

## **‘Caprice de chaconne’ (1671): Symmetry and proportions in Francesco Corbetta’s work for Baroque guitar**

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For performers of Early Music, there is an everlasting quest to unveil new perspectives on a historically distant repertoire in search of new ways of understanding and performing the music. This is true for all performers of Early Music, including Baroque guitarists. A currently very popular performance piece is Francesco Corbetta’s ‘Caprice de chaconne’ (1671, ff. 72–73), which is to be found in his 1671 Baroque guitar tablature-collection, *La guitarra royalle*. Displaying advanced technical performance skills, embroidered connections between temporal coordinates that border between fantasy and order, it serves as an excellent display, not only of the performer’s technical skills, but also of Corbetta’s virtuosity both as a performer and composer, and, as we will see, his political participation. In this article I will suggest new perspectives that may provide an extended understanding of how Corbetta’s political wit and musical talent manifest themselves in his ‘Caprice de chaconne.’ By unveiling symmetrical and proportional aspects to this music, I will present a structure that might have an influence on the performance of the piece, situating it within the socio-political context of Louis XIV’s court and the cult of his Sun King persona.

The Italian guitarist and composer Francesco Corbetta (born in Pavia c. 1615 and died in Paris in 1681; also known as Francisque Corbette or Franciscus Corbera) is undeniably a prominent figure among historical guitarists. By promoting an aesthetic based on a rich tonal language and mosaic complexity he distinguished himself from other contemporary composers. He was praised among colleagues across Europe; several paid him homage, and others included his pieces in their collections. Gaspar Sanz (1640–1710) called him ‘el mejor de todos’ (the best of all) while François le Cocq (1685–1729) and his copyist J. B. Castillion noted that he was ‘the most talented master to have appeared up to that time’ (Pinnell, 2016)

Corbetta appears to have possessed a special strategic understanding of patronage, which led him to frequent continental courts. According to *Grove Music Online*,

Corbetta understood patronage and used it to his advantage. His first book went out to middle-class patrons at Bologna, but his work was so remarkable that, according to many contemporary assessments, Corbetta became a major attraction at continental courts. His first court position was for Charles II of Mantua, and the book published for him in 1643 contained Corbetta’s portrait ‘at the age of 28’. Subsequently Corbetta served Philip IV of Spain, Archduke Leopold William of the Low Countries, Christian Louis and his brothers of Hanover, Louis XIV of France, and Charles II of England, and he published a collection of music for each sovereign (that of Hanover is lost). Corbetta thus became a high-ranking diplomat, even better known and travelled than the Dutch statesman Constanjin Huygens, a lutenist who became a guitar aficionado and Corbetta’s advocate in his letters. (Pinnell, 2016)

Corbetta’s political positioning is what has led me to write this article. In his work ‘Caprice de chaconne’, he employs a pattern of symmetry and proportion to create a range of effects designed to appeal to Louis XIV’s sensibilities. His relationship to the French king may be glimpsed in the following remarks in the 1674 edition of the Baroque guitar tablature-collection *La guitarra royalle* (although it bears the same name as the collection from 1671, their contents differ), translated by Monica Hall:

Today I have the opportunity to offer again some new compositions. I want them to conform to the style which best pleases his Majesty [i.e. Louis XIV to whom the book is dedicated], which, among other things, is the most chromatic/colourful [cromatique], the most delicate, and the least complicated. (Hall, 2007, p. 56)

Furthermore, in Corbetta's obituary, it is stated that: '[o]ur great Monarch honored him with such esteem and liberality, and employed him in the most pompous spectacles;' and in the Italian preface of the 1671 version of *La guitarre royalle*, Corbetta writes (again in Hall's translation; brackets in italics are my own additions) that:

In particular [I would like to tell you what happened] in 1656 here in Paris, to one I had had [*sic!*] printed [at the time] when it pleased His Majesty to allow me to take part in an Entrée for several guitars of a ballet composed by the most famous Sr. Gio. Battista Lulli [Jean-Baptiste Lully]. (Hall, 2013, pp. 22–23)

Corbetta, with his ability to excel at courts, stands out as a key person in the development of the guitar in aristocratic circles. Not only did he receive high esteem among his colleagues, he also strengthened the position of the Baroque guitar in Europe in general. With Corbetta becoming an ambassador of the instrument's courtly acceptance, the guitar became a progressive medium that, through its popularity, influenced new generations of composers on other instruments as well.

### **Case study: Caprice de chaconne**

There are several reasons why 'Caprice de chaconne' has been selected for this study. First, because of its clear idiolect among other contemporary guitar compositions, even within the very publication in which it is presented; second, because of Corbetta's Italian heritage, bringing Italian and French music together to develop his own musical aesthetics; third, because of his position in the Court's social circles; and finally, because of how it is composed and how its design relates to a courtly apparatus.

'Caprice,' or 'capriccio' includes a number of definitions depending on geographic and historical location. In Furetière's (1690) words, 'Capriccios are pieces of music, poetry or painting wherein the force of imagination has better success than observation of the rules of art.' The rules of counterpoint could be broken if necessary to promote a performance of a whimsical, fantastic and arbitrary character. This left much room for tempo fluctuations and rhythmic liberties, which fits Prætorius' name for the *capriccio*, namely 'phantasia subitanea' (a sudden whim). In Frescobaldi's (1625) words: 'In those passages which do not seem to conform to the rules of counterpoint, the player should seek out the affect and the composer's intentions'. Clearly, the 'caprice' seeks to promote affect through music making in the very moment it is being created, where the fantastic wins over the academic (all quoted in Schwandt, 2016).

