is a Spanish guitar tutor, whose first edition appeared in 1596. The earliest printed source of alfabeto per se is an Italian tutor...
from 1606, the chart of which is reproduced as illus.1. Other printed sources include many songbooks in which the alfabeto is added above mensurally notated vocal parts and, usually, a continuo line. The first of these songbooks appeared in 1610, followed by an abundance of similar volumes over the first half of the 17th century.

Manuscripts are another important source of the alfabeto repertory. As in the printed sources, the earliest manuscripts support a Spanish origin for the instrument and its repertory. The manuscripts also transmit strummed dances for solo guitar, which I call alfabeto solo dances, and song texts accompanied by alfabeto symbols. The major difference between manuscript and printed sources is that the manuscripts rarely provide any mensural musical notation whatsoever. The songs are given as what I call alfabeto-texts; that is, lyric texts with alfabeto symbols written above the text. See illus.2 for examples of alfabeto solo dances and an alfabeto-text from an early manuscript.

These manuscripts reinforce the five-course guitar’s status as an instrument for amateurs playing in a style that survived largely as an unwritten tradition. The song texts are light, strophic love songs, often in regional dialects, and the alfabeto solo dances include popular forms such as the Folia, chaconne and sarabande. Most tellingly, the lack of musical notation for the songs suggests a partly memorized, partly improvised performance, freed from the constraints of rhythm or counterpoint, for which the series of unconnected alfabeto symbols on the page provides a perfect accompaniment.

It is these alfabeto-texts that have been described as forerunners to Roman and Florentine monody, or, more precisely, as embodying a rhythmically free style of accompanied solo song that matches the aesthetics of the stile recitativo almost exactly. But a disagreement exists about how rhythmically free these early alfabeto songs actually were. The earliest manuscripts consist mostly of Spanish texts, and Spanish song has its own recitational tradition, one that does not exactly conform to the Italian recitational style. There is also the evidence of the alfabeto solo dances, which are accompanied by signs giving up- and down-strokes for the right hand. Could the rhythmic style really differ so greatly between dance and song?

These unresolved 16th-century issues cast a shadow across the 17th-century repertory even as that repertory is mined for information on 16th-century practice. If one takes the alfabeto-text song as an example of declamatory, improvisatory, rhythmically free performance, then the strictly metered alfabeto solo dances represent a strikingly different performance practice, one in which short, accented rhythmic periods are the most salient musical feature. A look at the alfabeto songbooks and manuscripts from the 1620s and 30s, created after the bloom of the early stile recitativo, suggests however that the two alfabeto genres may share a common basis in metrically accented structures. If so, the earliest of the alfabeto manuscripts should be re-examined with the understanding that alfabeto symbols given without any rhythmic notation do not necessarily indicate a rhythmically free performance. In short, whatever the relationship between strummed guitar and early recitational song, a direct relationship between a Spanish dance-song tradition and the 17th-century Italian strophic canzonetta is also evident in the earliest alfabeto sources.

The use of regular strumming patterns in song accompaniment may not come as a surprise to
performers of early music on the five-course guitar, who tend to be familiar with sources that garner less attention from the larger scholarly community. Notated strumming patterns do occur here and there in the context of alfabeto song accompaniment: the 1622 edition of Benedetto Sanseverino’s guitar book contains fully notated strummed accompaniments with time signatures and note values, and a lost canzonetta volume from 1627, surviving now in a transcription by Oscar Chilesotti, adds numbers to the alfabeto indicating strums per chord. In certain manuscripts rhythmic notation appears in varying degrees of specificity alongside song texts. But in the majority of surviving sources the alfabeto notation remains ambiguous, a glimpse into a performance practice so well understood at the time as to obviate further elaboration.

My investigation focuses on a peculiarity of alfabeto notation: the up- and down-stroke marks which are unique to this repertory. A manuscript held at the Biblioteca del Conservatorio Luigi Cherubini in Florence (henceforth the Cherubini manuscript) provides some fresh insight on the nature of these stroke-marks and their relationship to contemporary practice. The Cherubini manuscript is briefly described in RISM, where a date of 1670–80 is proposed, but has not otherwise been dealt with in the scholarly literature.

