Dear reader,

What follows is a free sample of Laudon Schuett's method book, "The Fundamentals of Renaissance Lute Playing." In it are the chapters we felt were most essential to a new lutenist and the chapters most helpful to learning the repertoire in the Lute Society of America's "A Graded Repertoire for Renaissance Lute: Level I."

An important note: if you are an LSA member or if you decide to join the LSA, a complete copy of this method will be available to you at no charge. Additionally, LSA members will have free access to any repertoire books that are written beyond level I.

We are excited that you have begun your lute journey with us and we wish you all the best!

Sincerely,

Andrew Flory, Carey Morrow, and Laudon Schuett

THE FUNDAMENTALS
OF
RENAISSANCE LUTE PLAYING



FRENCH TABLATURE EDITION

By Laudon Schuett

SAMPLE

Dedicated to Adelaide and Thomas

Cover Photo by Paul Sánchez

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INTRODUCTION

Preface

In 2022, I published The Art of Lute Playing (Mel Bay, 2022) for intermediate and advanced Renaissance lute players. My original intention had been to write a book accessible to beginners as well, but at the time I felt that no book could capture the nuances of individual, in-person lessons that beginners need to form a firm foundation for their playing. I still believe that lessons are the gold standard for learning to play any instrument, but I also recognize that for many players around the world, access to private lessons may be severely restricted. I have written this book for those students, though it certainly can be used in conjunction with lessons and with a teacher.

I have also set a price that I hope is low enough for almost any student around the world. There is a shortage of affordable (and available), high-quality Renaissance lute methods on the market, and my hope with this method is to fill that gap. This book is designed to help students learn the lute from their first pluck all the way through some of the most difficult surviving repertoire from the 16th and early 17th century. Of course, there is no such thing as a truly comprehensive method and so students are encouraged to seek out as many sources of information as they can and to take private lessons from more advanced players whenever possible. I hope that you find this method helpful in your journey to learn how to play the Renaissance lute.

Many people have helped me get to where I am but I would like to give a special thanks to my former teachers: Paul O'Dette, Frank Koonce, Chuck Hulihan, and Michael Singer. I must also give thanks to my wonderful wife, Meredith Achey, for putting up with me writing *another* book!

French Tablature vs Italian Tablature

When you purchase this book, you will receive two copies, one entirely in French tablature, which uses letters for its fret indicators, and one entirely in Italian tablature, which uses numbers for its fret indicators. Both systems were incredibly popular during the Renaissance and it would be to your great advantage to learn both. While I think it is great to focus on one at a time, you could also switch back and forth as you learn each piece in this book. Another option would be to master one tablature, take a year off from using this book (of course playing other pieces in the meantime) and then returning to master the other. If you are already an experienced player, you can also use this book to strengthen your reading of whichever tablature you are weak in.

In addition to Italian and French tablature, there also existed a German tablature system that uses unique symbols (letters and numbers) for each fret. Unfortunately, at the time of writing this, my software program does not have the ability to write in German lute tablature. If this ever changes, I will release a German lute tablature edition.

How to Use This Book

This book is intended to be used with my Youtube series, *The Fundamentals of Lute Playing*, which is entirely free and publicly available on Youtube **(https://www.youtube.com/@laudonschuett3019)**. Throughout this book, you will find live links that, when clicked, will

take you directly to a video discussing the relevant subject matter. The videos will add depth and nuance to the topics discussed in each chapter.

I do not recommend using this book without the videos unless you cannot access the internet.

Here is a link to the introduction of *The Fundamentals of Lute Playing.* Click on it to learn a bit more about me and the series: **Fundamentals Episode 1: Introduction**

As you proceed through the book, there will be many more links. In some cases, I may share the same video multiple times if the video is relevant to multiple topics or pieces discussed. Rewatching the videos is recommended to solidify your grasp of the subject matter. I have also included a list of all of the videos, with links, in the appendix for easy perusal. **Additionally, whenever I mention a source, you will be able to click that source and it will take you directly to a facsimile copy.** Text that is underlined like this will almost always be a clickable link. My goal was to make this book as user-friendly as possible and I hope students find this helpful.

Preceding the repertoire in this book, I have included several chapters on how to practice and learn these pieces. These instructions are designed to help students get the most out of this text and to learn as effectively as possible. This is especially important for students without an instructor. This book was NOT designed to be "read through," or played through flippantly.

Proceeding through this book too quickly and without following the practice and preparation advice given, will most likely lead to frustration, especially without an instructor to guide you. Students are advised to carefully read the chapter "Learning the Pieces." The chapter "General Principles of Practice" will also be extremely helpful.

If you do have a consistent private instructor, then do feel free to deviate as they see fit.

Errata and Improvements

I'm treating this book as a "first edition." If you find any errors or you feel that something pedagogically useful is missing, please write me at Laudonswebsite@yahoo.com. If it is called for, I will plan on releasing a revised edition or second edition in a couple years and will incorporate both corrections and calls for additional material.

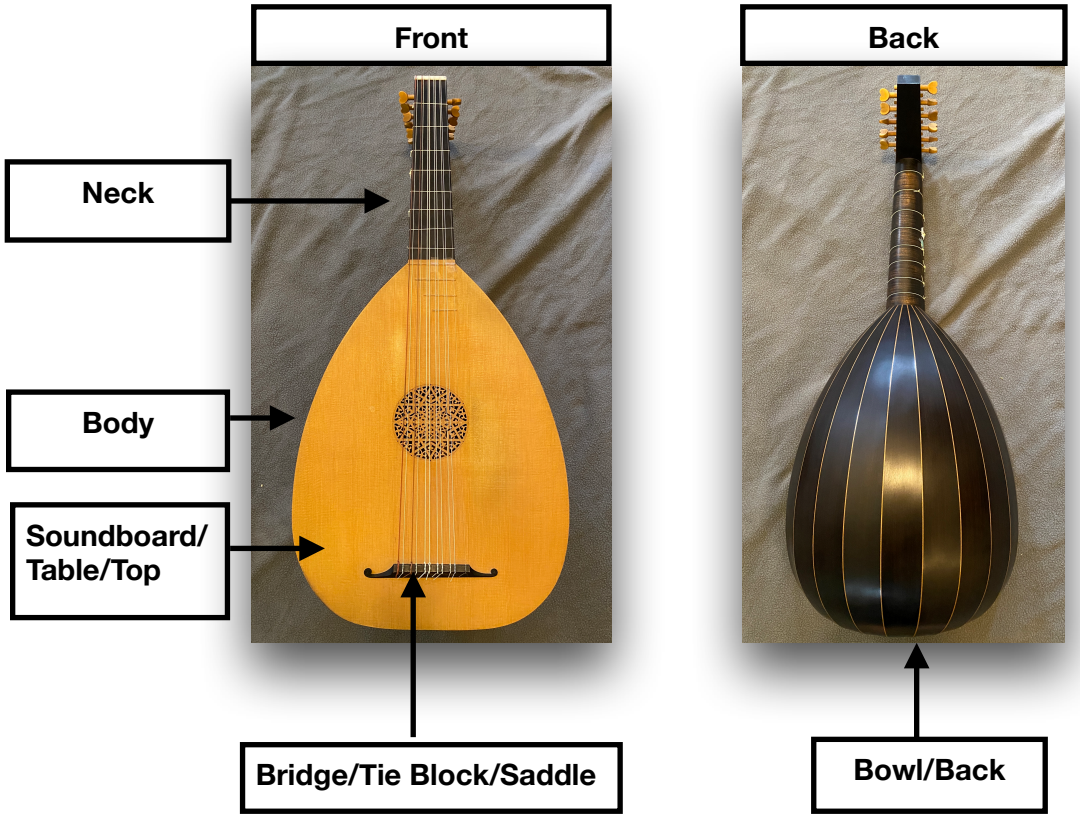
THE INSTRUMENT

Choosing a Lute

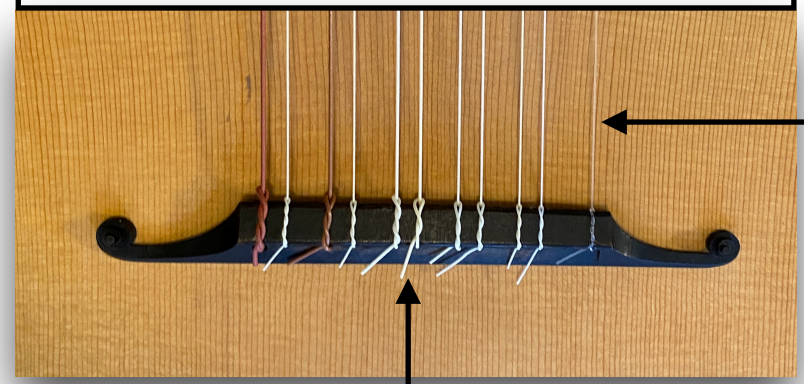
The period of time in which the Renaissance lute was popular covers (roughly) c1490-c1620. It is *very* important that students understand that there are no definitive margins between the medieval period, the Renaissance, and the Baroque. Instruments, compositional styles, and playing techniques often overlap and bleed into different periods. For example, plectrum playing, which was popular during the 15th century, did not suddenly end at the stroke of midnight in the year 1500, but continued to be a popular way to play the lute well into the 16th century. On the other end of things, opera, a hallmark of the Baroque period, was being developed and performed in the 1580s and 1590s, well before the end of the Renaissance era. Keep in mind as you learn more about the lute, its playing techniques, and its history, that often we create broad categories in hindsight, and that while helpful in some ways, they can hinder our understanding of a very complex instrument. While I know this is a lot to take in, it will all be quite relevant when choosing your first lute.

Renaissance lutes come in a great variety of shapes and sizes. Unlike the modern classical guitar, cello, or piano, which come in relatively standardized forms with relatively standardized tunings, Renaissance lutes have a huge amount of variation. Before we discuss that variation, let's familiarize ourselves with the basic structure of the lute and its parts (which are common to all lutes of this period):

A 6 course Renaissance lute:



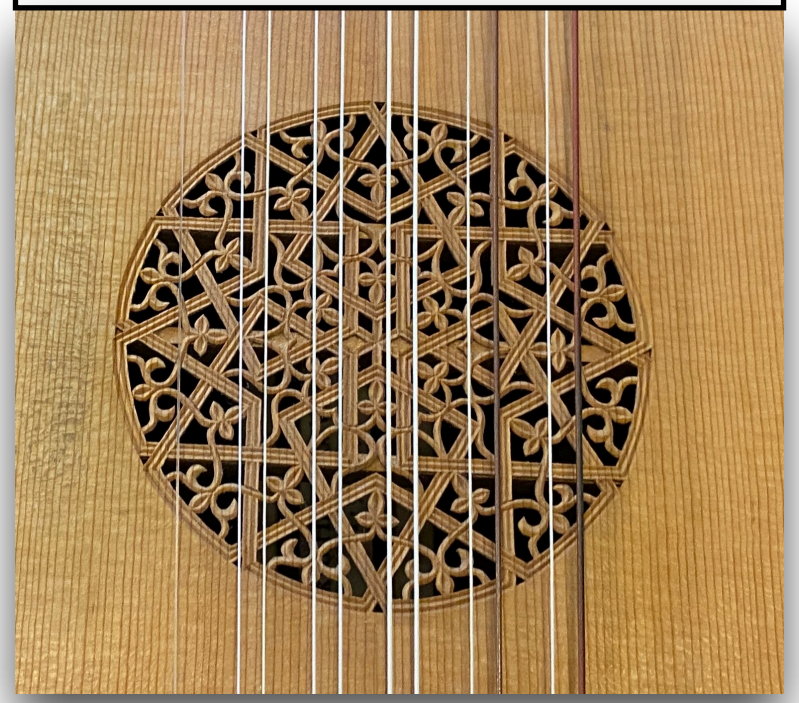
Close-up of the **bridge/saddle**

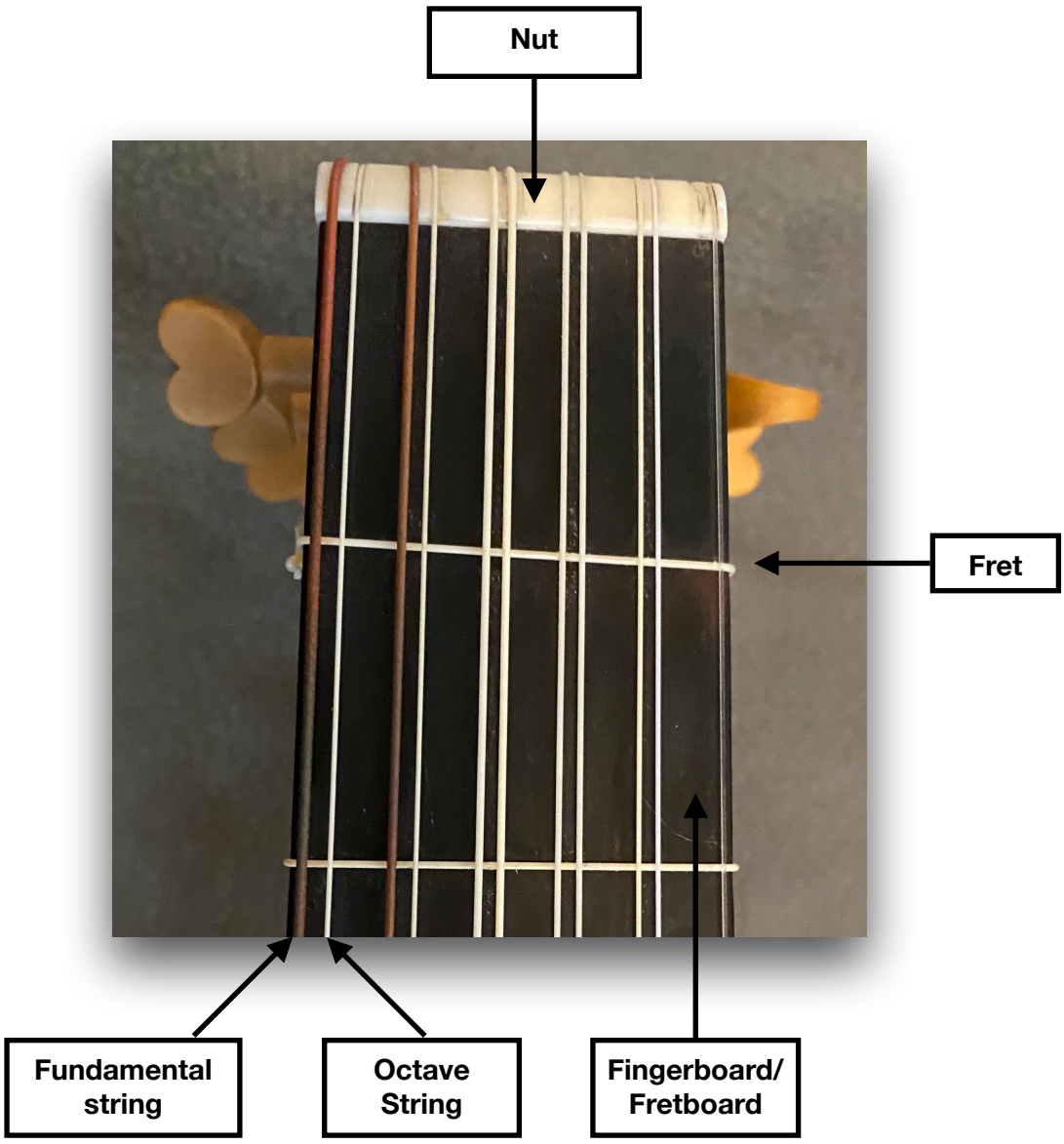


Chanterelle
(Single string)

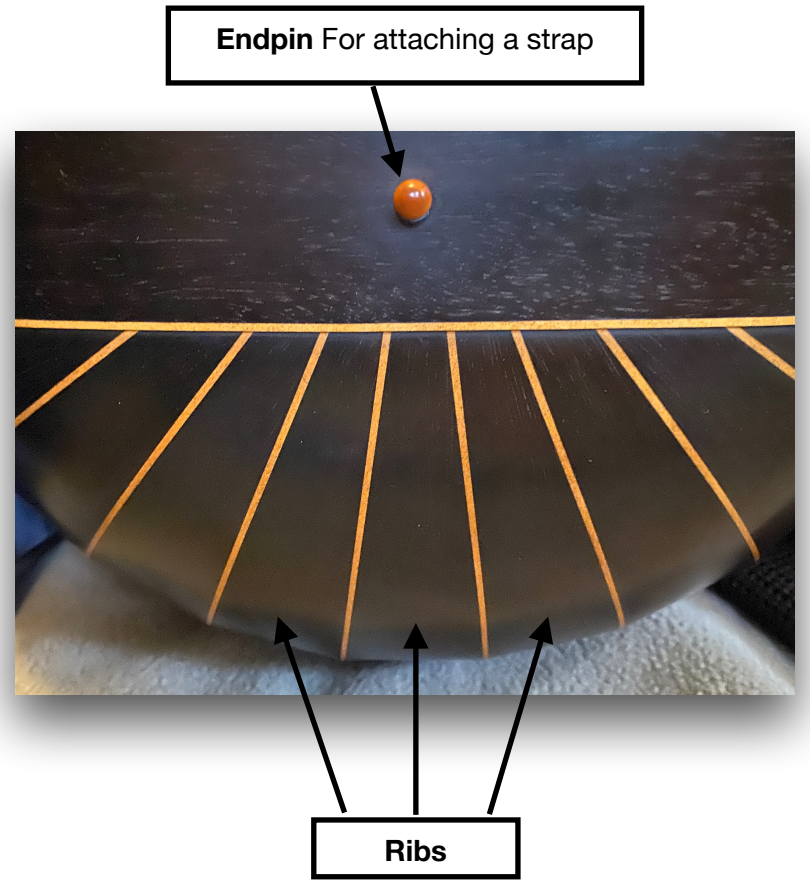
Courses
(Double strings tuned in unisons or octaves)

Close-up of the **rose**




Nut
Fret
Fundamental string
Octave String
Fingerboard/ Fretboard


Headstock
Tuning Peg/
Peg
Pegbox



Now that you are comfortable with the different parts of the lute, let's discuss some of the variation you may encounter when choosing your first lute. First, lutes come in different sizes with different tunings. For example, while Renaissance lutes are most commonly tuned in G, they can also be found in A, F, D, C, etc. Luckily, the intervals of the tuning will be the same, so no matter what pitch your lute is tuned to, you will be able to use this book and read from the tablature provided.

Lutes also come with different numbers of strings, or courses. A *course* is simply the term we use for a pair of strings. The strings of each course can either be tuned in unisons or octaves and this will be discussed later. The basic Renaissance lute is a 6 course lute (with the first course being a *chanterelle* or single string), but Renaissance lutes are are also made with 7, 8, 9, and 10 courses. While the topic is actually more complex than this, it can be helpful to know that generally speaking, courses were added as the 16th century progressed, so that later repertoire often uses more courses. Most of the repertoire in this book is written for a 6 course instrument so that basically any lute can play it. I do include some pieces that use the lower courses, or diapasons, for students with instruments that have 7, 8, 9, or 10 courses (additionally, I will put some supplemental material for these students in the appendix). There will be instructions for how to play a piece if you do not have the necessary bass strings to play them as written.

When it comes to actually choosing a lute, I would prioritize quality over other elements such as tuning or number of courses. For example, if you have the opportunity to purchase a fantastic handcrafted lute in A with 6 courses or a factory built lute in G with 10 courses, I would choose the lute in A. It is common for beginners to start with a cheap instrument because they don't want to invest too much before being sure that they want to commit to it, but this often leads to great frustration because cheaper instruments are often more difficult to play and produce a poorer sound. Getting a quality instrument right at the beginning can be a life-changer.

Because quality Renaissance lutes are not consistently mass-produced (at least at the time that I am writing this), the best place to purchase a lute is either directly from a luthier or used from another player. It is important to keep in mind that if you order an instrument from a luthier, the wait time is often extremely long, sometimes years. The Lute Society of America (LSA) maintains a wonderful page for individuals to buy and sell lutes. Here is a link to that page:

https://lutesocietyofamerica.org/resources/instruments/lutes-for-sale/

Additionally, the LSA also has a lute rental program, found here:

https://lutesocietyofamerica.org/resources/instruments/lute-rental-program/

Renting a high-quality lute can be a wonderful way of testing the waters and seeing if the lute is really the right instrument for you. You can also try a couple different types of instruments to see what you prefer before making a commitment with a purchase.

If you are living outside of the United States, then it can be helpful to go online and find the closest lute society. For example, if you live in the United Kingdom, you can contact The Lute Society, which provides many of the same benefits as the LSA. Over the years, many lute societies have popped up around the world, though many have also disappeared, so it is worth doing a thorough internet search. That said, keep in mind that organizations like the LSA and The Lute Society are international organizations that are committed to fostering lute playing all around the world. If you do not have a lute society near you, you should feel absolutely comfortable contacting the LSA or The Lute Society. They exist to help new players!

While it might be frustrating, getting your first lute will likely be very different than going to a guitar shop and getting your first guitar. You will probably have to spend more time reaching out to people and getting advice. In general, this is a good thing to get used to with the lute because it will also be very helpful when it comes to purchasing strings and frets, and getting repairs done on your instrument.

As for factory made instruments, I can't really make any recommendations. They can be a good starting point, but most students will need to move on to a better instrument within 6 months to a year. In general, I think it is much better to just save up a bit more money and purchase a hand-crafted instrument. If that is not possible, you can use a factory-built instrument to start. It seems that every couple years a new company pops up trying to make affordable lutes so I will not name any specific ones here but they are easily searchable on Google and other internet search engines. If you are unsure of whether an instrument is factory-made or hand-built, they can generally be distinguished by the fact that a hand-made instrument will often have the maker's name printed beneath the rose, in the body of the instrument. For example, one lute may say "Lute by Grant Tomlinson," while another might say "Roosebeck Lute, model ###." The "named" instrument will generally be of much higher

quality, though there may certainly be exceptions to this as inexperienced luthiers also make instruments.

The Care and Maintenance of Your Lute

Relevant video: Fundamentals Episode 38: Maintenance and Repair

Once you have purchased your lute, there are some simple things you can do to protect the instrument from harm and maintain (or even improve) its current condition. If you have purchased your instrument directly from a luthier, then I would also advice you to get whatever advice you can from them and to contact them if there are any issues with the lute going down the road. If you have purchased the instrument used, then, if possible, it is always nice to take it to a luthier to make sure that it is in good condition and there are no issues. If this is not possible, I would recommend taking the instrument to an experienced player who can check it for problems. If that is not possible, here is a basic list of things to check when you first receive your instrument. Keep in mind that this is not comprehensive and that often issues are caught later when you are playing your repertoire.

Checklist:

1) Check the soundboard for cracks. It is not uncommon for a lute to have some “hairline” splits in the soundboard, but if these were not discussed when purchasing the instrument, you may want to get them checked. Almost all older lutes have them but if you are purchasing a new instrument from a luthier, it is definitely something to discuss and assess.
2) Examine where the soundboard meets the bowl (or back of lute) and make sure that it is flush around the entire instrument. Sometimes during transport, glue will melt and the soundboard can start to rise off the bowl. With older instruments, you may see a small, but stable amount of this. Make sure that it is not something new that happened during transport of the instrument.
3) Examine the bridge (or tie-block) and make sure that it is glued flush to the soundboard. Again, glue can melt or weaken and the bridge can start to rise or separate from the soundboard. This needs to be fixed. A lute builder would be the preferred repairperson for this, but other luthiers are also often comfortable doing this repair (though you may want to put them in touch with a lute builder so that they use the correct techniques and glue).
4) Examine the back (or bowl) of the lute and look for any cracks or wood splitting. Sometimes this is serious, but often not. In either case, a good thing to get repaired when possible.
5) When moving the instrument, listen for any unusual sounds coming from the body. For example, does it sound like there are any loose pieces of wood or material in the lute? Sometimes a small piece of the rose can break off and fall into the instrument. This can usually be ignored or blown out with an air canister or just by jostling the instrument gently until it falls out. A loose bar (part of the internal structure of the instrument) is more serious and needs to be repaired.
6) The process of detecting a loose bar is a bit more complicated but you can gently push on the soundboard around the edge of the body with your fingers. The soundboard should generally be quite firm. If you find a spot that feels “spongy,” it may warrant further appraisal by a luthier. To fix a bar, the luthier will need to remove the soundboard (temporarily) and so this is best done by either a lute builder or an oud builder.
7) Check the rose for any damage. While this is an ornamental element of the lute, if it is damaged, pieces can fall into the body and cause issues. If there is damage but the

instrument is fine otherwise, it is generally not worth getting fixed unless you have a convenient luthier nearby.