The *chaconne*, at the other hand, was well established at the end of the seventeenth century. Despite its Hispanic-Italian roots, it was distinguishable from the Italian relative. The *ciaconna* was playful, capricious and volatile, while the *chaconne* was a well-planned, stately dance, controlled and inviting to pomp and circumstance in an orderly fashion. The *chaconne* was designed to be prolonged by repeating units and sometimes even approaching it in a *rondeau*-fashion. It had a firm position in musical life, employing a range of media and performance forums. In retrospect, Lully stands out as a prominent developer of the theatrical

*chaconne* which assumes a central part of his *tragédies lyriques* where it celebrates a hero's triumph of apotheosis; they can reach for an entire scene including over 100 units (Silbiger, 2016). According to the research of Peter Burke, most of Louis XIV's public image was governed by a selected group of people, a 'department of glory,' but music was not part of their concern because that task had been left entirely to Lully to govern. For Corbetta to be working in this environment, then, suggests that he found himself being a part of an innovative musical environment. As a matter of fact, the French-published *La guitarre royalle* from 1671, in which we find the 'Caprice de chaconne' selected for this study, there is a level of musical detail and innovation that stands out among Baroque guitar tablatures at the time. We can notice this very clearly, when comparing the French 'Caprice de chaconne' to the 'Ciaconna' found in Corbetta's earlier tablature collection, *Varii scherzi*, where we find a much more traditional, Italianate chaconne that is quite similar to those of other Baroque guitar composers at the time (Corbetta, 1648, pp. 28–30).

Susan McClary's *Desire and Pleasure in Seventeenth-Century Music* (2012), contains some intriguing remarks concerning the French *chaconne* as a genre. Accompanying most of the activities at court, dance was far more serious at the French court than pure entertainment (pp. 215, 225).<sup>[1]</sup> This included ritual aspects and symbolical activities designed to glorify Louis XIV. McClary brings special attention to the chaconne, depicting it as an effective tool to conclude operas in Louis XIV's honor:

The French shaped their court rituals around dance, which served both to provide recreational distraction and to inscribe courtiers physically into the Neoplatonic ideology prescribed by the Sun King [...] Lully [...] often positioned a chaconne as the concluding element in his ballets and operas. At this point following the plot's denouement, spectators joined the professional performers in dancing around the body of the king, thereby simulating the orbit of planets around the sun.

With the aim of erasing the self to bring full focus to the King, chaconnes served as long drones similar to religious sermons seeking to direct all attention to the Lord Almighty: 'Louis XIV deployed the chaconne pragmatically to turn "the God trick": to seduce his courtiers into that neurological condition in which they dissolved into a state of jouissance - not coincidentally with the king himself as center' (McClary, 2012, pp. 203–205).

In this present study, I will provide a different perspective to Corbetta's 'genius,' reaching beyond technical abilities and musical skills to a deeper level of structure in what is becoming one of his most famous works. This structure is important, not only because it presents valuable markers that give us hints to the performance of the music, but also because it unveils a hierarchical, almost altarpiece-like tripartite structure that comments on the French court and that utilises similar tools as those used by the French court apparatus to construct the 'Louis XIV' persona. On this background, I will now proceed to argue that this relation between the *chaconne*, the courtly admiration-apparatus and Corbetta can be found hidden in plain sight in 'Caprice de chaconne' based on proportion and symmetry functioning at multiple layers.

### **General proportions and symmetry**

The first instance of proportion is found when we count the bars throughout the piece and divide them in two. Because, if we designate the strumming section in the middle of the piece as the centre (I will further address this statement shortly), we will find that it is preceded by

31 bars and succeeded by 33 bars. What makes this significant is the minor, two-bar difference between the two; especially when we take into account that the section following the centre is marked with the instruction *plus vite* (quicker). Working on the hypothesis that the *plus vite* is designed to make the 33 bar section make up the same amount of time as the 31 bar section, that is, cancelling out the two bar difference, we actually get a proportional and symmetrical piece of music. This is further anchored in the beginning and end of the piece presenting musical movements in an almost mirrored fashion (see Ex. 1 below) where two chords, joined together by melodic successions (a1 and a2), are preceded or succeeded by similar sorts of movements in thirds beginning (b2) or ending (b1) with an ornament:

Example 1. The beginning and end of ‘Caprice de Chaconne,’ *La guitare royale*, fols. 72–73. In my own transcription. [[Listen to Example 1](#)]

Furthermore, counting the individual, vertical impulses, that is, each time a tone or chord is struck in the piece, we find some interesting indications. There are 209 impulses before the centre strumming group; 55 strumming impulses serving as centre which is also notated to be repeated, which leaves us with 110 impulses; and 144 impulses with a repetition in the final bars, leaving us with a total of 157 impulses. This calculation thus provides us with three groups of impulses consisting of 209, 110 and 157 actions. Interestingly enough, 110 is 70% of 157; 157 is 75% of 209; and 209 is 78% of 110+157, giving us an increase ranging from 5% to 8% which are surrounding the number 6. Returning to the *plus vite*, we may conduct a thought experiment by using this number. If one increases the tempo by 6% (i.e., for the sake of illustration, a strictly fictional tempo of 75 bpm would become 79.5 bpm; likewise, a tempo of 80 bpm would become 84.8 bpm) we would find that the piece actually becomes fully proportional on both sides of the central strumming pattern. I call this a thought experiment because there is no clear sense of tempo in the notation — the only tempo marks given are

*lentement* (slow) and *plus viste* (quicker) and the metronome had not been invented yet — but in the case of proportion we can find some interest in this subjective line of thought.

