

# German Tab Made Easy...er

A Primer for Reading from German Tablature



By Catherine Liddell



Part I LSA Quarterly - Summer 2011, pp. 43-48  
Part II LSA Quarterly - Fall 2011, pp. 31-37  
Part II LSA Quarterly - Winter 2011, pp. 48-52  
Part IV LSA Quarterly - Spring 2012, pp. 33-39  
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Final Installment LSA Quarterly - Fall 2012, pp. 36-37  
Addendum LSA Quarterly - Winter 2013, pp. 28-31

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## Part I

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This was going to be a single article introducing readers/players to the system of German Tablature with the goal of giving players some starting points for poking around in original tablatures themselves. But as I thought about what should be covered, I realized that the goal would be better achieved by presenting the material in installments. So this will be a little like a tutor. I don't claim to have solved every single inscrutable passage found in German tablature, but I do enjoy "the hunt," so to speak, and I would love nothing more than to increase the number of players working with this material. We need all the help we can give each other. Perhaps there can be an occasional column in the *Quarterly* where people present passages that have given them trouble and others can contribute solutions. Or better yet, a web-based location where players can post the trouble spots and others can offer solutions. Maybe there is such a venue for that already and I've just publicized my own ignorance of it.

Here's the plan. This first installment gives the bare essentials, introduces a font close to some you might find in facsimile prints, and presents single-line exercises and tunes, some from original sources, some I've contributed. These use only the first 5 courses.

The second installment takes up the various ways the 6th course is notated. It offers some simple 2-voice pieces. Most of the examples come from facsimiles so you can see the actual fonts. It also discusses fingering. It is said, sometimes, that books which are tutors may not represent fingering as the "pros" did it. But no teacher would give a beginner "wrong" fingering; therefore, it can be interesting to see how the teachers were thinking in mid-16th century Germany.

The third installment focuses on chords, presenting some chord-based pieces. It contains some common chord patterns. You will do yourself a huge favor if you can effectively memorize the chord stacks, as that will save you having to figure them out each time you encounter one, thereby slowing down the process of reading through pieces.

The fourth installment introduces some more of the different fonts and the annoying fact that certain letters take on different forms depending on whether they stand alone or in a stack. The tablatures of Wolff Heckel and Bernard Jobin will illustrate this.

The fifth installment takes on the so-called Dlugorajj Lute book with yet another font and with letters taking on different forms depending on if they stand alone or in a stack. The sixth installment presents a list of what's out there in terms of facsimiles and manuscripts just sitting in libraries waiting for the hordes of German Tablature Readers to appear. The list does not pretend to be complete, and yet there is plenty to sink ones teeth into. Don't wait for someone to transcribe all of this!

And then, when I thought I'd written all I could, I found a clever chart in one of the manuscripts listed in the sixth installment, CH-Bu Ms. F IX 70, one showing 5 ways to notate the frets on the 6th course. So, there is one last installment presenting pieces from that manuscript.

But first, why bother? Isn't most of the music originally in German tablature already transcribed into French tablature? Actually, no, as you will see in the last installment. So, here are seven reasons one might take up the challenge to learn to read from German tablature:

1. It's time to learn something new.
2. It's important to you to be able to check the original of the piece you're working on and the piece you're working on started out in German tablature.
3. You love cracking codes.
4. You don't want to be dependent on what others discover and put into a tablature you DO know.
5. You found a piece you want to play but it only exists in German tablature and you don't want to wait for someone to publish it in a tablature you know.
6. You don't want to be limited to just those publications others decide to transcribe; you'd like to be able to explore on your own.
7. You're stuck somewhere without any kind of staff paper...

If you like doing word puzzles, you'll love working with German tablature! So let's get started. With some practice, German Tablature is not as hard as it looks.

Cheat Sheet #1  
These are the upper case letters you'll see:

A B C D E F G H I  
A B C D E F G H I

... and these are the lower case letters:

a b c d e f g h i k l m n o p q r s t v y x z 7 9  
a b c d e f g h i l l m n o p q r s t v x y z 7 9

### Step 1: How the open strings are indicated.

German tablature consists of a combination of letters and numbers such that every single pitch location on the fretboard has a unique symbol, and this is why you don't need ruled staff paper to write music down in this system. You can use the back of an envelope if you must!

The open strings of courses 1-5 are notated with numbers from low to high: number 1 is the 5th course, number 2 is the 4th course, etc. We are accustomed today to referring to the highest sounding course as the first course, so this could be a tiny stumbling block at first, but don't let it become more than the anthill it is. I had more trouble switching from French to Italian tablature than I ever had getting used to this. Never mind the 6th course for now. That comes in the next installment.

**Step 2: How the stopped pitches are notated.**

Every intersection of string to fret is notated with a letter from the alphabet, but not ALL the letters in the alphabet are used. Just one look at your fingerboard and you'll realize that even the complete alphabet doesn't have enough symbols to represent all of the pitches, not even just up to the 5th fret. We'll get to that.

For starters, you simply begin the alphabet at the first fret on the 5th course.

- ◆ The first-fret letters are, from low to high (pitch) :  
**a b c d e**
- ◆ The second-fret letters are: **f g h i k** (notice: no **j**, although the **i** sometimes has a little bend in it making it look a little like a **j**.)
- ◆ The third-fret letters are: **l m n o p**
- ◆ The fourth-fret letters are: **q r s t v** (notice: no **u**)
- ◆ The fifth fret is where it gets a little interesting because the alphabet runs out so 2 other symbols are added, one looks like a **7**, the other like a **9**. In some sources, the **7** looks more like a printed **Z** with a line through it.
- ◆ The fifth-fret letters are: **x y z 7 9** (notice: no **w**)

**Step 3: How to decipher the alphabet letters.**

The German language fonts from the 15th through the better part of the 19th century were different from Roman fonts. Once you get used to it, it isn't so confusing. For those who find the script/font inscrutable, I present "Cheat Sheet" #1 (page 2).

Note that for us, the **s** can be confused with an **f** or possibly with a **k**. The **v** could be confused with an **o**; the **r** might be confused with a **7**. And if the facsimile isn't clear, you might confuse the **c** and the **e**. Sometimes the **e** is so small that it looks like a fly speck and since it's not used all that often you might forget what it looks like entirely. Usually the context gives the answer right away. Try what you think it might be and if it doesn't sound right, go on to the next option. And if you can't figure out that spot right there, keep on with what you can do. When the mystery letter shows up later in the piece maybe it will be easier to determine from the new context.

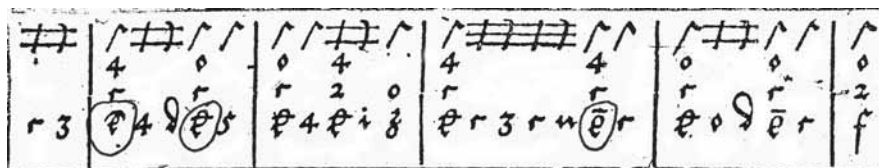
**Step 4: How the higher frets are notated.**

It's simple. The alphabet starts all over again, only this time there's a line above the letter. Note: only the alphabet starts again! Letters only, no numbers. As of this writing, I cannot think of a single German tablature I've seen that doesn't use this system. What you will find, though, is that sometimes the line is curved downward at the ends; sometimes it goes through the letter and sometimes it's just a straight line over the letter. At the bottom of this page there is a line from Wolff Heckel showing all three options (circled)!

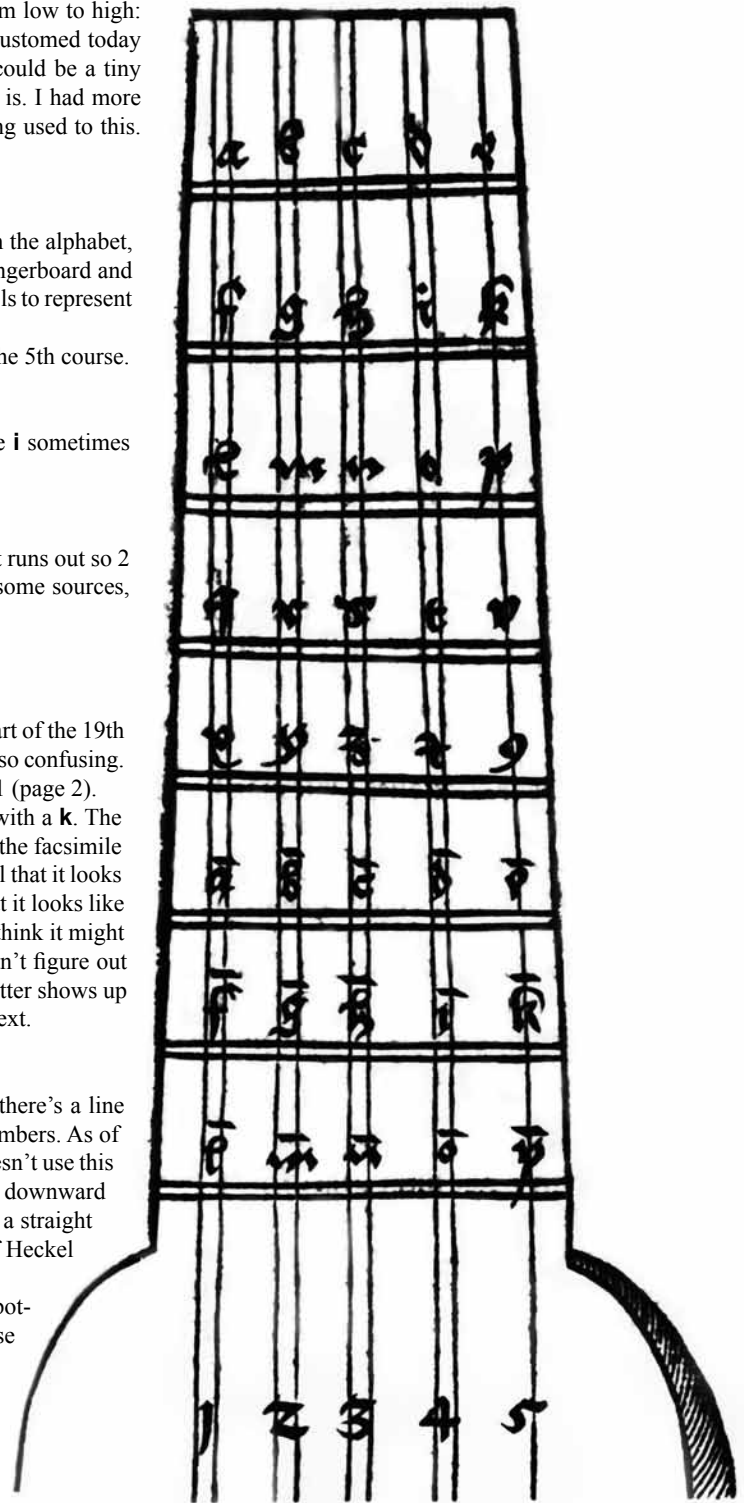
I will address the issue of why these lines are over notes at the bottom of the stack in the next installment. It has to do with how the 6th course can be notated. The earlier sources seem to stick with a straight line over the letter, except for the really *loopy* **k** and sometimes the **9** when it goes through the loop. It's in the later sources that the curved lines show up. I haven't figured out any reasoning behind the choices made.

