

The role of the development of the guitar and the changing performance techniques on the evolution of “*folia* variations” written for the guitar

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This paper focuses on how the compositional processes, the development of the guitar as an instrument, and its performance techniques specifically affected the *folia* theme and the variations written for this instrument, considering that the *folia* theme and the variations have constantly evolved over four centuries. In this research, the *folia* is treated as the framework, the role of improvisation and variation in the evolution of a musical work in general and the historical, cumulative effects on the *folia* are ontologically viewed within the model ‘living organism’.

Musical forms evolve during the course of history. When composers add new elements to their work in a given form, they cumulatively contribute to the evolution of that form. The main elements that help this evolution are melody, rhythm, harmony, style, structure, and the development of instrumental technique. In this article, the influence of the evolution of instruments and performance technique on the composition of *folias* will be investigated.

Although it first appeared during the Renaissance, the golden age of *folia* was during the Baroque period. In the first volume of his four-volume treatise called *The Folia, The Saraband, The Passacaglia and The Chaconne*, Richard Hudson investigates the *folia* and its form (Hudson, R.1982:XV-XXXVIII). He notes that the common aspects of all these four dances are that they were written for the five-course Baroque guitar and feature the variation form. Among these forms only the Sarabande does not include variations. They all have a common framework chord scheme, which lends itself to the variation form. With Jean Baptiste Lully’s *Air des hautbois Les folies d’Espagne* (1672), the *folia* framework was established as follows: (I-V-I-VII-III-I-V-I). Since its inception, the *folia* has become one of the most popular formulas for creating musical variations on all instruments and was used by innumerable composers.

In this article, the *folia* variations written for the guitar will be analyzed according to the type of the guitar they are written for, namely the five-course Baroque guitar, six-string Romantic guitar and six-string Modern guitar. The vihuela is not taken into consideration in this article since whether it is a disputed ancestor to the guitar and there are not many *folia* variations written for this instrument.

The *folias* that are written between 1577 and 1694 are usually in the *rasgueado* style. “Term ‘*rasgueado*’ is used to describe the technique of strumming the string of the guitar in downward or upward motions with the thumb or other fingers of the right hand” (Strizch, R. Tyler, J. 2007-2009). Unlike the sophisticated polyphonic interpretation of vihuela, the Baroque guitar was played with defined *rasgueado* accents, which brought the rhythm into the foreground. During the Baroque period, mainly triads were used as guitar chords, which were applied as left-hand finger patterns in blocks, just like today’s jazz guitarists. This system is different from the modal, contrapuntal and functional 18th-century harmony. On the Baroque guitar the music was generally of chordal texture, therefore it was necessary to know these chords and their charts as well as the *rasgueado* technique.

Rasgueado literally means ‘strummed’ in contrast to the technique of plucking called *puenteado*. Of the two styles of playing, *puenteado* was considered more refined and aristocratic, while *rasgueado* strumming was often deprecated as coarse, or even vulgar- the

music stable boy. Nonetheless, the energetic rhythms produced by *rasgueado* strumming proved seductive even to the connoisseurs of the *punteado* style (Cristensen, T. 1992:2). As an example we will present the *Folia* by Francesco Corbetta:

Example 1: *Folia sopra l'X, seconda parte passeggiata* (Corbetta)



In this *Folia*, the chords are in blocks and the *rasgueado* stroke directions are marked. In these chords the top note forms the melody; however if the technique is used without hitting the bottom string, it is possible to develop the melody as an improvisation. The *Folia* that Corbetta wrote in 1648 uses both *rasgueado* and the *punteado* style.

Example 2: *Folias* (Corbetta)



Most major composers during the Baroque period used the *rasgueado* technique. The chords were characterized as Major or Minor and, with a system called *alfabeto* tablature, it was notated in blocks with letter symbols. Gaspar Sanz defines thus the *folia* in his treatise *Instruction de Musica sobre la Guitarra Espanol* (Sanz, G. 2006 :39):

Example 3 : *Folias* (Sanz)



Sanz' *folia*, which is one of the most commonly played *folias* today, is polyphonic in a style reminiscent of the *Vihuela*. This work is one of the first examples of the anachronism on the guitar.