The symmetrical movement is also evident in the melodic flow presented in the piece, where each phrase, in most regards, moves in arches. Where we in the beginning of the piece find frequent use of upward arches we also find downward arches towards the end, all surrounding the more levelled and linear centre strumming section.

### Structural centre

The centre section itself is a fundamental part of the musical work, presenting a complex mosaic-like strumming pattern that is unparalleled in the Baroque guitar repertoire, even in the works of Corbetta himself (see Ex. 2 below). The pattern makes use of a combination of finger movements, to create a rapid rhythm, with shifting tone colours and dynamic weight. The pattern is created in the following manner, which is revealed by the notation as explained in the preface of the tablature collection (1671):

Vedrai lesemplio dun repicco posto in una Ciaconna, doue la nota piu longa significa il polzo, cominciando prima i diti poi con il polzo facendo listesso all in su e osserua che le guatro note legate significano douersi far prima con il secondo dito e poi con il primo appresso, e cosi all in su sotto a un tempo piu presto, e poi seguita con i diti et il polzo [...]

Vous uerrez l'exemple d'une batterie, mise sur un caprice de chacone où la note la plus longue signifie le pouce tant au dessous qu'au dessus et remarquez que quand uous uerrez quatre notes liees ensemble, uous devez uous servir auparauant du second doigt en descendant, et puis apres du premier doigt uous ferez de mesme en montant dans un tēps plus prompt et continuez tousiours avec les doigts et le pouce suiuant l'exemple que uous y uerrez. (Corbetta, 1671, ff. 3, 7)

(You will see the example of a *repicco* (i.e. strumming) in a *Ciaconna*, where the longer note [stem] signifies the thumb, starting first [with] the fingers, then with the thumb [and] doing the same [with] all [indicated fingers in an] up[wards motion], and observe that the four related notes [marked with a slur] signify having to be [played] first with the second finger and then with the first close by, and then all [indicated fingers] upwards in a quicker tempo, and then followed with the fingers and the thumb [...]

You will see the example of a battery [i.e. strumming section], set to a *caprice de chacone* where the longest note [stem] signifies the thumb, both from below and above, and note that when you see four notes tied together, you first have to serve [i.e. strum] the second finger downward, and then, after the first finger, you will do the same by going up in a faster time, and continue with the fingers and the thumb according to the example that you will see) (My translation.)

In Corbetta's 1674 edition we find similar instructions: 'Quand à la Batterie la plus longue notte marque le Poulce. / Et couchant le premier doigt sur la touche, Vous touschere les Points marques un a chaque corde.' (When at the battery [i.e. strumming section of the musical work], the longest note marks the thumb. / And setting the first finger on the fret, you strike

each string [of the chord] with the fingers marked). Summarising the Italian and French 1671 and 1674 instructions with the tablature, we can present the rhythmic structure accordingly:

Group: I II I

Rhythmic value:<sup>[2]</sup> 16 16 16 16 32 32 32 32 16 16 16 16 16 16

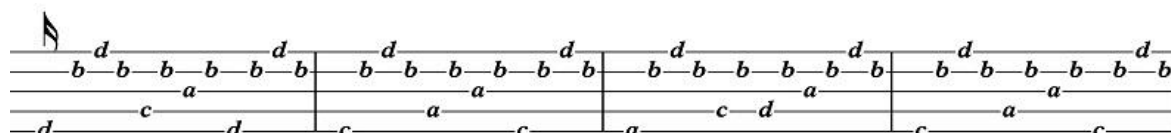
Finger:<sup>[3]</sup> m p p i m i m i i i m p p i

Finger-direction:<sup>[4]</sup> d d u d d u d u d d u u

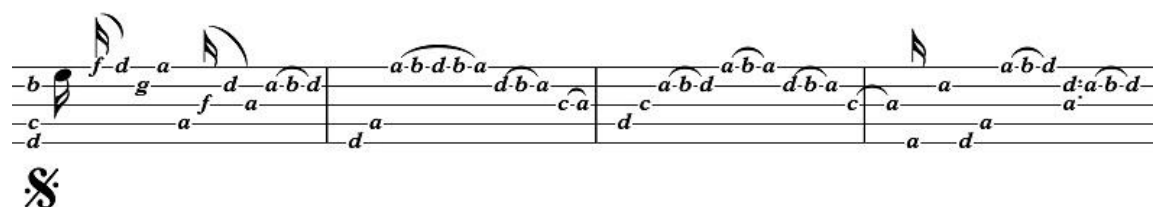


Example 2. The centre strumming pattern of ‘Caprice de Chaconne,’ *La guitarrre royalle*, fols. 72–73. In my own transcription. [[Listen to Example 2](#)]

The proportional and symmetrical character is obvious as the rhythmic pattern consists of one pattern (Group I) surrounding a second (Group II, which also presents the only demi-semiquavers [32<sup>nd</sup> notes] in the piece) on both sides. The rhythmic progression (i.e. I, II, I) is further surrounded by the only two occurrences in the piece with a steady semiquaver movement (16<sup>th</sup> notes; see Exs. 3 and 4 below):