**Step 5: Rhythm signs**

Nothing too inscrutable here, especially if you've looked at either Spinacino or Bossinensis where there's a rhythm sign over every pitch. What's a



Taken from Wolff Heckel, *Discant Lautten Buch*, Straßburg, 1562, pg. 48.



Cheat Sheet #2  
Adapted from Matthias Weissel, *Lauttenbuch drainn von der Tabulatur...*, 1592.

little different in German tablatures is that notes of the same note values are beamed together if the value has one or more flags. The Fronimo software I'm using doesn't offer that option or the music examples below would look more like the Newsidler facsimile in Example 3.

**Side bar: How did this happen?**

If you're wondering how anyone could possibly have come up with this system, Sebastian Virdung in his *Musica getutscht* of 1511 gives the credit to the blind organist Conrad Paumann (1410-1473). There is a short, but interesting article by Rudolph Henning in *The Lute Society Journal* (1973) you can read for more information. He mentions doubt circulating around the question as to whether someone who was blind could be capable of such an invention. But this is the perfect system for a

blind person to invent. In dictating the music, one need only say the symbol without having to say what course it's on.

Now that you know what the letters look like and where they are found on the fingerboard, you are ready for Cheat Sheet #2 (page 3). This is an image of a lute neck showing the placement of the numbers and letters for the first 5 courses. For the fun of it, compare Waissel's letters with the ones shown in the first Cheat Sheet. You know what the letters should be. Let your brain tell your eyes what they see!

**Step 6: Let's try a few examples.**

The first three examples use frets 1-5.

**Example 1**

Taken from "Ich klag den Tag" in Hans Newsidler *Ein Newgeordent künstlich Lautenbuch*, 1536

Example 1 notation (approximate transcription):

Staff 1: | p p | f f | p p f | 5 5 | o | o | d d | 4 | 4 | n n 4 | i o i | o |

Staff 2: | 4 | o d | 4 | o | o o | 5 p | f f 5 o d 4 | 4 n c n | c |

**Example 2**

Taken from "Ein guts hofftzenlein" in Hans Newsidler's *Ein Newgeordent künstlich Lautenbuch*, 1536

Example 2 notation (approximate transcription):

Staff 1: | o o | o i o 5 o | 4 n 4 | n n | n h n | 3 3 h | n n | n h n 4 n | c 3 c | 3 3 | 3 3 |

Staff 2: | 3 4 n 4 i | o o | o i o 5 o | 4 n 4 | n n | n h n | 3 3 h | n n | 3 h n 4 n | 3 3 h | n n |

Staff 3: | 3 h n 4 n | c 3 c | 3 3 | c 3 | g 2 g | 2 |

Example 3

"Ein gering Fundament" from Hans Newsidler's *Ein Newgeordent künstlich Lautenbuch*, 1536

Example 3 is your first chance to practice reading from an original. It's the only single-line "piece" I know of in German tablature. Your ear will discover the mistake bar 16. The 5th letter looks like a **v** which would be the 4th fret on the top course, not exactly what one would expect to hear right there. It should be an **o**. It seems Newsidler's typesetter also got confused between the **o** and the **v**! In order to play this example, you need to know that Newsidler notates the 6th course by assigning an UPPER CASE LETTER to every fret, starting with **A** for the open string, **B** for the first fret, etc. Use Cheat Sheet #1 to decipher the font. You will notice dots over the letters. Those indicate LEFT-hand fingering.

The next example shows what some cadential decorations look like. Since you are working on trying to READ from German tablature, I don't recommend playing this string of letters by ear once you've figured it out. But do play them as many times as you need to until the string of letters becomes a "word." This way, when you come across this combination of letters in a facsimile, you won't have to figure out each individual note.

Example 4  
Melodic patterns that might occur at cadences

Example 5

Taken from Hans Newsidler's setting of "Elslein, liebstes Elslein" in *Ein Newgeordent künstlich Lautenbuch*, 1536

5	5 5 f p	f 5	f f p 9	† †	9 9 p f	p 5	o	o	f f p	9 p	5 5 f p
f 5	o 4	5 t	5	o	f p	9 p	5 5 f p	f 5	o 4	5 t	5

Now, here is a tune that uses a higher fret. Note that Fronimo only knows how to put the line through the letter, not over it.

Mystery Tune #1

o o 5	i o 5	f f p	f 5 o	5 o i	o	9 9 9	9 p f	p p p	p f 5
f p f 5 o	f p 9	† p f 5	o						

Mystery Tune #2

4	4 i t	f 5	t t	f 5 i	t 4	f 4	i 4 f 4	i i	4 i t	f 5	t t
f 5 i	t 4	f f	4 i t	5 t i 4 i	4 4 f	4 f	4 i t	5 t i 4 i	4 4 f		
4											

Extra Credit — Mystery Tune #3

The image displays four lines of German lute tablature. Each line consists of a horizontal staff with rhythmic flags above and letters below. The letters are 'n', '3', 'c', 'n', '4', 'n', 'g', '3', 'cn', '4', 'n', 'b', 'n', 'n', 'o', 'i', '4', 'n', 'g', 'c', '3', 'n', 'c', '3', 'g'. The second line begins with a double bar line and a '2' with a colon. The third line includes letters '1', 'f', 'q', '2g', '3g', '2q', 'f', '1', '1', 'g', '3', 'c', '3', 'c', '3g', '2', 'g', 'n', 'o', 'i'. The fourth line contains '4', 'n', 'c', '3', 'n', '3c', 'g', and a circled '2' with a bar line.

It's fun now, right? Make up some! Take some tunes you know and put them into German tablature on the back of an envelope, just because you CAN, then play from it. Or, if you use Fronimo, type in a tune you know into, say French tab, and let Fronimo turn it into German tab and play from that. This is actually a really good idea. Your ear will teach your eyes to recognize patters. The more patterns you can recognize, the less actual deciphering you have to do.

The next installment will take up the different ways to notate the 6th course and present some 2-voice pieces from different composers so you can get used to original fonts.

**Sources:**

Newsidler, Hans. *Ein Newgeordent künstlich Lautenbuch*, Nürnberg, 1536. Facsimile print in the series Instituto pro arte testudinis, Serie A, Band 1, pub. GbR-Junghänel-Päffgen-Schäffer, 1974.

Waissel, Matthäus. *Lautenbuch darinn von der tabulature und application der Lauten*, Frankfurt an der Oder, 1592

Heckel, Wolff. *Discant Lautten Buch*, Straßburg, 1562 (Xerox copyflow)

# German Tab Made Easy...er



## Part II

By Catherine Liddell

Gerle Ochsenkuhn	Heckel	Johin	Newsidler	Waissel

Example 1 - Waissel's fingerboard and alternate ways of notating the 6th course



We continue in this second installment with the various ways composers indicated pitches on the 6th course. The music examples will be pieces in two voices, two of which will be familiar from the first installment. Having music in two voices in a system of notation that does not have lines representing courses, invites an expectation, perhaps even a hope, that matters of voice-leading—which notes belong to which voice—might be made more clear. We'll see what happens to that! Matters relating to fingering also become interesting. While neither voice leading nor fingering is specifically germane to learning to read from German tablature, per se, they are a pertinent and interesting digression.

In addition, this installment will show how you might begin to tease out the solution to problems you might encounter reading from German tablature.

### How the 6th Course is Notated

To review a bit from the first installment, German tablature was apparently developed for a lute with only 5 courses. As long as your lute only has those 5 courses, no more explanations are needed. I don't actually know of any music in German tablature that only uses 5 courses. Perhaps others will write in and illuminate us on that detail. So the problem for 16th century composers is how to notate the 6th course, since the alphabet is used up notating the 5 courses. I've come across four other ways, five total including Newsidler's.

1. Newsidler uses a line through the number **4** to indicate the 6th course open. Then he just starts the alphabet using upper case letters and assigns each fret a letter: **A** is the first fret, **B** is the second, etc.
2. Gerle and Ochsenkuhn start the same way with the open course, a number **4** with a line through it, but they use numbers with lines through them for the frets. This takes some getting used to because the first fret is the number **2**, the second fret is the number **3**, etc.
3. Judenkunig and Waissel use upper case letters but they start with **A** as the open course, so the first fret is **B**.

Heckel and Jobin are more creative and require some effort to figure out.

4. Heckel starts with the number **4** with a line through it as the open string. For the first five frets he uses the same lower case letters as the 5th course but puts a line OVER the letter. Once he reaches the 6th fret, he doubles the letter and keeps the line over the pair. He's relying on the context to keep the player from being confused between the first 5 frets on the 6th course and frets 6-8 on the 5th course. We'll see in the 4th installment how successful he was! If you have access to a facsimile of Gerle's *Musica und Tabulatur...* 1546, you will see this illustrated as one of 3 possibilities on the lute neck diagram he provides.
5. Jobin starts the way Heckel does. The open 6th course is a number **4** with a line through it. The first 5 frets are the same letters as the 5th course but with a line over each. Once he gets to the 6th fret, however, he doubles the letter but takes the line away.

Among the sources I have here, I don't see an obvious variant which would be to use the letters from the 5th course but make them upper case. Above the fifth fret, the upper case letters could have a line through them.

If anyone today felt moved, either by desire or necessity (no staff paper) to print his or her music in German tablature, it would follow historic precedent to go ahead and come up with yet another, "perfectly logical" way to notate the 6th course. And I suppose we'd have to invoke the Greek alphabet to indicate a 7th course!

The illustration on the previous page (Example 1) shows a drawing of Waissel's fingerboard, complete with how he notates the frets of the 6th course. The strips to the left show the other ways. You might just photocopy this and keep it at your desk when working from German tablature.

### Is that Voice-Leading I See?

This will be discussed in more detail in the next installment, but already with two-voice music we can observe trends. German tablature has an advantage over other tablatures (what!?) in that it would be possible to show the contrapuntal movement of individual voices. An example of this is below in Newsidler's *Die Ander Regel* and in *Die drit regel*. The top voice is nicely visible as such and so is the bottom voice. However if you look at Judenkunig's *Der hoffdantz*, you'll see that the fastest-moving notes are found in the bottom layer, no matter what voice they're in. Gerle does the opposite: look in *Ich klag den tag*, in the 10th bar. Those double-flagged notes in the top layer are all part of the lower voice. Newsidler's setting is perfectly clear: when the upper voice moves, it's notes are in the top layer; when the bottom voice moves, it's notes are in the bottom layer.