8) Check the neck of the instrument for any obvious warping or bowing/bending. It should be (basically) level with the soundboard. There can also be subtle problems with the neck that can cause intonation issues. This may be too complicated for beginners to check but a more advanced player can check the tuning of an opening string and then test the pitch at the 5th, 7th, and 12th frets. If the open string is perfectly in tune but the other notes are out: first check to make sure that the frets are placed correctly. Then check to see if the issue occurs across multiple strings. If it is just the one string, replace it and check again. If it is multiple strings, then it may be worth having the instrument checked by a luthier. For beginners, if you have any concerns, either take the instrument to a luthier or have a more experienced player check it. If you do not have an experienced lutenist near you, an experienced classical guitarist would also be able to check this for you!

Humidification

Relevant video: Fundamentals Episode 38: Maintenance and Repair

It is important to protect your instrument from extremely dry and extremely humid environments. If you are an amateur player who keeps their instruments at home, you have a number of options:

1) There are a variety of systems available for maintaining the humidity level within a single room. These can be quite expensive but if you own lots of instruments, it may be a great investment.
2) If you live in a humid environment, you can use your home or apartment's air conditioning unit to draw the water from the air and keep the humidity down.
3) There are many guitar case humidifiers available on the market and these can often work quite well. The ones that tend not to do well are the ones that need to be placed in a sound hole, though even those, when placed in the head part of the case, are fine.

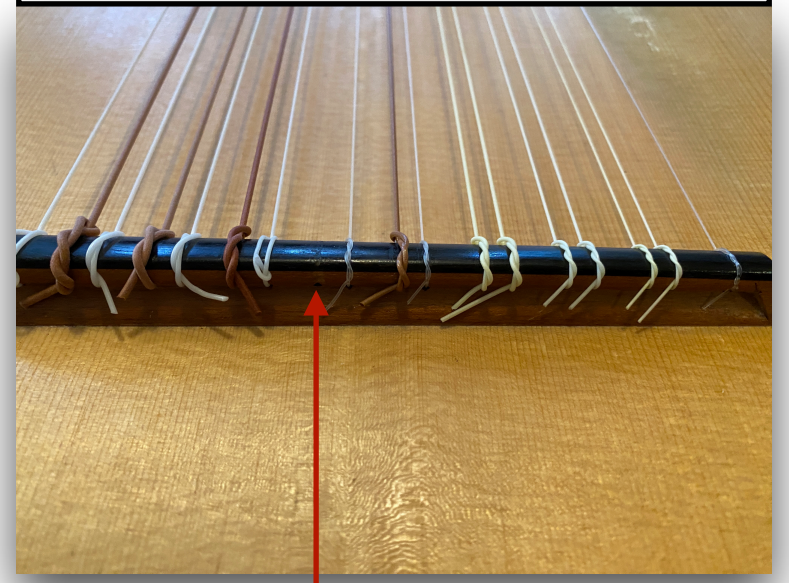
For professionals and players who often travel with their instruments, things can be a little more complicated. I've had to go from extremely dry environments like Arizona to extremely humid environments like Charleston, SC within a single day. Luckily, there are some new systems, like the D'Addario Humidipak system, that maintain a safe humidity level in the case whether you are in a dry environment or a humid environment. Overall, I think these systems are the simplest and I highly recommend them unless you have a humidity-controlled room in your house.

Playing outside: Unless the weather is very mild, I would generally use a cheaper instrument for this. There are companies that produce relatively cheap instruments in the $800 range. If you want to play outside a great deal, then I recommend owning one of these so that when damage occurs, less investment is lost than when using your nicer lute.

Changing Strings

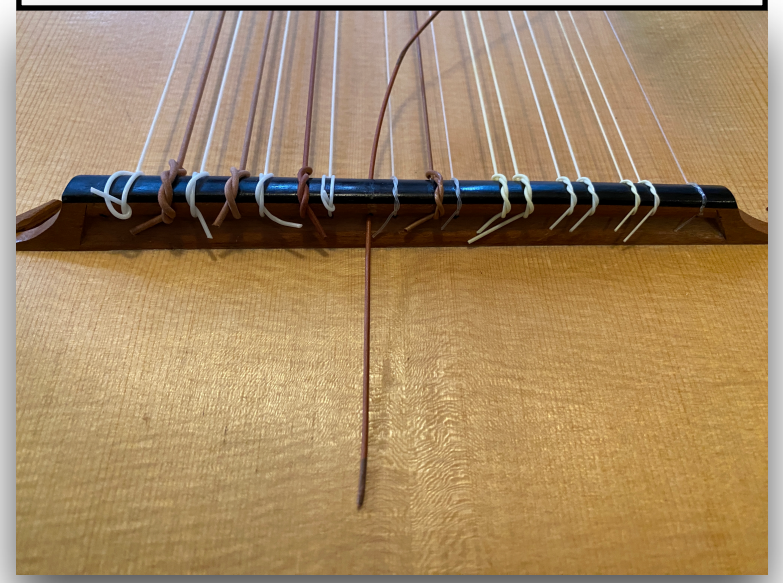
Obviously, the best way to learn to change strings is to have an experienced player take you through the process and then observe you while you do it yourself. Assuming that is not possible, I have provided some images below that show how to change a string. I have not found a huge difference between changing gut strings vs changing nylon or nylgut (as opposed to frets, which can be a bit different). The one the thing that can be different is the diameter of the bass strings depending on the material. If the bridge holes are too small for the string to pass through, you can take the instrument to a luthier or even a good classical guitar shop and they can expand the hole slightly. This is particularly helpful if you are trying to transition from wound basses (which did not exist in the 16th century) to thicker unwound gut or nylgut.

How to Change a String

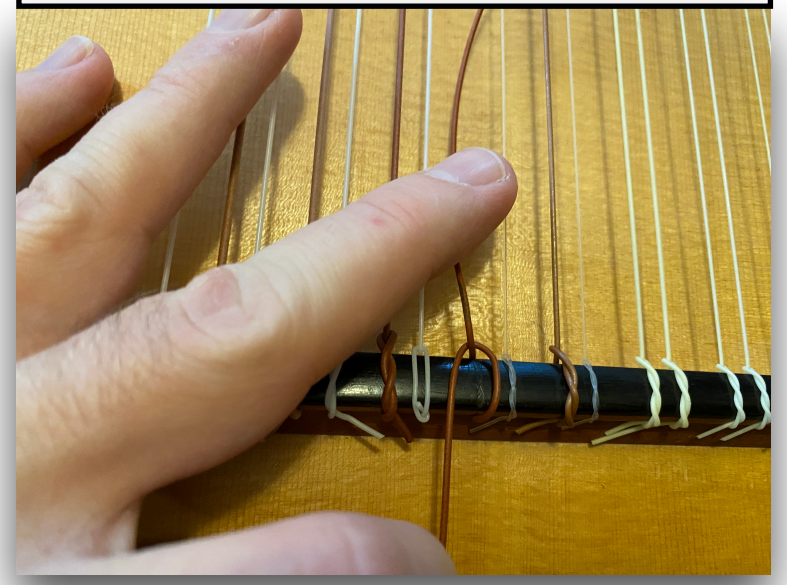


String hole in the bridge

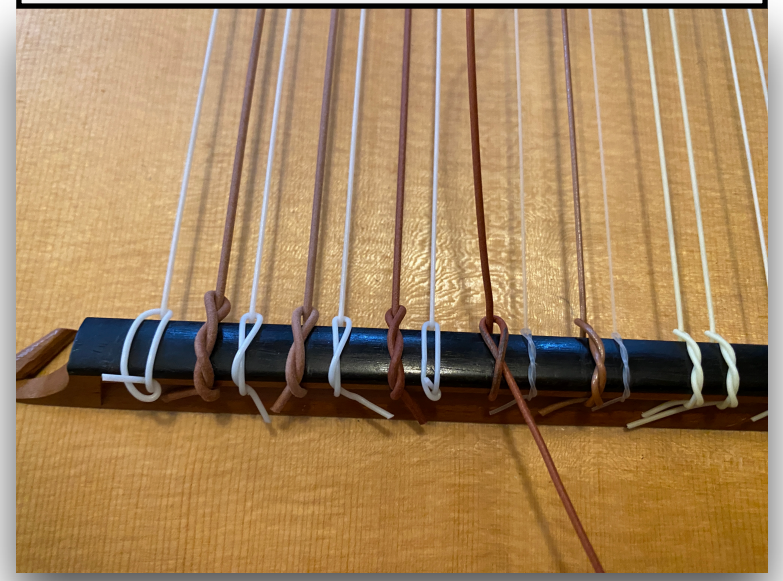
Insert the string into the bridge hole



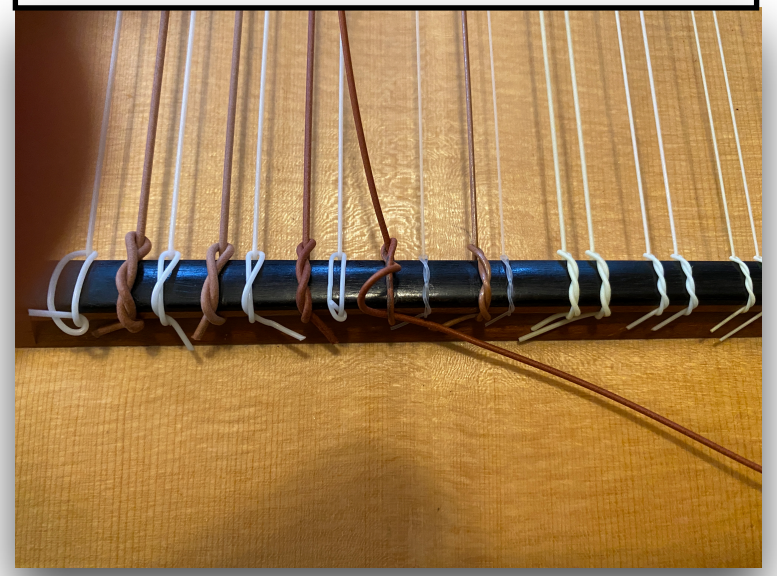
Wrap the end of string around and behind like this



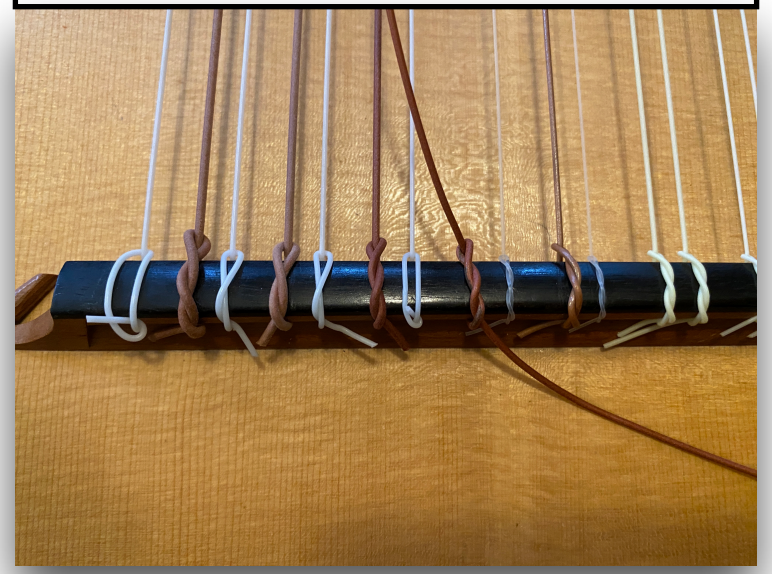
Pull under and through like this



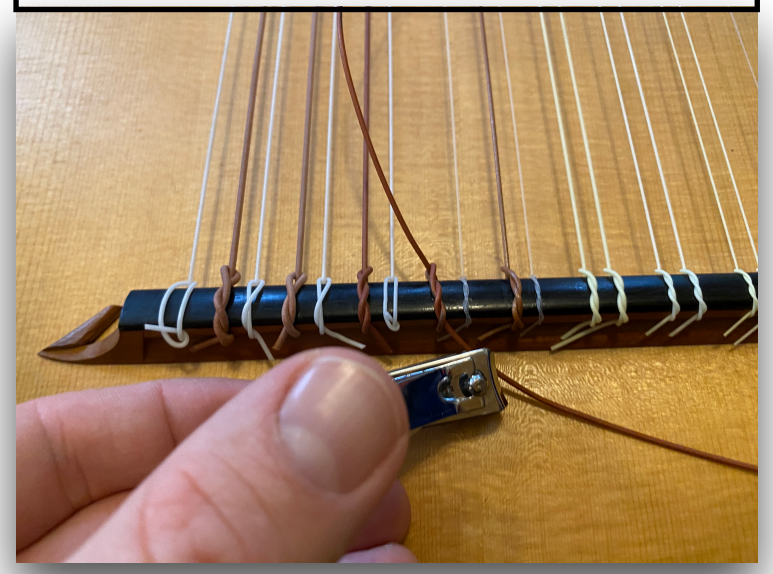
Pull under and through a second time like this



Pull both ends of string to tighten



Clip the string so it does not touch the soundboard

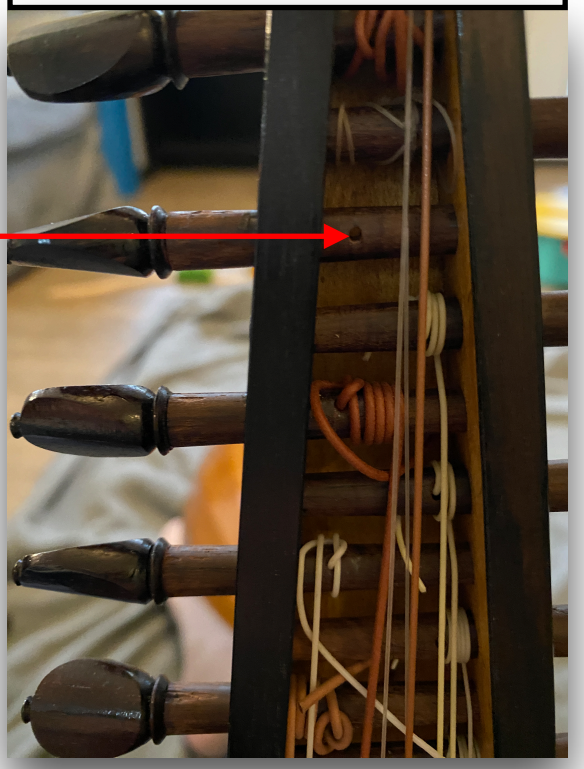


It should look about like this

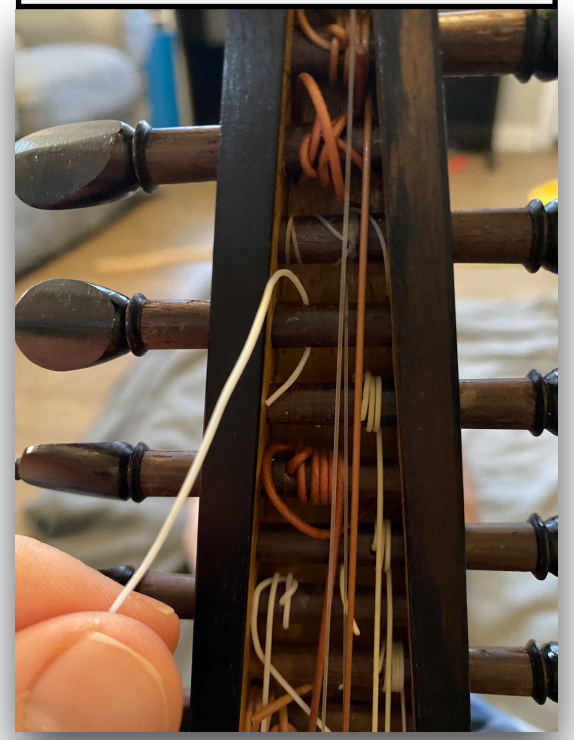


Peg hole in peg box

Hole



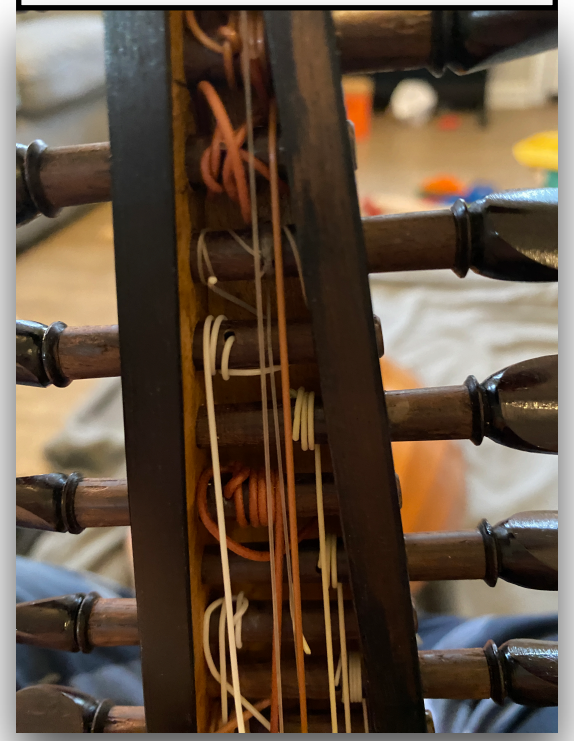
Pass string through hole



Tie a knot like this



Tighten the string and begin tuning



Types of Strings

Remarkable progress has been made in recent years when it comes to the production of lute strings, both in the recreation of historically-inspired gut strings and in synthetic alternatives. I think both gut strings and synthetic strings have their strengths and weaknesses and as players and performers, it is up to each of us to work out the best strings for ourselves and our instrument(s). I've found that gut strings tend to create the greatest variety of colors when playing but can be inconsistent, expensive, and they sometimes wear out faster than their synthetic alternatives. Synthetic strings tend to be more stable and consistent, but do lack the color that gut strings bring. I love using gut when possible (and when I can afford it!), but will generally use synthetic strings because of their stability when traveling and the fact they generally last longer (I play my instruments a LOT). Nylon strings are a third option but I think they are generally inferior to both gut and synthetic gut. The one exception I make is that I do use a nylon chanterelle (1st string) when traveling and performing because it is much less likely to break.

Finding appropriate strings when you are a beginner is often challenging and confusing. If you are a guitarist, you can simply buy a pack of strings and they will likely work just fine. For the lute, which comes in a great variety of sizes and tunings, things are a bit more complicated. My

best recommendation is to contact a distributor directly and provide them with details on your instrument such as:

1) String length: length of the string from the nut to the bridge
2) What type of lute: G lute, A lute, E lute, etc.
3) Pitch level: A=440, 415, etc.

If you struggle to answer these questions, makers and distributors such as Aquila Corde Armoniche are very friendly and always looking to help new players. It may take a couple email exchanges to work out the right strings, but is well worth the effort. Additionally, if you decide to make changes in the future, they often keep records and can help you with adjustments. I put off contacting a string distributor directly for a long time and it was a huge mistake. When students ask me about strings, the first thing I recommend is that they contact a distributor and open a line of communication about their instrument. The end result is always a better sounding instrument.

Some distributors:

1) Aquila Corde Armoniche (Italy)- **https://aquilacorde.com/**
2) Boston Catlines (USA)- **https://www.bostoncatlines.com/**
3) Gamut Music, Inc. (USA)- **https://www.gamutmusic.com/**
4) The Early Music Shop- **https://earlymusicshop.com/**
5) Kuerschner (Germany)- **https://www.kuerschner-saiten.de/**
6) Northern Renaissance Instruments (UK)- **https://nristringshop.co.uk/**

Changing Frets

Relevant videos:

Lute Society of America video on tying frets with Travis Carey, luthier

Like changing strings, learning to change frets is best done in person, but I will provide some advice and some images that will hopefully make your first attempts easier. Frets need to be changed (or rotated) when they get too loose or when the string starts to make a groove in the fret and the note starts to buzz or sound muffled. **Before you remove an old fret, make sure that you know the diameters of the current frets you have on your instrument, particularly if they were working well before getting worn out.** Luthiers will often provide the diameters when you purchase the instrument. If you buy your lute secondhand, be sure to ask the seller for the diameters. If, for whatever reason, you don't have access to that information, you can purchase a micrometer at a home improvement store (Like Home Depot or Lowe's in the US) or on Amazon. When you measure the frets with the micrometer, be sure to measure on the back of the neck, where the frets will be less worn down. This will give you a more accurate diameter.

There are some unique qualities and considerations when choosing the type of fret material you will use on your instrument. Gut, synthetic gut, and nylon each have their own characteristic advantages and disadvantages:

ANIMAL GUT FRETS

Positive qualities: They wrap very snuggly around the fingerboard, often creasing just at the edge. This is great because it eliminates any gap between the fret and the soundboard. Little air pockets can cause issues with tone and sound production. Gut frets are also very easy to spin when they get worn, buying you some more time before actually needing to change them. When the fret is worn down, simply pull it back toward the nut (so it loosens a little), rotate the fret so that the worn side is now on the back of the fingerboard, and then push it back up into position.

Negative qualities: They do wear out faster than other types of frets (though this is somewhat negated by spinning) and I have found that they are more likely to break.

SYNTHETIC FRET GUT

Positive qualities: They are generally very cheap and if you are someone who plays your instrument a lot, it can help keep costs down. They tend to be a bit more resilient than gut and so it takes longer for them to wear down.

Negative qualities: They don't tend to spin very well, so once they are worn out, they need to be replaced. You also need to work a little harder than with gut to avoid having a gap between the fret and the fingerboard (air pocket). I will generally get the fret quite tight before pushing it down into position (see images below).

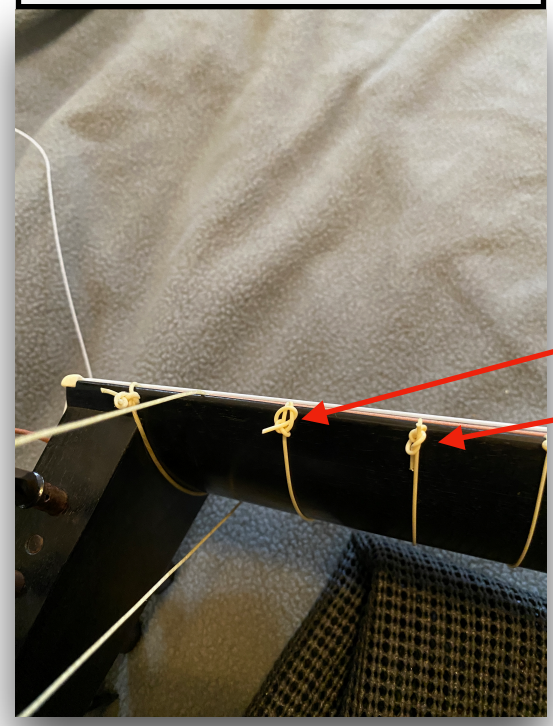
NYLON

Positive qualities: My first lute came with nylon frets and I don't think I needed to change them for ten years…..so there is that!

Negative qualities: You have to work really hard to avoid having a gap between the fret and the fingerboard (especially near the edge of the fingerboard). Using the thinnest usable diameter helps. Nylon frets can also leave a deeper "groove" in the fingerboard than gut or synthetic gut, so something to be aware of if you ever want to sell the instrument.