Corbetta and Sanz emphasized improvisation while creating their *folia* variations. This is also one of the significant characteristics of the Baroque period. Another common aspect is the fact that both composers were also players of their instruments.

During the second half of the 18th century, the guitar did not adapt to the times and the repertoire was not very extensive. With the invention of the six-string guitar during the early

part of the 19th century and the single melody string of the instrument, the interest on the guitar started to increase again.

The first important representative of the six-string guitar, Federico Moretti, helped the transition from the tablature notation to the standard notation on the guitar. Standard notation emphasizes the interpretation much more than the tablature. The transition from the improvisational interpretation to the interpretation of written notes started as a result of the change in notation. In many respects standard notation, which presents the actual pitches visually, is advantageous compared to tablature notation, which notates the fingers and their physical location. It is also easier to notate the nuances and dynamics using standard notation. This historical juncture is also suitable to divide the history of the guitar into two periods. At first Moretti considers the guitar as an accompanying instrument and recommends guitarists of the day to use the instrument as such.

Using the guitar as an accompanying instrument also brings a homophonic approach with it. Gradually Moretti makes the guitar an instrument capable of playing both the melody and the accompaniment, just like the piano. The famous guitarist-composer of the time, Dionisio Aguado, says the following:

The genre of music and the manner of writing it underwent a great change some time ago: one finally came to give each note its full value, and to write with precision everything that it was possible to play. D. Federico Moretti was the first who began to present in his written music the progress of the two parts, one the melody, the other the arpeggio accompaniment.
(Tyler, J Sparks, P. 2002:234)

Fernando Sor and Mauro Giuliani strived to make the guitar suitable for the requirements of the Classical period, albeit about a 50 year delay. The 'harmony' concept used during the Baroque and Classical period arrived to the guitar anachronically during the 19th century. In his guitar methods, Sor includes harmonic analyses, as well as exercises with third and sixth intervals. Moreover, he explains how the guitar could be used to imitate other instruments such as the trumpet and the oboe. During this period, the two most important *folias* for the six-string Romantic guitar were written by Sor and Giuliani. Most *folias* for the guitar are written in the key of D minor. Richard Hudson analyzes *folias* in two groups: 'The Early *Folia*' and 'The Later *Folia*'. The Early *Folia* is usually written in G Minor, The Later *Folia* on the other hand is almost always in D minor. The *folia* of Sor is an exception, since it is in E minor in spite of being an example of The Later *Folia*. After Sor, the tradition of writing *folias* in D Minor for the guitar continued. It is not conceivable that Sor did not know the tradition of writing *folias* in D Minor. However, we can surmise that his approach to the guitar as an instrument capable of simultaneously playing the melody, bass and the accompaniment, caused his selection of E minor as the key of his *Folia*. The first and sixth strings of the guitar are tuned to E, therefore together with the second and third strings they provide the E Minor key simply with open strings. At the same time, it makes the sixth string a bass note in the main key of the work. The homophonic approach is easily noticeable in the writing of the theme.

Example 4: *Les Folies D'Espagne Variées Et Un Menuet* (Sor)



In the first variation, the interval of thirds is used as a melody with the bases. In the second one, the third interval is used as accompaniment. In the third variation, the thirds are used as a textural element. In the fourth variation, triplets and arpeggios are used. After the theme and four variations, Sor includes a Menuet showing his influence by the Vienna classics. This is an exception among the *folias* written for the guitar.

The *Folia* by Giuliani consists of a theme, six variations and a coda. The texture is a mixture of polyphony and homophony. The theme is written in a two-voiced contrapuntal texture. The melody is similar to Lully's with various changes. The word 'Andantino' as the tempo marking is reminiscent of the Later *Folia*.

Example 5: *Variations Sur Les 'Folies D'Espagne* (Giuliani)



Giuliani did not write a guitar method but rather a study book, consisting of exercises with brief explanatory notes. The variations of his *Folia* are similar to the fundamental studies and exercises from his book. Among the variations, the first is with scales, the second with a legato texture, the third with arpeggios, the fourth octave scales and the finale is written with staccato chords. The fifth variation includes a horizontal mixture of all these textures.