This manuscript is unusual in that the alfabeto texts include the same stroke-mark notation as the dances, proving that the two styles were at least sometimes combined in practice (see illus.3). The specifics of their juxtaposition suggest that this stroke-mark notation was more than just a way of directing the motion of a player’s hand. In
fact, these unassuming little scratches on the page delineate a previously undiscovered relationship between prosody and popular musical styles in the canzonetta repertory.

Do these guitar-specific versions represent mere simplifications for amateur or student performance, thus telling us little about the main currents of compositional development? After all, this manuscript would have been prepared for one who needed something more (or less) than the printed version, presumably a performer who lacked skills in note-reading or continuo realization. But to view the guitaristic arrangements in the Cherubini manuscript as merely simpler, that is, containing less information, is to miss a larger point. These pieces refer to a performance tradition that existed outside the printed sources. They presuppose a familiarity with common strum patterns and melodies, a familiarity that allows for minimal notation. In effect, while the intended performer may have known less than is necessary for a performance from the printed score, (s)he also knew more, and was part of an unwritten tradition that paralleled the composition and development of secular strophic Italian song.

For this reason, the guitar-specific versions in the Cherubini manuscript present us with valuable information on performance practice in a repertory that straddles the divide between high-art and popular music. Canzonetta composers like Giovanni Ghizzolo, Girolamo Kapsperger, Biagio Marini and Carlo Milanuzzi were trained composers, often with positions in their respective court, church or cathedral. In their canzonetta books, however, they consciously adopted a lighter tone, as shown by the fanciful titles of many of these volumes (Frutti d’amore, Affetti musicali, etc.), and designations such as ‘villanella’ and ‘napolitana’. Musically these pieces might also seem to ape a ‘popular’ style: because the texts are strophic there is little room for madrigalistic text setting or seconda prattica harmonies. Instead, clear rhythmic and harmonic structures prevail, much as in the well-known arie from Caccini’s Le nuove musiche, as opposed to the pieces Caccini labelled ‘madrigal’.

There is, however, a gulf between these volumes and a hypothetical ‘popular’ tradition from Spain, Naples or the rest of Italy. In fact, in the most comprehensive study of the canzonetta repertory to date, Silke Leopold focuses on text rather than geography or social categories. She points out that the texts themselves constitute a new formal element, in that their short, metrically repetitive lines lend themselves to the clear harmonic and rhythmic periods that predominate in the strophic canzonetta repertory. According to Leopold, it was the need to accommodate their compositions to these newer text forms that drove composers to create new musical forms. The audience was also new, consisting of an expanding middle class who enjoyed a recently created light, popular style.
high-class imitations of earlier vernacular music. Leopold characterized the first few decades of the 17th century as a period of experimentation, during which musical metre sometimes conflicted with syllabification as composers struggled with the new text forms.

The guitaristic versions of solo canzonettas in the Cherubini manuscript offer a unique view of that struggle as it played out in practice, and display a more direct connection to older, unwritten practices, a connection that should be added to Leopold’s description of secular solo song in the early 17th century. The manuscript stroke-marks are, in effect, the visual trace of the strummed performance practice as it impacted the contemporary conception of strophic canzonettas.

Fully notated concordances to alfabeto-texts in the Cherubini manuscript make a re-evaluation possible. Table 1 lists these concordances. The songs taken from Giovanni Ghizzolo’s 1623 Frutti d’amore follow Ghizzolo’s alfabeto closely, suggesting that the guitarist who prepared the manuscript had access to Ghizzolo’s print.