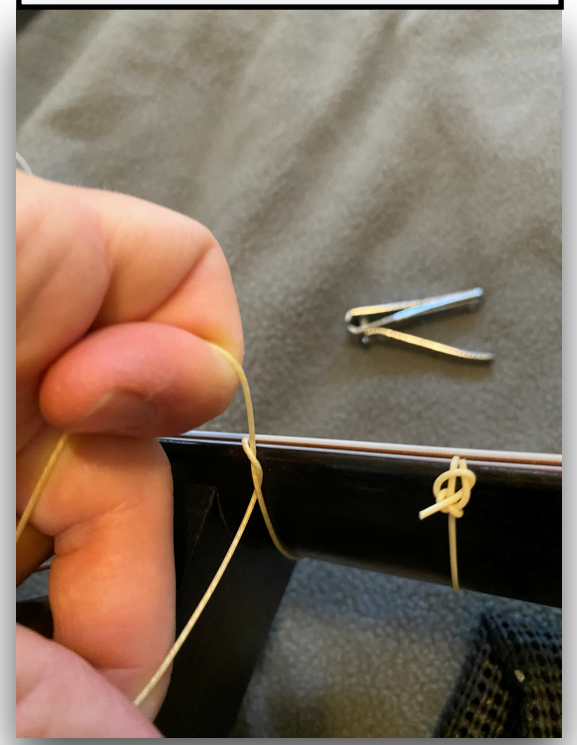
Here are some still images of the knots so that you can use them as a reference. There are a number of ways that people like to tie their frets but just keep in mind that it doesn't matter how you do it as long as it is tight and secure. **I've put some examples of *bad* knots for comparison on the instrument as well.**

Slide new fret underneath all the strings



Bad knots

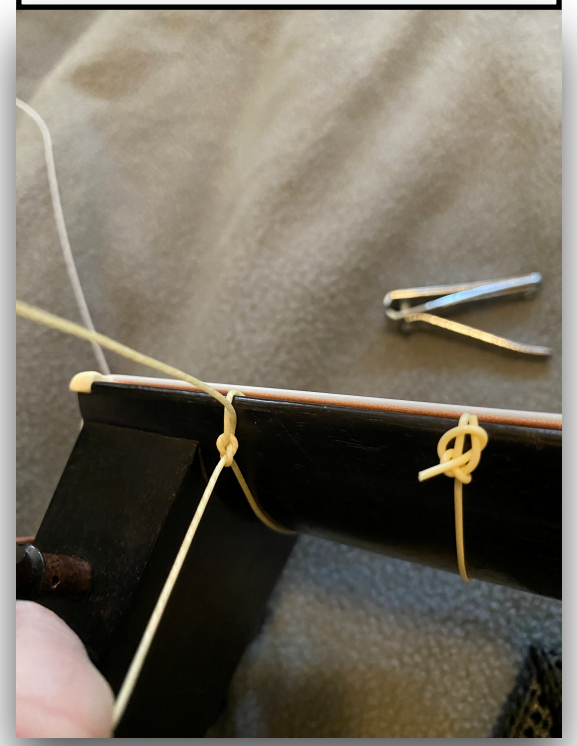
Tie knot back a bit from where fret Will be



Make second knot like this



Tighten hard



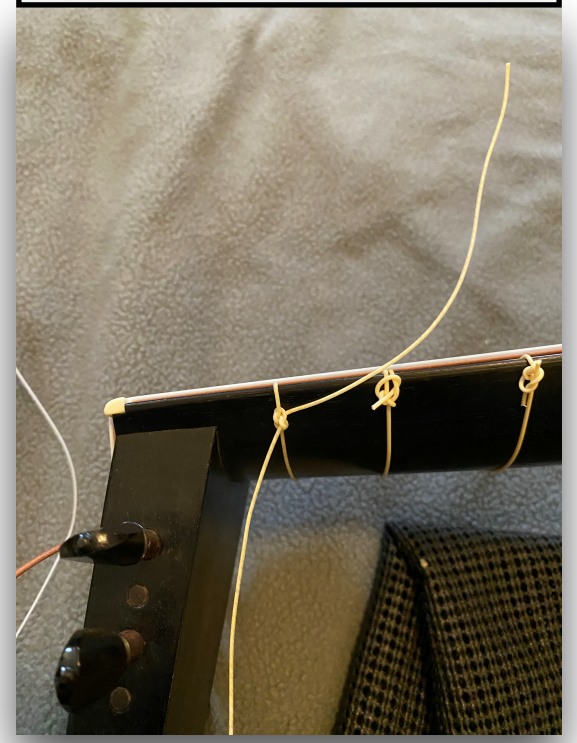
Create third knot like this



Tighten very hard like this

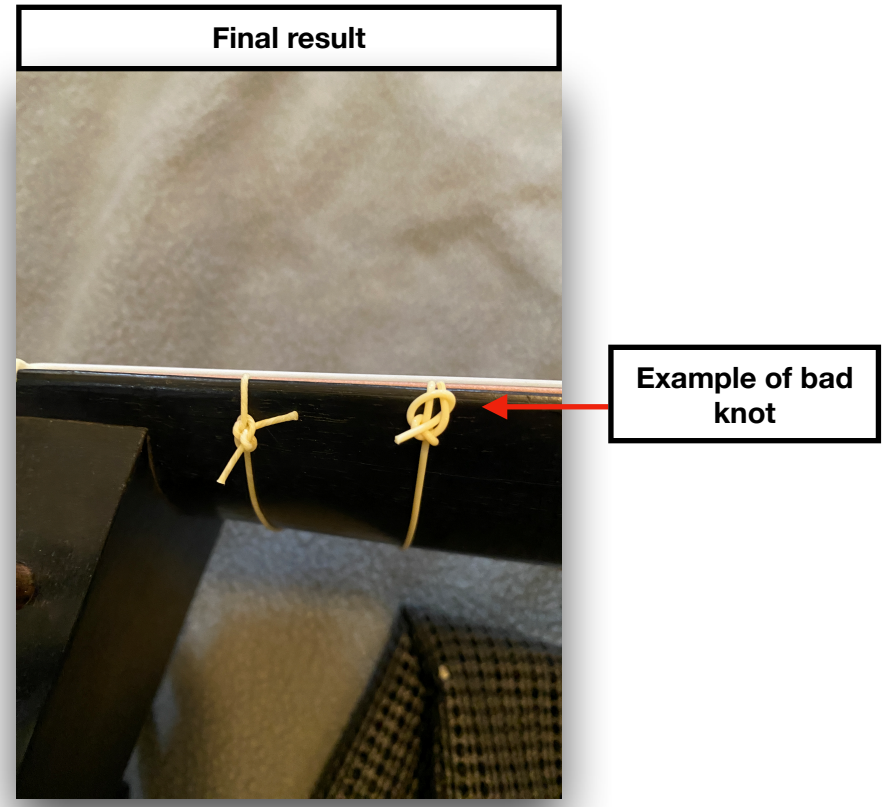


Slide fret up into position



Clip excess fret





Travel

It is wonderful to travel with a lute because it allows us to continue our playing and practicing, but it can also come with some significant stress. The lute is a delicate instrument and the options for strong cases to protect them are not great. Here are some basic tips for the most common forms of travel:

Driving-

1) Make sure to keep the instrument out of direct sunlight or cover it with something to protect it from the sun. Even in its case, a lute can heat up very quickly in a car.
2) If your car is loaded with other items, make sure that you do not place anything on top of your lute. Most lute cases are quite fragile and with items shifting in the car, you can inadvertently put pressure on the top of the case, which can damage the instrument.
3) When leaving the vehicle, make sure the instrument is out of sight. Odd-looking instruments are sometimes targeted more often by thieves because they think they might be worth more.
4) If you need to leave the vehicle for an extended period of time, consider bringing the lute with you, especially if the temperatures outside are very hot or very cold. If I stop at a restaurant, I always bring my lute in with me.

Flying-

1) If you can afford it, just buy a second seat for the lute. This completely removes the stress of flying with the instrument. The only hassle sometimes is getting the seatbelt around the instrument so purchasing a seatbelt extender will basically make your trip as effortless as possible.
2) If you can't afford a second seat, or one is not available, do everything you can to get the instrument into an overhead bin. Pay extra for early seating, book flights on larger planes, or ask other passengers if they would be willing to rearrange their bags to get that lute in. As a last resort, you can also ask the flight attendants if they would be willing to put it in their coat closet. That has saved me many times…
3) If you must put your instrument below the plane, then having the strongest possible case is a must. Even with that, you need to prepare yourself for the possibility of damage. It is simply an unfortunate reality of gate-checking an instrument. You can purchase special flight cases, which are essentially metal boxes with foam padding inside. You can place the lute case inside, pad it, and lock it. It will need to be checked though and this does add to the cost of flight.

Tuning

Relevant Video: Fundamentals Episode 4: Basic Tuning

We are a bit goofy in these videos but the information is still good:
BEDLAM tuning video part 1 (more advanced)
BEDLAM tuning video part 2 (more advanced)

Unlike the piano, cello, violin, guitar and other common instruments that are relatively standardized when it comes to their tuning, the lute presents some unique challenges. As previously discussed, lutes come in a variety of sizes and are tuned at different pitch levels. The issue of historical tuning systems can also add an additional barrier to beginning lute students. As frustrating as this certainly is to the student, it can also be difficult for the teacher. I have received numerous messages via email or on Youtube from people asking how they should tune their instruments and my response is almost always that I need specific information about the instrument they own to best advise them. Giving a student inaccurate information about how to tune their lutes could cause the strings to break and could also potentially cause damage to the instrument. Here is a list of the most common Renaissance lute sizes and their tunings:

Type of lute	1st course	2nd course	3rd course	4th course	5th course	6th course
Octave lute in D	D5	A4	E4	C4	G3	D3
Octave lute in C	C6	G5	D5	Bflat4	F4	C3
Descant lute in A	A4	E4	B3	G3	D3	A2

Type of lute	1st course	2nd course	3rd course	4th course	5th course	6th course
Alto lute in G (Common)	G4	D4	A3	F3	C3	G2
Tenor lute in E	E4	B3	Gflat 3	D3	A2	E2
Bass lute in D	D4	A3	E3	C3	G2	D2

You will find that the most common lute today is the alto lute in G, though we are starting to see more and more variety. Many of these lutes could also have additional bass strings called “diapasons.” Usually the 7th course was tuned a step below the 6th or a 4th below. For example, a 7 course G lute could have the 7th course tuned as an F or a D. For an 8 course lute tuned in G, it could be the 7th course is F or F# and the 8th is D. Once you get into 9 and 10 course lutes, the diapasons are usually tuned in steps, like this:

6th course	**7th course**	**8th course**	**9th course**	**10th course**
G	F or F#	E or E flat	D	C

Another consideration is octave stringing. Other than the chanterelle (1st string), every course has two strings. The second and third course are tuned in unisons but starting with the 4th course down, octave stringing becomes a possibility. The octave is generally the string closest to the floor and the “fundamental” is closest to your head when playing. Early repertoire such as Spinacino, Capirola, and Dalza rely heavily on having an octave on the 4th course (in addition to the 5th and 6th). This 4th course octave seems to have gone out of favor sometime in the middle of the 16th century and by the early 17th century, many players are in favor of unisons all the way through the 5th course. This may have been due to changes in how strings were made or may have reflected an urge to make the counterpoint in the basses clearer. It is generally thought that octaves help to “enliven” the sound of a bass note. Because of this, when we pluck a bass course, even though we are technically plucking two notes an octave apart, we usually treat it as a single pitch.

There was no pitch level standard in the 16th century as there (mostly) is today. Toward the end of the 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th, efforts were made to set a “pitch standard” for Western classical music. The end result of that standardization is that most classical musicians will tune their A to 440Hz (or 440 vibrations per second). If you have an alto G lute, this would be the A on the 2nd fret of your first string. Bruce Haynes wrote a wonderful book called The History of Performing Pitch: The Story of A if you are interested in learning more about the history of pitch level. For our purposes, it is just important to know that pitch level could vary significantly from town to town and even church to church in the Renaissance period. Let’s talk about what this means for you on a practical level.

In general, it is a good idea to stay within a half step below or a half step above what the luthier intended. For example, if you purchase a G lute that was built and strung by the luthier to be tuned at A=415, then you can either keep the instrument at 415, tune it down to 392, or tune it up to 440. Keep in mind that you must also consider the tension of the strings, so tuning up always carries the additional risk of breaking a string. This can be easily resolved by simply

contacting your string distributer, giving them your string length, and asking them for strings that will work well at the higher pitch

For beginners, the easiest way to tune your lute is to use an electronic tuner. Most guitar tuners work quite fine as long as they are not designed to be guitar-exclusive. You want to make sure you purchase a chromatic tuner. Most tuners come with the option to change the "A," usually a pair of arrows that allows you to move the pitch level up and down. Once you have the pitch level you want (let's say A=415), you simply tune each string of each course using the tuner. It is not uncommon for beginners to break strings while first learning to tune, so I highly recommend having spare strings available for when that happens. I generally will tell beginning students not to worry too much about historical tuning systems until they have been playing at least 6 months or a year. The only exception would be a student who is very advanced on another instrument. Historical tuning systems add another layer of complexity to tuning the lute. I talk about this a fair bit in the BEDLAM videos above, but I will summarize some things here. If you are a beginner, you may wish to skip the following paragraphs for now.

The laws of physics rarely yield to human will and when it comes to dividing the octave, it certainly does not. To discuss tuning systems, the first thing we need to describe is what it means to be "in tune." There are actually two answers to this, one based in physics and one based in compromise. Let's talk about the answer based in physics first. Imagine a single string on a lute with its frets removed. Let's say that when you pluck that string, it produces a sound that vibrates at 100 vibrations per second, or 100Hz. If you take your finger and place it at the exact halfway point of the string's sounding length (The vibrating part of the string), press down, and then pluck, you will produce a pitch at 200Hz, or exactly double what the open string produced. This means that when you use 1/2 the vibrating length of the string, it produces a note that is exactly an octave above what note is produced when the string is plucked with no finger down. Now, if you move your finger closer to the nut so 2/3 of the sounding string vibrates when you pluck, you will produce a pitch that is a perfect 5th above the string's pitch with no finger down. If you continue to move your finger toward the nut so that 3/4 of the string vibrates, you will produce a pitch that is a perfect 4th above the string when it has no finger pushing down on it. You can continue this process and produce all of the intervals using perfect ratios, what we call "justly" or "purely" tuned intervals:

1/2= octave
2/3= perfect fifth
3/4= perfect 4th

Etc.

So, why don't we just use a tuning system that uses only "purely" tuned intervals? That sounds great! Well, the problem arises when we start to make music from these intervals. Imagine a situation where a group of singers, singing *a cappella* (with no accompaniment), begins a piece on the pitch C. They then sing a 2 minute solo piece where every interval is "purely" tuned. It sounds fantastic but when you compare the C they started on and the C they end on, you discover that they are two different pitches. Now, this isn't necessarily a problem. If you are okay with having a shifting pitch level, then the piece will sound absolutely beautiful. But what if you are a lute player or a keyboardist and you can't adjust the pitch level as you play? Let's take a moment to examine this issue.

Because lutes and keyboard instruments are "fixed" pitch instruments, we can't actively adjust the tuning as we play, which means we run into serious issues when trying to play only "justly" tuned intervals. Justly tuned intervals rely on pitch flexibility because you are always tuning the next note to the one currently being played. There are technically no "absolute" pitches in just

intonation. This means that at one point in a piece of music the A might be 440 Hz but six measures later it might be 446 Hz. Vocalists can easily do this but it is practically impossible on the lute unless you plan out every note ahead of time and this would only work for that particular piece. So, at the end of the day, just intonation, as beautiful as it is, is not generally considered a very practical tuning system for the lute.

Many of these issues arise because of harmonies (notes sounding together at the same time). The physics and math goes above my poor lute-playing brain a bit but I will try to explain it the way it was explained to me by someone with a degree in physics. Once you add harmonies, counterpoint, and especially any kind of modulation or borrowing, it becomes incredibly difficult to balance all of the intervals and make sure they are all justly tuned. Invariably, something gives and a sacrifice must be made, which then means you are using a temperament, or compromise system and are no longer performing a piece with just intonation. As I pointed out above, there are vocal ensembles that take the time to work it out and do perform using just intonation, so it is not impossible, just very difficult, even with voices. For plucked instruments, there are guitars that have micro and moveable frets, allowing more note options and making it easier to play with just intonation. Similarly, there are keyboards with extra split keys and multiple manuals to try to make it easier. Many of these tricks were tried in the 16th century as well, but didn't really become mainstream. Instead, alternate tuning systems were devised that are beautiful in their own right.

While on the surface it may seem that a tuning system with all its intervals perfectly, and acoustically, in tune would make the most ideal system for music, but is this true? We've talked about some of the practical reasons just intonation is not always ideal, but what about musical reasons? Well, imagine going to see a movie where the character you are following has a completely normal day with absolutely no drama or stress. While I have no doubt there is an art film out there exactly like this, I'm not entirely sure I would want to watch something like it more than a fews times and then only as an escape from the norm or out of curiosity. Similarly, in music it is helpful to have certain intervals be less in tune than others. This can accentuate or even create dissonance which then can be used in a multitude of ways, perhaps most powerfully at cadences. With changes in style and composition over the centuries, there also came significant changes in the way mainstream Western art music was tuned. There have been a huge variety of tuning systems but I will summarize the most popular below. Please keep in mind that MANY other systems exist, especially when you step outside of Western classical music:

Just Intonation- As discussed above, just intonation is a tuning system that uses *acoustically* tuned intervals based upon simple ratios. While technically "perfect," just intonation is difficult to apply using "fixed pitch" instruments such as the lute or keyboard. There are also some musical drawbacks to having every interval perfectly tuned. This tuning system, because it is based on simple ratios, is likely to be one of the oldest, if not the oldest of the known tuning systems.

Pythagorean Tuning- A tuning system popular in the medieval period. This system is based around perfectly tuned perfect fifths, fourths, and octaves, but uses wildly out-of-tune thirds and sixths. When you examine the music of this period, you realize that the out-of-tune intervals are used to accentuate the cadences by making the pre-resolution interval as dissonant as possible. For example, the standard medieval cadence is usually:

A minor 3rd resolving in to a unison, a major third resolving out to a perfect fifth, a minor sixth resolving in to a perfect fifth, or a major sixth resolving out to an octave.

In each case, the resolution harmony is a perfectly tuned interval and the interval that precedes it (the dissonance) is quite out of tune (when compared to an acoustically tuned version of the interval). In this case, we have the perfect marriage of a tuning system with a style of music that uses the inherent dissonant intervals to make the music more expressive.

Meantone Temperament- In some ways, a mean tone temperament is the opposite of Pythagorean tuning. This tuning system emphasizes tuning the thirds and sixths in exchange for fourths and fifths that are out of tune. The most basic form of meantone temperament is 1/4 comma meantone, which has perfectly tuned thirds and sixths with wildly out-of-tune fourths and fifths. There are "milder" forms of meantone (1/5 comma meantone and 1/6 comma meantone) that soften the effect by trading a bit of the tuning of the 3rds and 6ths for slightly more in tune 4ths and 5ths. This tuning system was popular during the Renaissance and may have come as part of the *Contenance Angloise* or "English Style" that arrived on the continent from England in the 15th century. This tuning system works extremely well when combined with the basic Renaissance cadences, particularly the 4-3 suspension. The out of tune 4th adds a lot of color to the dissonance and makes the resolution to 3 more powerful. For a Renaissance lute player, the meantone temperaments are probably the best tuning systems to get acquainted with.

Well temperament- A series of tuning systems that is associated with the Baroque era. Here the goal is to produce a tuning that modulates very well to as many keys as possible. This involved many subtle alterations of the intervals within the octave and many possible solutions. This led to a great many different variations, with tunings associated with individual towns and even individual churches. Because of the emphasis on the ability to modulate, well-tempered tunings are often confused with equal temperament (as is often the case with J.S. Bach's *Well Tempered Clavier*), but the musical results are quite different. Even though modulation to distant keys is possible, the interval sizes are not equal and different keys will literally sound different. This is used to great advantage in Baroque pieces where the most intense moments/ scenes are in distant keys to take advantage of the additional dissonance. For example, an opera might begin in a friendly key like G major, but by the murder scene in Act 3, it might be in C#minor. Some examples of well tempered tunings are Kirnberger, Werckmeister, Neidhardt, and Vallotti, many of which have sub-variations leading to things like Kirnberger I, Kirnberger II, or Neidhardt "village," Neidhardt "city," etc.

Equal temperament- Often associated with 20th century music, equal temperament has actually been proposed as a tuning system many times throughout the history of Western art music. Vincenzo Galilei (1520-1591), a lutenist and the father of Galileo Galilei, championed the idea of using equal temperament. Equal temperament takes the octave and divides it into twelve equal half steps. The intervals produced by this are mostly in tune, though the major thirds are particularly bad. They are so bad, that it is not uncommon for musicians to slightly temper major thirds whenever possible. For example, guitarists will often tune their G string a little low so that the common E major chord, with its G# on the third string, sounds a bit better. Even pianos technically "fudge" the equality of the tuning in order to account for some of the inherent issues that arise when a hammer strikes a fixed string.

While it might be tempting to think of these tuning systems as an evolutionary progression, the truth is that musicians and theorists have been dealing with tuning as far back as records survive and these tuning systems, or variants of them, often coexist throughout history, though there is often a dominant system in play during a particular period or with a particular culture's music. For example, meantone systems would have been dominant in the 16th century. That said, we know people like Vincenzo Galilei were experimenting with equal temperament.

Singers were likely using just intonation whenever possible or still using Pythagorean tuning for older works or in less progressive areas. The most important thing to remember is that history is messy and though we like to put things in to clean boxes, life doesn't actually work that way.

So what does this all mean to you, the Renaissance lute student? Well, it means that it is perfectly acceptable to use equal temperament, the tuning that your electronic guitar tuner is automatically set to. It also means that you could explore meantone (I use 1/6 comma meantone most of the time). If you decide to explore some 15th century repertoire, particularly those pieces written in an older style with parallel 4ths, 5ths, and octaves, Pythagorean tuning might be appropriate. As your knowledge of the repertoire and period grows, so too will your choices.

For the repertoire contained in this book, I recommend using either 1/6 comma meantone or equal temperament. The easiest way to tune your instrument to a historical tuning system is to download an application like Cleartune or Tunable on your phone or a tablet. The second BEDLAM video (link at beginning of this chapter) has a good set of instructions for what to do the first time you set up your instrument's tuning. A couple things to keep in mind: Tune your open strings as perfectly as possible to the app. Your frets will then need to be moved to match the pitches the app produces.

Keep in mind that you will run into situations where a compromise is necessary. For example, the fret position that produces a 1/6 comma meantone A flat on the 1st course of a G lute, will also produce an F# on the fourth course that is too high. This can be tempered a bit by leaning the fret back a touch so the A flat stays in position and the F# is a bit lower. Of course, this now means the A flat on the sixth course is too flat, but such is the nature of tuning! Over time, you will develop your own opinions about where to compromise and how to handle playing pieces that require different versions of notes. For example, you might need to lower your first fret if you are playing a piece in E major because the G# needs to be lower to produce a sweeter major third against the E. For a piece in A flat, the fret will need to be higher to produce a sweeter major third with C. Keep in mind that though physics are involved in the calculation of vibrations and ratios, ultimately tuning on your instrument is a subtle art and there is a range of what is "in tune." The modern obsession with "absolute pitch" only applies to a fixed pitch system in equal temperament, a relatively new idea in the course of human history and one that has significant weaknesses for music prior to the 20th century.