### Observations about Right-Hand Fingering

#### Thumb-Index Alternation

Some of the tablatures do indicate the index finger notes. Newsidler's tutor of 1536 doesn't give any rules, but in his didactic way, he gives first 2-voice pieces with left-hand fingering (see next section) but no right-hand fingering; then 2-voice pieces with right-hand fingering but no left-hand fingering. He does the same thing with 3-voice pieces. Then comes a section with no fingering at all, but there is an instruction for the right hand that each player should look out for himself which letters and numbers should be plucked with the forefinger.

Some other tablatures do indicate the "up" strokes, those made with the index finger, and they do it by taking advantage of the fact that every single note has a rhythm sign over it. Heckel and Jobin slightly curve every other stem to the left to show that the index finger plucks it. Judenkunig puts a little hook on every other rhythm sign. Newsidler, Gerle, Ochsenkuhn and Waissel leave you to your own devices.

#### Playing 2-Note Chords

Judenkunig, Newsidler, Gerle and Waissel explain that 2-voice chords are to be plucked with the thumb and the index finger. I will confess that I have not absorbed that instruction in my own playing. Those who assume that it's just a simplification for students or that they only did that in Germany might have a look in the instructions at the front of *A Varietie of Lute Lessons*, where it says: "let two strings stand close together be stroken with the Thombe and fore fingers..." It goes on to say that if there be one or more strings between them, pluck with the thumb and middle finger. As for the "meant for students" assumption, I'd ask why a teacher would instruct a student to do a wrong thing or something that would not serve him as he or she progresses. And yet, there are personal preferences that come into play probably then as now. At least for these composer/players, plucking 2-voice chords with thumb and index was a viable option.

### Observations About Left-Hand Fingering

Newsidler and Waissel are the only two German tablature composers I know of who give any information about left hand fingering.

That statement needs to be qualified: Judenkunig's book is divided into six sections each preceded by a diagram of a hand with tablature letters listed in columns on the fingers that presumably play those pitches. The first hand shows all notes on the first fret being played by the first finger (from low to high: **B, a, b, c, d, e**); all notes on the second fret being played by the second finger (**C, f, g, h, i, k**); the third-fret notes on the top 3 courses being played by the fourth finger (**n, o, p**); the third-fret notes on the 4th through 6th courses being played by the third finger (**D, I, m**). This is well and good for a starting point, but Example 2 shows where it breaks down,

Look at bar 5. The piece is in two voices. Using the fingering as indicated on the hand, the second finger would play both the **g** and the **i** and if it does that, the 2-voice texture is destroyed. So the fingering suggested by the hands is rudimentary at best, and not

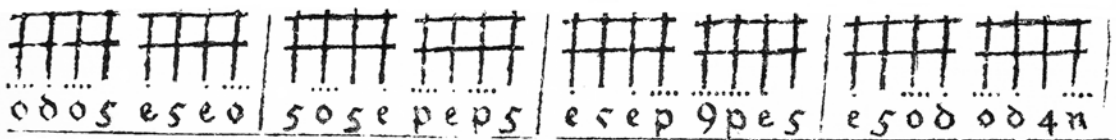


Example 2 - opening to Ich bin ir langzeyt hold gewesen in Hans Judenkunig, Ain schone kunstliche underweisung, 1523.

very enlightening.

Returning to Newsidler, three instructions stand out. First, look at bar 11 in *Ich klag den Tag*. When both notes are on the second fret on two different strings, Newsidler says to put the first finger on the upper course and the second finger on the lower course, the opposite of what we would normally think of doing. It does feel odd at first, and yet, since learning this fingering and getting used to how it feels, I have come across situations when it works better than the alternative. So, I'm glad to have this solution in my bag of options. If you look at the fingerings in Thomas Robinson's *Schoole of Musicke*, you'll see the same thing in the few pieces where he indicates fingering. Again, this might just be a solution only meant for beginners, or amateurs, but why steer such players down a futile path?

Secondly, there are a few instances in Newsidler's settings where he has the fourth finger play several notes in a row, starting with *Die Erst*



Example 3 - from Hans Newsidler, *Ein Newgeordent Künstlich Lautenbuch*, 1536, *Die Erst Regel*.

*Regel*. Look in the third bar in the example below and you will see that he asks for the fourth finger to play 3 notes in a row: p-9-p.

**Exempel da der kleine Finger in Coloraturen auff der Quinten  
uber etliche Buchstaben auff vnd abe lauffen musß.**



**In diesem Leufflein brauch den Mittelfinger im andern Bunde / den kleinen Finger im dritten / vnd was ober den dritten Bund hinauff gehet musßn auch alles mit dem kleinen Finger auff vnd abe lauffende / greiffen.**

Example 4 - *Exempel da der kleine Finger in Coloraturen auff der Quinten uber etliche Buchstaben auff und abe lauffen muß*, from Mattheus Waissel, *Tabulatura Guter gemeine Deutscher Tentze*, 1592.

Newsidler is not the only one who indicates such fingering. Here's an example from Waissel, along with a translation of his instructions.

"In this run use the middle finger for the second fret, the small finger (4th finger) for the 3rd fret, and whatever is above the 3rd fret must all be played with the small finger (4th finger)." [*In diesem Leufflein brauch den Mittelfinger im andern Bunde / den kleinen Finger im dritten / und was uber den dritten Bund hinauff gehet musßn auch alles mit dem kleinen Finger auff und abe lauffende / greiffen.*]

Unbelievable as that seems to us, that's what he wrote. I can't think of a situation where that solution has helped me out, so I don't put it very high on the list of suggestions I'd make for students!

And thirdly, look at the fingering for the left hand in bars 6, 18 and 31 of Newsidler's *Ein guts hofenzlein* below. In these bars the music has two notes on the same fret of adjacent strings (g and h) and Newsidler indicates that both are played with the same finger, the 2nd. Do that and you create a mini-barre with the 2nd finger. That's a nice option to keep in mind for later!

**Beginning to Hone Your Puzzle-Solving Skills**

In the two-voice pieces below there are two instances of where puzzle-solving skills will come in handy. In both examples, two symbols look so similar to the untrained eye that it's hard to tell them apart. For the first example, look at the fourth bar of Gerle's setting of *Ich klag den tag*, and notice the symbol on the bottom layer of the second chord. Is that a number 1 (5th course open) or the lower case letter l (5th course 3rd fret)? Here's where the puzzle-solving skills come in. Find other places in the piece where this symbol is used and see what you learn. Bar 7 has similar-looking symbols in the bottom layer. So, you try out both options there. If you decide they are letter l, you won't like the parallel octaves that occur getting into the measure from the bar before. So you decide they must be number 1. There's another similar symbol in bar 10. If you've decided that the symbol is number 1 and you play that passage, you won't like what the lower voice does. So, you try the passage with the letter l and you like it better. Right around now, you begin to detect a slight difference in the way this symbol is made such that one is a number and the other is a letter. The puzzle is solved when you

discover/realize that the straight symbol is the letter and the symbol with the slight curve to the left is the number.

Another instance where one has to have “eagle eyes” is found in *Mag ich unglück nit widerston* below, in the second measure of the second row of music. The last notes in the bar look like an *m* over an *r*. But *m* and *r* would both be on the 4th course, *m* on the 3rd fret, *r* on the 4th fret. That’s when you take out the grid from the first installment and look around on the neck to see if you can find any other letter that could possibly look like either the *m* or the *r* because at this point you don’t know which note is the mistake, especially if you don’t have access to the vocal original. Sure enough, the *x* becomes a candidate because it looks a little like an *r* and it’s not so far away that you couldn’t play it along with the *m*. Your ear will tell you that *x* is the solution. Ironically, if you had referred to Judenkunig’s own fingerboard in Example 1, you might not have resolved this as quickly, because the *x* on the fingerboard doesn’t look much like the *x* in the piece!

Die Ander Regel/ vnd  
ist ein ander art.

Finis der andern regel.

Die drit regel/  
vnd ist auch ein  
andere art.

Finis der dritten regel des geringen fundaments.

Hans Newsidler: *Die Ander Regel* and *Die drit regel*.

Here are some pieces in two voices,

The little cross next to the *c* and anywhere else you see it indicates that you should hold down that finger. It would be nice if the voice-leading was always so visible! Don’t get used to this!

Ich klag  
den tag

Finis.

Hans Newsidler: *Ich klag den tag*

Ein guts hofftentz-  
lein für ein schüler.

The image shows a piece of handwritten musical notation in German lute tablature. It consists of five staves. Each staff begins with a rhythmic signature (a vertical line with a flag) and is divided into measures by vertical bar lines. The notation uses letters (a, b, c, d, e, f, g) and numbers (1-4) to represent fret positions on the strings. Some letters have dots above them, and some numbers have dots above them. The text 'Ein guts hofftentz-lein für ein schüler.' is written above the first staff. The piece concludes with a double bar line and the word 'Fins.' (Finis).

Hans Newsidler: *Ein guts hofftentz-lein für ein schuler*

Mag ich unglück nit widerston.

The image shows a piece of handwritten musical notation in German lute tablature. It consists of three staves. Each staff begins with a rhythmic signature (a vertical line with a flag) and is divided into measures by vertical bar lines. The notation uses letters (a, b, c, d, e, f, g) and numbers (1-4) to represent fret positions on the strings. Some letters have dots above them, and some numbers have dots above them. The text 'Mag ich unglück nit widerston.' is written above the first staff. The piece concludes with a double bar line and a fermata symbol (a curved line over a vertical line).

Hans Judenkunig: *Mag ich unglück nit wiederston*



Madonna katerina. Oder hast du mich genummen.

Hans Judenkunig: *Madonna katerina*

Zart schönste fraw.

Finis.

Hans Judenkunig: *Zart schönste fraw*

Note the stranded cadence note at double bar. Because of the repeat sign, its rhythm sign is on the next line! Symbol at beginning of 4th system is not a letter. It's the mark Judenkunig uses to tell the player to hold that finger down, in this case the e from the bar before, which is at the end of the previous system.

Newsidler pieces are from *Ein Newgeordent Künstlich Lautenbuch*, 1536. Gerle pieces are from *Musica und Tabulatur...* 1546. Judenkunig pieces are from *Ain schone kunstliche underweisung*, 1523

# German Tab Made Easy...er



## Part III

By Catherine Liddell

In this installment, you will become accustomed to reading vertically from German Tablature. To get you started, one example will show some of the most common chords played several ways. That will be followed by examples of 3-voice cadence formulas in several keys. What you want to do is create an association between what you see and what shape your left hand takes. If you are someone that immediately hears harmony, you might also attach that information to what you're looking at (is it an F chord or a C chord, etc.), but that is more information than you need. The information you need is: what do I do with my left hand when I see that stack? The more you can associate clusters of information with a hand formation instead of reading individual letters and numbers, the more fluent you will be in reading, just like when you first learned to read back in first grade! T-h-e is "the" not "t-h-e."