Table 1 Alfabeto-texts from the Cherubini manuscript, with concordances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cherubini manuscript incipit</th>
<th>Folio</th>
<th>Concordance</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>O Clorida</td>
<td>46r</td>
<td>Giovanni Stefani, Affetti amorosi (Venice: Vincenti, 1618), ‘O Clori[n]da gia che s’adorna’ Stefani, Affetti ‘Altro non e il mio amore’</td>
<td>Ms. has no text, alfabeto matches closely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altro non e il mio core</td>
<td>48r</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ms. has no text, alfabeto matches closely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mio desire mio gioire</td>
<td>53r</td>
<td>Giovanni Ghizzolo, Frutti d’amore (Venice: Vincenti, 1623)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bocca ridente</td>
<td>53v</td>
<td>Ghizzolo, Frutti d’amore</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O care selve</td>
<td>53v</td>
<td>Ghizzolo, Frutti d’amore</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten fuggi mia vita</td>
<td>54r</td>
<td>Ghizzolo, Frutti d’amore</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amor sento ben io</td>
<td>54r</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due fresche rose</td>
<td>55v</td>
<td>Pietro Paolo Sabbatini, Il quarto de villanelle a una, due, et tre voci (Rome: Robletti, 1631); Sabbatini, Prima scelta di villanelle a due voci (Rome: Mascardi, 1652)</td>
<td>Transposed alfabeto (in 1652), slightly varied text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sempre dunque credevi</td>
<td>54v</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perche piangi o bel fanciullo</td>
<td>57r</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corri Lidia</td>
<td>57v</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spesso veggio colei che il cor m’apri</td>
<td>59r</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T’amero piu che mai</td>
<td>60r</td>
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Strum patterns in print and performance

Rhythmic treatment in continuo realization is one of the most obvious topics at issue here. Much has been written about the proper treatment of consonance, dissonance and texture in basso continuo realizations, but the basic rhythm of the part, it is assumed, will proceed from the notated bass line. The Cherubini manuscript, however, provides clear evidence that guitarists used strumming patterns from the unwritten tradition when accompanying canzonettas even when such patterns were not explicit in the continuo line. Even more surprising is the evidence that the written vocal lines may themselves have been altered in performance in order to suit pre-existing strum patterns better.

As an initial example, the text ‘Due fresche rose’, which appears as an alfabeto-text in the Cherubini manuscript, can also be found in Pietro Paolo Sabbatini’s 1631 book of villanellas, set for two voices with basso continuo, and in his 1652 book, which includes alfabeto symbols (see illus.4 and 5). I have marked it as a musical concordance in Table 1, although, as we will see, the extent of that...
concordance is open to debate. But the relationship between the text and the stroke-marks in the Cherubini manuscript is telling in its own right, and the comparison with Sabbatini’s print will outline the unusual status of the stroke-mark notation in the overall repertory.

Two factors argue against a concordance between the manuscript and the printed version. First, there is an obvious disparity in alfabeto symbols between the two versions. However, this could be explained by transposition, a common enough practice in alfabeto manuscripts. In Sabbatini, for instance, the first four symbols outline a I–IV–V–I progression in G major (A B C A), and a final IV–V–I cadence appears at the end of the piece. The Cherubini manuscript opens and closes with cadential progressions on A minor, suggesting a vocal line transposed up a step, which is largely supported by the other symbols. Second, there is also the matter of rhythm. In the manuscript, the rhythm implied by the stroke-marks seems to preclude a fit for Sabbatini’s melody or, for that matter, any plausible metric setting of this particular text.

There is in fact more to the manuscript text setting than an initial survey would suggest. Part of the difficulty here lies with the way metre is presented in early guitar notation. The alfabeto solo notation from which the stroke-marks derive combines alfabeto symbols with up- and down-strokes in repetitive and recognizable patterns. For this reason, in most alfabeto sources no method of notating time signatures and durations is used or needed. In the ritornello for ‘Due fresche rose’, for instance, the overall triple metre is obvious, even though some of the up-strokes are equal in duration to the down-strokes, while some of them divide a beat together with the preceding down-stroke. The performer is expected to recognize the opening D–D–U (‘down–down–up’) pattern and infer a triple metre. Having established

4 ‘Due fresche rose’, f.55v
5 'Due fresche rose' from Pietro Sabbatini, *Prima scelta di villanelle* (Rome, 1652)

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3 Pietà non trovo da chi mi frugge
Senza pietà de' trafelato mercè
Cruel pur fempre da me fen fugge
Ne valmi ogn'ora gridare ahime

4 Di tal po'anza, di tal valore
Fù il primo guardo, che m'infiammò
Ch'ogni riparo del fragile core
Sul primo asalto ruppe e spezzò.

