

# Raclerie Universelle

## Israel Golani - Baroque guitar

**Henry Grenerin** ca.1625-1700

*Prelude et Passacaille*

Suite in d minor

*Allemande*

*Courante*

*Sarabande*

*Gigue*

(source: *Livre de gitarre et autre pieces de musique...*, 1680)

**Pièces de village (Anon.)**

*Mariez moy*

*L'Otoñera*

*Mascarade (Visée)*

*La Vielle*

*La Forlane*

(source: ms Vm7 6222, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.  
*L'Otoñera* source: Isabel van Langenhove's guitar book, ms 133.K.6, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague)

**Anon./Jean-Baptiste Lully** 1632-1687

*Allemande Entrée d'Apollon*

*Air de Galatée*

(source: ms Vm7 844, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris)

**Robert de Visée** ca.1650-ca.1725

Suite in G major

*Prelude*

*Allemande*

*Courante*

*Saraband*

*Gigue*

(source: ms Vm7 844, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris)

**Francisque Corbette** 1615-1681

Suite in a minor

*Prelude*

*Allemande*

*Courante*

*Sarabande*

*Passacaille*

(source: *La Guitarre royalle dediée au Roy de la Grande Bretagne*, 1671)

*La Villanelle*

(source: Vm7 6222, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris)

*Passacaille en rondeau*

(source: *Livre de pieces pour la gitarre*, 1686)

## ***“And God knows what a universal strumming there was...”***

When the five-year-old Louis XIV came to the throne (1643) cardinal Mazarin ordered to bring from Italy a guitar master to teach the young king. Already during the reign of his father the Spanish renaissance guitar had found its way to the palace, accompanying ballets. But it was during the Sun King's reign that the improved 5-course guitar achieved its royal status, and its music reached new peaks of subtlety and grace.

Lute and theorbo players such as Henry Grenerin quickly took to this novel instrument. At the time Grenerin held the exclusive post of a Musicien de la chambre de Roi, giving him permission to play for the king in his private chamber. Years later he published his Livre de guitarre containing 16 suites.

17<sup>th</sup> century guitarists made a distinction between two techniques of playing: *á pincer* – plucking the strings separately; and *á battre* – strumming over all the strings at once. The second style is what makes all the difference. As opposed to lutenists the guitarist had his own rhythm section. The percussive sound of the fingers brushing over the strings inspired the French to call this effect *raclerie* (scratching).

Once in fashion, many of the nobility desired to play the guitar, acquired an instrument, a tutor and in many cases a fancy booklet in which they wrote the most popular tunes of the time. Such is the case of Manuscript Vm7 844, whose anonymous author collected and arranged more than 500 dances, arias and choir music of the period as well as original pieces by Visée. The most prominent composer in this compilation is J. B. Lully, whose ballets and operas captured the public's heart. Incidentally, Lully was a talented guitarist.

Robert de Visée became a musician of the king's chamber in 1680 where he played lute, theorbo, guitar, viol and occasionally he also sang. In 1719 he was appointed Maître de Guitarre du Roi. Unsurprisingly one finds numerous arrangements of his compositions for those instruments such as the suite in g of which a transposed version exists for theorbo. Visée's talent for melodic line and long phrases has produced some of the most refined pieces for a solo instrument. His music requires strumming only in selected moments in order to ensure the continuation of the melody.

Manuscript Vm7 6222, from which the next group has been compiled, contains many country dances that did not belong to the court-suite. Along the peasant's dance La Forlane, the mesmerizing La Vielle and the lyrical Mariez moy one finds also the piece Mascarade by Visée, famous for its spirited temper. La Otoñera comes from an interesting manuscript belonging to a woman from the Duchy of Brabant, named Isabel van Langenhove. During her years as a young lady she collected poems and songs in Latin, French and Dutch as well as guitar music with Spanish influences as the titles suggest. Later, Isabel married Leo Jan de Pape who was the “advocaat-fiscaal van de Souvereine Raad van Brabant, Voorzitter van de Geheime Raad”. They had no less than 14 children.

“El mejor de todos” - the best of them all, is how Gaspar Sanz described Francisque Corbette (originally called Francesco Corbetta) many years after the latter's visit to Spain. A flamboyant virtuoso he was one of the few musicians in 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe who had an international career as a freelance musician. Travelling to Vienna, Hannover, Brussels or London – Corbette always found a welcoming monarch. His strongest bond however was with the throne in Versailles and he travelled regularly to France in order to give lessons, not only to the king, but also to court musicians such as Visée. His compositions show an exquisite balance between the plucked and the strummed style. Short melodic motives with lavish use of ornaments are intertwined with chordal passages, rich in dissonances. The count of Grammont once commented, after witnessing several court musicians playing a certain sarabande by Corbette: “...et Dieu sait la raclerie universelle que c'était...” (and God knows what a universal strumming there was).

Text: Israel Golani