### German Tablature: Voice-Leading Made Visible?

Since both course and fret information is contained in one symbol, there is complete freedom about the placement of that symbol on the page. Therefore, you might think, and even hope, that matters of voice leading could be "seen" in how the tablature is laid out. Alas, from what I can see, composers notating their music in German tablature missed a huge opportunity to be helpful in this regard. I wouldn't be surprised to learn someday that this fact has something to say about what composers were "thinking" as they notated pieces, or about what exactly the publishers received from the composers. A topic for another day!

To avoid confusion, I will use two sets of terms, one to describe the counterpoint and one to describe what the page looks like. Thus, a piece might have 3 *voices*, a lower voice, a middle voice and a high voice. The page will have maybe 3 *systems* of tablature, and each system will have 1, 2 or 3 *rows* of letters/numbers. A "row" is NOT synonymous with a "voice." And that's what we are lamenting because so often it could have been. What were they thinking? Or HOW were they thinking?

A quick glance at Newsidler's tablatures gives the impression that he does indicate voice leading. You'll see runs in the top row, some in the middle row and a few in the bottom row. But if you examine it closely, you'll see that there are inconsistencies throughout. If you look at *Nach willen dein*, everything is going so well, visually, until you get to the second bar of the second system. The **1** you see in the middle of the bar could just as well have been in the bottom row, with the **g** in the middle row, the rest of the notes staying in the top row. With Newsidler, just when you think you've figured out the thought process for what note appears in which row, it all breaks down a few bars later.

It's quite possible that Hans Judenkunig's print shows the most consistency in layout and that consistency has nothing at all

to do with showing voice-leading. He builds his tablatures up from the bottom row. If there is only one voice sounding, it goes into the bottom row, no matter where it sounds in the counterpoint. If there are two voices, you'll see something in the bottom and middle row, and if there are three voices, you'll see something in all three rows.

Gerle is also consistent, but his tablatures are the exact opposite of Judenkunig. He builds his from the top row down. All of the notes in quick note values are written on the top line no matter what voice they belong to. Waissel does the same thing as Gerle.

Sebastien Ochsenkuhn's tablatures seem to make the most effort to show voice leading. One can see up to 4 rows of letters, and at first glance the way the letters are placed as if in a soprano, alto, tenor or bass. A closer examination shows inconsistencies and raises questions again about why certain notes appear in one row rather than another. It could be an interesting exercise to compare his settings with their vocal originals to see how close his tablatures come to showing exact voice leading and what might explain the inconsistencies. Some of the seeming inconsistencies might just be in the nature of lute music. Anyone who has tried to transcribe any tablature into staff notation has had to deal with the question of to what voice a given cluster of notes belongs. Ochsenkuhn definitely gets an "A" for effort, though, and his tablatures are a bit easier to read for his having been helpful on this front.

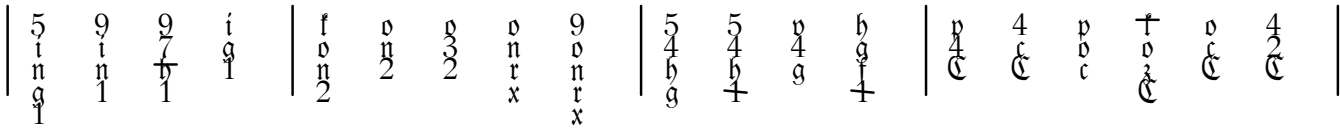
Jobin also shows consistency. In his tablature print, the fastest moving notes are on the *second* row from the top, no matter what voice the note belongs to. Interspersed 2- to 4-note "chords" are built from the top row down.

Heckel's tablatures assume a mostly-three-voiced texture built from the bottom, and that bottom row is the 3rd row from the top. All of the fastest note-values appear in that "bottom" row. The reason "bottom" is in quotation marks is that when a 4th voice appears it is in its own row below that. If that voice is ever the only voice moving, it will start as the very bottom row but continue its movement in the third row from the top.

### Example 1 (next page): Some Chord Shapes and What They Look Like in German Bablature

If you have forgotten what some of the less frequent letters look like in this font, you have a Cheat Sheet to refer to from the first installment. The chords here are labeled so that you can also use that knowledge to help you. For example: perhaps you don't recognize the second letter from the top in the A Major chords. You know the chord needs a C#. From your Cheat Sheet (page 2), you see that C# is the letter **s**. The **s** in some German fonts don't look like any **s** non-German readers are used to. Now you know what **s** might look like. Refer to the fingerboard illustration in the previous installment (see page 8) to see another way **s** is printed.

## Chord shapes - Major

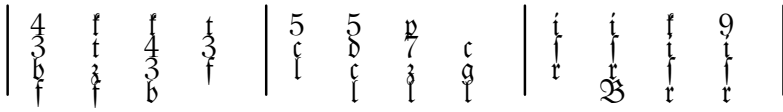


C Major

F Major

G Major

Bb Major

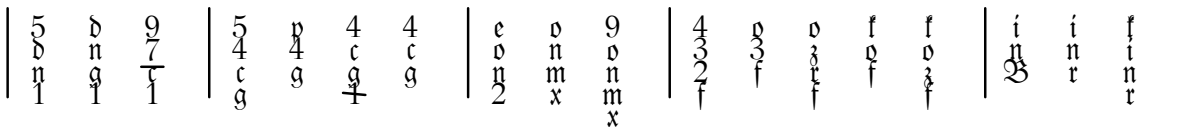


D Major

Eb Major

A Major

## Chord shapes - Minor



c minor

g minor

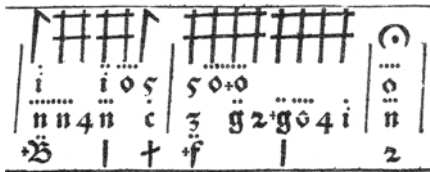
f minor

d minor

a minor

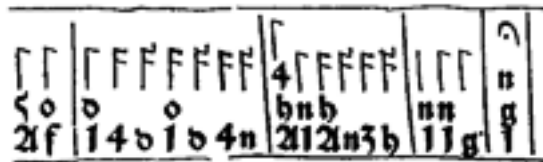
Example 1

Here now are some sample cadence formulas in 3-voices.



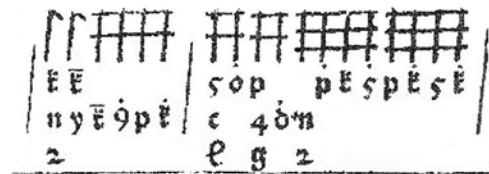
Example 2: from *Von edler art*, Hans Newsidler, *Ein Newgeordent künstlich Lautenbuch*, 1536, fol. L ii v

The little crosses tell you to hold the finger down. Also, see what it feels like to follow Newsidler's left-hand fingering.

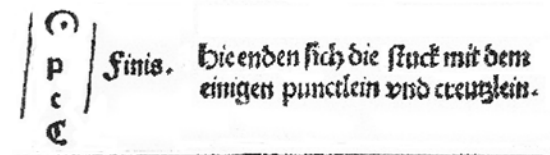


Example 3: from *Rosina ain welscher dantz*, Hans Judenkunig, *Ain Schöne Underweisung*, 1523, p. 20 v

Note that Judenkunig notates his 6th course the same way Weissel does, by running the upper case alphabet up the frets starting with A as the open string. Refer to the fingerboard illustration in the second installment (*LSA Quarterly* – Fall 2011, pg. 8).



Example 4: Example 4: from *Freundlicher gruß*, Hans Newsidler, *Ein Newgeordent künstlich Lautenbuch*, 1536, fol. N iiiii v



Example 5: from *Freundlicher gruß*, Hans Newsidler, *Ein Newgeordent künstlich Lautenbuch*, 1536, fol. N iiiii v



Example 6: from *Mon seul espoir*, Hans Gerle, *Musica und Tablatur*, 1546, fol. T 3.

You have to be really sharp to detect the difference between the number 1 (5th course open) and the letter I (5th course 3rd fret). I'll spare you the detective work here: beat 3, the symbol under the g is the letter; the symbol under the 5 is the number. If you'd gone to the last measure, you'd have figured it out!

Now for some pieces to practice on. Here are two that are mostly chords.

**Hast du mich genumen:**

This piece is straightforward. If the tune sounds like something you played from a previous installment, you get extra credit! It was in the second installment under the title *Madona Katarina*. Remember, Judenkunig notates the 6th course by running the alphabet in upper-case letters starting with A as the open string.

Hans Judenkunig, *Ain Schöne Underweisung*, 1523

*Ain Spaniyelischer hoffdantz:* Again, nothing mysterious in this piece, just more practice reading 3-note chords.

**Ain Spaniyelischer hoffdanz.**

Hans Judenkunig, *Ain Schöne Underweisung*, 1523

Now for some chords with notes in-between:

*Ain niderlendisch runden dantz:* A rhythm sign with no letter or number under it, such as at the opening of this piece and near the end of *Preamble*, indicates a rest. The **+** you see in it is the same kind of sign Newsidler uses to show that you should hold down the finger, only it's bigger and refers to the note *below* it. The letter that looks like a loopy e is the letter I (3rd fret, 5th course). In the second system, 6th note from the end, you see what looks like a question mark or an ear lobe: it's the 5th fret on the 1st course.

**Ain niderlendisch runden dantz.**

Hans Judenkunig, *Ain Schöne Underweisung*, 1523

Gassenhawer.

**Gassenhawer:** This piece appears between pieces *mit durchstraichen*, meaning that you play the chord with a downward (toward the floor) strum using your thumb. It's fun!

Hans Newsidler, *Ein Newgeordent künstlich Lautenbuch*, 1536, fol. X

Preambel.

**Preambel:** Probably one of Newsidler's best-known pieces just because it's so hauntingly beautiful. There are a few letters in this piece that we haven't encountered very often, if at all, but you'll figure out what they are from the context. Your left hand, led by your ear, will take you to the right place. You'll check on your cheat sheets and learn what letters they are.

Hans Newsidler, *Ein Newgeordent künstlich Lautenbuch*, 1536, fol. S iiiii

*Ich klag den Tag.*

*Finis.*

*Ich klag den Tag:* Here it is now in Newsidler's 3-voice version, and with fingering for you to try out.