3 Ahimè, che quando 'l l'hor mi volto
Al dolce tirale, ch' il cor m'apri
Penfando al crine, penfando al volto
Sofpirò, piango la notte, e l' di.

5 Spezzammo il core, passammo il petto
Si fiero colpo si crudo fu
Ch'incatenammo col vago aspetto
Al dolce laccio di ferro 

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[5 'Due fresche rose' from Pietro Sabbatini, *Prima scelta di villanelle* (Rome, 1652)]
the triple metre, in conjunction with the direction of strum, which adds an emphasis to beat 1, it is then clear that the second half of the ritornello, in which the harmonic pattern repeats, is to be played with subdivisions, beginning with the second appearance of the A minor chord (see illus.6). Thus these patterns of stroke-marks, tied by common usage to well-known metrical patterns, give the context for determining the meaning of each individual stroke-mark. The opening D–D–U pattern in this ritornello, for instance, occurs often in the alfabeto solo dances found elsewhere in the manuscript, such as the Passacaglias in the first folio (see illus.7), and in the repertory as a whole.

It is only by reference to this context that the notation becomes precise. For this reason the stroke-mark notation bears some resemblance to medieval notation, in which the pattern of ligatures, or of longs and breves, determines the precise duration of any given note. In sum, the pattern of stroke-marks must be repetitive in order to fix the metre. Deviations that alter the visual pattern must be integrated into the base pattern. In the case of the ritornello, the deviation involves doubling at the next level of duration, which of course does not alter the sounding rhythmic pattern. The scribe assumes that the most intuitive interpretation of the deviation will be the correct one. And the proper intuition will proceed from a performer whose musical sensibility was developed by playing alfabeto solo dances and who has fully internalized the basic patterns common to them.

The unusual thing about ‘Due fresche rose’ in this manuscript is that the stroke-marks in the texted portion of the song are not aligned with the alfabeto symbols they accompany. But when the stroke-marks are observed in isolation from the alfabeto symbols a pattern suddenly becomes clear: a repeating down–up–down. This pattern fits well with the text of ‘Due fresche rose’, which consists entirely of quinario lines (‘Due fresche rose / due stelle erranti / un vivo lampo / ch’al cor mi va’); when compared to Sabbatini’s melody, the rhythmic pattern fits well. In fact, a short–short–short–long–short rhythm is so standard for quinario texts in this repertory as to be a cliché.6 Giovanni Girolamo Kapsperger’s ‘Fiorite valli’, which was printed with an intabulated theorbo accompaniment, provides a representative example (see ex.1).

Kapsperger’s piece displays an exact correspondence between musical and textual metre, as well as an independent dotted rhythmic gesture in the theorbo at the end of each phrase. Clearly, the stroke-marks for ‘Due fresche rose’ in the Cherubini manuscript are not aligned with the text because they do not need to be: the connection would be obvious to anyone familiar with this style. They seem instead to have been fitted in above the text as space allowed. The alfabeto symbols, however, are aligned with the text, since the text is what the performer is assumed to be following. When, therefore, I rearranged the manuscript alfabeto symbols assuming a correspondence between the strum marks and the syllabification, a plausible accompaniment suddenly became clear. By transposing Sabbatini’s melody upwards and placing it above this accompaniment, I have created a transcription of ‘Due fresche rose’ as it

6 Ritornello from ‘Due fresche rose’ (Cherubini manuscript), facsimile and transcription. The alfabeto characters have been transcribed into modern chord symbols, and the stem direction indicates an up- or down-stroke.
might have been performed by the owner of the Cherubini manuscript (see ex.2).

Of course, the melodic fit may be accidental, with the manuscript referring to a different version yet to be discovered. The biggest objection to my proposed version is the apparent change in mode from G major to A minor. But there are two factors that support this concordance as a useful example.