Example 3. The semiquaver movement appearing before the central strumming pattern in ‘Caprice de Chaconne,’ *La guitare royale*, fols. 72–73. In my own transcription. [[Listen to Example 3](#)]



Example 4. The semiquaver movement appearing after the central strumming pattern in ‘Caprice de Chaconne,’ *La guitarrre royalle*, fols. 72–73. In my own transcription. [[Listen to Example 4](#)]

To summarise, there are several levels of symmetry present in this piece (as notated). Upon the foundation of the somewhat mirrored beginning and end of the piece, we can see how an

arch is formed. The centre of the arch is provided by the strumming pattern which in turn is surrounded at both sides by a steady semi-quaver movement (A: semi-quavers; B: strumming; A: semi-quavers). The central strumming pattern itself is structured into two different patterns which also provides the structure ABA (see fig. 1 below). I will now show that the structure is significant, and that it is not by happenstance that Corbetta chose to construct the piece in this manner; that is, like a sunrise for the Sun King through a tripartite *sunrise*, *apex* and *sundown*.

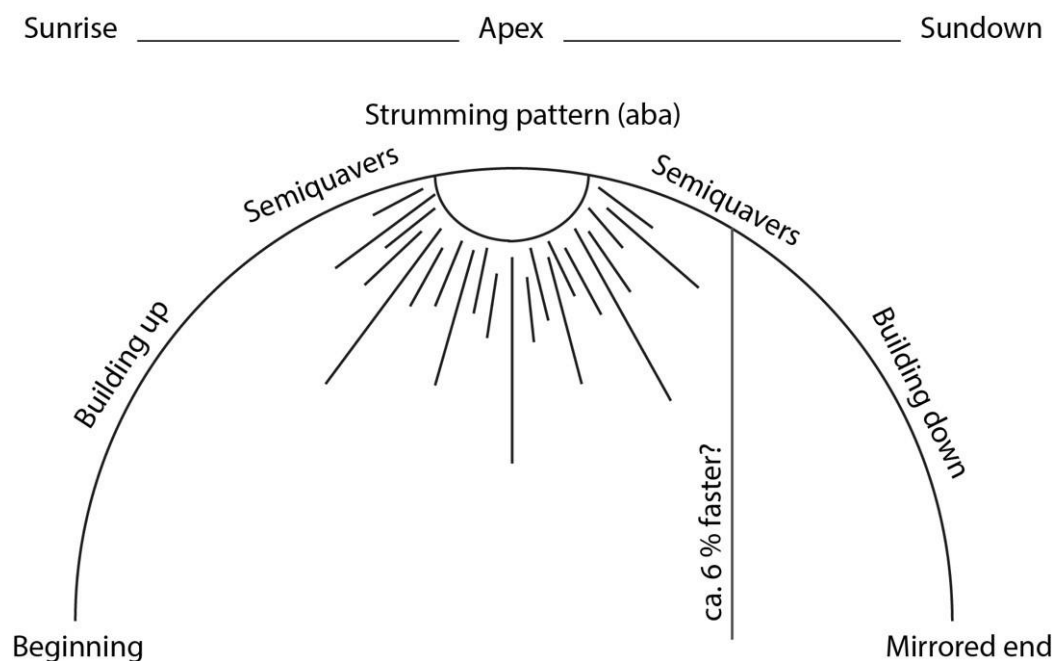


Figure 1. A graphical overview of the proportional and symmetrical findings presented in the present article.

### Religious tools and the design of the “Sun King”

Various levels of symmetry and proportion have been used throughout music history to secure balance and control; arguably, this is the very purpose of music theoretical tools such as counterpoint, functional harmonic perspectives and cadences. This is because music and art in general have always been closely related to rhetoric, that is, employing deliberate tools to convey a musical message in a persuasive, memorable way to create a faithful audience; this is axiomatic. By using repetitions and various forms of rhyme schemes, poets and musicians have established conformity, structure and sense of form (examples include theme and variation, sonata-form and fugues, to name but only a few). These are often obvious means of composition that even an untrained eye can spot immediately; it takes little training to spot a rhyme scheme of ababcc in a literary poem, for instance. The Early Modern artist (be it visual, literal or musical), however, had more advanced tools for including structure at a deeper level, hidden in plain sight, where words, topics and other means of creating architectural markers were organised to create a structure that supported the narrative of the creative work and strengthened the rhetorical mediation of it. Roy Eriksen states that ‘this is not a modern invention’ and argues that ‘Renaissance aesthetic theory and practice reveal an impulse to control the various systems of signification that reproduce and communicate the artist’s initial idea’ (Eriksen, 2001, pp. xv, xxi). Although Eriksen directs his argument towards Renaissance literature, architecture and art, we can also find examples of this in the Early Baroque, as has been made evident in the analysis above. Indeed, Baroque poetry is often even more highly

patterned than Renaissance poetry, and even if it was not always easy to see and not all could acknowledge it, it was still part of contemporary fashion. As Scholar Peter Burke comments: ‘The allegories were not always easy to decode, even for contemporaries, but the interest in literary and pictorial enigmas was part of the taste at the time’ (Burke, 1992, p. 26).