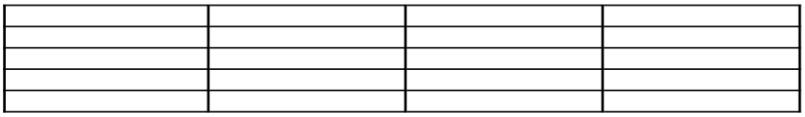
MUSICAL FOUNDATIONS

Lute Notation

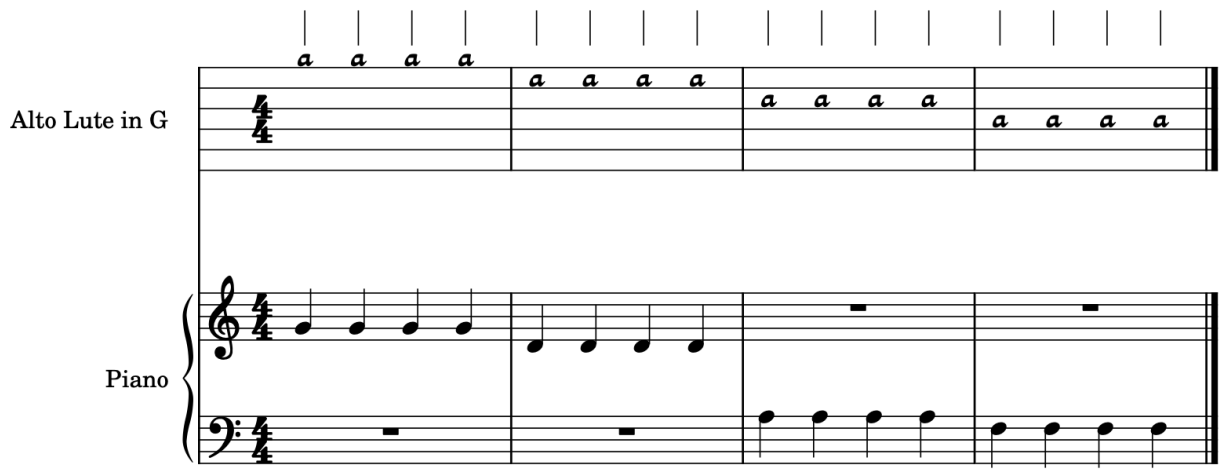
Relevant videos:
Fundamentals Episode 7: Introduction to Tablature
Fundamentals Episode 3: Essential Terms

Lute music in the 16th century was usually notated in tablature, which is an instrument-specific notation system that shows the physical positions of notes on the fingerboard. Rhythm signs placed above the tablature denote the fastest moving current rhythm. The three most common tablature systems used during the 16th and early 17th century were the French tablature system, which uses letters to denote fret positions, the Italian tablature system, which uses numbers to denote fret positions, and the German tablature system, which uses a combination of letters, numbers, and other symbols to denote frets. In this edition of the *Fundamentals of Renaissance Lute Playing*, we will be focusing on the French tablature system.

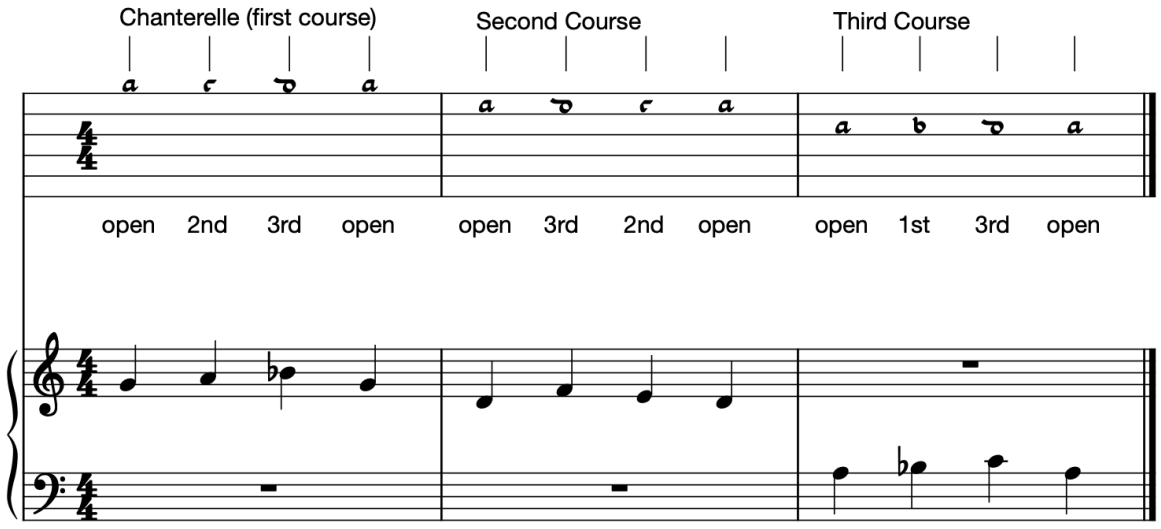
Most French tablature that you will encounter in the 16th century will have six lines, though you may occasionally run into tablature with five lines, especially with earlier repertoire. The space above the tablature staff and each space between the lines represents a string.



Letters are used to represent the frets. Tablature A represents an open string (un-fretted), B represents the first fret, C represents the 2nd fret, etc. The letter J is skipped. In the example on the next page, you will see four tablature A's in each measure. These represent the open strings. The lines above each measure indicate that each note is a quarter note in length when plucked. Below the tablature is a transcription in standard notation. If you are not comfortable with standard notation, I highly recommend taking some time to get acquainted with it. Artusi is an excellent program for doing this. Standard notation is the language that most Western musicians use and it can also be incredibly helpful when analyzing your lute pieces.



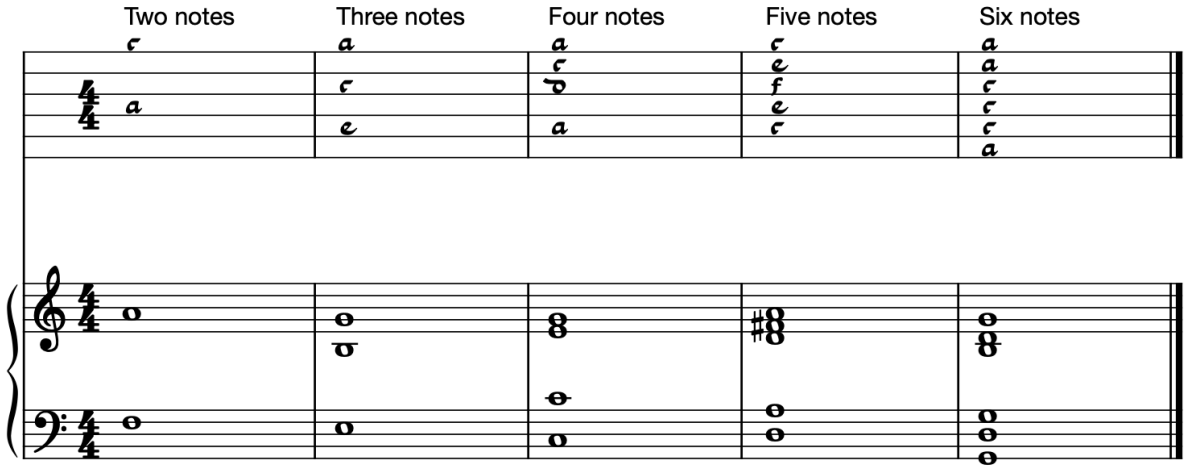
This second example shows some fretted notes. One important thing to keep in mind is that the tablature C often looks like an “r.” This is to help avoid mistaking it for an “e.” Under each tablature letter, I have written its fret position. I have also indicated the course being played above each measure. In this example, only one course is being played per measure, but future examples will have course changes within the same measure.



Here is an example with some rhythm changes. Notice how the changes are indicated above the tablature and compare it to the standard notation.



Chords, two or more notes played simultaneously, are indicated by vertically stacked tablature letters as shown in the example below.



The next example mixes everything you have seen so far: chords, rhythms, etc. The numbers next to the tablature letters indicate the left hand finger that is to be used when holding the string down on that fret. The left hand fingers are:

1= first finger
2= second finger
3= third finger
4= fourth finger



In this example, taken from an Albert de Rippe fantasy, the fingerings are editorial. We will go into much greater depth on fingerings in the sections below on “Basic Left Hand Technique” and “Basic Right Hand Technique.”

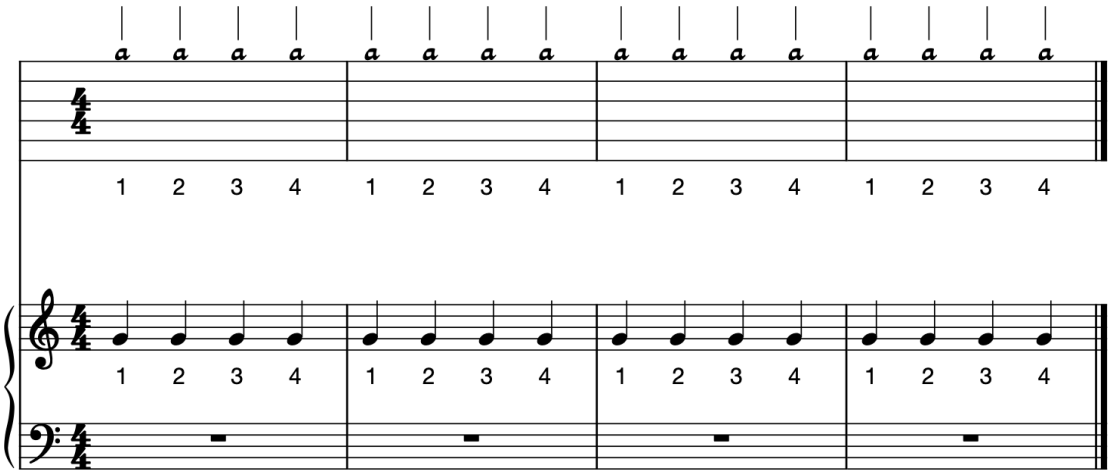
Don’t worry too much if you are still a little confused after reading this section. This simply serves as an introduction to the notation system. Between watching the videos above, working on your earliest pieces (which are in the repertoire section), and referencing the fingerboard sheet in the appendix, you will gradually get more and more comfortable with French lute tablature. That said, having some basic understanding of music can be very helpful. If you have no musical background, I recommend reading the section below on “Music Theory” and following the advice given there.

Counting and Rhythm

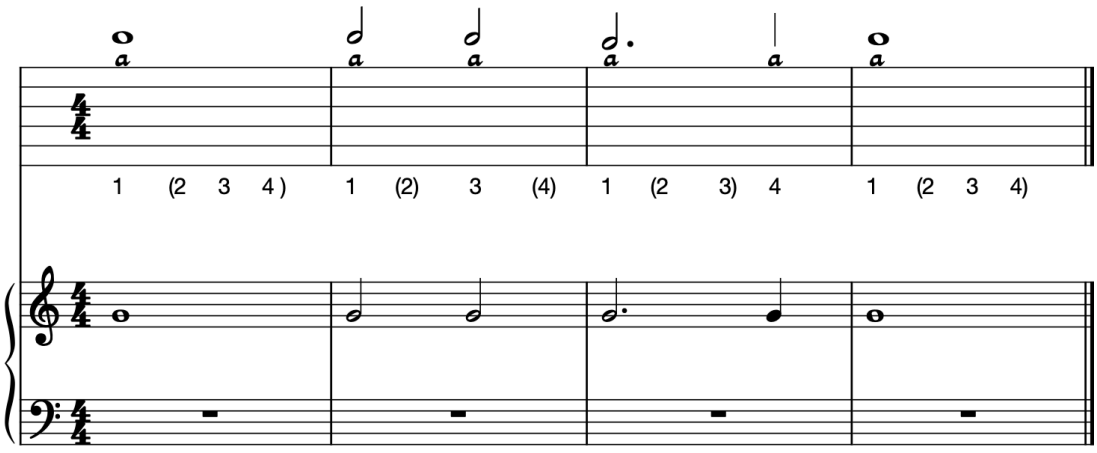
Developing a good sense of rhythm and learning when and how to manipulate it, can be a daunting task for a beginner, especially one working alone. While I am not a fan of playing music to a metronome, it can still be a very valuable tool for developing your innate sense of rhythm. You can either purchase a metronome from a store or you can simply google “metronome” and use the digital metronome that Google provides. Below are some rudimentary counting exercises. I recommend turning your metronome on and setting it to 60

beats per minute (BPM). The click that you hear will correspond to the quarter note value in these exercises. For each exercise:

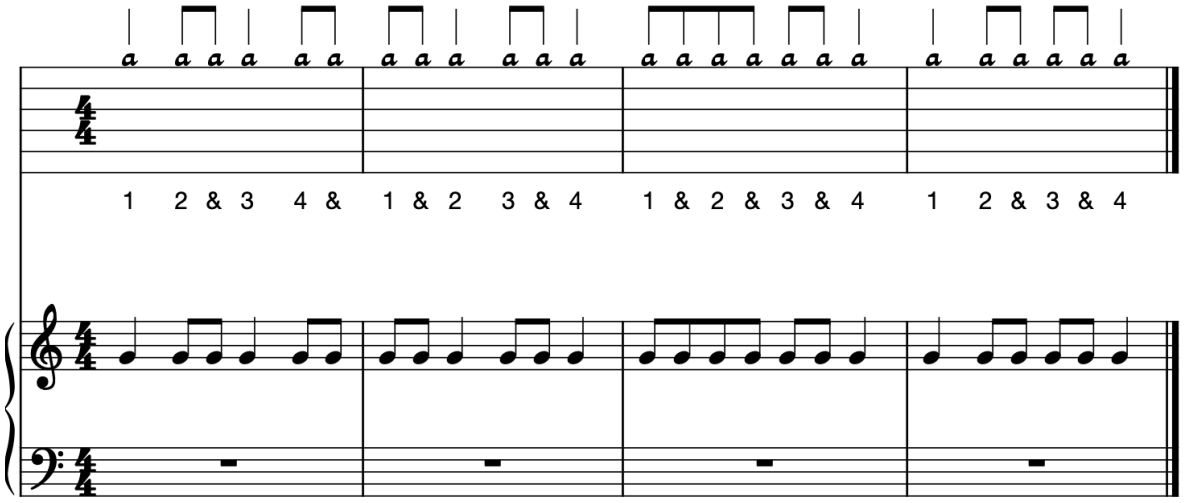
1) Count and clap to the beat. You should only clap where the notes land, which will correspond to where you pluck on the lute.
2) Once you are confident that your claps are lined up with the beats/metronome and that your counting is accurate, record yourself and listen back to make sure this is true. Recording and reviewing your work will be a big part of learning to play the lute, so getting used to this early is a great idea!



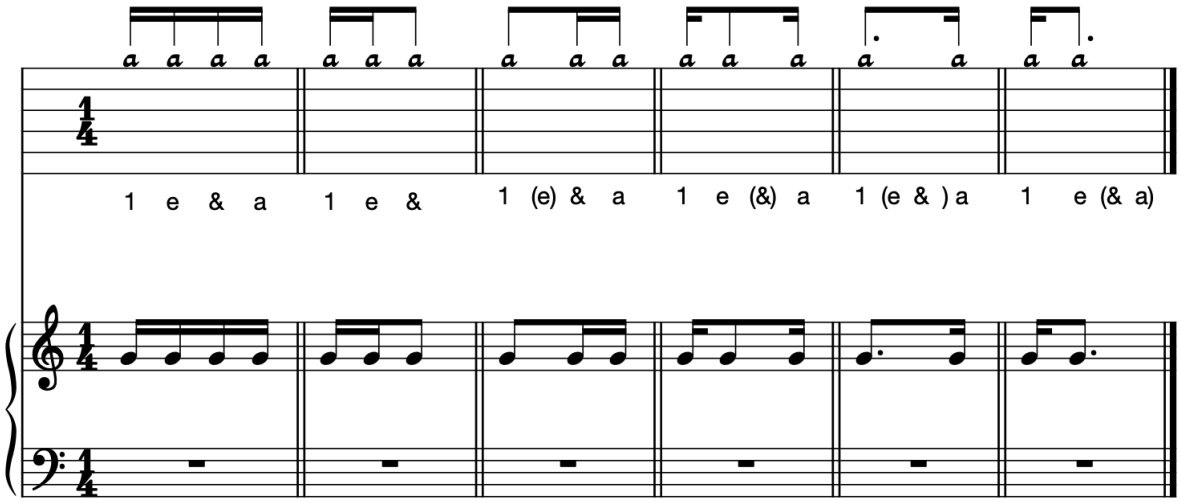
Between each number in your counting of the exercise above, be sure to say the word “and” so that your counting sounds like “1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and.” Even though you are saying “and” between each number, only clap where there is an actual note. The next example contains some larger note values: the whole note (4 beats), the dotted half note (3 beats), and the half note (2 beats). A dot beside a rhythm sign simply adds half of its value to it. For example, a half note with a dot would be worth 3 beats instead of two. A dotted quarter note would add an eighth note to its value, etc. Here is the second exercise:



This next example adds eighth notes. In this case, you will be clapping on some of the “ands” in this exercise. Between clapping, counting, and listening to the metronome, this can be quite complicated so make sure that you don’t rush this. Take breaks and make sure that you are absolutely comfortable with it before moving on.



While it is not necessary, it can be quite helpful to continue counting the “ands” even when you do not need to clap them. This is called subdividing and it can help to avoid rushing, or getting to the next beat early. This next example includes sixteenth notes. First, I will show you several different ways the beat can be divided using sixteenth notes and then I will give you an exercise to practice with. The syllables in parenthesis can be said aloud but you should not clap on them. This is just another example of subdivision to help stay in time.



The final example below should provide an excellent challenge. If you can complete this one in a satisfactory manner, you will be more than ready to count the earliest exercises/pieces in this book. If you find it too difficult, don't worry, you will still be able to start learning the pieces. Just come back to it and complete it later. From this point on, I recommend:

1) Turning the metronome off and keeping the beat by counting aloud and gently tapping your foot. You can bring the metronome out if you are concerned that you are making mistakes, but put it away after you resolve any issues. Try to avoid playing long stretches of music to the metronome as this can hinder some of the natural flexibility of the music.
2) Make sure that you are able to count aloud every piece you play. Once you are comfortable counting a piece aloud, you can count in your head, but make sure that you are being honest. A good transition is to continue gently tapping your toe to maintain the beat when you first start counting in your head.

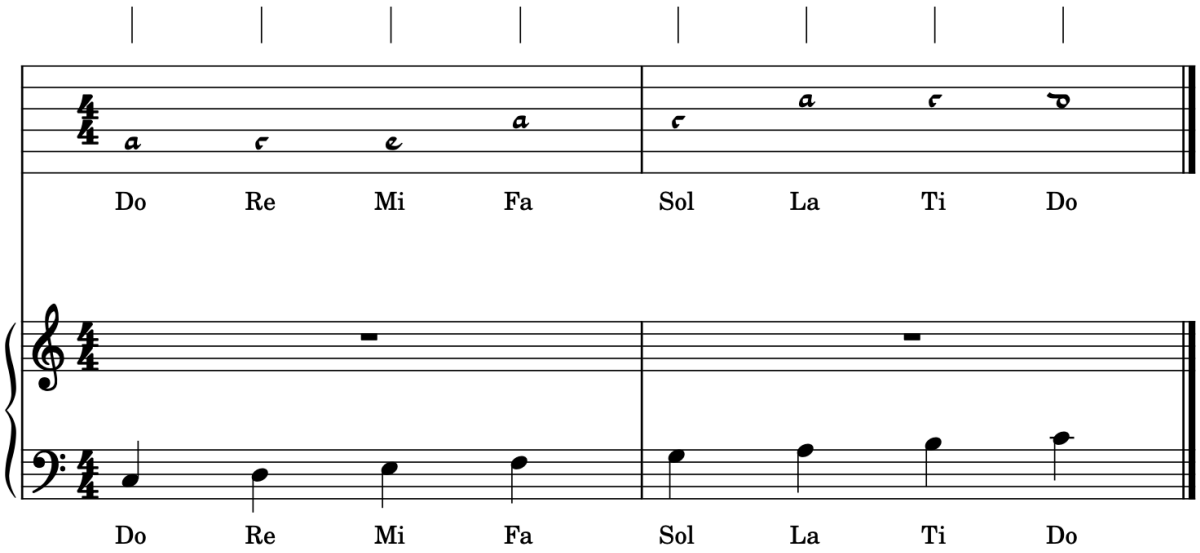


Solfege

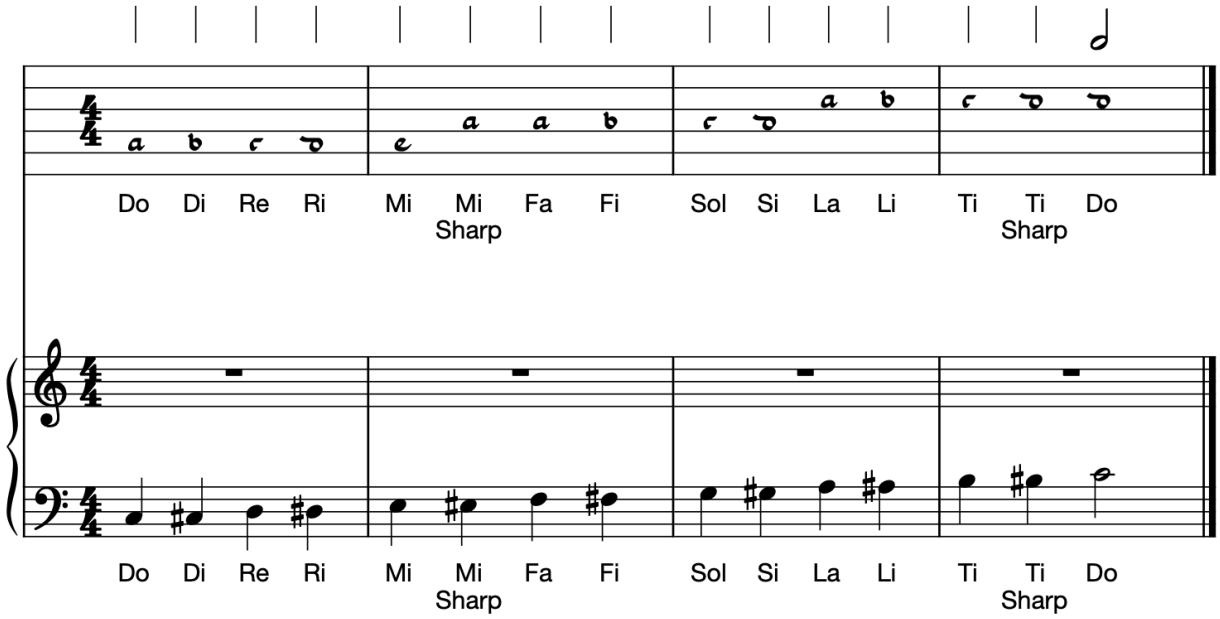
It can be a wonderful thing to sing through the individual voices of your pieces. By removing the physical and technical challenges that the lute presents, it gives the student the opportunity to decide how they would like an individual voice or line to sound. Dynamics, articulation, tempo, and to some degree, color can all be worked on without actually using your lute. If you have a plan for the way you would like a phrase to sound, it gives you something to strive for when playing it on the lute. While it is perfectly fine to simply sing the pitches with a single syllable, like *la*, I do want to discuss two possible solfege systems that the student can use to aid in their singing: *fixed Do* and the hexachordal solmization system of the 16th century. Other systems do exist but I think these are the best two for approaching Renaissance music.

The history of solfege, stretching back to the medieval period in Europe, is too long and complicated to discuss in this text but I highly recommend spending some time learning about it, particularly the historical systems that were used in the Renaissance period. Elam Rotem's Early Music Sources webpage and series on Youtube, provide tons of information on this topic in an entertaining and transparent way. That said, for beginners I recommend starting with a simpler solfege system. Learning a new instrument is already overwhelming and so I think that for most students, starting with *fixed Do* is a good idea.