Ex.1 ‘Fiorite valli’ from Girolamo Kapsperger, Libro primo di villanelle (Rome, 1612)
of contemporary practice. First of all, the rhythmic pattern used by Sabbatini was very common for *quinario* texts, as mentioned above. The relationship between the strum marks and the text in the manuscript thus pertains to any likely melodic setting of the text. Secondly, I believe there are mitigating factors to explain the discrepancy in mode. 'Major' and 'minor' were certainly interchangeable in the alfabeto dance-song repertory, as shown by various transpositions given in guitar books such
as Montesardo’s *Nuova inventione*, which I have referred to already. In fact, transposition in these guitar sources is often referred to by the alfabeto letter rather than any key- or mode-related designation; for example, passacaglias are given in ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’, ‘D’, etc., where the letter refers to the opening chord. ‘D’ (A minor) is thus a possible transposition of the ‘A’ (G major) passacaglia. In the *Nuova inventione*, Montesardo goes on to indicate that every dance in the book may be transposed in the same manner as the passacaglias. Since many of these dances were traditionally associated with texts (and, therefore, melodies), Montesardo’s system might result in traditional melodies being altered by mode when transposed. If this indeed occurred in the Cherubini version of ‘Due fresche rose’, it would be an example of an older, vernacular tradition displacing the contemporary notions of transposition. And the chords in the Cherubini do show some signs of adapting the modal identity of Sabbatini’s melody at the level of the phrase. The second line, for instance, ‘due stelle erranti’ (ex.2, bar 2) is given a D major chord on the third beat, suggesting a vocal line that retains the intervallic structure of Sabbatini’s. And the final verses, ‘vado gridando / pietà, pietà’, are actually equivalent to their first iteration in Sabbatini (ex.2, bars 7–8). But the most vital issue here is the importance of the regular patterns of stroke-marks in relation to the text accents, which will assume even greater significance in the Ghizzolo concordances discussed below.

A word is in order about the function of the dot in stroke-mark notation. Its most obvious function, as in mensural notation, is to lengthen the preceding strum. This use of the dot is described in at least two alfabeto guitar books. In ‘Due fresche rose’, the resulting dotted rhythms meld nicely with the vocal part, and also mirror the dotted gesture found in Kapsperger’s theorbo part for ‘Fiorite valli’ (ex.1), suggesting a common practice for quinario accompaniments. But in the ritornello of ‘Due fresche rose’, a dot appears after the first down-stroke on the repeat of the rhythmic pattern (thus corresponding to the downbeat of bar 5 in illus.6b). In this case a dotted rhythm would not seem to apply, since it would necessitate a complex and ungainly mixture of quavers and crotchets for the succeeding strums. Instead, the dot appears to have a different function: that of marking the point where the pattern recurs, perhaps used because the subdivided strum marks threaten to obscure the basic pattern. Such a relationship between the dot and the basic strum patterns may also be at work in other songs from the manuscript, as seen below.