The symbolism of the sun became an important part of Louis XIV’s public persona (Burke, 1992, p. 130), and when he made his debut at court, in 1653, performing in *Le Ballet de la nuit*, he fully embraced the figure of the ‘Sun King’ (see fig. 2 below). Here, he was presented as the rising sun (p. 45) and, like many other times thereafter, portrayed with rays of light (or even flames) bursting out from his head and the major joints of his body. Indeed, the symbolic design of a rising sun was very common in contemporary music, theatre, ballet, architecture and other artistic designs, and it is to be found both before and after the publication of *La guitarre royalle*.



Figure 2. Louis XIV performing in *Le Ballet de la nuit*, choreographed in 1653 when he made his debut at court. Henri Gissey. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported via Wikimedia Commons.

Looking closely at Figure 2 above, we see a small head with flames coming out of it at the chest of Louis XIV. This symbol occurs at multiple instances during his reign, such as the golden gate at his castle in Versailles (Fig. 3, below) and in a portrait by Robert Nanteuil,



dated 1670 (Fig. 4, below). As shown in Figure 1 above, we can find this symbolic use of the sunrise in Corbetta's 'Caprice de Chaconne,' as well, where the beginning (cf. Example 1.; see a1 and b1) initiates the sunrise where the different variations on it marks the rising of the sun. At the apex we find the elaborate strumming pattern which is accompanied at both ends by a fluid musical texture that contrasts everything else present in the 'Caprice de chaconne.' Listening to the performance of Example 3 and 4 above (cf. the video links), it is not hard to imagine the steady, persisting semiquaver movement as the rays of light surrounding the main event shown in Example 2 (cf. the film-link where the complex pattern is broken down, finger by finger). The main event surrounded by radiant linearity is by no surprise, very similar to the face-symbol found throughout Louis XIV visual appearance (see. figs. 2 and 3, for instance). When the apex has been passed the music falls more and more at ease, like a sundown, only to rest asleep in the mirrored ending (cf. Example 1; see b2 and a2), as if we are still looking back, to remember the apex in all its glory.



Figure 3. Detail of a golden gate at Versailles, built in the 1680s. By Dennis Jarvis. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Generic.



Figure 4. Portrait of Louis XIV by Robert Nanteuil, 1670. Public domain.

The threefold symmetry that the music presents (sunrise, apex and sundown) raises questions, and presents interesting perspectives that have a direct influence on the performance and function of the piece. Recall the remarks made by Susan McClary cited above, that the chaconne, especially, functioned to glorify Louis XIV and served to bring the audience into a state of *jouissance*, with the king at the centre of attention by turning ‘the God trick’ (McClary, 2012, pp. 203–205). A threefold construction such as the ‘Caprice de chaconne,’ with the elevated rhythmic pattern at the centre of two supporting parts, soon brings the altarpiece to mind. Designed to aid and inspire devotion and to focus worship on the divine, altarpieces can often be read as narratives from left to right, similar to how we read texts in the Western world. It was a sort of communicative, functional artwork that most people in the Christian seventeenth century world would have seen and experienced, so it was a well-known sort of language that had a widespread audience. Now, in comparison to the ‘Caprice de chaconne’ there are several features that resembles the altarpiece, particularly the triptych in which three artworks are joined together as one.

First, the threefold format: sunrise – apex – sundown.

Second, the left to right narration (sunrise building up to the main piece at the apex followed by the sundown with the somewhat mirrored end which sort of provides a reminiscence of how it all began.

Third, the main piece at the apex, the centre of attention focusing the devotion of the sun (for which, read Louis XIV) and its virtuoso, masterly, authoritative and brilliant nature (which can be more or less emphasised, of course, in the performer’s execution; cf. the virtuoso semiquaver movements and complex strumming pattern) that, in the context, should be compared to the elevated, divine Louis XIV persona, the high protector of the arts, the King who cured people from their illness by laying his hand on their heads (Burke, 1992, p.168). Burke tells us that:

A myth of Louis XIV existed in the sense that he was presented as omniscient [*informé de tout*], as invincible, godlike, and so on. He was the perfect prince, associated with the return of the golden age. Poets and historians described the king as a ‘hero’ and his reign, in the words of Racine, as ‘an unbroken series of marvels.’ His public image was not simply favourable: it had a sacred quality. (p. 7)

This may also be the very reason why, I am now speculating, we only find this complex strumming pattern in the ‘Caprice de Chaconne’ and not anywhere else in the 1671 version of *La guitare royale*, because the status it was designed to address called for the unparalleled and elevated. It needed an artistic act that called for the best and that had no comparable match.

This sort of rhetoric is to be found in altarpieces all around the Christian world. In the altarpiece of the Royal Chapel of Versailles (see fig. 5 below), for instance, we see a symmetrical, arch-like structure focusing our attention to a triangle from which rays of light are radiated in harmony with the angels, very much like a sunrise. This design, although not finished until 1710, uses a similar architectural construction as the earlier ‘Caprice de chaconne’. Indeed, comparing the altarpiece presented in Figure 5 below with Corbetta’s work we notice the shared features clearly: the ornamented and decorated pillars (cf. the first and last parts surrounding the centre; and the mirrored beginning and end), the Holy Power in the centre (the elaborate strumming pattern) and the rays connecting the two (the linear, semiquaver movements enclosing the centre). The relation between the triangular shape of Corbetta’s work and the various designs used to construct the Sun King persona is then not to be reduced to a simple happenstance, but is a firmly established part of the Court apparatus and the public ‘Louis XIV’-persona.