Fixed Do simply means that we assign a solfege syllable to each individual diatonic note: C is *Do*, D is *Re*, E is *Mi*, etc. There are some solfege systems that have a movable *Do* but these work better for music that is tonal. There are a variety of ways that accidentals (sharps and flats) are handled in fixed *Do*, but here I have chosen to assign them different syllables as well. The first example below shows you the diatonic notes (no sharps or flats) and the syllable that is assigned to them. I have put the example in tablature (For an alto lute in G) as well so that you can see the relationship:

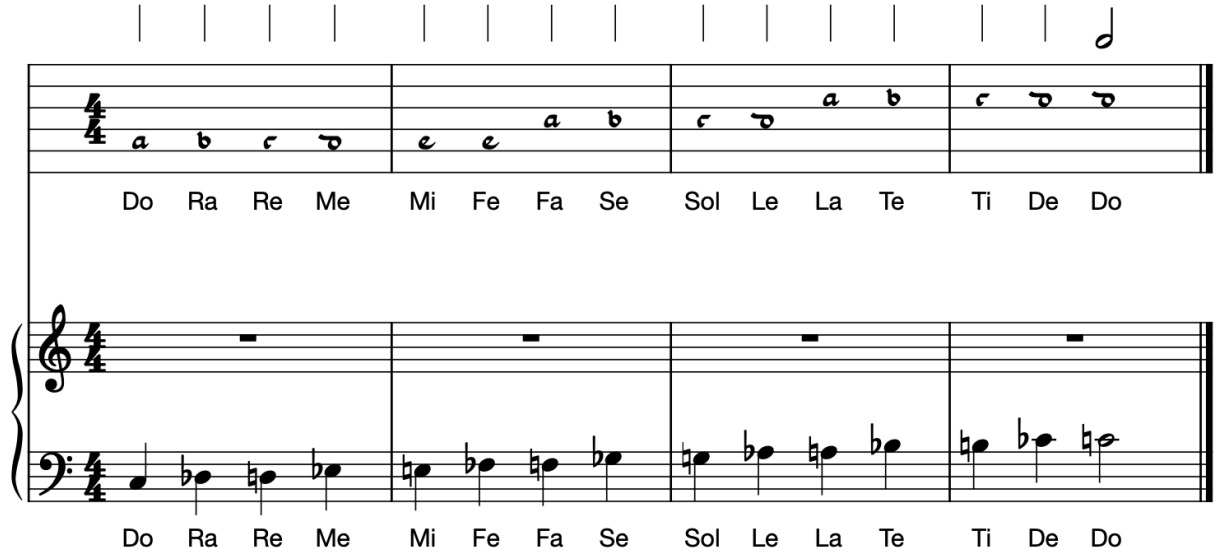


The next example includes the syllables that are used when singing sharps (#):



Notice E sharp and B sharp. These notes are quite rare in the lute repertoire but do occur. I usually just sing "*Mi* Sharp" and "*Ti* Sharp" but you could also come up with your own syllables if you run into them or simply keep the name of their enharmonic equivalents: *Fa* and *Do*.

The next example shows how to handle flats:



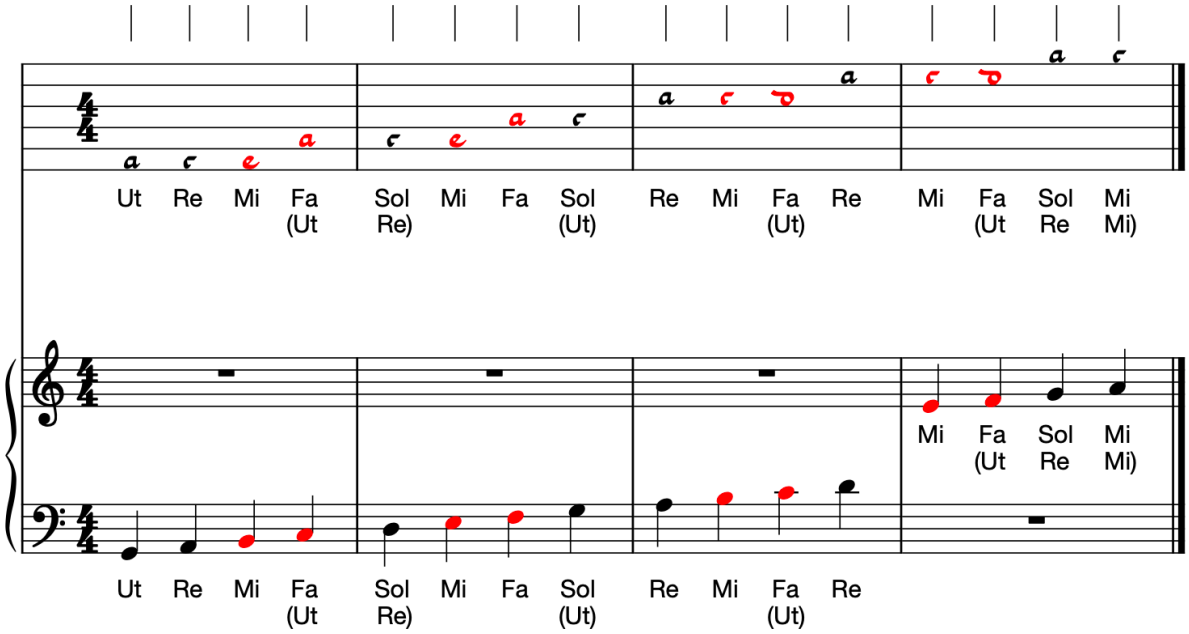
Students will quickly notice that the same note can have several different syllables depending on the context. A basic understanding of music theory can help significantly when determining what syllable to use. For example, if you are in the key of A flat, you will probably be using the flat names. If you are playing something in D major, we use sharps. We will use the term *key* to describe the collection of pitches that are used to make a piece of music, but understand that most 16th century music is not tonal, though it is also not strictly modal in the 15th century sense. It lies somewhere between and sometimes this creates issues when we use certain common terms like *key.* Since there isn't an alternative, we use *key* with the understanding that it carries some added connotations that the term doesn't have in later periods.

I have found that *fixed Do* is an excellent system for 16th and early 17th century music. Not only does it work well when singing through "standard" repertoire, but can also be used in more experimental works, like chromatic fantasies. That said, it wasn't necessarily a historical system. It is true that there is evidence that school children sang notes using "their names," but a different system was used by singers: *hexachordal solmization*.

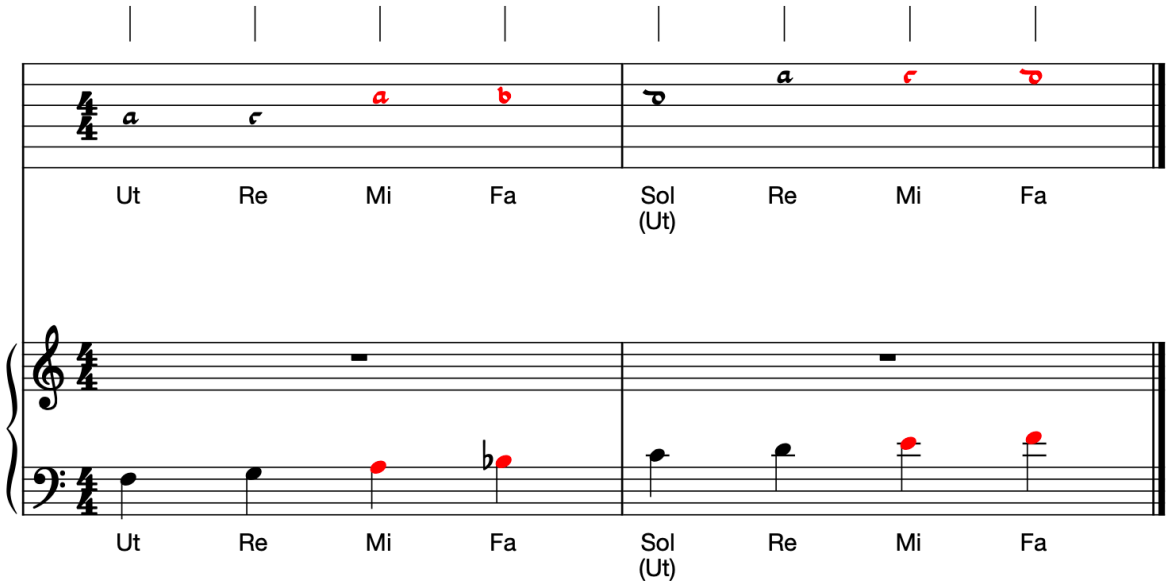
The hexachordal solmization system, created in the medieval period of Western Europe and used through the Renaissance (and, to some degree, the Baroque period), uses six syllables: *Ut*, *Re*, *Mi*, *Fa*, *Sol*, and *La*. Notice that at this time *Do* is not in use, *Ut* is the first syllable. This system is a bit more complicated than *fixed Do* in that it is based upon intervals and predicting where half steps occur. This example shows where the whole and half steps land between the basic six syllables:

UT	Re	Mi	Fa	Sol	La
W	W	H	W	W	

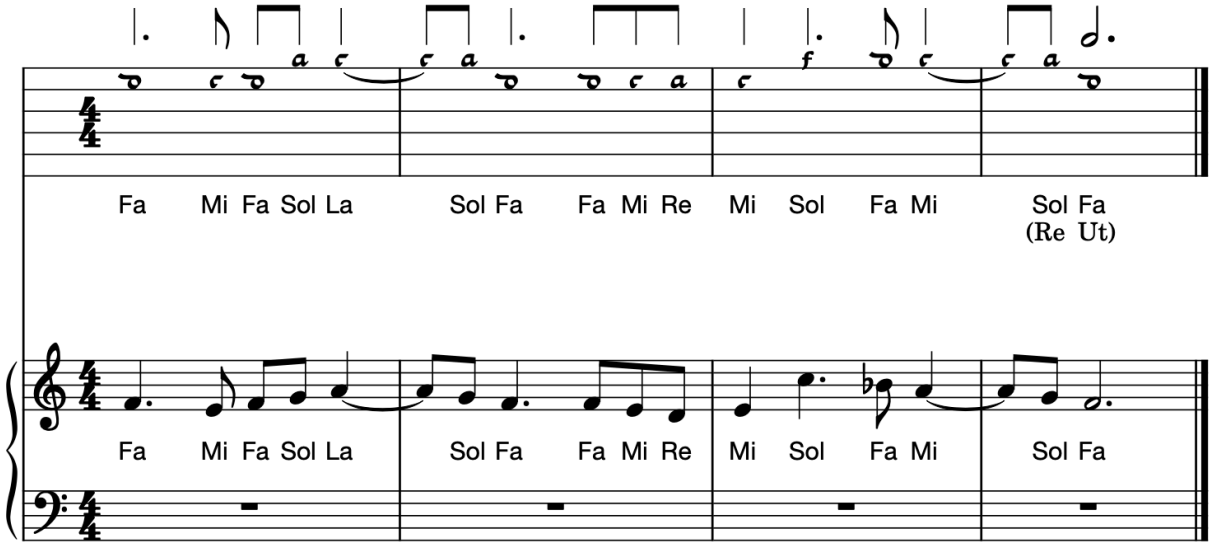
As you can see, the only half step falls between *Mi* and *Fa*. This means that the use of syllables will depend on where the next half step occurs. On the next page is an example beginning on G. The primary goal is to line *Mi* and *Fa* up with the half steps in a given line of music and we can do this in several ways. The syllables in parenthesis represent alternative options for preparing for the next *Mi-Fa* or half step coming up. I have marked the half step pairs by making them red.



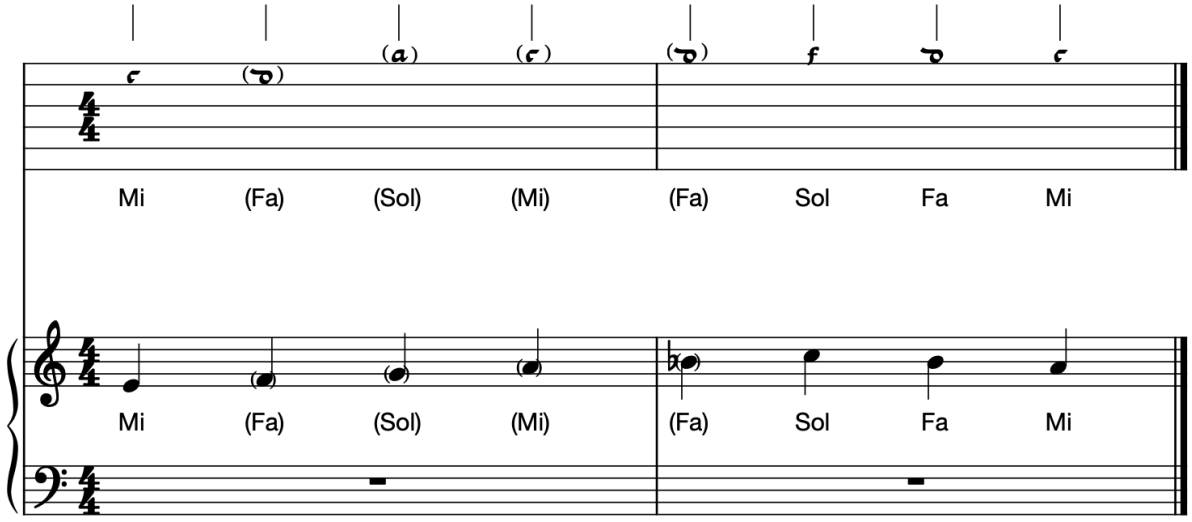
Here is another example beginning on F:



Now let's look at an example drawn from a line of music in the repertoire:



The first thing you may notice when looking at the example above is that wherever a half step is located, *Mi-Fa* (ascending) or *Fa-Mi* (descending) is used. Beyond this concept, there are two tricky spots that require some explanation: the leap between the first two beats in measure 3, which may seem counterintuitive, and the last two notes of the piece, for the same reason. Let's look at how we solve the first. In this example I have put the notes that were *leapt* over with their syllables in parenthesis so that you can see how this interval between E and C becomes *Mi-Sol*:



If you look at the previous example, all that is occurring is that we follow the pattern *Ut Re Mi Fa Sol La* when ascending and *La Sol Fa Mi Re Ut* when descending, *but* whenever we run into an ascending pair of notes that forms a half step, it must be *Mi-Fa*. When we run into a descending pair of notes that form a half step, it must be *Fa-Mi* and so that breaks the pattern. This explains the leap in measure three but why are the last two notes in measure four, *Sol-Fa*? Why not *Re-Ut*? To be honest, you probably could do *Re-Ut* and some might argue that that is better for this segment the way it is written, but because this is technically just a segment and I don't *know* what is coming next, I would rather assume it is an E and prepare for the *Fa-Mi*. If I know this is truly the end of the line, I might just sing it *Re-Ut*. This flexibility is what makes this system interesting but also challenging. You can consider this a *quick and dirty* crash course on hexachordal solmization. If you really want to explore it in greater detail, I recommend checking out EarlyMusicSources.com and reading some period theoretical texts.

My recommendation is that beginners learn to use *fixed Do* and then once you are completely comfortable with that system, experiment with hexachordal solmization. I do think it is great to experience solfege in this way, and gives some interesting insights into how the 16th century *pitch-world* worked. That said, there are some weaknesses to hexachordal solmization, the most notable being chromaticism. The system is not really built around the idea of figures or passages moving entirely in half steps. While this is not very common in the lute repertoire, it is also not extremely rare. Lute composers wrote chromatic fantasies, intabulations of chromatic vocal works, and even some dances that use chromatic lines. In these pieces, *fixed Do* is a life saver. In any case, I hope that students will explore both and you can ultimately decide when and where to use either.

Your Musical Ear

When we talk about developing our *musical ear,* we are really talking about a lot of different things, the most obvious being our ability to identify intervals and chords. This is called *relative pitch* and we will talk about this first. Developing a strong sense of relative pitch is an important goal when taking ear training courses in college and graduate school. Beyond obvious things like improving your ability to tune and your ability to "play back" what you hear, a strong sense of relative pitch also gives a player a better *real time* understanding of what is going on in the music. For example, instead of having to sit down and analyze chords by sight, you can hear them as you play them and immediately understand their relationship. So, how do we develop our sense of relative pitch? Here are some pointers:

1) Find a recording of a lute piece that you like. If it is on Youtube, you can slow down the recording without changing the pitch. Starting with the first note or chord (pause and replay as needed) figure out where that note (or chord) is on your lute. Continue this process until you have the whole piece worked out. This is VERY time consuming but I have found it to be one of the most effective ways to develop your ears. HIGHLY Recommended.
2) Solfege all of your music (see previous chapter on "Solfege"). You can support your voice with piano or even with your lute to begin with, but eventually it is a good idea to work on being able to solfege *a cappella* (with voice alone). This really helps to develop a "mental map" of the notes.

3) Practice harmonizing yourself on the lute. Find a tune to sing. Even something simple like *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* works. Sing the melody while playing chords underneath. You can take this all the way up to playing and self accompanying lute songs. Overall, a fantastic workout for your voice and ear.
4) There are some good ear training programs available online. Artusi (https://www.artusimusic.com/) includes one as part of its music theory program.

These are some excellent ways to develop your relative pitch, but what are some other ways to develop our musical ear? As important as relative pitch is, there are a whole host of other things that we need to develop in relation to our ears that I will place broadly into the category of *critical listening.* Let's discuss critical listening, a skill that will prove essential when practicing.

Critical listening simply means that we are listening *actively,* taking note of what we are hearing, both the things we like and the things we don't. This is very different than listening to a recording for pleasure. With critical listening, we are often pausing and re-listening to passages so that we can pick up on details that are easily missed. I think there are two really great ways to develop your critical listening skills, but both rely heavily on your ability to concentrate. My recommendation when listening is to remove any distractions and make sure that you are in a genuinely quiet place. I am a father of two young children and I know how challenging this can be but just try to do your best. First, let's talk about listening to other people's recordings.

I recommend picking a single track that you really love, preferably by a well-respected artist. Locate the tablature to that track and find a quiet place to listen to the recording with the score in hand. Make sure that you are wearing the best headphones available so that you can really hear the details in the recording. Listen to the piece in small chunks and write any details that you hear into the score. Note the color, articulation, what voices are held and lost, and any extraneous sounds you hear (breathing, buzzes, scratches, etc.). Mark anything that you really like (a beautifully rolled chord or a little *tenuto* on a stunning harmony). With each phrase, note what you like and what you don't. Don't worry if you are a beginner and don't have the vocabulary yet to describe what you are hearing. This is a skill that you will develop over time and you will get better and better at it.

Once you have advanced a bit on the instrument, a great exercise is to take a phrase from a high-level artist and see if you can imitate it. First, do what was described in the paragraph above, noting as many details as you can in the recording and marking them in the score. Then grab your lute and see if you can recreate the phase. Record yourself and listen back to see how close you got. While this might seem like an exercise for a very advanced player, it is actually great for any level (as long as you can play the phrase) because even if you fail to mimic the phrase, it will make you a better player. Obviously, our goal is not to copy other players in general, so try to use pieces that you are not actively learning for this exercise.

The second great way to develop your critical listening skills is to record your phrases and listen back as you are learning a piece of music. Use the best microphone you have available and place it within about a foot of your instrument. We want to make sure that we can really hear the details. Take a phrase that you believe is ready for performance and record three takes. Put the lute away and sit down to listen with the score in front of you. Mark *anything* you hear that bothers you. Be as picky as you possibly can be. This can be an excruciating exercise but can really speed up your development as a player. Once you have marked all the issues you hear, you pick the lute back up and try to resolve them. Re-record the phrase when you think you have solved all the issues and listen back. This may take several attempts, but again, your playing will improve much faster doing this. That said, I try not to do this everyday

because it can wear you out. I discuss how to integrate this into your practice in the section below on “Learning Pieces.”

Developing your *relative pitch* and your *critical listening* skills *will* make you a better musician and should be prioritized. I recommend picking a day during the week where you make it your top priority. Once the skills are developed, they integrate well into your practice and won’t need as much time, but do plan on it taking significant investment.

Music Theory

Music theory is a massive topic in its own right. There are music theorists who earn doctorates in theory and spend their entire lives studying it. For the beginning student, the prospect of learning music theory can be very intimidating. That said, it can be incredibly rewarding and can improve your playing significantly. Understanding dissonance, consonance, suspensions, intervals, etc., can help you in the interpretation of your music. Because the subject matter is so expansive it is not practical to include here. I am instead going to provide some advice and links to students of different levels to help develop their understanding of music theory. How far you take it will be entirely up to you.

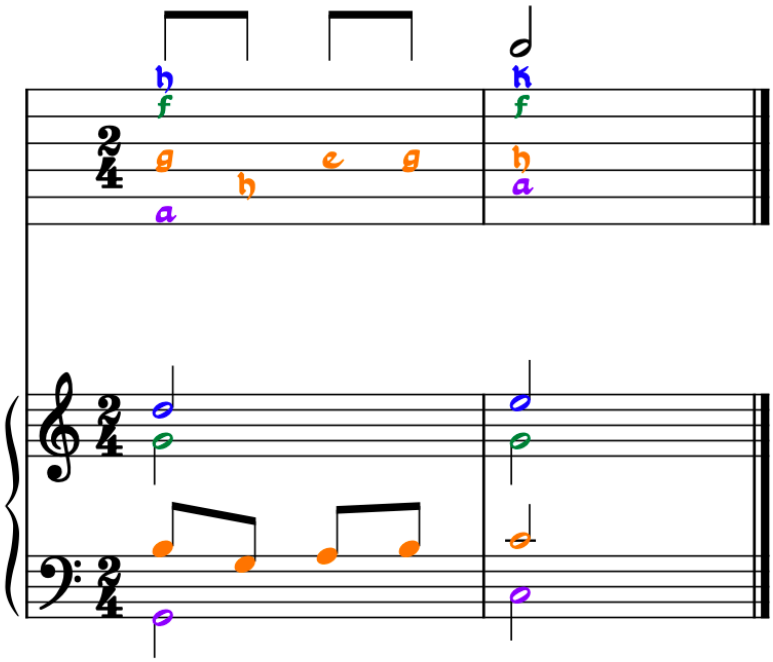
For beginners- One of the best programs for beginners without access to college music theory courses is Artusi. This free online program basically covers the first 3 or 4 semesters of undergraduate music theory. It is self-paced and automatically grades the exercises that are provided for you. It really is a wonderful tool and I recommend using it if you are intimidated by music theory.

Here is the link to Artusi: **https://www.artusimusic.com/**

If you cannot access Artusi, then the next best thing is to purchase a couple undergraduate music theory textbooks. Buying a generic theory textbook like Steven Laitz’s The Complete Musician and then a Renaissance counterpoint textbook like Peter Schubert’s Modal Counterpoint: Renaissance Style would be an excellent place to begin but this is more costly than using Artusi. For as long as it is available, I recommend going there first.

For Advanced players and Professionals- While you may have studied some counterpoint and have a fairly good grasp of music theory, it can be extremely helpful to read some period theoretical sources in order to expand your understanding of this complicated period in music history. The 16th century sits in an unusual spot. The music is not strictly modal as it often was in the 15th century, but it is also not yet firmly tonal as it will become in the 17th century. Sources like Zarlino’s Le Institutioni Harmoniche (1558) and Thomas Campion’s A New Way of Making Fowre Parts in Counterpoint By a Most Familiar and Infallible Rule (1615) are immensely helpful. That said, perhaps the best thing to do is to analyze the works of the great lutenists like Dowland, Milano, De Rippe, Terzi, and Molinaro. By analyzing the works of respected lute composers of the period, you will see how and where they pushed the limits of the theoretical “rules.”

One practical thing to be aware when using this book is the convention of assigning individual voices names that are derived from the vocal choir tradition. For example, lutenists will often call the highest voice in a piece, *soprano* and the lowest, *bass.* On the next page is an example with the voices highlighted.



Blue= Soprano
Green= Alto
Orange= Tenor
Purple= Bass

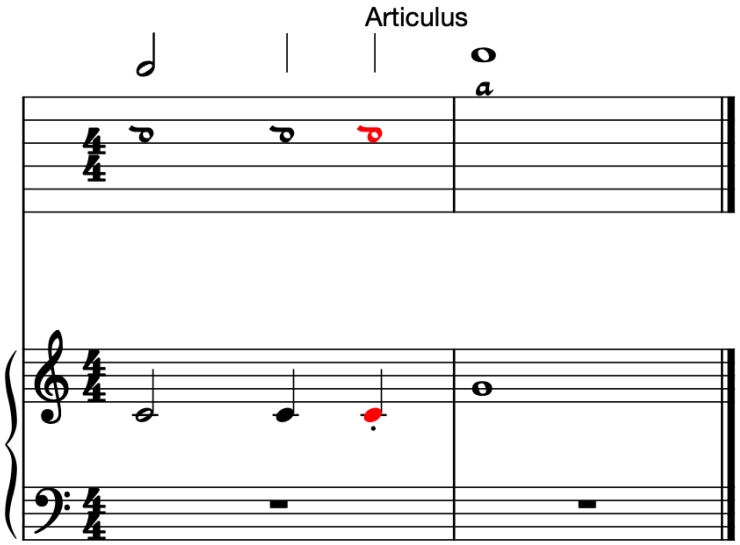
It's good to get used to thinking of Renaissance music as generally being in "voices," and I will use these designations throughout the book.

