

Web Audio Review:

Works from La guitarra royalle (1671) and Italian Guitar Music of the Seventeenth Century, Battuto and Pizzicato.
Eisenhardt, Lex. <http://www.lexeisenhardt.com>.

A Superb Musical Offering

Lex Eisenhardt literally wrote the book on Baroque guitar, in *Italian Guitar Music of the Seventeenth Century: Battuto and Pizzicato* (U. of Rochester Press, 2015). Eisenhardt's own considerable discography comprises not only Corbetta and other Baroque guitarists, but also later guitarists like Sor and Giuliani, as well as the sixteenth-century *vihuela* school. Yet the best source of Eisenhardt's interpretations of Corbetta is not his CDs but the recordings he has made openly available for streaming on his website. These are in two programs, *Works from La guitarra royalle (1671)* at <<http://www.lexeisenhardt.com/corbetta>> and *Italian Guitar Music of the Seventeenth Century, Battuto and Pizzicato* at <<http://www.lexeisenhardt.com/audio>>. The first includes the dance suites in D-minor, G-minor, and B-minor; the second has the A-minor suite, along with the *Caprice de chaconne* and a *Sarabande et sa passacaille* (also from 1671) as well as instrumental music by Foscari and Bartolotti, and guitar-accompanied songs by Landi, Berti, Obizzi, and Pesenti.

Because of space limitations I will confine this review to the Corbetta works, but the others deserve equally to be heard. The *Battuto and Pizzicato* page is, of course, the repository for audio files to accompany Eisenhardt's book; but I like to think of it as an online album with a book-length liner note available separately. The Corbetta page is a pure musical offering to lovers of the Baroque guitar.

The G-minor and A-minor suites are the same ones recorded by William Carter and Izhar Elias on CDs reviewed elsewhere in this issue. Corbetta seems to have a predilection for dance movements in minor keys, perhaps because they afford him more variety in the modulatory plan. In the G-minor suite, for example, the *Allemande*, *Courante*, and *Sarabande* all cadence in the relative major at the double bar, while the *Gigue* moves instead to the minor dominant. In the A-minor suite, the *Allemande* cadences in the relative major while the *Courante* moves to the major dominant, touching the relative major along the way. In the *Courante* of the B-minor suite, Corbetta has it both ways: he cadences in the major dominant at the double bar, but begins the B section in the relative major.

Here Eisenhardt plays the Prelude of the A-minor suite with more rubato than either Elias or Carter, even though in the G-minor suite it is Carter who takes most liberties with time. Eisenhardt plays the *Allemande* faster and the

Courante slower than Carter, and his *Courante* is in straight rhythm where Carter uses *inégaies*. Eisenhardt, however, more successfully brings out the sarabande-like second beat accents in the B section of the *Courante*. Eisenhardt skips "La Victoire" and the *Passacaille* that follows, going straight to the second *Sarabande* and finishing with the *Gigue* and *Menuet*.

Interestingly, the closing *Menuet*, with its dotted-triplet rhythm, is rather more *gigue*-like than the *Gigue* itself; its uneven, 7-bar opening period is also most un-minuettish. Of all the pieces in the 1671 book, Corbetta included only four minuets, and it is open to question whether he was completely comfortable with the genre. In his earlier Italian books he had included plenty of *almandas*, *correntes*, and *sarabandas*, but never a *minuetto*.

The G-minor, A-minor, and B-minor suites all share important characteristics. The preludes are broken and arpeggiated; the *allemandes* and *courantes* have the same patterns of strummed openings. All include at least one *sarabande* and some combination of *passacailles*, *folies*, or other dances. The A-minor and G-minor suites include a *gigue*, though not in the final place; the B-minor *Allemande* develops the dotted rhythm of its beginning in the course of the piece, moving it from beat to beat while exploring its possibilities.

The D-minor suite is more of a mash-up than the others. In a kind of mixing-and-matching that seems odd but was normal in the seventeenth century, Eisenhardt substitutes an *allemande* from earlier in the book and a *sarabande* from later.

Eisenhardt also offers his own take on the *Caprice de chaconne*, with its elaborate *batterie* section. Eisenhardt's approach to the form of the piece is as flexible as that of Elias, but he makes different choices. Most significantly, instead of ending the piece with a grand, repeated *reppico* flourish, he returns to the quiet opening section for the final statement, creating a smooth dramatic arc that ends where it began.

Eisenhardt plays Corbetta's music with great sophistication and understanding. His stringing includes low octaves on both lower courses, giving him somewhat greater resonance in the bass than the high fifth course used by Carter, but his sound is brighter than Carter's while still more fluid and legato than that of Elias.

The two audio programs on Eisenhardt's website amount to around an hour and three-quarters of listening, well over what could fit on an audio CD. We owe him a debt of thanks for this superb gift.

—ELLWOOD COLAHAN