Hans Newsidler, *Ein Newgeordent künstlich Lautenbuch*, 1536, fol. K

*Si mon vouloir.*

*Si mon vouloir:* Check the chart in the second installment to remind yourself how Gerle notates the 6th course. In the last measure of the first system the context will tell you that the letter that looks like an o is a v. I don't know what the two dots are in the first bar of the 3rd system. I had to pause a bit at the last chord in the 4th bar of that system. It's an imperfectly printed g. The symbol in the middle of the last full bar on that system could mean "repeat to here." One would have to hunt down the original vocal version to see if that is correct.

Hans Gerle, *Musica und Tablatur*, 1546, fol. X 3v.

# German Tab Made Easy...er



## Part IV

By Catherine Liddell

Up until this installment, I have avoided the tablatures of Bernhard Jobin or Wolff Heckel.<sup>1</sup> Some might be wondering why, others know full well: While the tablatures themselves are very clear, they are also very confusing because of the formation of some of the letters. Compounding the confusion is the fact that some letters have more than one shape. In this installment, I will present some of these anomalies to show you what you are likely to encounter. I do not claim to have scrutinized every single note in these tablatures, nor have I resolved all of my own questions. But what I present here should give you enough to resolve remaining questions on your own. Perhaps if you are still with me at this point in the series, your own interest is piqued and you will dive in and find solutions you can share.

To make this installment shorter than it would be, I've created several charts, "cheat sheets." One shows most of the font variants found in these two tablatures. The second "cheat sheet" shows how the 5th and 6th courses are notated.

The chart below shows the alphabet letters used in German tablature in a clear, normal font. Under each letter are the way(s) the letter appears in the tablatures of Heckel and Jobin. Since they both published their books in the same city, the font peculiarities are the same.

You will see that there are multiple fonts for several of the letters: 6th course open, 5th course open, **d**, **f**, **g**, **i** and **p**.

### Notating the 6th Course, First Five Frets

Heckel and Jobin tablatures notate the first 5 frets on the 6th course the same way: they use the letter from the 5th course frets and put a line over it, or through it. You ask, "But wait! Isn't that how the frets above the 5th course are notated? How do we tell if an f with a line over it is the 6th course at the 2nd fret or 5th course at the 7th fret?" Read on.

1	2	3	4	5						
	2	3	4	5						
j										
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H			
a	b	r	s	t	u	v	w			
			z							
I	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q			
i	k	l	m	n	o	p	q			
r	s	t	v	x	y	z	"et"	"con"		
r	s	t	v	x	y	z	e	z		

Heckel's and Jobin's tablature font

Heckel		Jobin	
6th	5th	6th	5th

A "cheat sheet" you can use when deciphering the 5th and 6th courses of Heckel and Jobin tablatures

**6th Fret and Above on the 6th Course**

On the chart on the previous page we see two solutions. Both Heckel and Jobin use the same letters as were used for the lower frets, so: **a, f, l, q** and **x**. Heckel doubles the letter and puts a line over them.

Jobin doubles the letter but does NOT put a line above it. So, we make a note to ourselves: on the 6th course above the 5th fret, Heckel puts a line over doubled letters, Jobin doesn't.

**Resolving the Confusion Between the 5th Course Above the 5th Fret and the 6th Course Frets 1-5**

With Heckel's tablatures, the context is your only help. If you have a chord that already has a letter on the 5th course, the letter in question will likely be on the 6th course. Or, if most of the notes in the chord are below the 5th fret, it's unlikely you would be asked to play a note above the 5th because the stretch is too much. And there is also the pitch itself: **f** with a line over it on the 5th course is pitch G. On the 6th course it is pitch A. Thanks for all your help, Wolff!

Jobin resolves the problem differently. He doubles the letters and puts a line over them. Perhaps you are making a note to yourself:

Heckel's doubled letters with a line over them are on the 6th course above the 5th fret and Jobin's doubled letters with a line over them are on the 5th course above the 5th fret. And to make matters potentially more confusing, sometimes Jobin's printer got confused about when the line goes over the double letters and when it doesn't. You will see in the tablature examples below that the line can go either over the letter or through it. The placement of the line over or through the letter does not determine the place on the fingerboard.

**Here are a few pieces from the Heckel and Jobin publications:**

In this piece you will see the two different fonts for **f**. You'll also see a **t** in the first measure, so don't confuse it for some other letter with a line through it. There's a **v** in the third measure that might fool you into thinking it's an **o**. You can almost count on the letters in a stack being in the right order from low to high, bottom to top, so if you see what looks like a **p** in the middle of a stack, it's a **g**.

151.

Der Betler Tantz from Wolff Heckel, Tenor Lauttenbuch, Straßburg, 1562, pg. 151

4 4 4 0	5 4 2 0	4 4 0 4 4	4 4 2 0	4 4 0 4 4
8 7 1 8	8 7 1 8	7 3 9 4 8	7 3 9 4 8	7 3 9 4 8

		<b>Proportz auff den Becler.</b>		
4 3 9	5 8 1		5 8 1	5 8 1
7 8 1	7 8 1		7 8 1	7 8 1

5 3 2	5 3 2	5 3 2	5 3 2	5 3 2	5 3 2	5 3 2	5 3 2	5 3 2	5 3 2
8 3 2	8 3 2	9 f f	7 8	7 8	7 8	7 8	7 8	7 8	7 8

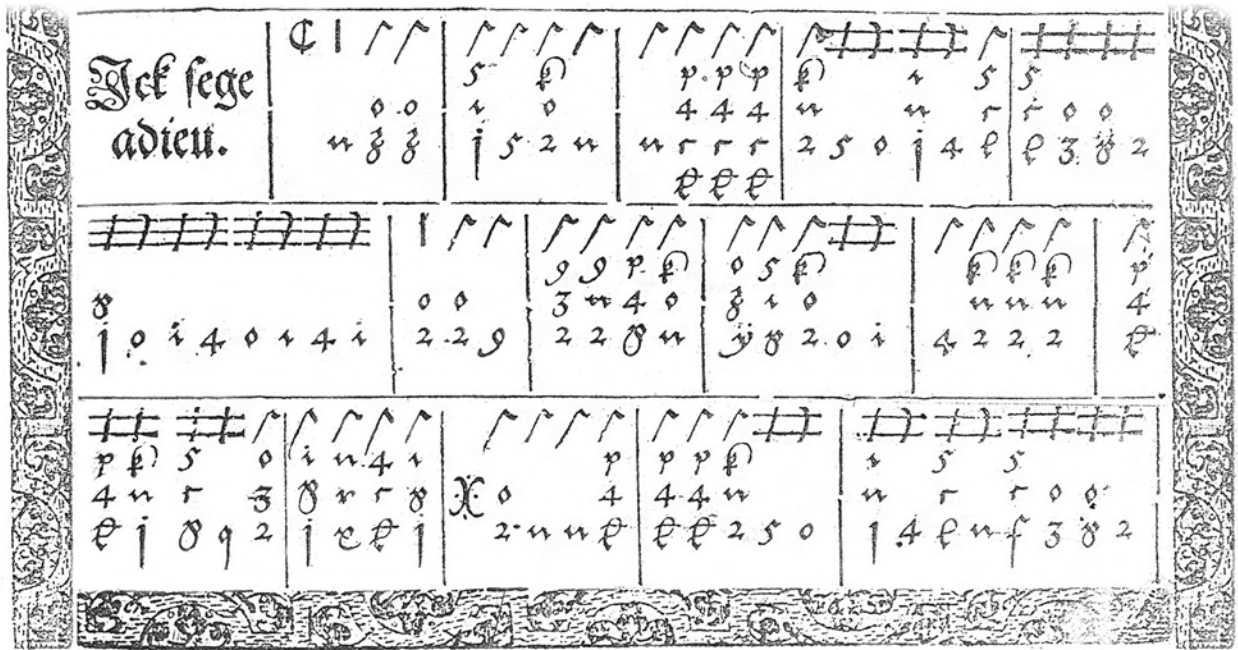
5 3 2	5 3 2	5 3 2	5 3 2	5 3 2	5 3 2	5 3 2	5 3 2	5 3 2	5 3 2
9 f f	7 8	4 3 2	4 3 2	2 5 8 2	2 2	8 4	8 2	9 1	9 1

0 3 5 0 4	4 2 3 5 4	4 2 3 5 4	4 2 3 5 4	4 2 3 5 4	4 2 3 5 4	4 2 3 5 4	4 2 3 5 4
f 5 0 4	7 8 1 8	7 8 1 8	7 8 1 8	7 8 1 8	7 8 1 8	7 8 1 8	7 8 1 8

							<b>Finis.</b>
4 3 9 4 8	4 3 9 4 8	4 3 9 4 8	4 3 9 4 8	4 3 9 4 8	4 3 9 4 8	4 3 9 4 8	Finis.
7 8 1 8	7 8 1 8	7 8 1 8	7 8 1 8	7 8 1 8	7 8 1 8	7 8 1 8	7 8 1 8





*Ick sege adieu* by Claude de Sermisy from Wolff Heckel, *Discant Lauttenbuch*, Straßburg, 1562, pg. 185



In this piece you will see some letters you haven't met yet: z (bar 1 and 8), y (bar 8), r, and x (both in bar 11).

Note that Heckel builds his tablatures up from the bottom layer, meaning that all of the activity is in that layer. He does not attempt to make the typesetting convey anything about voice leading. Thus, just because a letter is on the bottom layer does not mean it will be found on the lower strings. The very first measure of *Betler Tantz* shows this. And just because a string of notes are all on the same line, doesn't mean they all belong to the same voice. Look in the penultimate measure of the *Proportz auff den Betler* for an example of this.

Note also, that Heckel shows you which notes should be plucked with an upstroke. He does it by slightly bending the stem of every other rhythm stem when they are in groups of two or four. "The straight mark should be played with the thumb under itself and the crooked mark should be played with the pointing finger over itself" (This is taken to be a description of thumb-under technique.)<sup>3</sup> When the rhythm sign is a single stem with a single flag that looks like an open loop, "the notes under it are played with the fingers."<sup>4</sup> There doesn't seem to be a lot of consistency with this, but those are his instructions.

#### Now for Some Pieces from Bernhard Jobin's Publication

This beautiful, clear tablature shows you the different fonts for the letters **p** (bar 2 and 10) and **d** (bar 2, 10 and 26), and for the number **1** (bar 3, 38 and 39). It shows you the line that can be over (bar 1) or through (bar 5) the letter **l**. You see a doubled **ff** with a line over it (bar 42) indicating the 6th course, 7th fret. Note that Jobin's fast note values are placed in the second layer from the top. Again, no attempt to show which voice has the fast values.