The dance song repertory

The title ‘O Clorida’ appears over an alfabeto solo dance in the Cherubini manuscript, perhaps indicating a grey area between dance and song. The incipit ‘O Clorida’ (or ‘Clorinda’) also heads alternate texts in anthologies by Giovanni Stefani and Pietro Millioni, and in both cases the alfabeto is similar to that found in the Cherubini manuscript,
saying that the basic rhythmic and harmonic pattern existed independently from any specific text or composer. This seems to be true for many pieces in anthologies like Stefani’s and Millioni’s, where texts and songs tend to be given without attribution and are often linked to alternate texts. Stefani’s three anthologies in particular are a nest of manuscript concordances and alternate texts. For instance, ‘Altro non è il mio core’, another alfabeto solo dance from the Cherubini manuscript, also appears in Stefani’s Affetti, and (as ‘Altro non è l’Amore’) in Remigio Romano’s Prima raccolta, as well as being given as an alternate text for ‘Fermi ne’ su’ in Remigio Romano’s Seconda raccolta. In addition, at least one other piece appearing in Stefani was used as the basis for instrumental composition: ‘Fuggi, fuggi, dolente core’, which appears as an alternate text for ‘Torna, torna, ostinato core’ in Stefani’s Scherzi amorosi (Venice, 1620), was also connected to a commonly known melody, appearing among other places as a trio sonata in Biagio Marini’s Diversi generi di sonate (1655). So the importance of sources such as the Cherubini manuscript is open to question: do these minimal, chordal versions represent pieces that have been simplified for use by students and amateurs, with the more complex, printed versions standing as the real piece? Or are these manuscript versions more prototypical than simplified, representing the basic elements common to different performances and reproductions of varying complexity? In this latter case, the stroke-marks should present us with a visual trace of the musical assumptions by contemporary performers when reproducing a strophic song; in other words, the basic musical ‘idea’, which took the form of a harmonic and rhythmic structure, was very unlike theoretical descriptions of musical forms in this period. In this view, the task of assimilating these contemporary assumptions would fall to educated composers like Giovanni Ghizzolo, who had the job of presenting strophic compositions that satisfied both the demands of the amateur, paying public, and the circle of composers and patrons on which he also depended for his livelihood.

Ghizzolo vs. the guitar

Four of the alfabeto-text songs in the Cherubini manuscript are taken from Giovanni Ghizzolo’s 1623 publication, Frutti d’amore (see Table 1). Unlike the Stefani and Sabbatini concordances, the text and alfabeto match the printed versions exactly, suggesting that they were copied from the print. The discrepancies that remain, therefore, are in the realm of rhythm, the only other aspect notated in the manuscript, and provide us with an insight into contemporary performance practice by guitarist-singers. In addition, Ghizzolo is one of the composers singled out by Silke Leopold as standing at the junction of the new compositional style, where music had not yet caught up to changes in the text. Ghizzolo’s compositions, therefore, show a composer struggling to accommodate musical metre to textual metre. The manuscript adaptations show a guitarist who, in the interests of practicality, further adapts the rhythm to accord with commonly understood patterns. The resulting picture is one of performance practice as reactionary, reducing Ghizzolo’s rhythmic experimentation to repetitive strumming patterns that hearken back to the early days of the five-course guitar.

‘O care selve’ in its manuscript manifestation represents a clear victory for dance rhythms in the battle between rhythmic patterns and text setting. Ghizzolo’s original already shows strain between the two. The text consists entirely of quinari and thus leads the musical metre towards a gagliarda pattern. But, as Silke Leopold points out, the syllabification varies between iambic and dactylic from line to line (see illus.8). Leopold describes Ghizzolo’s setting as ‘sloppy’, since the composer allows the iambic rhythmic setting to overpower the dactylic lines, especially in the B section. The rhythms Leopold refers to are, of course, created by the quavers and semiquavers in the melody, since the continuo proceeds with steady crotchets below. But the guitar version in the Cherubini manuscript, instead of following the continuo, gives a D–D–U pattern that recurs for every crotchet beat; when transcribed according to Ghizzolo’s metre, therefore, the guitar presents a recurring iambic pattern that overwhelms Ghizzolo’s already weak attempts at accommodating the varied textual meters (see ex.3). The obsessive strum pattern would also seriously interfere with any attempt, by way of vocal nuance, to observe the textual metre in performance. Yet the Cherubini manuscript blithely persists with this regular, dance-song style
strum pattern. Obviously, the contemporary performance practice associated with guitaristic strumming patterns was part of the reception for these newly composed canzonettas. This practice has roots in the popular music of the preceding century, creating a connection to that repertory even where, as in this case, the composer did not consciously imitate it.

8 (a) Giovanni Ghizzolo, 'O care selve' from Frutti d’amore (Venice, 1623), p.2; (b) 'O care selve', Cherubini manuscript, f.53v
In the other alfabeto-texts taken from Ghizzolo's print the manuscript goes even further in accommodating the standard strum patterns. Apparently guitarists felt no compunction about using older, alfabeto-solo-style dance rhythms when performing these songs, even to the point of expanding and contracting the composer's notated melody. In copying Ghizzolo's 'T'en fuggi mia vita', for instance, the alfabeto was left completely unchanged (see illus.9). The opening strum pattern also fits well with the syllabification of the opening line. But in this piece, almost as if anticipating Leopold's criticism, Ghizzolo took pains to compose his melody so that strong accents fall on the downbeats and the expostulation in the final verse, 'Ah, che mi struggi', can be given a proper expressive performance.