Figure 5. The altarpiece at the Royal Chapel of Versailles. By Allin, J. C. Licenced under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported.

The number of religious references based on the number three are, of course, plentiful (including the Holy Trinity) as is the triangular, pyramidal symbol that has a tradition of being synonymous with light and fire (the latter when the point of the triangle is directed upward, which is also connected to masculinity and virility) (Nozedar, 2010, pp. 22–23). Louis XIV and his court apparatus employed these symbolic designs at all levels of society. Depicted on the coins used for trading and on medals used to commemorate important events, such as the renewal of the alliance with the Swiss (Wellington, 2016, p. 28; see fig. 6 below), the triangular relation is evident. Louis XIV makes up the left-hand corner, what is presumably the Swiss delegation is at the right-hand corner, and a dove emanating divine light is at the top, all surrounding the cross in the middle. We might also see the edge of the medal as representing the vault of heaven with the sun shining its light upon the people below it. The triangle is also discernible in the portrait of the King on the other side of the medal, emphasised by his hair and clothes.



Figure 6. A French medal from 1663 commemorating the renewal of the alliance with the Swiss. Jean Arin, ‘NULLA DIES SUB ME NATOQUE HAEC FOEDERA TRUMPET’ (Never in my name will this treaty be broken). Classical Numismatic Group, Inc. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 2.5 Generic, via Wikimedia Commons.

Looking at Corbetta’s *chaconne* from this perspective certainly brings important features to the forefront. Indeed, Carla Zecher addresses the poet in renaissance poetry: ‘Poets do not write of participation in consort [...] for they wished to present themselves symbolically as soloists’ (Zecher, 2007, p. 9). She also reminds us that ‘a soloist could perform the same polyphonic repertory as an ensemble’ (Zecher, 2007, p. 11). Solo music can so be claimed and nurtured by the individual, unlike the orchestra and as the Baroque guitar, as well as the lute, could be used in more private circles than orchestras, it could provide an outlet for self-expression. As I have argued, Corbetta seemed to have an innate talent for patronage, a strategic mind that led him to frequent continental courts and to promote the Baroque guitar within courtly circles. With this aspect in mind, the altarpiece-like ‘Caprice de chaconne’ may then have functioned, not only as piece within the puzzle of the Royal apparatus, but also as a politically strategic composition, that is, gaining the King’s favour by participating in the rhetoric and religious designs already in use.

## Communicative aspects

Seen from the perspective presented above, Corbetta, through his compositional design, uses specially designed *social markers* in his music — that is, language (or in this particular case, music) usage that unveils personal characteristics — that enables a communication of a wish to be accepted in a closed group, as well as the person's particular suitability to be part of that said group. For reasons and a context unknown to us today, Corbetta may thus have engaged in *speech accommodation*, or more specifically, *speech convergence* in which he consciously accommodates his 'language' to suit the receiver in order to display *common grounds*, leading to an established rapport. This is crucial when regarding Corbetta as a political strategist. Sutton and Douglas write: 'Research has demonstrated that the source's attractiveness, likeability and similarity to the target, perceived credibility, expertise and trustworthiness are all important determinants of the success of a persuasive attempt' (Sutton and Douglas, 2013, pp. 222, 224–225, 228, 260). The allegorical tools presented above, were by no means unknown to the seventeenth century audience and it was incorporated in all the arts and propaganda. Indeed, resemblance was a fundamental part of the world-view at the time (Foucault, 1994, p.17). And the artists were not unattainable if there were any questions to raise about the performance. In the words of Matthew Potolsky: 'In seventeenth-century France, it was common for members of the audience to sit on the stage, converse with actors during the performance, and request that they perform scenes more than once' (Potolsky, 2006, locs. 1371–1372). In courtly circles, in particular within the salon culture, there would have been numerous occasions through interaction both to acquire and develop such listening skills necessary to 'read' analogies from music.

A Courtly circle is, in many respects, a set group where birth and heritage outranks social ability and skills. However, in that group's interaction with the outside world, normal psychological rules of group development, formation and maintenance apply. By deliberately addressing the group's norms, roles and status in their own language, so to say, and participate in that said group's *social creativity*,<sup>[5]</sup> Corbetta may very well have gained from utilising the current political tools and so persuade them to 'take him in.' Consider Allen's (1965) and Deutsch and Gerard's (1955) research (in Sutton and Douglas' words): 'Specifically, when people perceive that their fates depend upon other people (and other's fate likewise depend upon them), and that they need to work together to reach a common goal, then conformity increases' (Sutton and Douglas, 2013, pp. 369, 371, 390, 409).

'Caprice de chaconne' can be said to present communicative perspectives reaching far beyond a 'simple' delivery of a musical experience from performer to audience. It can also communicate a more elaborate interplay between forces, utilising religious tools to engage in political strategies. By its symmetrical and proportional design, it resembles the altarpiece and the profiling effects used by the King's persona to establish stature and authority. It can serve as a comment to political practice as well as a desire to be accepted and to fit in. By its sheer design, it possibly serves as a commentary on Corbetta's political wit, and his conscious strategist mind.

In 1987, Simon Frith asked: 'The question we should be asking is not what does popular music [in this case, read Early Modern] *reveal* about "the people" but how does it *construct* them?' (Leppert and McClary, 1987, p. 137). From this perspective, it is not perhaps in the logically constructed, subjective 'truths' about social phenomena the true value of symmetry and proportion is to be found, but rather in what it unveils of people's past engagements in a political construct and how they participated in constructing that socio-political practice.