The right-hand technique of Giuliani caused an important change for the guitar. Before him, the performer was resting his small finger on the top plate of the guitar just like the earlier lute technique. Due to the motion of the hand over the strings in Giuliani's works, the index and middle fingers of the right hand became more agile for playing the melody notes. Moreover, this technical improvement enabled the exploration of various tone colours by moving the hand near or away from the bridge. This contributed to the guitar's evolution to become a small orchestra, the evolution which had been started by Sor.

In his Op 6, variation 4, Giuliani writes that the right hand should move from the 15th fret towards the bridge (Heck, F. T.1995:153). This way, the sounds which evolve from dolce to metallic emphasize the feeling of crescendo, imitating orchestral timbres.

Example 6: Op. VI, variation 4 (Giuliani)



It is therefore possible to interpret the crescendos and decrescendos in Giuliani's *Folia* using this technique.

During the 20th century, with the creation of the Torres guitar, the modern guitar was born. The most important *folia* during this period was composed by Manuel Ponce within his collaboration with Andres Segovia. The work titled *Variations sur Folia de Espana et Fugue* contains the theme, 20 variations and a fugue as the final. Among the *folias* written for the guitar, this is the only one that is written by a non-guitarist composer.

Andres Segovia's dissatisfaction of the guitar repertoire of the day and his motivation to collaborate with the important composers of the period is an important factor in the creation of this work. Although Ponce's contemporaries chose to compose miniature pieces, Ponce used longer and more developed structures for his musical expressions. A partial list of his works for guitar includes: *Sonata Classica*, *Sonata Romantica*, 24 Preludes. From the titles of these works, one can see his interest in the past musical forms. In his letter to Ponce dated December 1929, Segovia writes:

I want you to write some brilliant variations for me on the theme of the *Folias de Espana*, in D Minor. In a style that borders between the Italian classicism of the 18. century and the dawning of German romanticism. I want this work to be greatest piece of that period, the pendant (i.e., counterpart) of those of Corelli for violin on the same theme.
(Alcazar, M. 1989:50)

Although generally he fulfils Segovia's requests, Ponce made some changes; instead of Segovia's request for 12 or 14 variations, he wrote 20. However, the D minor key and the sublime character of the piece was just like Segovia wanted. Although Segovia wanted the work to be dedicated to Giuliani and be composed based on Corelli's *folia*, the work does not follow this path. In his December 1929 letter Segovia also says:

The variation that precedes it, is Chaconnesque, that is, as beautiful as any of those of the Bach Chaconne.
(Alcazar, M. 1989:52)

With the encouragement of Segovia, improvised Baroque *folia* variations evolved into the monumental work of a creative composer.

Although Segovia encouraged Ponce to use classical guitar techniques such as tremolo, arpeggio, legato, the XVIth variation is written using only one technique, namely the tremolo. The other 19 variations consist of a horizontal and vertical mixture of various guitar techniques. This is a result of Segovia's and Ponce's approach to the guitar as an instrument imitating an orchestra. Segovia's interpretation which included tone colours exploring the sounds of instruments such as the cello, the brass and the violin, caused Ponce who was an expert orchestrator to write the *folia* variations like a small orchestral piece.

Conclusion

In this paper, the *folia* variations written for the guitar were studied with examples of the five-course double-string Baroque guitar, the six-string romantic guitar and the six-string modern guitar. We note the anachronism in these *folias*, which we can see as a living organism. *Folias* for the five-course Baroque guitar are formed by the use of *resgueado* and *alfabeto* systems with the performance of chords. With the evolution of the guitar technique and performance, tone colours start to become prominent. For colours, guitar techniques are used horizontally. The guitar starts to play the melody, bass and the accompaniment. The *folia* of Ponce, the most important one written for the six-string guitar, was created as a result of his collaboration with Segovia. In this work, creative and sublime characteristics are prominent. Although the influence of Bach's Chaconne creates a connection to the past, the work presents a neo-Romantic approach, with an increase in volume and the number of musical techniques used. Since the work was written by a composer expert in orchestration, it was conceived as a work for a small orchestra embodied in the guitar; the variations present complicated combinations of various guitar techniques in a horizontal and vertical texture. This was also influenced by Segovia and his ability to create an enormous range of tone colours during his performances.

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