Rhetoric and Interpretation

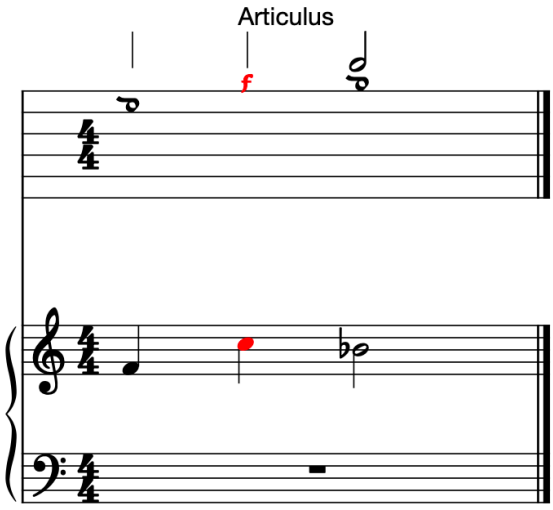
Relevant video: Fundamentals Episode 14: Rhetoric and Interpretation

Most musical scores from the 16th and early 17th century lack specific performance instructions like dynamics, articulation, color, etc. Many of these details would have been transferred orally. Luckily, in addition to oral transmission, which we cannot access for obvious reasons, there was also a set of standard performance practices that were used in oration, acting, poetry, writing, and music. This set of standard performance practices was called *rhetoric*. The goal of rhetoric is to empower the artist, writer, or speaker with the ability to influence their audience's emotions. This "manipulation" of an audience's emotions is what eventually lead to the negative connotations that are often associated with rhetoric. At the time, though, the principles of rhetoric were infused in all the written, spoken, and sung arts of the Renaissance.

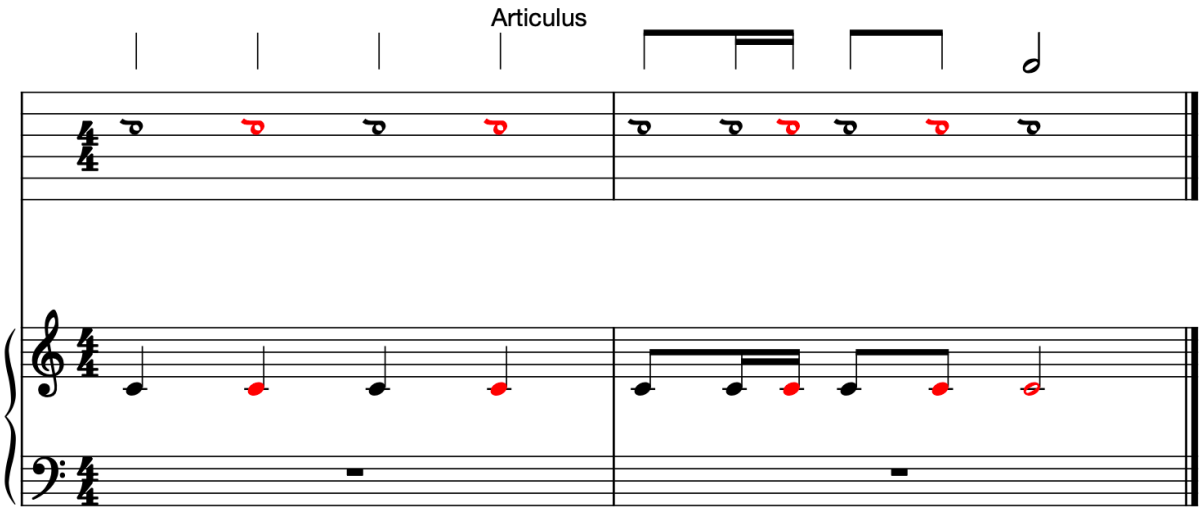
In the video above, I discuss the ten most common figures that apply to music on the lute. I highly recommend watching the video and then looking at the additional examples below that I have provided. Rhetoric is a massive topic, worthy of study in its own right, and I am also providing some references to some additional sources for students to continue their study if they so choose: Wilson, Peacham, and Toft. Keep in mind that these performance instructions are just the "standard" way of playing these figures. You can always ignore them or do the opposite but it is always good to know the normal way of doing something before you go outside of the box. The following example is a figure called **articulus,** and relates to when it is appropriate to shorten a written note.



In the example above, the note preceding a leap can be shortened (in red) assuming the second note of the leap is a "strong" beat. If the last note of the leap lands on a weak beat, you can shorten the second note (see example below). The decision to shorten the written value of a note will depend on the character of the piece, tempo, and the genre. For example, a lugubrious pavin might be much less articulate than a vigorous jig.

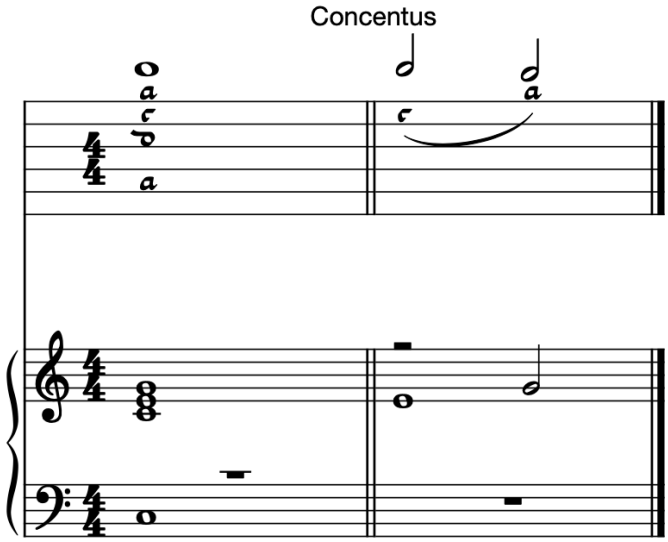


In this final example, we see how notes that are repeated can also be shortened. It will always be unaccented notes that are shortened (See chapter on “Accent-Based Fingerings).

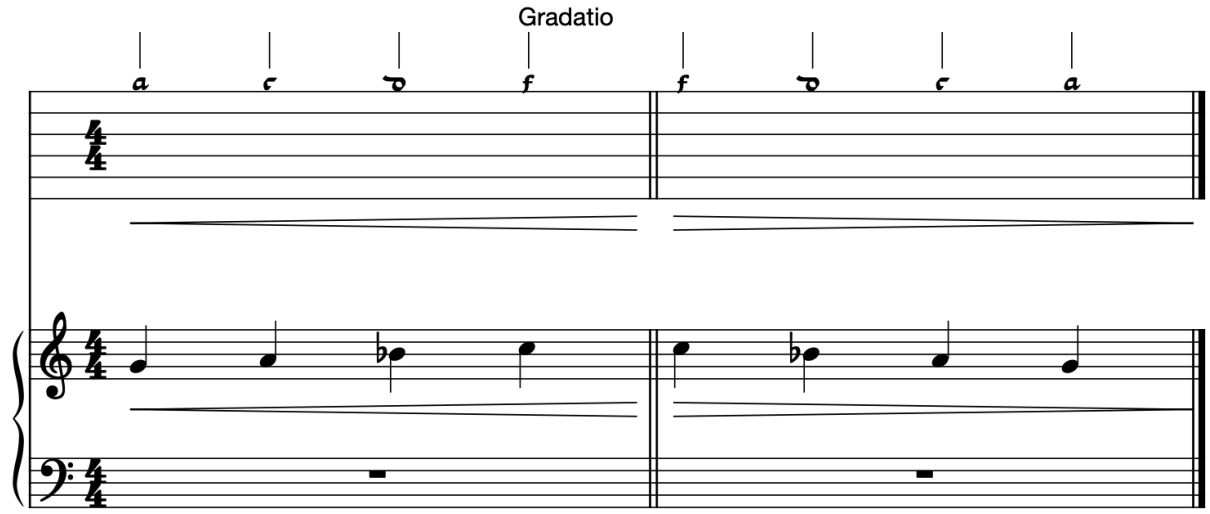


Each of the notes in red *can* be shortened but this will depend on the character and tempo of the piece. Just know that it is always an option and that you do not have to play repeated notes for their full value, though you certainly can if it is appropriate for the affect.

Concentus is merely a more period-appropriate term for *chord* and can be used any time two or more notes are sounded together. This can either be a simultaneous sounding of the notes or can be the result of one voice coming in after the other, with the previous one being held.

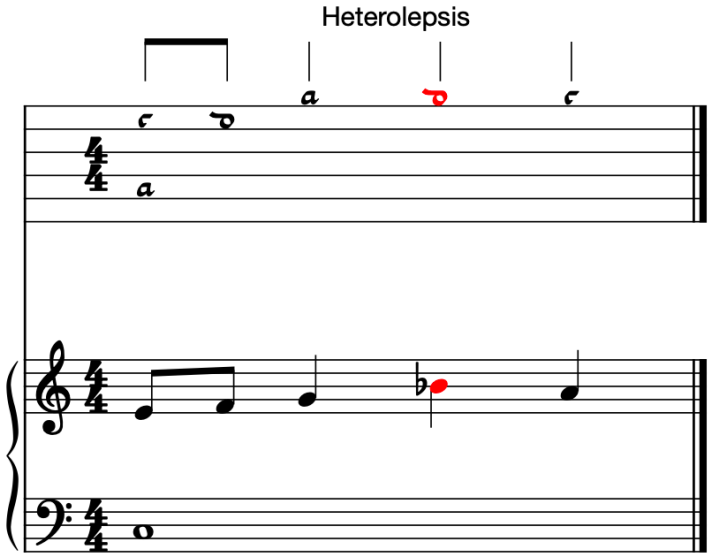


Gradatio simply means that we match the dynamics to the stepwise ascent or descent of a line. A figure that is repeated at different levels will also have its relative dynamics determined by the relationship of the pitch levels. The examples below add some clarification:





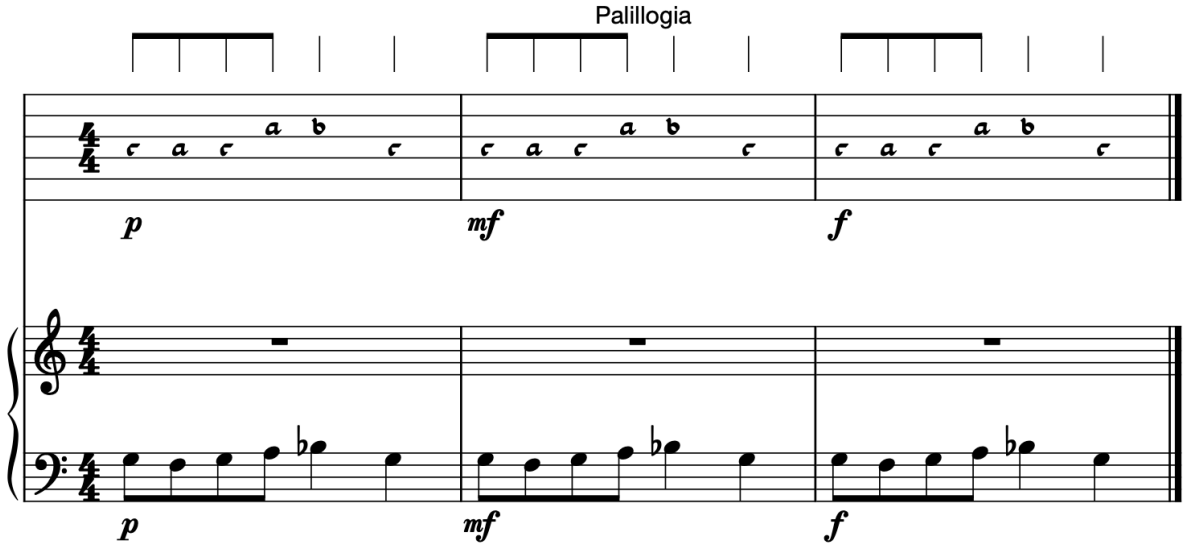
In Renaissance music, dissonances are generally prepared. With **heterolepsis**, an exception is made for expressive purposes. Keep in mind that dissonance should almost always be emphasized. I have marked the dissonant note in red in this example:



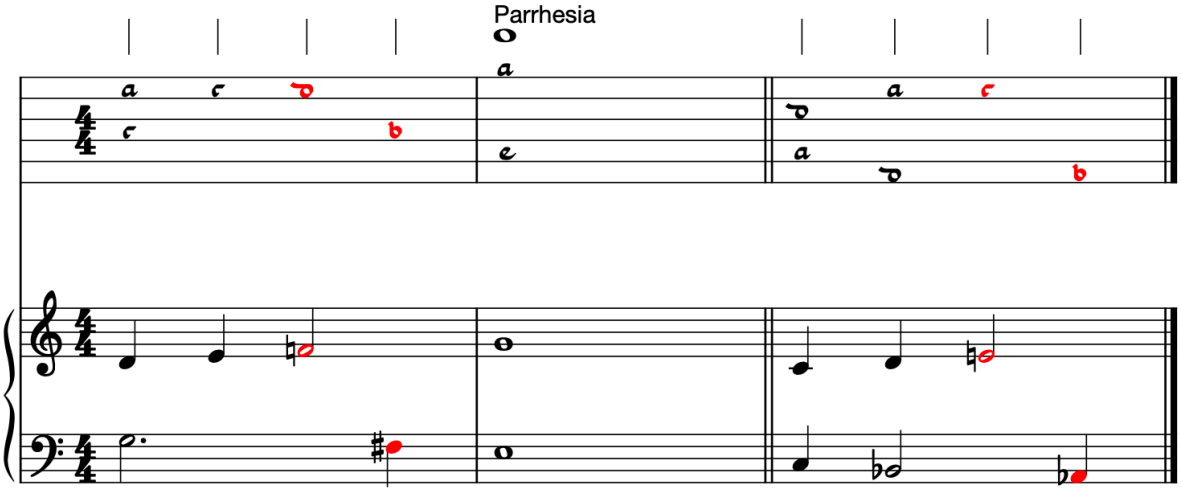
Mutatio toni describes an unusual chord (concentus) change, often including chromaticism or borrowed notes from other keys/modes. This is very common in the madrigal repertoire where it is used for dramatic effect on important words. There is a tendency for players to try to deemphasize these moments, where in fact it is meant to be brought out. Here is an example of mutatio toni:



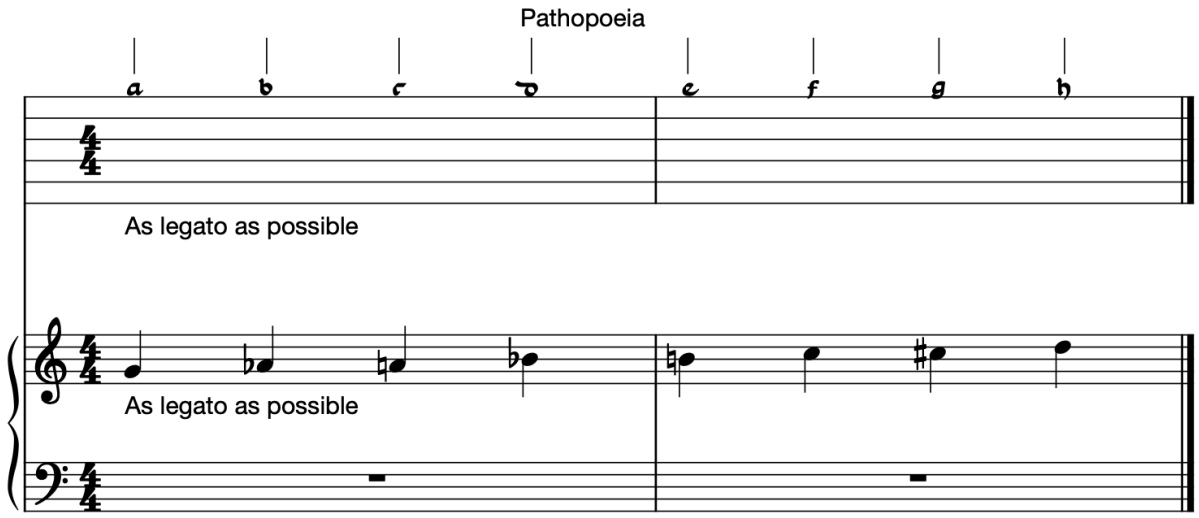
Palillogia is when a musical passage is repeated at the same pitch level. We play each repeat louder. Echos can be used as well, but are less common in this period.



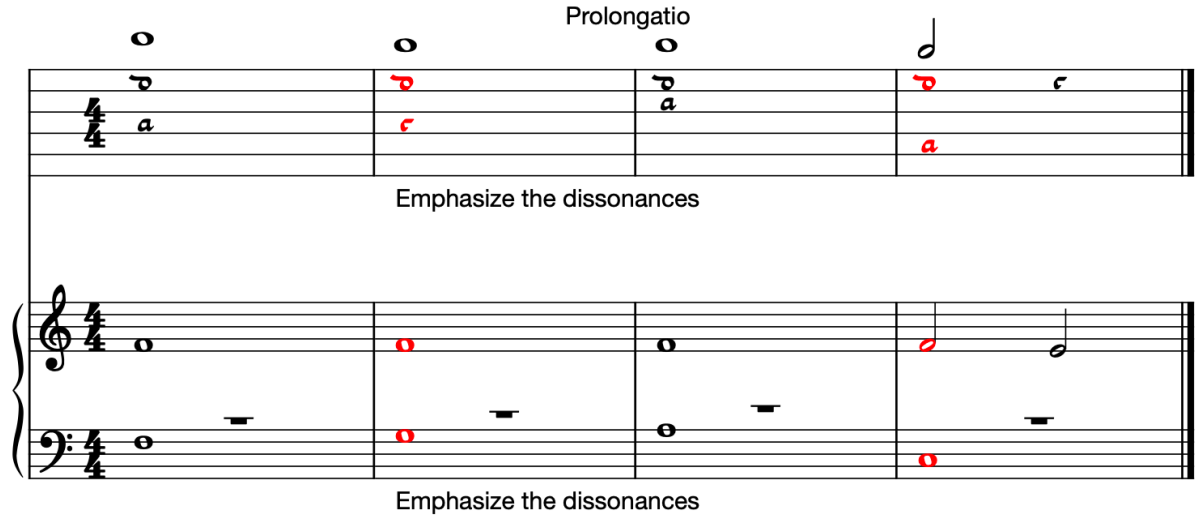
Parrhesia is a figure describing a false relation: either the combination of a sharp and natural tone in different voice parts (C natural in bass, C# in soprano) or the creation of a tritone against the bass. Unlike heterolepsis, dissonance is approached by step. The example below shows both variants:



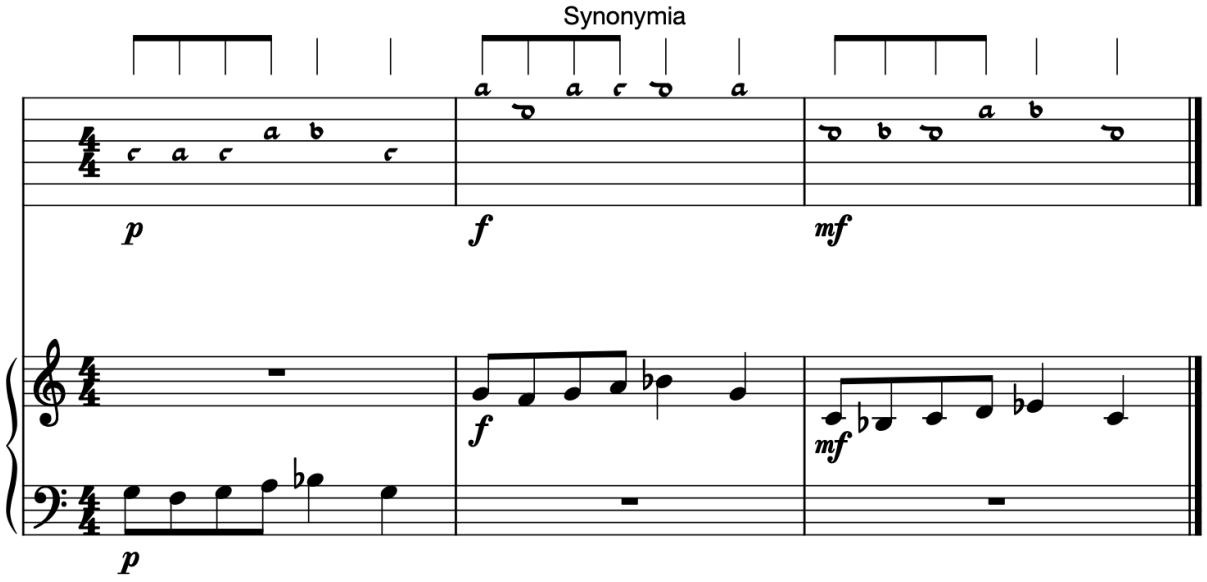
Pathopoeia describes chromatic movement. In general, it should be played as legato as possible, though exceptions are certainly plausible, especially when a piece has text (lute song).



Prolongatio is an unusually long dissonance. This is generally created by having a drone in one of the voices on the lute. On other instruments and voice, the drone is generally not re-struck, but on the lute it must be re-plucked because the note will decay naturally and the dissonance will be lost.



Synonymia is a figure describing the practice of getting louder when an entire phrase/sequence is repeated at a higher pitch level and quieter when repeated at a lower level. Unlike gradatio, this is always in leaps, not stepwise motion as with gradatio.



Reading Primary Sources

Relevant video: Fundamentals Episode 20: The Importance of Reading Primary Sources

The term *primary source* is used when talking about a surviving publication, manuscript, image, or other item from the 16th or early 17th century. Primary sources are a treasure trove of information. While they can sometimes be intimidating for beginning students, I highly recommend diving into them early. Since most libraries are now digitizing their collections, it has never been easier to access a primary source. Some examples of primary sources:

1) Publications of musical scores, tablature, texts on theory or music performance, etc. Really anything published related to music. Often these have lots of useful information. Some excellent sources to look at: Joan Ambrosia Dalza's Intabolatura de lauto libro quarto (1508), any of Hans Newsidler's publications, Gioseffo Zarlino's Le Institution Harmoniche (1558), Thomas Robinson's The Schoole of Musicke (1603), Robert Dowland's Varietie of Lute Lessons (1610), Thomas Campion's A New Way of Making Four Parts in Counterpoint (1615), and many others.

2) Surviving manuscripts are equally important and can often contain more information than that which is in publications because they were less constrained by the printing costs. The downside is that they can sometimes be a little more challenging to read. Some excellent sources to look at: The Capirola Lute Book (1517), Herwarth lute ms (1570), The Willoughby Lute Book (1575), The Folger Dowland Lute Book (c.1594), and The Welde Lute Book (1605), among many others.

3) Iconographic evidence such as paintings, drawings, wood carvings, and any other depiction, can provide some really interesting evidence. That said, it is important to take iconographic evidence with a grain of salt. Painters posed subjects with instruments they didn't play and took liberties with the depictions of the instruments themselves. If you can match an image to something discussed in writing or some clue you have found in the music, it can be powerful evidence. One example would be depictions of lute players in the early 16th century with their left hand thumbs wrapped around the neck of the lute, something modern classical guitar players avoid. By themselves, we could assume that the images are just non-musicians posing with instruments for a painting or drawing, but the introduction of The Capirola Lute Book (1517) specifically mentions that it is a good habit to have so it becomes clear that it was practiced by at least some high level musicians.

4) Surviving instruments and strings can also provide tremendous amounts of information. Though many instruments were modified and repaired repeatedly over many decades, luthiers and forensic specialists have found ways to reverse engineer the construction of the instruments so that replicas can be made of the originals. Though rare, we do also have some unmodified instruments from the 16th century. Not only do they provide a wealth of information to luthiers, but subtle things like sweat marks on the soundboard can give clues to players looking to recreate techniques and performance practices.

The abundance of primary sources means that you could probably spend your entire life exploring them, and some people do, but for the average player, I would just recommend looking at one source very thoroughly each week. It might not seem like much, but it will add up quickly and if you are thorough, you will learn things that will change your perspective on the instrument and the music.