The alfabeto notation in the manuscript, on the other hand, is set to a regular pattern of stroke-marks which cannot be shoe-horned into Ghizzolo's melody. One must bear in mind that the alfabeto stroke-mark notation, which rarely gives any indication of metre or duration, depends solely on the repetition of an easily recognizable pattern. In the Cherubini manuscript, both in the alfabeto texts and the alfabeto solo dances, as well as most of the alfabeto repertory, these patterns are altered only in certain cases, as in the ritornello of 'Due fresche rose' described above, and those cases are often signalled by the use of a dot. In the case of 'T'en fuggi mia vita', therefore, we must assume a uniform rhythm for the stroke-marks throughout the song. Ex.4 gives Ghizzolo's melody above the alfabeto rhythm from the Cherubini manuscript. The alfabeto is the same in both cases, allowing me to match the strum marks from the manuscript to the melody from the print.

In some places, for example the second line 'per l'arena', there are not enough strums to cover the durations in Ghizzolo's melody. The only way to match the strums would be to assume an unrealistically wide range in durations of the strums themselves, which would completely obscure the pattern, as well as contradict the use of these patterns elsewhere in the manuscript and the alfabeto repertory at large. Instead, the manuscript matches textual rhythms to the strum patterns with a pause at the end of each line. For this reason, there are also places where there are too many strums for Ghizzolo's melody. For example, Ghizzolo sets the fifth line, 'rivolgì a me', almost as an enjambment with 'quella luci serene', but the manuscript adds strums to the end of the fifth line to complete a full pattern. Again, it would be unrealistic and awkward to speed up the strumming pattern in order to fit four strums into the space of a quaver. A dot appears after the last stroke-mark in the fifth line, marking the division, a similar function to that described in the ritornello to 'due fresche rose' earlier. Since the alfabeto notation

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Ex. 3 'O care selve' reconstructed from the Cherubini manuscript. Note that the alfabeto matches Ghizzolo's print exactly save for the 'I' (A major) chord near the end of the A section.
Two versions of 'T’en fuggi mia vita': (a) Cherubini manuscript; (b) Ghizzolo, *Frutti d’amore* (1623).

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makes no use of metrical or durational symbols, the visually obvious regular pattern is necessary to mark beginnings and endings of phrases, and becomes even more important than the composed melody. Ghizzolo’s compositional niceties are swept aside by tradition, creating a guitar-friendly version in which textual metre is matched to pre-existing dance rhythms. Ex. 5 gives my reconstruction of ‘Te’n fuggi mia vita’ according to the notation in the Cherubini manuscript.

Stroke-mark notation is the physical trace of the older dance tradition, and depicts the struggles of performers as they grappled with new compositional strategies. Although most manuscripts do not combine stroke-mark notation with song texts, the Cherubini manuscript represents the visual record of a mental process that guitarists must have commonly used to integrate strummed dance patterns into sung accompaniment. Clearly, a lack of rhythm-metric notation does not mean a lack of rhythm, and printed versions of 17th-century songs do not prescribe performances that vary greatly in their rhythmic interpretation. While scholars such as John Walter Hill have found evidence of a recitational, declamatory performance practice associated with early alfabeto manuscripts, we must also admit the possibility of a more metrically regular strumming style that continued to influence Italian song after the rise and fall of the stile recitativo.