If your playing takes you as far as the seventh and eight systems, you'll encounter the 2 errors in this piece. In the 7th system, first bar: the 1st chord can't be played as written because the **d** and the **4** need the same string. The **4** is dissonant, so we can safely leave that out. Structurally, this is the second full bar of the third section of the Galliarde. Unfortunately, we are not helped by looking at the written out repeat of this section. In bar 43, the chord is still wrong, but for a different reason. In this case, the **3** is a dissonant pitch. I would suggest fixing these measures by making both the **4** and the **3** a **c**. Perhaps when the typesetters put back the letters into the font drawers after the previous printing process was over, a few letters landed in the wrong drawers: the **4** and the **3** landed in the drawer with the **c**'s. The typesetter just reached into the **c** drawer and happened to pull out the 2 impostors. Just a guess.

You will also notice, after you've played the piece a few times that the 3rd beat of these two bars has a different harmony comparing the first section with its repeat. The first time through, it's a Bb chord; the second time it's an Eb chord. Fix it or not, as you will. I happen to prefer the interest of the Eb harmony, but haven't decided if I would make the measures agree or not.

The next example is also not without mistakes, but they aren't crippling mistakes, and since mistakes do occur, you might as well see how some might be resolved.

Gailliarde  
brunette.

^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ /
p p s	o s	4 o	4 o	4 n	r		
4	o p s	r s n	r r 2 s	r r 2 s	r e 4 j	f	
r	n r	2 s	2	2	2		
e	2 e	e 1	e	e	e		

^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ /
r 3	4	4 p	e	o	4 n
s 2	r 2 n r 3	r e 4	o p s o s	r s o s e n	r r 2 s
e	2	2 r	n	2	2
e	e	e 2	e	e	e

^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ /
4 o	4 s	3 3	4	4 4	o
r r 2 s	r o 2 4 n r	e s 2 n r 3	r 2 n r 3	r e r s	r 2 n
2	2		2	2 2	2
e	e		e		f



^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ /
4 s	o	s	s	e	s	p
r e 4 s o	s s o s 4	s o s p s	o 2 p o	4 s o	4	r
2	r	r	n	n	r r n	e
f	e	e	2	r	s e 2	e

^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ /
2 n r 3	4 e r s	r 2 n 4 s	r s o 4 e o	s o s 4 s o	s o
r	2	2	2	r	r
	e	e	f	e	e

^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ /
s p s s	e s s p r p	r s o p n e	4 2 n r 3	4 s o	4 e e o	s
n	n	n	r	r	r n	n
2	2	2	e	2	s	r

^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ /
s o 4	r s o s e n	r n 4 i o s	o o s e i o	f 4 n o s i	e
4 r r	2	2	n	s	n
s 2 e	f	e	2	j	2

^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ /
2 p s	o 2 o	4 e e o	s o s	r s o s e n	r n 4 i o s	o o
n	n	n	n	2	2	n
2	2	r	s 2 e	e	e	2

^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ / ^ /	^ / ^ / ^ /
s e i o	e 4 n o s i	o 2 p s	e o 2
n	s	n	n
1	1	2	2

Gailliarde brunette from Bernhard Jobinm Newerleßner  
fleissiger etlicher viel schöner  
Lautenstück, Straßburg, 1573,  
pg. 134.



Dantz and Nach dantz from Bernhard Jobin, *Newerleßner fleissiger etlicher viel schöner Lautenstück*, Straßburg, 1573, pg. 161.

**Dantz and Nach dantz**

This piece provides great practice in finding notes above the 5th fret. Letters we haven't encountered much: The letter in the bottom layer of the 3rd measure, last 2 beats, is an **r**, and in the next measure it has a line over it. The letter in the 3rd bar, 1st beat, top layer is a **v**. Under it is "et". In Heckel's and Jobin's tablatures, "et" always comes with a line through it. When it's above the 5th fret, you'll see a line through it AND over it. Under "et" in the next beat is the letter **b** with a line over it.

For the first mistake, look in the first full bar of the second system, second beat. The note in the 3rd layer from the top is a **g** (letter, not pitch) and it should be letter **b**. This bar is the structural equivalent to the third bar of the piece. When you compare these two measures you'll see and hear that the typesetter made an error on the repeat.

Note that the letter in the top layer of the third full bar of the second system might look like the **r** at first, but it's a **v**. You can rule out the **r** for two reasons. Firstly, the **r** is found on the same course as the **g** in the 3rd layer from the top. Secondly, only rarely does it happen that the notes in a stack are in the wrong order.

In the *Nach dantz*, the chord at the end of the sixth measure should have a "con" with a line over it. The run leading up to it makes this obvious. Once you make that correction, you notice that the equivalent spot in bar 2 doesn't agree melodically. So I would suggest turning the **k** with a line over it into a "con" with a line over it.

You'll have noticed that the pieces I've given here are all dances with mostly chords. And that's where I suggest you start when you acquire music in German tablature. Notice I said "when!" Dances, except for *pas-*

*samezzi*, tend to be shorter pieces with clear structure, so it can be easier to spot/hear mistakes and figure out how to fix them. Perhaps the best advice I can give at this point is: if you encounter a symbol you don't understand, keep reading/playing. The symbol is likely to appear again, perhaps in the same piece, or, if not, then in other pieces where it's context will be more revealing. And once you are done with this, you can all apply for jobs with your governments' code-breaking departments!

In the next installment, we will take a look at one more tablature, the so-called *Dlugorai Lutebook*, because it presents yet another way of forming the letters. The final installment of this series will be a list of where you can go to find music in German tablature, because by then, you'll be ready to explore on your own.

# German Tab Made Easy...er



## Part V

By Catherine Liddell

### The So-Called *Dlugorai Lute Book*<sup>1</sup>

With this installment, we present the last of the close looks at some German tablatures. You'll be glad this was included because the letters in this publication look substantially different compared to those in Jobin and Heckel. And, as in the Jobin and Heckel books, there are sometimes two or three ways to make a letter. To help you with this font, Example 1 is another grid showing you the letters in an easy-to-decipher font with the Dlugorai letters beneath.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	"et"	"con"
s	t	z	2	1	x	≠	z	9
							z	
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	
a	t	c	9	e	/	g	h	
	b		9		/	g		
			g					
I	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	
i	k	l	...	...	o	p	q	
	k			...		p		
	h							
R	S	T	V	X	Y	Z		
r	s	t	v	x	y	z		
	s	t		x		z		
	g					z		
6th Course								
open	1st fret	2nd fret	3rd fret	4th fret	5th fret	6th fret	7th fret	
x	B	C	D	E	F		H	

Example 1. Deciphering Dlugorai's alphabet

<sup>1</sup> So-called *Lautenbuch des Albert Dlugorai*, Stadt Leipzig Städtische Bibliotheken Musikbibliothek (II.6.15). Tree Edition Facsimile, Albert Reyerman, editor. 2001

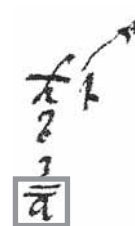
Back in the second installment, I made light of what might happen if the tablature system, originally designed for a 5-course lute, had to accommodate a 7- or 8-course lute. Well, in this publication, our curiosity is laid to rest. Dlugorai has 3 different ways to notate the 7th course. One way is to make the number 1 and put 2 lines through it. Another way is to make the letter a and put a line over it. And a third way is simply to make the number 7. Example 2 shows the three possibilities.



Example 2. Three ways to notate the 7th course

There can be no doubt that the pitch of the 7th course is an F (assuming a lute in G) because every time it occurs in any of these ways, the notes above it are an F chord.

Example 3 shows how the eighth course is notated: with 2 lines over an a. It is clear that the 8th course is tuned to D because the notes above it are D, F#, A.



Example 3. How the 8th course is notated

I would not be surprised to see other ways to notate the 8th course, similar to the 7th course. So, keep your eyes peeled!

Once you have worked with this cheat sheet and ventured into the tablature itself, you'll discover that the issues with this tablature seem to have more to do with the placement of the rhythm signs than with reading the letters.

Here are three short pieces from the so-called *Dlugorai Manuscript*.  
 First, a tiny *Chorea Anglica*.

*Lautenbuch*, Tree Edition, pg. 379

The smudgy letter at the bottom of the last beat in the first bar is a *y*. *Y*'s always have the 2 little dots you see there. The letter that looks like an *x* at the bottom of the two-note chord at the start of bar 3 is an *r*.

*Lautenbuch*, Tree Edition, pg. 156

At the end of the first system, it's a little indistinct. The last three letters are "et" *t* and *i*. The placement of rhythm signs is imprecise. Thus, the quarter note should be over the "et." We don't encounter *s* very often but there is one in this piece: second system, third bar, middle layer. To my ear there is a note mistake in the last measure. There are 2 *i*'s in a row, and I suggest making the second one a *4*. Also in that measure, the first letter under the quarter note

rhythm sign might look like an *s*, but it's a *z*. Your ear would tell you that. Your ear would also tell you that the letter at the top of the final chord is a *k* and not some kind of *d*, which is what it looks like at first, except that Dlugorai's *d*'s don't look like that.

Lautenbuch, Tree Edition, pg. 302

Here we have two letters not in the previous piece: **b** and **h**. The letter at the top of the third beat in the first bar is a **v**. Your ear might have told you that. When it stands alone, as it does in bar 2, it starts to look like the number **2**, but that would not sound good. Bar 4 shows 2 different ways to make **k**, so don't be tripped up there. And bars 1 and 3 show you two different ways to make **f**. Sometimes, as happens in the first full bar of the second system, the number **5** is so small it's hard to tell what it is, there between the **k** and the **v**.

I think you have a choice to make in the last bar of the first section, unless you love cross-relations: the second beat is a 4-note chord with a Bb in it (the **c**), the very next note looks like a **v** which is pitch B-natural. But that **v** could also be a **p** with the tail too faint to see. If you want to "fix" this, either play a **p** instead of a **v** in the run, or play an **h** instead of a **c** in the chord.

This manuscript is fairly consistent in putting a loop at the bottom of a **g**, so eventually you will not confuse the "con" with the **g**.

There's a rhythm sign problem in the second measure: the eighth note sign belongs to the **k**, not the three-note chord. The second measure of the second system also has a rhythm sign problem. The two-note chord under the eighth-note rhythm sign should

be separated, bottom note first. Here you see a double crossed **1**, which as you now know, is how Dlugorai indicates a 7th course. The bottom note of the next two-note chord might look like an **i**, which doesn't sound great, but it's a number **2** which sounds much better.

You'll have noticed that the pieces I've given here are all dances with mostly chords. And that's where I suggest you start when you acquire music in German tablature. Notice I said "when"! Dances, except for *passamezzi*, tend to be shorter pieces with clear structure, so it can be easier to spot/hear mistakes and figure out how to fix them.

Perhaps the best advice I can give at this point is: if you encounter a symbol you don't understand, keep reading/playing. The symbol is likely to appear again, perhaps in the same piece, or, if not, then in other pieces where it's context will be more revealing. And once you are done with this, you can all apply for jobs with your governments' code-breaking departments!