Finding Community

Relevant video: Fundamentals Episode 35: Finding Community

One of the great strengths of the lute is that you can play a complete piece of music on it without having to rely on other musicians. While this is a wonderful thing, it also means that you are often sitting in your room alone, missing out on one of the most amazing parts of music, the social aspect. When I was a classical guitarist in high school, I used to attend guitar and music classes at Glendale Community College in the evenings. One of my favorite courses was the guitar ensemble class. It was amazing. I got to make music with 4, 8, or even 20 other guitarists. We all helped each other and we were working toward a common goal. I was younger than most of the other players and it was immensely helpful to seek and receive their advice. Through college, ensemble classes continued to be my favorite and when I switched to the lute, the collegium musicum at Eastman, helped to fill that gap.

My advice to students is to find whatever community you can. You may be using this book to teach yourself the lute because there are no lute players in your area. If so, seek out other early musicians in your area such as singers, viol players, recorder players, keyboard players, etc. I'm certainly not against joining or forming communities online, but I do think that meeting with people in person has benefits that cannot be replicated by other means. Besides, working with non-lutenists can really help to expand your horizons and see music in new ways. Make the best of what you have available and try to get out of that lonely practice room!

TECHNIQUE

Sitting Position

Relevant video: Fundamentals Episode 2: Sitting Position

Your sitting position is one of the most important things to work out as a lutenist. It is literally the foundation of your playing. Unfortunately, it can often be very challenging to find a sitting position that works really well. Unlike many other instruments, the lute does not come in a standard size, or even shape. Additionally, the rounded back can make it very hard to hold securely without creating extra tension. In the video above, I demonstrate a variety of positions for you to try with your instrument. I'll reiterate a couple things that I mention in the video because I think they are very important when working out what position works best for you:

1) I often see students sticking with the first position they use. This is unfortunate because as beginners, our needs are very different from when we advance to higher levels. If you are noticing pain, excess tension, or are hitting technical limitations in your playing, you should consider exploring and experimenting with different sitting positions.
2) It can be tempting to emulate our lute heroes and copy their sitting position but understand that the best position for you might look very different. If we look at the sitting positions of the players at the highest levels, you will notice that there are often significant differences from player to player. This is because they have found the position that works best for them.
3) A new position can be uncomfortable at first and beginners can mistake this for being "worse" than their old position. Make sure to give the new position at least a couple of days to really test it.
4) You may find that different positions work better for certain right hand techniques than others. If you decide to experiment with a different right hand position, it may be helpful to also test it with a different sitting position.

As you read through these chapters on technique, you will see a common theme: **experimentation**. To develop as players and musicians, we need to try things and evaluate how well they work. If something is successful, we keep it. If not, we try something different. While it is true that some level of commitment is necessary to learn a new technique, students often take this principle too far and can even spend years in a rut hoping that things will eventually get better. In the beginning, new techniques can take weeks or months to get comfortable with so experimentation can be a little challenging but as you advance you will find that you can evaluate a technique quite quickly, usually within a couple days. As you read through this book and begin learning the pieces in the repertoire section, just keep an open mind to the possibility that you may need to occasionally make fundamental changes to your technique as you progress. While this might sound discouraging, it can actually be very exciting, especially when a change works and helps you to get out of a rut!

Basic Right Hand Technique

Relevant videos:
Fundamentals Episode 5: Basic Right Hand
Fundamentals Episode 15: Right Hand Part 2
Fundamentals Episode 23: Right Hand Part 3
Fundamentals Episode 31: Four and More Notes
Fundamentals Episode 43: Ring Finger Planting

One of the most exciting revelations of the early music revival for lutenists was the discovery and reconstruction of the Renaissance *thumb-under* technique, and deservedly so. Prior to its rediscovery, lutenists were primarily playing with a hand position and technique very similar to modern classical guitar. The rediscovery of the thumb-under position ostensibly brought us closer to the sound world of lutenists in the 16th century. This technique became extremely popular with Renaissance lutenists working in the late 20th and early 21st century, to the point that you will often hear it referred to as *lute technique*. The unfortunate consequence of this is that other right hand techniques that we know were also used in the 16th and early 17th century have been less explored, and even, to some degree, ignored by the lute community. Here I will present the different right hand techniques that I am aware of. This is a large topic that warranted the creation of many videos. I recommend watching them all and returning to them for review as you progress and experiment with different right hand techniques.

16TH CENTURY RIGHT HAND TECHNIQUES

Plectrum- Use of a plectrum (or pick) didn't end after the 15th century. Giovanni Maria Alemanni, one of the most important lutenists of the early 16th century, was a plectrum player. Sadly, his *Intabolatura de lauto*, published by Ottaviano Petrucci in 1508, is lost. Plectrum playing may also have been a common way of playing treble grounds, a form of duet where one player plays a single voice while the other plucks (or strums) chords for accompaniment. These treble grounds were popular well into the early 17th century.

The plectrums themselves were often made from bird feathers or leather, but it is likely that players experimented with many different types of materials. As with most modern plectrum players, the plucking action is generated by the up and down motion of the right arm. While this book does not pretend to go into this technique in any great detail, I do think that it can be very helpful for beginning lute students to spend some time playing with a plectrum as it can help develop this arm motion that is so essential to most of the other techniques described below.

Thumb-under- Certainly the dominant right hand technique of lutenists in the 16th century. It developed from plectrum technique, but because it allows the use of four of the right hand fingers when plucking, it opened the door to more possibilities, especially when playing complicated counterpoint. Unlike modern classical guitarists who generally use the alternation of the middle and index finger to play single lines, the thumb and index are used. Like plectrum technique, these plucks are supported by motion from the right arm. The pinky is planted on the soundboard both as support for this motion and to stop the arm and prepare for the next

upward stroke. The technique is called *thumb-under* because the thumb disappears into the palm each time it plucks. It may have been originally developed by Germanic lutenists in the late 15th century, but this may simply be a popular explanation. It is entirely possible that lutenists in many locations were experimenting with ways of being able to play the complex polyphonic music that was popular at the time and naturally came to find a similar solution. This is an excellent technique to start with if you are interested in playing Renaissance lute. I won't go into too much more detail here because this technique gets most of the attention in the videos that are provided above.

Thumb-out- Despite some modern misconceptions, the historical *thumb-out* position of the 16th and early 17th century differs greatly from modern classical guitar technique. Like thumb-under, the pinky is planted on the soundboard and the primary plucking technique is the alternation of the thumb and the index finger, though the position of the hand allows for more use of the middle finger when advantageous. The motion of the arm can still be used but there is some evidence that they were moving more toward plucks initiated from the base of the fingers. In Robert Dowland's Varietie of Lute lessons (1610), the introduction mentions that one of the advantages of this technique is that the arm doesn't need to move.

It is difficult to ascertain when thumb-out position started to become popular, but we know that John Dowland (1563-1626) transitioned from thumb-under to thumb-out during his lifetime, likely after spending time traveling and working in continental Europe. We know that Jean-Baptiste Besard mentions that his teacher, Lorenzo Tracetti, taught him the technique in his Thesaurus Harmonicus (1603). This was likely while he was in Rome during the early 1590s. This essentially means that the technique was already multi-generational by the 1590s, which is not surprising since there are sources that already show experimentation with middle and index alternation. Iconographic sources, which admittedly must be taken with a grain of salt, seem to indicate that some players were using the technique as early as the mid-century. Vihuela sources from the first half of the 16th century, which are very detailed in their descriptions of various right hand techniques, not only mention thumb-out, but middle and index alternation as well. Though the vihuela was a different instrument than the lute and was isolated mostly to Spain, we do know that they interacted with lutenists, so lutenists would have likely been *aware* of the technique as early as the first quarter of the 16th century.

Finger plectrums- There is a very interesting account of Francesco da Milano, the most important and influential lutenist of the first half of the 16th century, playing for an audience with thimbles on his fingers. These thimbles had feathers built into them so that he could likely got some of the benefits of using a plectrum: increased volume and probably a little extra speed (though likely not equal to what a plectrum player can achieve), while also allowing the freedom to play multiple voices and complex counterpoint that fingers afford. The use of finger plectrums has not been explored much by modern lutenists, though I have noticed that is starting to change. It makes sense that professional lutenists working in courts during the 16th century might have different needs in terms of volume than amateur players and so the use of finger plectrums isn't so surprising. If the most famous lute player in the first half of the 16th century used them, then it would blow my mind if no one else emulated him.

Middle and index alternation- While we tend to think of middle and index alternation as a modern classical guitar technique, not only is it mentioned in vihuela sources in the first half of the 16th century, it can also be found in sources like the Cavalcanti lute book (1590) and the music of Nicholas Vallet (Le Secret des Muses, 1615 and 1616). Additionally, Robert Dowland's Varietie of Lute Lessons (1610) mentions the use of middle and index alternation when the "thumb is busy in the bass." How busy is not entirely clear but what is clear is that the middle finger is seen as a viable replacement for the thumb.

With all of this, keep in mind that when we find something in a published source or even in a manuscript source, that thing is often several years old and, in some cases, much older. This means that lute players were likely starting to experiment with middle and index alternation before 1590 and that middle and index alternation is a viable and historical right hand technique that can be used when playing Renaissance lute music. It is important to note that there is no indication that rest stroke was used and it is likely that this technique was in the minority, even in the 1590s. My educated guess is that *pure* middle and index playing was quite rare until the 17th century, but that players often mixed it with thumb and index alternation, especially when using thumb-out. The ratio of thumb and index to middle and index playing probably varied from player to player.

Nails- The evidence for nail use in the 16th century is slim. Besides some iconographic evidence, which should always be viewed with caution, there is essentially nothing describing the use of nails until the 17th century. That said, it is important to keep in mind that the total number of surviving sources that describe right hand technique are actually quite few, especially considering that the lute was the most popular instrument of the 16th century. Additionally, all of those surviving sources are essentially texts written for beginners on the instrument. To put this in perspective, imagine that in 400 years, the only surviving texts on playing the electric guitar are Hal Leonard and Mel Bay's introductory books, really just book one of either series. There are no surviving recordings of electric guitar playing. Now imagine that for years you have studied these books and then suddenly come across a recording of Jimi Hendrix's Machine Gun (Live at the Filmore). The gap between what Hendrix does in that recording and what is in those books is so gigantic that it is shocking.

Without hesitation, I would say that the gap between reading the introduction to Robert Dowland's Varietie of Lute Lessons, which is one of the most detailed surviving pedagogical texts for the lute, and playing a Terzi Canzone arrangement is equally large. Honestly, the gap is pretty significant between it and most of John Dowland's own pieces. Modern players are forced to look at the music and come up with hundreds of solutions to issues that are never addressed in these texts. I say all of this because I find it absolutely ridiculous to believe that some lute players did not play with nails. The description of Francesco da Milano playing with finger plectrums indicates that volume was an issue, as it is today, for many professional musicians. It also shows that the timbre, which is quite different from flesh, did not bother either Milano or his audience (the description is one of the most positive reviews of a musical performance I have ever read!). I will also point out that in modern genres where fingerpicks are common (bluegrass, Celtic, country, blues, etc.), there are always players who choose nails instead. In fact, many players switch to fingerpicks because they find that their nails are not reliable or they fear breaking them. As early as the 17th century, we already have stories of guitar players cancelling performances due to a broken nail (Francesco Corbetta, if you were wondering).

The fact is that we don't have a ton of information about right hand technique for the lute in the 16th century *in general* (the vihuela sources are SO much more detailed). What we do know is that they enjoyed a wide variety of timbres and techniques. Between Vincenzo Capirola's instructions to use high enough frets to create a buzz (what we call today a *bray lute*) and Francesco's finger plectrums, we are already getting colors that are quite distant from the *plump* tone produced by the flesh of the fingers in nailless thumb-under technique. By the 17th century, we can definitively state that at least some players used nails. Alessandro Piccinini advocated their use, Elizabeth Burwell disliked them, and Thomas Mace, while preferring flesh, admitted to some of the advantages they afford, especially in ensembles.

So what does this all mean for the student reading this book? It means that I can't prove that nails were ever used by lute players in the 16th century, but I do find it far more likely that some players used them than none at all. I *do* think it was more likely that they were used by professionals or consort soloists than amateur players at home. It is a controversial topic in the lute world and if you decide to use nails then you will likely receive some criticism. I do hope we see more players experimenting with them and I do hope that the community opens itself to the possibility of nail use in the 16th century.

Basic Left Hand Technique

Relevant videos:
Fundamentals Episode 6: Basic Left Hand
Fundamentals Episode 16: Left Hand Part 2
Fundamentals Episode 24: Three-note Chords with Left Hand

Many of the principles that form the foundation of good left hand technique for modern guitar, also apply to the lute. The videos above will introduce you to the technical elements involved, but bear in mind that some things will be dealt with in later chapters, specifically shifts, barrés and stretches/extensions. Here I will reiterate some key points that are covered in the videos:

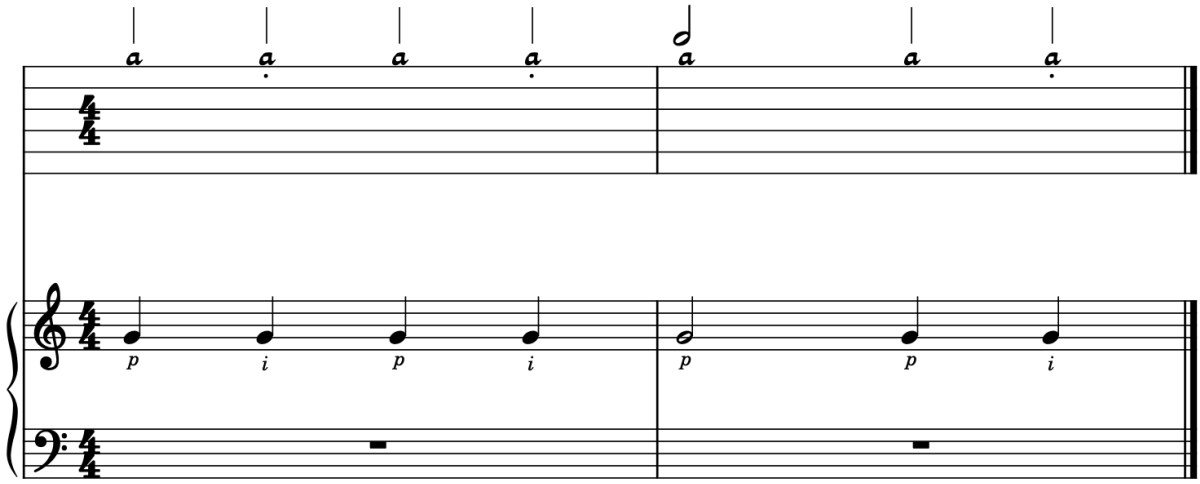
1) A good *standard* position can get you a long way in your playing, but it is important to understand that as you progress, we must often deviate from that position in order to play a particular chord shape or to handle a complex fingering. These deviations are normal. We simply make them and then return to standard position when that moment ends. Many players get "stuck" trying to playing everything in a perfect standard position. This is often because teachers or instruction manuals don't always do a good job explaining the importance of deviations.
2) There will be variation in how good left hand technique looks depending on your individual physiology. A person who is 6'4 might need to approach the same instrument differently than someone who is 5'2. This applies to thumb position, fingering choices, sitting position, etc.
3) When we push a string into the fingerboard, we try to use the minimal amount of pressure necessary for producing a sound. We leave fingers down when we want a note to ring out or if that finger is helping to execute another move (pivot, guide, etc.).
4) When we push a string into the fingerboard with a particular finger, we should also pay attention to what the other fingers are doing. It is best if the other fingers remain relaxed and un-extended. The unnecessary extension of fingers not only can add tension, it also means that you need to bring those fingers back before you can use them again. This equates to a significant amount of extra movement.
5) If you have large hands or a small lute (usually a 6 course lute), the left hand thumb can be wrapped around the neck and used to fret bass notes. Not only is this seen in iconographic evidence, but it is also recommended in the Capirola Lute Book (1517). This practice became rarer as lutes got larger and additional bass strings were added, but it is an excellent technique for early 16th century repertoire, particularly on lutes in A (Spinacino, Dalza, Capirola, etc.).

Accent-Based Fingerings

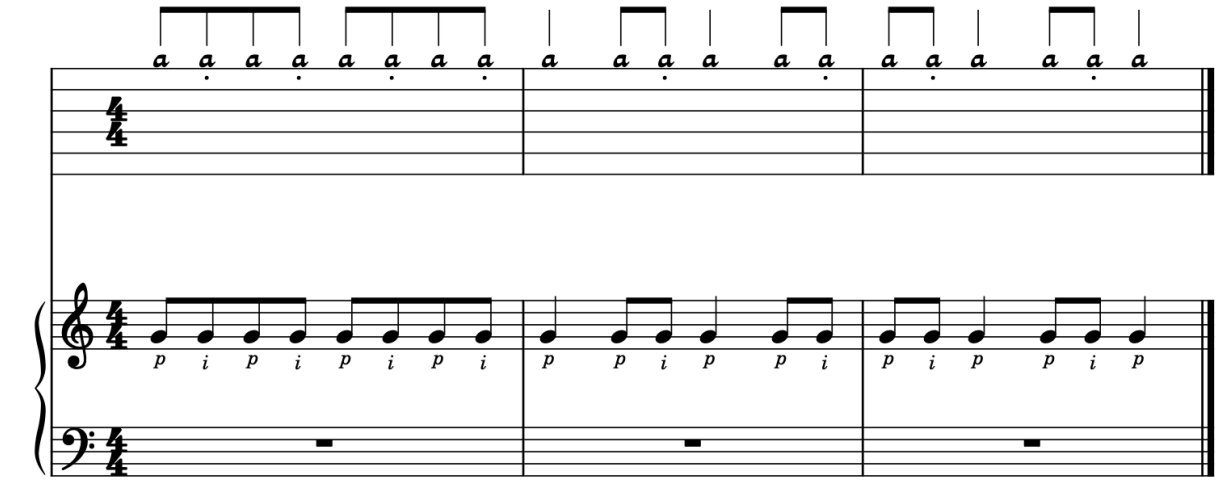
Relevant video: Fundamentals Episode 13: Accent-Based Fingerings

An accent-based fingering system is a system that matches physical technical elements to the natural accents in the music. For example, if we pluck a string with our thumb, not only are we using the largest digit of our right hand, but we are also plucking down toward the ground, and so we have gravity on our side. This makes it very easy to make a strong accent using the thumb. In contrast, the index finger is much smaller and plucks upward, against gravity. This means the index finger is better suited for notes requiring a softer accent. Accent-based systems were widespread during the Renaissance and were used by practically every instrument. For example, string players would use downstrokes for strong beats and upstrokes for weak, and wind players would use accented syllables for strong beats, and unaccented syllables for weak beats, etc. These systems started to go out of vogue in the late 18th and early 19th century, when musicians started to experiment with systems that sought to *equalize* all the fingers (or strokes, or syllables). Both systems have their strengths and weaknesses and they are not necessarily mutually exclusive (you will find instances where both systems borrow from each other in particular situations), but it is important to understand that if you are looking to perform Renaissance music, accent-based fingerings play a big part in creating an "authentic" sound, assuming that is important to you. Let's discuss how we apply these principles when playing the lute.

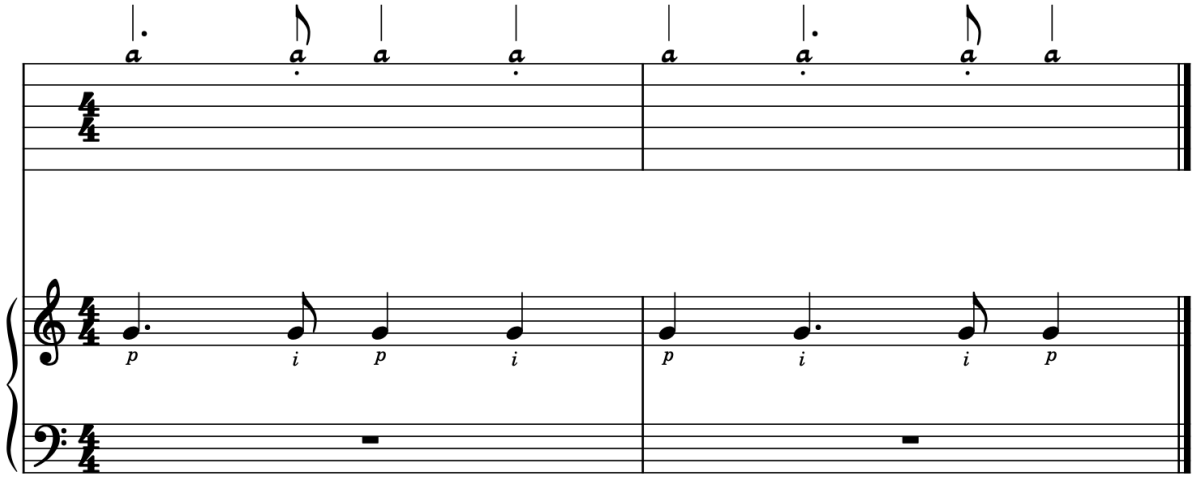
This first example is in common time (four beats per measure). In four time, we generally have an accent on beats one and three, though understand that as you approach more complex music, exceptions will arise. The thumb will be used for strong beats and the index finger will be used for weak beats. Keep in mind that the middle finger can take the place of the thumb. Even though the stroke is against gravity, the larger digit helps to produce a stronger sound than the index finger. Middle finger use is not always indicated explicitly, but when it is, it will be indicated by double dots (..). I will provide some examples toward the end of this section that use (..) but for now just know that any tablature letter with no dot under it indicates the use of a strong digit, either the thumb or middle finger, while a single dot (.) indicates the use of the index finger.



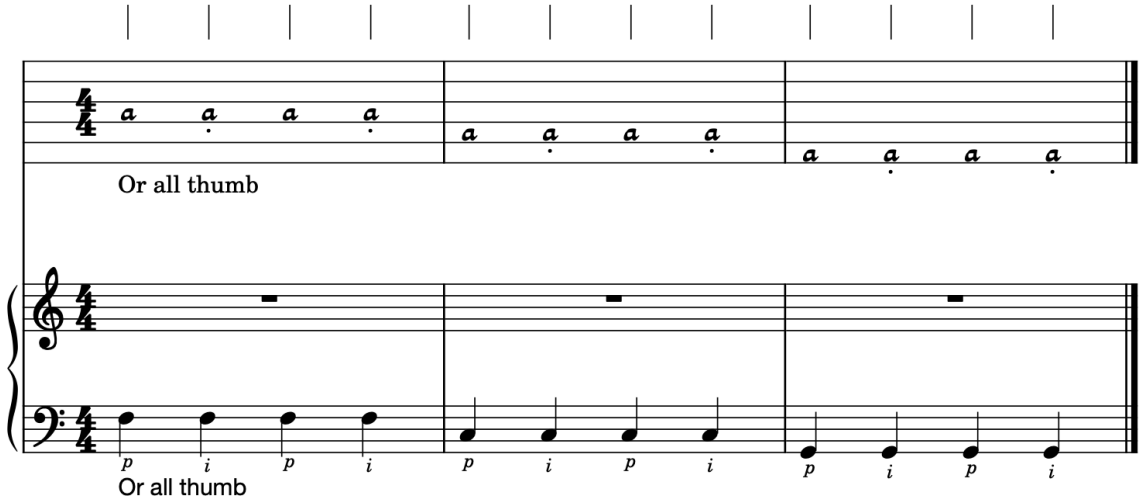
In the previous example, I have provided the right hand fingerings in both the tablature and in the standard notation. Just a reminder, “P” indicates use of the thumb and “i” indicates the use of the index finger. If you are using M and I alternation, the P can be replaced by M (middle finger). Notice in the second measure that the thumb is used twice in a row, once on the downbeat and once on the third beat. Since they are both “strong” beats and no notes are played on the second beat, then you get two thumb strokes in a row. This is quite different than modern classical guitar where strict alternation is common. For eighth notes, we always use thumb on the numbered half of the beat and index on the *and* of the beat.