And if, as Silke Leopold argues, the regular periodic structures of mid-century Italian canzonettas were the seedbed of 18th-century compositional style, we must allow for the influence of strummed guitar dances in that narrative as well. Although this study has dealt mainly with issues peculiar to the early 17th century, the relationship between rhythm and harmonic progressions in dance-song practice is indeed pertinent to later musical developments despite an increase in the specificity of notation. At stake is the unseen motivation for these observable musical aspects of early 18th-century music. As discussed earlier, Leopold finds this motivation in the versification of strophic Italian lyrics, leaving the guitar aside completely, while Thomas Christensen and Richard Hudson point directly to the guitar solo dance notation. But these latter scholars avoid the issue of rhythm in vocal music, thus giving the impression of guitar chord progressions as abstract harmonic entities that display a surprising nascent functional tonality. The reality is much richer: the harmonic progressions seen in the passacaglias and ciaconas originated in the oral tradition, spurred on by those movements of the body that were partially lost in the transition to the stylized, 17th-century dance styles. Bodily motion remained as a vital feature of the dance-song tradition, however, as evidenced by the role that the right hand plays in the transmission of guitar music. This physical relationship between sounding harmonies and their repetition and duration was prompted partly by a cultural relationship between the newly developing consumer base for
printed music and the marginalized ethnic groups evoked by the strummed guitar sound. It was this newly modified, physical approach to organized chords that collided with the newly developed verse forms described by Leopold. Each element was transformed as it came into contact with the others; not least was the growing acceptance of continuo realization by means of vertical harmonies above the bass notes. As Christensen rightly notes, it was a theorist and guitarist, François Campion, who formulated the ‘rule of the octave’ that foreshadowed Rameau’s theoretical structures so convincingly. But the theoretical application of guitaristic harmonic practice was hardly a direct progression from the traditional dances of 16th-century Spain to the treatises of the Enlightenment. Instead, cultural, physical, musical and economic elements joined together to create a widely understood relationship between lyrical metre and metrically organized harmonic progressions. Although not at first subjected to description and analysis, this relationship was at length adopted, assimilated and enriched by teachers and theorists, thus becoming part of the mainstream of Western classical music.

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3 For example, see T. Christensen, "The Spanish Baroque guitar and seventeenth-century triadic theory", Journal of Music Theory, xxxvi (1992), pp.1–42.


5 Joan Carles Amat, Guitarra española de cinco órdenes ... (Lerida, 1626, first printed 1596). For information on dating this work, see Monica Hall’s introduction to the facs. edn (Monaco, 1986).


7 Stein, ‘Origins and character of recitado’.


14 Leopold, Modo d’Orfeo.

15 Leopold, Modo d’Orfeo, pp.204–5.

16 See Leopold, Modo d’Orfeo, p.87.

17 Girolamo Montesardo, Nuova inventione d’intavolatura per sonare li balletti sopra la chitarra spagnuola, senza numeri e note (Florence, 1606); Giovanni Ambrosio Colonna, Intavolatura di chitarra alla spagnuola (Milan, 1619).

18 A similar use of the dot occurs in Giovanni Paolo Foscarini’s Primo secondo e terzo libro della chitarra spagnola (c.1630), where the dot indicates a phrase ending or pause between pieces.


20 Stefani, Affetti, p.15; Remigio Romano, Prima raccolta di bellissime canzonette e musical e modern ... ([Vicenza?], 1618, r/Vicenza, 1622), p.9; Romano, Seconda raccolta di canzonette bellissime per cantare, & suonare sopra aria moderno (Vicenza, 1620, r/Vicenza, [1622]), p.52.


22 The only exception is ‘O care selve’, in which the manuscript omits one alfabeto symbol (and its stroke-marks), as well as repeating a line of text rather than giving the rhyming line. Both of these can be reasonably ascribed to carelessness in copying.

23 Leopold, Modo d’Orfeo, p.89.

24 Leopold, Modo d’Orfeo, pp.88–9.

25 Both the opening and the beginning of the B section in ‘O care selve’ present a potential harmonic discrepancy between the strummed chords and Ghizzolo’s melody. In both cases the strummed chord, if the rhythmic pattern is taken strictly, clashes with the voice. In the opening I have assumed a loosening of the strum pattern to set up the opening pitch. In the B section I set the strums in exact rhythm, creating an accented passing-note dissonance in the voice. Of course, a slight variation of the melody is also a possibility.


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