The final installment of this series will be a list of where you can go to find music in German tablature. I promise you that once you get into it, it does become easier. I've gotten so that I can sing from it, and you will, too. Now THAT'S an accomplishment!

# German Tab Made Easy...er



## Final Installment

By Catherine Liddell

If you've been practicing your German tablature reading using the previous five installments in this series, you are now ready to head out on your own. To build your confidence, I suggest spending time, first with Hans Judenkünig. There is a really clear facsimile produced by the International Music Score Library Project. Here's the link: [http://imslp.org/wiki/Category:Judenkuenig,\\_Hans](http://imslp.org/wiki/Category:Judenkuenig,_Hans). The reason for starting there is that the pieces are grouped according to what left-hand fingers are required. Each section of pieces is preceded by the image of a hand. All of the symbols in the following pieces are on that hand. His general rule is first finger plays first fret notes, second finger plays second fret notes. You'll see on the first hand that the third finger plays the 3rd fret on the lower strings, the 4th finger plays the 3rd fret on the upper strings. On the second hand, it's a straight one finger assigned to each fret used. If you are stuck on a letter, find it on the hand. That will tell you what string it's on, and what fret. OR, you can refer to one of the cheat sheets in previous installments. Perhaps you have already cut them out and laminated them for future reference!

Then read through Hans Newsidler. He does present the fingerboard with all the letters on it, but at least in my facsimile, it's not very clear. His font is much like Judenkünig's, so you won't have trouble there. Then read through Hans Gerle. His font is a little different, but very clear. With this confidence, you are ready to wade into deeper waters.

Here is a list of available publications in German tablature. I have tried to be thorough, but some publications may have slipped past my awareness.

## Facsimiles with German Tab

### OMI Facsimiles

(OMI has the Minkoff Catalog)

Website: <http://www.omifacsimiles.com/cats/lute.pdf>

Martin Agricola, *Von der Lauten aus Martin Agricola's Musica Instrumentalis Deutsch*, 1529

Hans Gerle, *Ein neues sehr künstliches Lautenbuch*, 1552

Wolff Heckel, *Lautenbuch*, 1562 (duets)

Bernard Jobin, *Das erste [-ander] Buch newerlessner fleissiger und viel schöner Lautenstück*, 1572

Sebastian Ochsenuhn, *Tabulaturbuch auff die Lauten*, 1558

Hans Newsidler, *Ein newgeordent künstlich Lautenbuch*, 1536

Melchior Newsidler, *Teütsch Lautenbuch*, 1574

Arnolt Schlick, *Tabulaturen etlicher Lobgesang*, 1512

Matthäus Weissel, *Tabulatura continens insignes et selectissimas quasque cantiones*, 1573

Rudolf Wyssenbach, *Tabulaturbuch uff die Lutten*, 1550

[Dlugorai lute book], *Sogenanntes Lautenbuch des Albert Dlugorai*, 1619

Lautenbuch Ms. *Ulm 1556*

### Tree Editions

Website: <http://www.tree-edition.com>

Martin Agricola (1486-1556), facsimile of 35 lute-related pages of *Musica Instrumentalis Deutsch*, 1529.

Johannes Arpinus: *The Lute Book of Johannes Arpinus* (1571-1606) Facsimile

*Dlugorai Lute Book*, 1619. This is being transcribed into French tablature, which will take 4 volumes at 30+Euro each. If you read German tablature, which you now can, the entire manuscript is available on a CD ROM for 40 Euro....

Hans Gerle, *Ein neues sehr Künstlichs Lautenbuch*, 1552

Hans Newsidler, *Ein neugeordent Künstlichs Lautenbuch*, 1536

Sebastian Ochsenuhn, *Tabulaturbuch auf die Lauten*, 1558

Arnold Schlick, *Tabulaturen, etlichen Lobgesang*, 1512

Rudolph Wyssenbach, *Tabulaturbuch uff die Lutten*, 1550

Melchior Newsidler, *Teütsch Lautenbuch*, 1574

Sebastian Ochsenuhn, (1521-1574) *Tabulatur auf die Lauten*, 1558

### Cornetto Verlag

Website: <http://www.cornettoverlag.info/verlag.htm>

Hans Gerle: *Ein News sehr künstliches Lautenbuch*, 1552

Hans Newsidler: *Ein Newgeordent künstlich Lautenbuch*, Nürnberg, 1536

Hans Newsidler: *Das dritt Buch*, Nürnberg, 1544

Hans Newsidler: *Das ander Buch*, Nürnberg, 1549

Matthäus Weissel: *Lautenbuch*, 1556

Melchior Newsidler: *Teutsch Lautenbuch*, Straßburg, 1574

Sebastien Ochsenuhn: *Tabulaturbuch auff die Lauten*, Heidelberg, 1558

Wolff Heckel: *Lautenbuch*, Straßburg, 1562

Arnold Schlick: *Tabulaturen etlichen Lobgesang*, 1512

[http://www.accordsnouveaux.ch/de/Quellen\\_CH/Quellen\\_CH.html](http://www.accordsnouveaux.ch/de/Quellen_CH/Quellen_CH.html)

At this website, set up by François-Pierre Goy and Andreas Schle

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gel, you will find online facsimiles of manuscripts and prints with Swiss connections, meaning the manuscript either originates there, is currently there, or has some other connection to Switzerland. Their long list includes the following in German tablature:

Basel, Universitätsbibliothek (CH-Bu):

*Ms. F IX 23* (Ludwig Iselin, 1575)

*Ms. F IX 39* (Online facsimile in preparation)

*Ms. F IX 70* (8 books of German tablature written by Emanuel Wurstisen between 1591 and 1594)

Samedan, Biblioteca Fundasiun Planta (CH-SAM)

*Ms. FP/M I* (manuscript for 6-course lute from 1563)

It is definitely worth your while to poke around on this site!

I add the following lists with the caveat that the information is old. There is much work going on such as that being done by François-Pierre Goy and Andreas Schlegel, putting tablature sources on the web. Thus, this list is primarily intended to create *awareness* of what is available in German tablature.

### Sources Not Available Except in Microfilm

(list derived from Ernst Pohlmann's *Laute, Theorbe, Chitarrone: Die Instrument, ihre Musik und Literatur von 1500 bis zur Gegenwart*, 1982). Asterisk indicates sources available through the LSA Microfilm Library.

Stephan Craus\* (Österreichische National-Bibliothek *Mus. Ms. 18688*)

Benedictus Drusina (listed as being in Leipzig, but no further identification)

Petrus Fabritius (Copenhagen Det Kongelige Bibliothek *Ms. Thott 841*)

Octavianus Fugger (Österreichische National-Bibliothek *Mus. Ms. 18821*)

Sixtus Kargel\* (copies of his *Lautenbuch viler neuerlessener fleissiger schöner Lautenstück* in many libraries, no further identification given in Pohlmann)

Gregor Krengel\* (*Tabulatura nova* listed as being in Munich, no further identification given, for 1 and 2 lutes)

Johannes Nauclerius\* (Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz *Mus. Ms. 40141*)

Nicolaus Schmall von Lobendorf\* (his *Laurrentabulatur Buech* is listed in Prague, SÁtni knihovna-Universitni *XXIII-F 174*)

### Manuscripts of German Tablature in the Following Libraries:

Amsterdam:

Stichting Toonkunst Bibliotheek (*Mus. Ms. 32*) Luitboek in *Duitsche Tabulatur*; ca. 1575

Ann Arbor, Michigan:

University of Michigan Library (*Ms. M.2.1 T 12*) German tablature dated 1620

Berlin:

Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz *Mus. Ms. 40588*, *Mus. Ms. 40161*, *Mus. Ms. 40596*, *Mus. Ms. 40632*

Karlsruhe:

Badische Landesbibliothek *Mus. Ms. A 678*

Liegnitz (Poland):

Biblioteka Rudolfina *Mss. 98, 99, 100, 101*

München:

Bayrische Staatsbibliothek *Mus. Ms. 267*, *Mus. Ms. 272*, *Mus. Ms. 1512*

Universitäts-Bibliothek *Ms. 718*

Wroclaw (Breslau):

Biblioteka Uniwersytecka *Mus. Ms. Mf. 352*

You can see from the above lists, it is definitely worth learning to play from German tablature! Stick with it and you'll find yourself even able to sing from it. (Now there's a skill you can't do without!) And for anyone who runs into something indecipherable, it's pretty easy to collaborate online.

Good luck!

# German Tab Made Easy...er

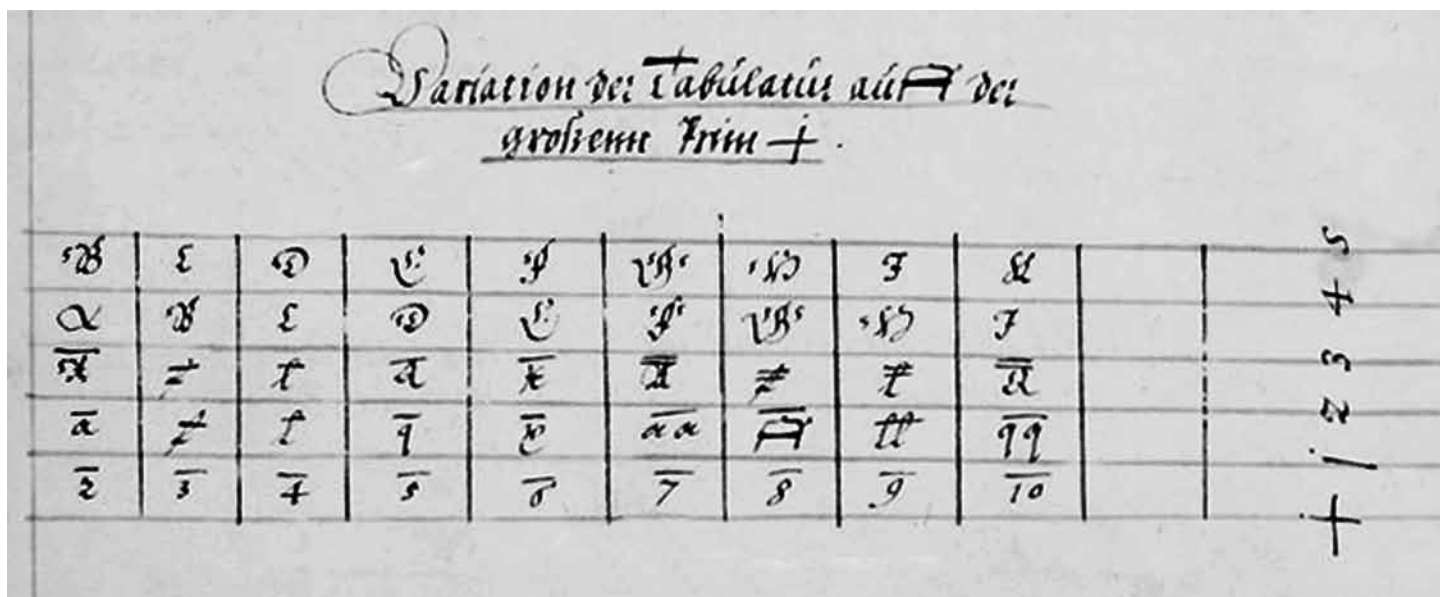


## An Addendum, but not the Last Word on Reading from German Tablature

By Catherine Liddell

I recently came across a very clever diagram showing five ways to notate the 6th course. It's on page 16 in the manuscript, CH-Bu Ms. F IX 70<sup>1</sup>, a large manuscript collected by a lute-playing doctor, Emanuel Wurstisen, while he was a student at the university in Basel, Switzerland. When his diagram is compared to the five options on the cheat sheet in Example 1 of the second installment of "German Tab Made Easy...er," one discovers that they aren't exactly the same five possibilities. Since it would be difficult to remember all of these possibilities, it occurred to me that it might be helpful to start a table that describes each different way and gives the composers/sources that use that way.