Perhaps it is in the very construct itself we find the true value, in that it could have been used, as mentioned above, to establish rapport between bourgeoisie and aristocracy. When addressing musical representations in visual arts, Richard Leppert writes:

It can be no wonder that with the advent of the bourgeois world, but with notable recourse to Plato, so much anxiety was manifested about music as a waste of time. That the emergent bourgeoisie were so consistently reproachful about musicians in their ranks, especially male musicians, is hardly surprising when given both the class's hatred for the perquisites and discursive practices of the nobility and its ironic fetishization of time as money. Nor can it be surprising that the bourgeoisie themselves quickly figured out how music — be sure, music of their 'own sort' — could be engaged sonorically to represent their interests. [...] The power of music is not only the power to control time through the expenditure of leisure; it is also the licence to waste time. (Leppert, 1993, p. 27).

If music is a licence to waste time, then creating music with elaborate structures and intellectual virtuosic display could be considered an even greater waste of time, adding a new level of flirtation with the upper classes in addition to incorporating the religious tools that have already been discussed. By reaching out to the aristocracy by using their own language, so to speak, Corbetta did not only lay the foundation for being accepted by the upper class, but also to affirm his belonging with them by creating a work that through its structural design distances itself from more common, simpler and straightforward ways of composing music; for instance, folk music, or *musique populaire*. In Theodore Gracyk's words: 'So we arrive at a sort of crossroads. Musicians project an identity by situating themselves in relation to other musicians. Listeners derive meaning and value from [...] music by contributing cultural capital to the process — which seems to imply that their own identity as members of a certain audience depends on the ability of others to employ cultural capital situating them properly' (Gracyk, 2001, p. 35). That is, the symmetry and proportion in Corbetta's 'Caprice de chaconne' would, by the interchange of cultural capital (i.e. speaking the same language and utilising a conforming set of tools), symbolically have affirmed his place at court.

### **Compositional context**

The picture of a historically important musical work with political features for Baroque guitar has now unveiled itself through its compositional design, but the contextual signification is yet to be determined. That is, how does the 'Caprice de chaconne' position itself among Corbetta's other compositions and among works of other contemporary, French Baroque guitar composers? In the 1671 edition of *La guitarre royale*, the other *chaconnes* are not nearly as obvious in its symmetry and proportion compared to the 'Caprice de chaconne;' the smaller D major *chaconne* (fol. 69) only progresses from a major tonality to a minor one (very close to the metrical centre) and back to major again, and in the C major, 'Autre chaconne' (fol. 75), symmetry is clearly lacking. In the latter, the strumming pattern is not even close in complexity to that of the 'Caprice de chaconne,' only having been notated as up and down strokes.

In the two *folies* (fols. 76–77 and 79–82) there is no resemblance to the religious tools used in 'Caprice de chaconne.'

As opposed to the other *passacailles* found in the manuscript, the C minor 'Passacaille' (fol. 9) show some traits of the kind of arch-like structure found in 'Caprice de chaconne,' but not

in any way near the same complexity and refinement. In this case, we are simply speaking of chordal progressions at the beginning and end with melodic leaps in the middle (see fig. 7 below):

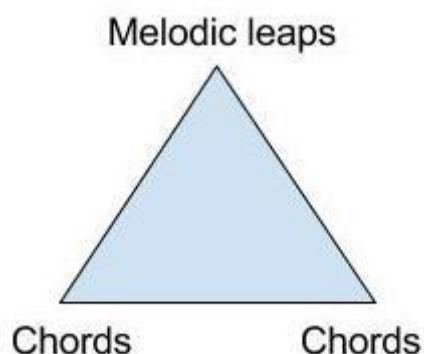


Figure 7. A simple, graphic overview of the ‘Passacaille’ found at fol. 9 in *La guitarrre royalle* (1671).

Similar to the single ‘Rondeau’ (fol. 38), the preludes show no sign of clear, elaborate symmetry in the sense of what is found in the ‘Caprice de chaconne,’ except for the prelude on fol. 22 progressing from melody to chordal progressions and back to melody again; and, for obvious reasons, there is no threefold symmetry in the other dance pieces presented in the tablature since they are based on the twofold pattern (AB) often progressing from *tonic* to *dominant* and back to the *tonic* in a traditional fashion. This would make the discussion of proportion and symmetry a bit different in character from what has been presented here, since we then must relate to tradition, idiolect and structure in a somewhat different manner. I will leave these perspectives to future research.

The 1674 edition of Corbetta’s *La guitarrre royalle* does not present any work of the stature of ‘Caprice de chaconne’ in terms of symmetry of virtuosity. The two *chaconnes* presented are both in C major where the first, simply named ‘Chacone’ (fols. 22–23), is quite simple compared to Corbetta’s other chaconnes and is of no interest in the present enquiry. The second, ‘Autre Partie de Chacone’ (fols. 26–28) is not arch-like in the sense of ‘Caprice de chaconne,’ but rather develops in the scheme of ABC where the latter part presents a similar rhythmical pattern as the strumming part of the ‘Caprice de chaconne;’ in fact it presents the first group (labeled Group I) without the demi-semiquavers of the second group.