Here, first, is Wurstisen's diagram:



From: CH-Bu Ms. F IX 70, PDF pg 16, showing 5 ways to notate the 6th course

### First A Few Observations Pertaining To Emmanuel Wurstisen's Diagram:

1) It would appear that, in assembling this diagram, Wurstisen, made use of a grid that would normally have shown the letters for the first five courses. That is why to the far right you see the numbers showing how the six open strings are indicated. Everything else on the grid pertains only to the frets of the 6th course.

2) The 6th course open is a number one with a line going through it. I have not had time to go through the entire eight-book manuscript, so I don't know if this is the only way the open 6th course is notated. One might expect, for example that for his top row, where the first fret is upper case **B**, the open string might be upper case **A** as it is for Mattäus Waissel. In the brief perusal I have made, I've only noticed Wurstisen using his second solution.

3) The third and fourth ways are curiously similar in the notation of frets 1-5. Look closely and you see that the only difference is how the **a**, **q** and **x** are made. I can see why a print shop would use different fonts, but why would a person have different ways to write the same letter? Perhaps Wurstisen is just showing what is

possible, but if they aren't actually found in the manuscript, why do that? I have only looked briefly at this manuscript, so a closer look is definitely in order.

4) About the placement of lines over and through the letters: You will notice that two of Wurstisen's ways to notate pitches on the 6th course involve putting a line through (or over) letters that are on the first five frets. That can be confusing at first, to players who



have come to associate a line through (or over) a letter as indicating a pitch above the fifth fret. I have so far detected no significance to the placement of the line or lines. The presence of a line is important, but not whether it goes through or over a letter. In Wurstisen's grid, if the letter gets a line over it in notating the first five frets, the line, which might become two lines, stays over the letters for the upper frets.

### Let's Put This All Together Now

As I said above, the second installment of "German Tab Made Easy...er" (*LSA Quarterly*, Fall 2011) also shows five ways to notate the 6th course, and they aren't exactly the same five ways as Wurstisen's. Perhaps it is time to start gathering together all of the alternatives. To begin, here is a table that puts these two together and begins to assign sources to each tuning.

Ways to notate the 6th course	Where it's used
Upper case alphabet up the neck starting with B for the 1st fret. Open string is a 1 with a line through it.	Dlugorai shown as an option in CH-Bu-Ms. F IX 70 (Wurstisen); seems to be the one he preferred
Upper case alphabet up the neck starting with B for the 1st fret. Open string is upper case A.	Waissel shown as an option in Gerle 1546 Judenkunig
Upper case alphabet up the neck starting with A for the 1st fret. Open string is a 1 with a line through it.	Newsidler shown as an option in CH-Bu-Ms. F IX 70 (Wurstisen)
5th course letters, with a line over or through it up to the 5th fret, the letter doubled (no line!) from the 6th fret on. Open 6th course is a 1 with a line through it.	Bernard Jobin
5th course letters, lower case with a line through/over them up to the 5th fret, with 2 lines through/over it from the 6th fret on	shown as an option in CH-Bu-Ms. F IX 70 (Wurstisen)
5th course letters lower case with a line through them up to the 5th fret, letters doubled with a line over or through the pair from the 6th fret on.	Heckel shown as an alternative in Gerle 1546, Iselin (CH-Bu Ms. F IX 23) shown as alternative in CH-Bu-FX 70 (Wurstisen)
numbers going up the neck with a line over each, starting with 2 for the 1st fret	Gerle 1546 (line consistently through the number) Ochsenkuhn (line consistently through the number) shown as alternative in CH-Bu-FX 70 (Wurstisen)

It will sometimes happen that we cannot place a manuscript on such a chart because there is no diagram showing how the 6th course is notated, and the pieces do not include all of the pitches. Thus, from Ms. F X 11 on the accordsnouveaux website, we can glean that Iselin used a **1** with a line through it for the 6th course open; that his 6th course frets are the 5th course letters with a line through up to the 5th fret, but he never uses a note above the 5th fret on the 6th course, so we don't know how he would have notated those.

There may well be a better way to do this. I could imagine a wikipedia-type on-line environment where information can be gathered by those who play from German tablature. All of the "cheat sheets" from this series could be there. It could be the GO-TO place for all levels of players from German tablature. If such a vehicle already exists, shout it from the roof tops!

Here are three pieces from the Wurstisen manuscript<sup>2</sup> *Ach Gott wem soll ich's klagen*, its *Nachdantz*, and a setting of *Innsbruck ich muß dich lassen*.

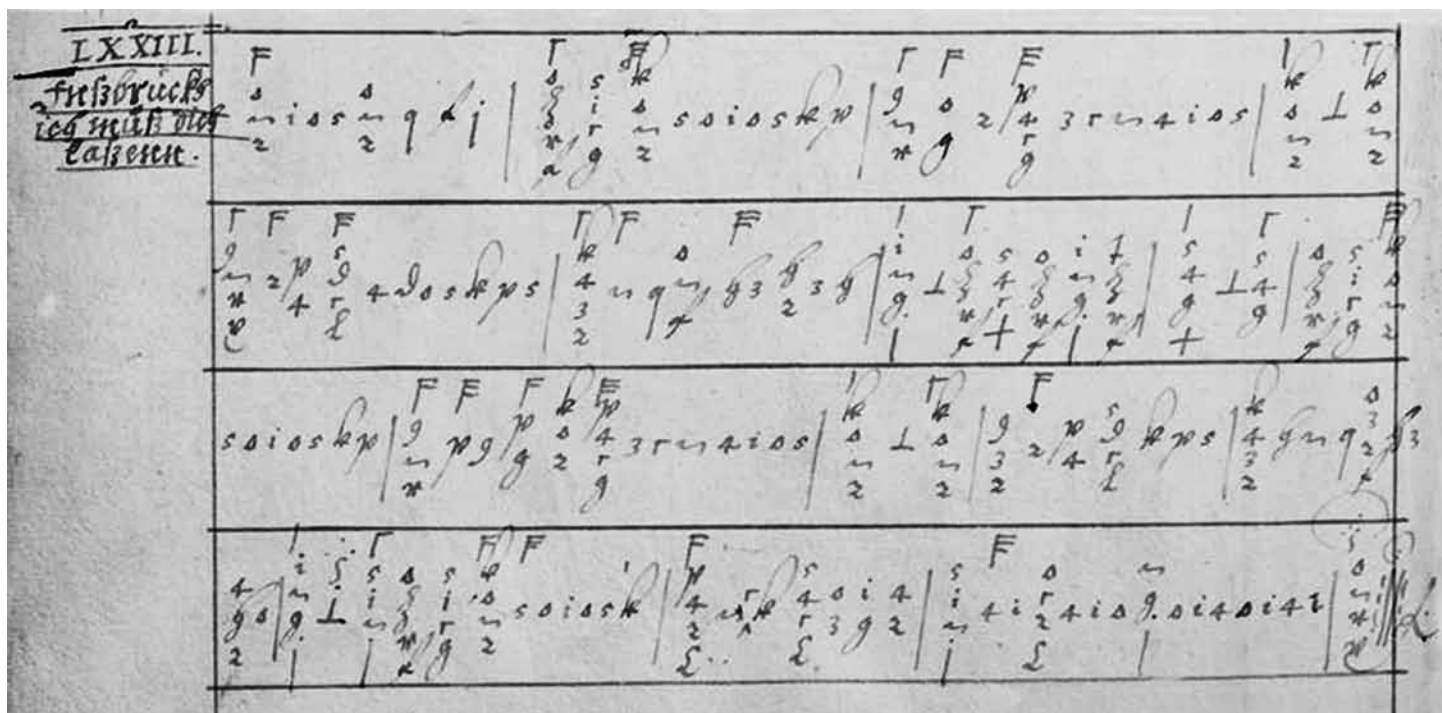


come over the 4-note chord.

4. In the 1st measure of the 3rd system, the letter that looks like a combination of **b** and **g** is an **h**.
5. In the middle measure of the 3rd system, the very squiggly letter is a **z**.
6. In the last measure, the third-to-last note should be the number **1** with 2 lines through it, not **3**.

**Nachdantz** Notes:

1. The return to repeat the 1st section needs an upbeat. The upbeat going to the second section works both for repeating the first section and for going on to the second section.



*Innsbruckh ich muß dich laßen.* Universitätsbibliothek Basel, CH-Bu Ms. F IX 70, (PDF, pg 30)

**Innsbruckh ich muß dich laßen** Notes:

1. The sign just before the end of the 1st system is a rest with the value of a single-flag sign.
2. The 2nd system, 2nd measure is missing some rhythm signs. I suggest for the last 3 notes in the bar, a 2-flag value followed by 2 3-flag values.
3. 2nd system, 3rd measure, that very squiggly letter in the 2nd chord is what Wurstenen's **z** looks like. The note under that is an **r**.
3. The last measure of the 2nd system finishes on the next line with 3-flag values.
4. The last 2 notes of the 3rd system, the **h** and the **3** should be 3-flag values. The measure is completed on the next system and those 2 notes should be 2-flag values.
5. After the first beat of the next measure, you see a rest with a sign over it. That sign marks the start of the section that will be repeated

once you get to the end of the piece. You'll see the same sign over the last chord.

6. In the 3rd full measure of the 4th system, after the first chord, there is an **n**, followed by a caret showing that a **c** should be inserted before the **k**.

**Endnotes:**

- <sup>1</sup> [http://www.accordsnouveaux.ch/de/Quellen\\_CH/Quellen\\_CH..html](http://www.accordsnouveaux.ch/de/Quellen_CH/Quellen_CH..html)
- <sup>2</sup> Universitätsbibliothek Basel, CH-Bu Ms. F IX 70. Included with permission.