Corbetta’s music, most particularly in *La guitarrre royalle* (1671 and 1674), already exerts idiolect features as it, to a great extent, combines the Italian and French tradition, not unlike Lully who promoted the more Italianate melodic function, ballet and opera to the French. Indeed, Lully went even further to, so to say, re-invent the French expression by Italianising the French musical formats (rather than discarding them). Corbetta’s union of the two traditions, then, conforms with the practice of Lully in that sense. It is clear, however, that ‘Caprice de chaconne’ is unprecedented even within the two *La guitarrre royalle*.

If we compare to other French guitar composers we see that ‘Caprice de chaconne’ is unparalleled even among Corbetta’s colleagues. Neither Robert de Visée’s *Liure de guitarrre...* (1682) and *Liure de pieces pour la gvittarre...* (1686); Antoine Carré’s (Sieur De la Grange) *Liure de guitarrre...* (1671); François Champion’s *Nouvelles découvertes sur la*

*guitarre...* (1705); nor François LeCocq's *Recueil des pieces de guitarre...* (1729) present any composition of such a design and stature as Corbetta's 'Caprice de chaconne.'

### **Concluding discussion: Effect on performance**

Derek Scott wrote in 2003, that 'music should not be considered in isolation from the political arena' (p. 57); and clearly, 'Caprice de chaconne' is no exception from this statement. By utilising symmetrical and proportional features much like the religious tools employed by the courtly apparatus, it seems that Corbetta wished to present a piece that took part in this profiling phenomenon. Several indications can be found, including:

1. Mirrored beginning and end
2. An arch-like, proportional structure
3. The notated length of the piece, that is how many variations are presented, compared to other works (excl. the *folias* found in the publication); cf. McClary's description of drone-like *chaconnes*, transcending the self.
4. The unparalleled centre, surrounded by the only occurrences of steady semiquaver progressions
5. And the virtuoso and masterly, authoritative and brilliant nature (which can be more or less emphasised, of course, in the performer's execution) that, in the context, can be compared to the elevated Louis XIV persona, the High protector of the arts, and the Sun King.

Clearly, with Corbetta seeking to communicate something through this structure, we must adhere to it and relate to it consciously when planning our own performance. What is actually being communicated from the composer to the receiver is, of course, a matter of subjective speculation — due to the historical distance, we cannot know anything for certain, and we can only perceive and receive 'the message' from our own historical context — but the structures unveiled here give us important clues regarding its realisation.

It remains unclear why the piece has this structure, but there are various, relevant possibilities that we can deduce. Firstly, it may represent a social outreach with an intention to strengthen Corbetta's position at the court by adhering to their in-group practice and their public profile; another explanation can be that Corbetta, like almost anyone else living at the time, had the opportunity to see, and perhaps study altarpieces (since the practice described here was not uncommon) and employed deliberate strategies to include this structure in one of his works; furthermore, it may also be no more difficult than Corbetta drawing on contemporary fashion. Indeed, the possibilities are to some extent endless.

Whatever reason might seem most logical, the structure and proportions are there in 'Caprice de chaconne' and they present important markers to the performer of this work that not only merits the musical abilities of Corbetta, but also sets up a structure from which a performance can be designed. What we also find are further indications of seventeenth century French music functioning as an inter-human, social mediation construct, emphasising social relations and the political machinery. The latter is sometimes easy to neglect in a performance situation, but music has always been produced in relation to a political climate or particular ideology to various degrees. To label something as non-political is to relate to the political by the very act of distancing oneself from it. What is important to the performer, then, is to find these markers hidden in plain sight, and to address them in their artistic work to reconstruct the very structure and proportions it present. This is because, by unveiling and promoting the



craftsmanship of the composer, we are more apt to establish a communication between performer and audience, mediator and receiver, closer to what may seem to be the original intent, and thus unlocking new perspectives and nuances to Corbetta and his work. Of course, this is not a straightforward task because what communicated then does not automatically communicate now. Furthermore, in the seventeenth century, enigmas and allegories were common and part of fashion in a different way than it is today. Musical communication in Early Modern music is a complex matter that must be reserved for later occasions in more proper formats, but what is interesting is that the rhetorical devices are there to be found in the music, and that it provides a narrative and direction to how the modern performer can interpret and present the music to modern audiences. That is, we can get a better understanding of how to approach the music and what purpose it had. Indeed, the ‘sunrise – apex – sundown’-analogy says something about how to distribute the dynamics of the piece. Rather than simply playing a number of variations in proper order as they are written, that is, one variation following the other in an equal manner, one could use the analogy to have the music slowly build up towards the strumming pattern. Furthermore, the performer may give the strumming pattern its proper space, making it the centre piece by its own right, and use the remainder of the music to fall to rest and thus simulating the sun’s journey across the sky and make the ‘Caprice de chaconne’ the devotional, awe-inspiring allegorical piece of music it was likely designed to be.

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<sup>[1]</sup> It is fairly obvious when inspecting any French tablature collection from the period that most of the solo lute repertoire is written in the form of dances. And as the D minor tuning was standardised in the period 1650 to 1670, we can also see that new dance genres were introduced (Torres, 1998, p. 30).

<sup>[2]</sup> 16 = semiquaver and 32 = demi-semiquaver.

[3] m = middle finger, i = index finger and p = thumb.

[4] d = down and u = up.

[5] That is, to form strategies that the group members engage in to maintain the group's esteem, creating a strong sense of importance (regardless of the group's social status) and also make the members more apt to accept criticism from within the group than from the outside world.