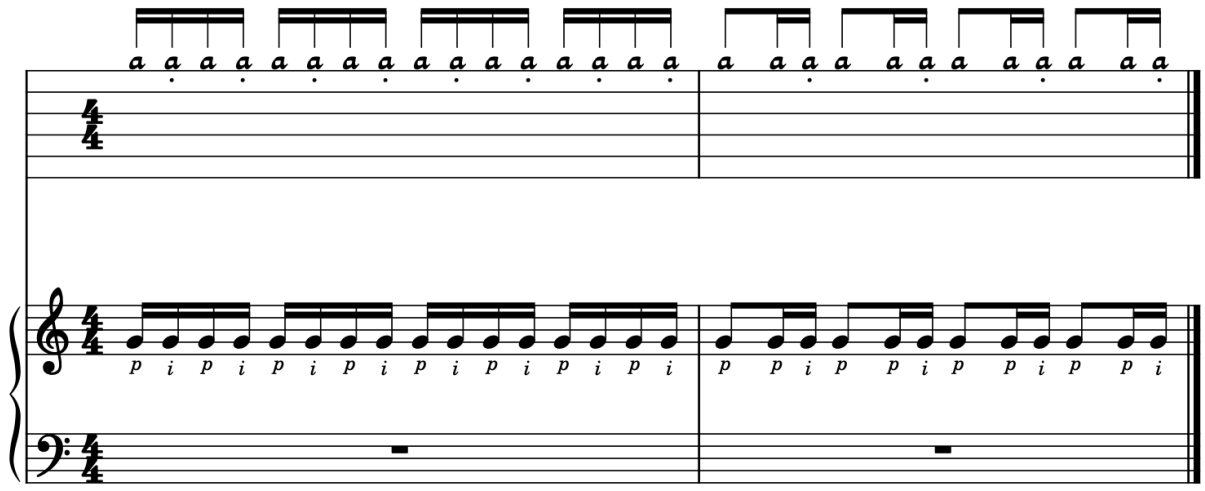
When eighth notes and quarter notes are mixed, the *ands* will always be plucked by the index finger. If a quarter note immediately follows an eighth note, it is played by the thumb, even if it is technically a *weak* beat. This is to avoid awkward and quick repetitions of the index finger. Keep in mind that the index finger can be repeated when there is more time between the notes (see beat two of the second measure).

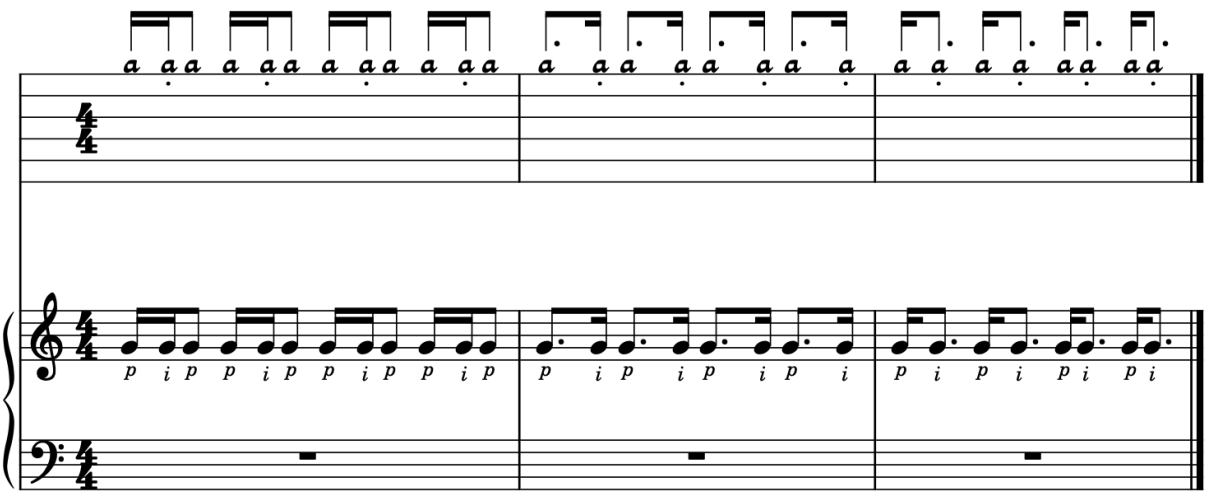


Bass notes (fourth course or lower), can be plucked normally or can be plucked with all thumb. Whether you do it one way or the other will depend on the tempo and whether you want to deemphasize the octaves on your bass courses (this is usually for contrapuntal reasons).

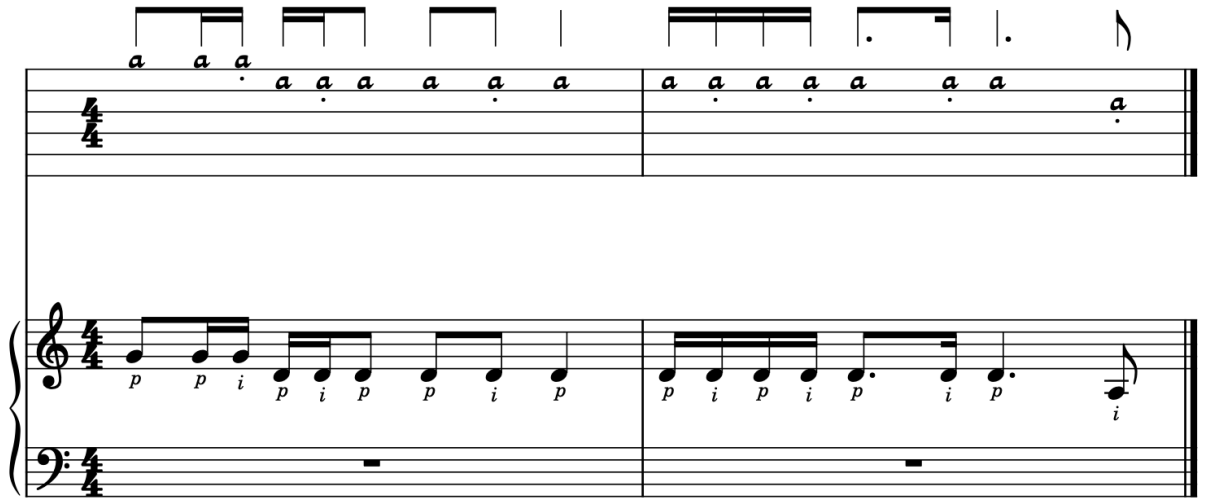


When sixteenth notes are introduced, the number and “and” are played with thumb, while the “e” and “a” are played with index. This rule is followed in all the following variants.

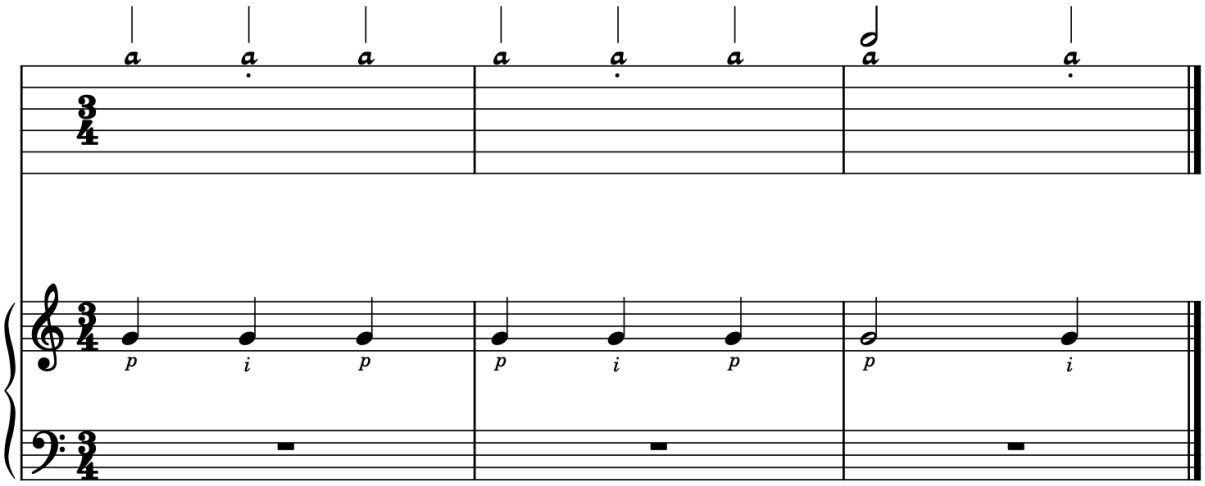




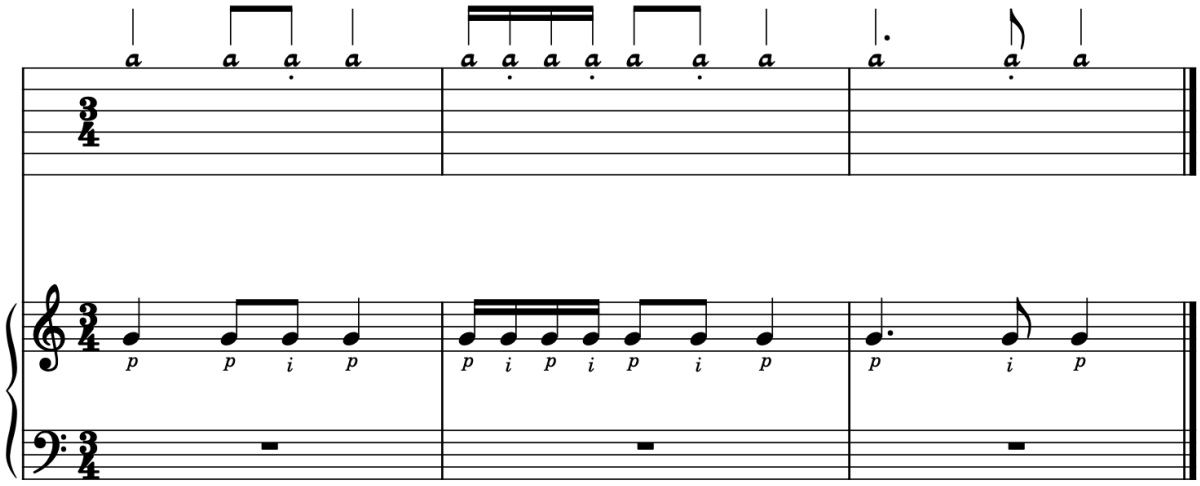
The next example mixes some of the previously discussed rhythms.



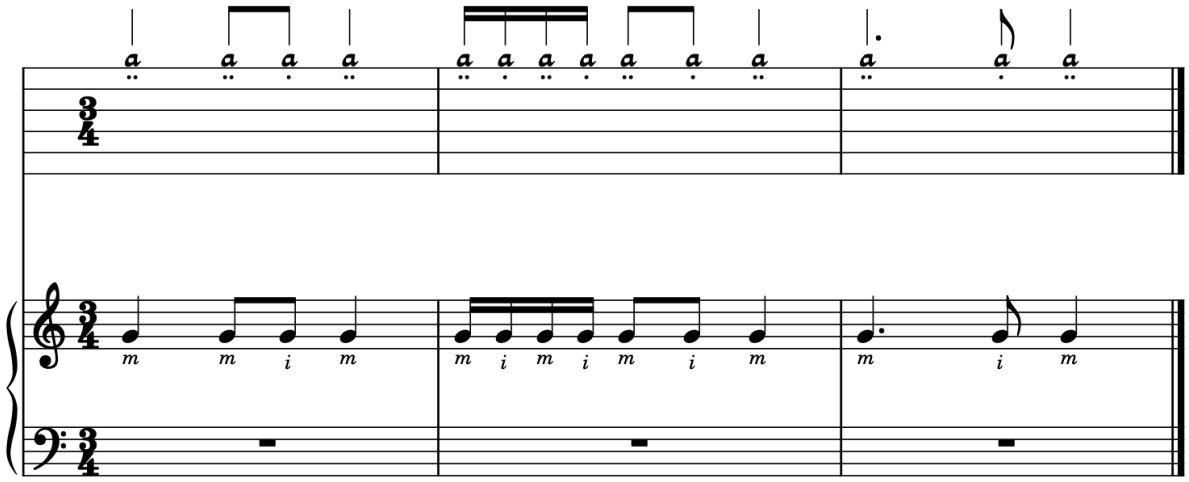
Here are some examples in triple time. You will notice that the thumb plays on beat three (as it does in common time) except when it is preceded by a half note.



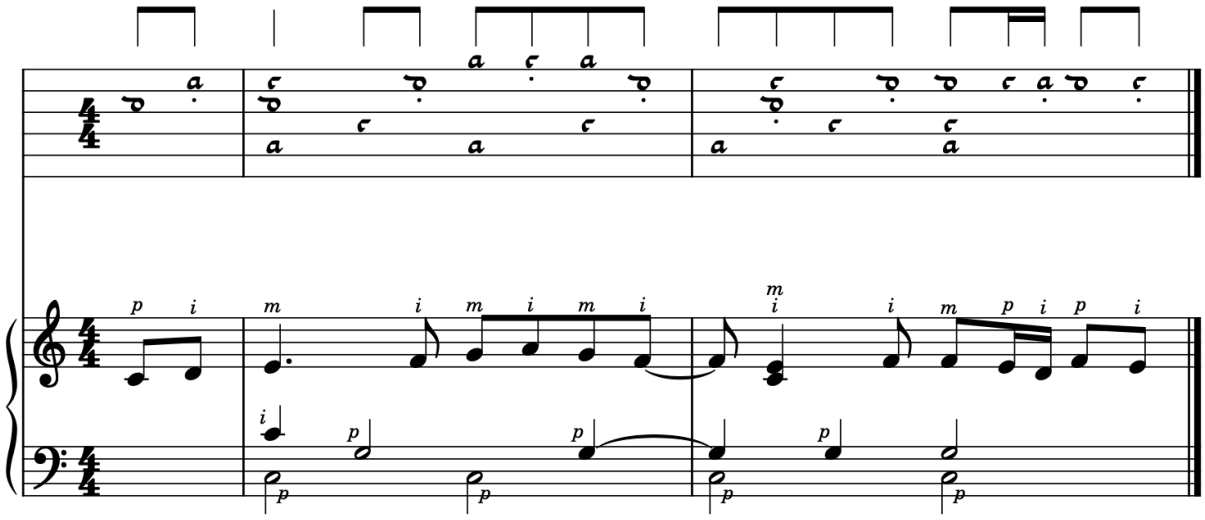
Here is a more complex example in triple time.



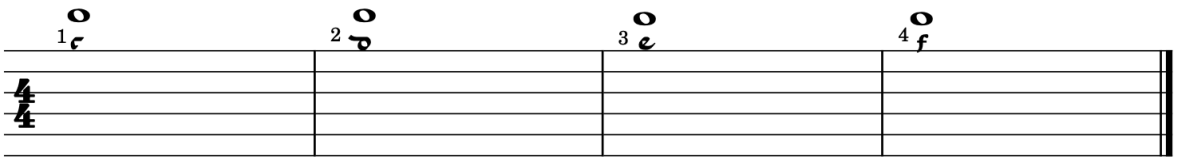
This next example shows what middle finger indications look like. Again, keep in mind that these symbols are not always used, the thumb and middle finger were commonly known to be interchangeable.



When we add additional voices, the rules remain essentially the same, the only difference is that when playing chords, the thumb is obviously needed in the bass. In the example below, we see how this is handled.



Exercise 2:



Obviously, things get more complicated with multiple voices and we often have to make compromises, but mastering these simple exercises will go a long way, particularly if you apply what you have learned to your pieces.

Tone

Relevant video: Fundamentals Episode 28: Tone

Tone can be a somewhat controversial topic, particularly in the world of classical music, where *good tone* is often synonymous with a warm, somewhat dark sound. Imagine the difference between a bluegrass steel string guitar and a nylon classical guitar for a moment. I think both are beautiful, but I think you will find the brighter tone of the bluegrass guitar to be fairly rare in classical guitar playing. Some of these same associations and assumptions have developed in modern lute playing and I think we need to be careful about how it influences our choices. Some of these things were already discussed in the chapter above on right hand technique, but let's examine them a little closer in relation to tone.

As discussed previously, the modern Renaissance lute world has emphasized nailless thumb under technique, played fairly parallel to the strings. In general, this produces what most listeners consider a "plump, warm sound." But as previously discussed, thumb under was not the only technique used and we know that players also continued to use plectrums and even experimented with finger plectrums. Even more radical sounds were created, as in the "bray lute" described by Vincenzo Capirola (1517) and with metal-strung instruments, including the lute in some instances. In addition, when we examine other genres of art in the Renaissance, particularly the visual arts, we see a tremendous range of contrasting colors, shades, and materials. In fact, I would consider contrast to be a primary characteristic of Renaissance art in general and so I find it hard to imagine the lute, often considered the greatest of instruments at the time, to be so monochromatic.

So what does this mean to you as the student? Well, it certainly doesn't mean that you have to constantly change the color while you are playing (though you certainly could!). Such contrasts don't have to be taken to the micro level, though I think it is often quite effective when done well. At the very least, I recommend being accepting of the idea of a variety of color possibilities. You may enjoy color contrasts between players or perhaps between individual pieces. For example, you may choose to play the Lachrimae Pavin with a darker tone than Lady Clifton's Spirit, a lively Galliard. Now, in the context of discussing different color

possibilities for good tone, is it possible to still describe good tone vs bad? Yes. Here are some key elements of good tone, whether bright or dark:

1) A ***full*** sound- this is produced by using plenty of flesh (or a good combination of flesh and nail). A thin, raspy sound is usually produced when a player brushes a string without making good contact.
2) The speed of attack- whether you need a fast stroke or a slow stroke, the stroke needs to be controlled during its entire arc. In general, this means using the slowest possible stroke for the speed you are playing and making sure that you control the trajectory of the finger even after the pluck is finished. This shares some qualities with the "follow through" that is needed when throwing a ball or throwing a punch.
3) Taking care of your flesh and nails- making sure that your skin is healthy and smooth and managing your nails, whether you are using them or not, can have a huge impact on your sound. I have very dry skin and I often need to sleep with Aquaphor on my hands to keep them healthy.

All this said, keep in mind that there are many instances when "ugly" sounds are absolutely appropriate. The lute song repertoire is full of amazing and descriptive text and it is essential that the accompanist try to capture the color of the words with their playing. You could certainly play an ugly, raspy chord on the word "cruel" and then switch to an ethereal color for the word "heaven." If you are thoughtful about it, this can extend into your solo playing with great results. Once the audience trusts that you know what you are doing and that it is purposeful, you can really play with it!

Rubato

Rubato is an umbrella term for a variety of techniques where the exact value of a written note or notes is not strictly adhered to, generally for purposes of expression or to emphasize a particular moment. A note, or notes that are altered can "borrow" time from a neighboring note, in which case the overall timing of the passage is still strict, or the time can simply be added or "stolen," causing the passage to have more time than is written. When done well, this can be very beautiful and expressive. When done poorly, it can just sound like the performer does not know how to count. In either case, it is not something that can be captured by music notation, the subtle alterations and relationships need to be experienced in an auditory manner.

Some forms of rubato are defined by their relationship to the bass or pulse. One form of rubato keeps a steady bass line while the upper voices can arrive slightly early or slightly late. This can produce a very expressive performance and is common in jazz, folk, and other traditional styles. The second form, which is more common in western classical music, though can also be found in Indian classical music and other art music styles, changes the pulse, speeding up and slowing down according to the character of the music and the moment that is being played.

Since there are no recordings of performers from the 16th or 17th century, there is no definitive way to know how much rubato was being used. From writings, we do know that rubato was an expressive device that musicians did use, but the descriptions are often vague and it is rarely clear what type of rubato is being indicated. There are exceptions. For example, in vihuela

PRACTICE

A note:
Before diving into this section on practice, I think it is very important to acknowledge the fact that we all learn in different ways. The section that follows is based upon my work with students at all levels over 21 years of teaching. I'm including concepts and tools that I have found to be the most consistently helpful when applied diligently and I have left out things that proved to be less helpful. That said, it is important to keep in mind one overall guiding principle of practice as you read through this section: **Process is irrelevant, results are all that matter.** If something is genuinely working for you, continue it. If not, try something else.

General Principles of Practice

Relevant video: Fundamentals Episode 9: How to Practice

In order to get the most out of our practice, it is very important that we understand how to improve. It is common for students to ask "how long should I practice?" This is totally understandable because our lives are filled with transactions, situations where we trade an exact amount of something (usually time or money) for something else. For example, that car you want is $35,000, that A+ in your class is 625 points over the course of the semester, and that pension is earned after 20 years of service. Unfortunately, things are not so simple when developing a skill, especially in the arts. Someone could practice for 6 hours a day and not sound as good as someone who practices for an hour a day, particularly if their practice time is not effective. So what is effective practice? Effective practice, in a nutshell, is:

LEARNING NEW SKILLS OR MATERIAL WELL AND SOLVING PROBLEMS

A great musician is someone who has a learned a great number of things well and solved a great number of problems. The amount of time it takes you to do those things is ultimately irrelevant. Another factor that should be taken into account is the ***way*** we go about learning new things and solving problems. Take a look at this generic practice regimen, which is very similar to many that you will find in books and on sites across the internet:

Warm-up (10 minutes)
RH tone exercise (5 minutes)
LH Finger independence exercise (5 minutes)
Scales (10 minutes)
Trebles (15 minutes)
Repertoire (30 minutes)

This gym-like regimen is certainly better than being completely aimless in your practicing, but is it really the best way to learn learn new things and solve problems? I don't think so and there has been some recent research into how humans learn that would indicate there is a better way. First, we learn difficult things best when we have the energy to do so. It is not a good idea to work on a very challenging part of a piece when we are tired or have already practiced for some time. For this reason, we need to organize our practice so that when we sit down to play, we start working on the most difficult thing first. As we tire, we move on to easier items on our list or take a break.
The second element of human learning that is very important, is that we learn best when having fun or enjoying ourselves. I don't think this will be a huge surprise to anyone, but it can be challenging to make some aspects of lute playing enjoyable. Maybe it is a VERY difficult leap or chord shape, or maybe you hate counting aloud as you play. Whatever it is, try to

actively FIND the joy in everything you do. Sometimes our feelings about things are self-reinforcing and we just need to break the cycle and approach the topic in a different way. I try to set myself up for success by having some hot cocoa or tea by my side and I will sit in front of the window with some nice natural light. I have found that we have a lot more control over our feelings than we may think we have! Even if you aren't necessarily having fun dealing with an issue, **try to stay relaxed.**

Let's discuss some practical ways you can incorporate these ideas into your practice. First, I would recommend sitting down for a few minutes before you start to practice each day and assess your needs. Be as honest as you can be and then grab a piece of paper and write down your goals for the day. Put the most challenging item first because we have the most energy at the beginning of our practice session. It might look something like this:

1) Work out beat 3 to beat 4 in m. 36 of the Canzone
2) Chain through m. 22 of the Saltarello (@tempo)
3) Bring the first 3 phrases of the passamezzo up to tempo

Another day, perhaps one where you are tired might look like this:

1) sight read through first half of the Capirola Lute Book. Try to ignore mistakes but play slowly
2) Read an article on ornamentation
3) Listen to some 16th century vocal music.

Perhaps you are dealing with some left hand tension. Your day might look like this:

1) Working note by note, play first phrase of the Pavane as lightly with the left hand as possible.
2) Work on playing a 3 string barré without using the thumb on the back of the neck
3) Practice plucking very loudly with the right hand while hold the left hand fingers down as lightly as possible.

Or maybe you are working on changing your posture:

1) play in front of mirror testing positions 1, 2, and 3
2) Practice position 2 for 30 minutes and see how shoulder is feeling. Take a break after.
3) Practice position 3 for 30 minutes and see how shoulder is feeling.

Every day should be a little different. If you finding yourself doing the same thing every day, not only will it get incredibly boring, but your progress will slow down. Even if your general goal stays the same, each day should be a little different. For example, if your goal is to learn Lady Clifton's Spirit, the first day might look like this:

1) Do some research on Galliards, Dowland, and Lady Clifton
2) Find all the versions of Lady Clifton in the sources and start making comparisons

Day 2:

1) Make a standard notation score of LCS and start singing through the individual voices
2) Start playing through the individual voices

Day 3:

1) Start playing pairs of voices
2) Start working out fingerings for the first 3 phrases

Keep in mind that it is also okay if we don't finish all the items on our list for the day. If that happens just move the unfinished items to a different day. **Our goal is not to check boxes. Our goal is to genuinely improve. It is much better to truly solve one problem or truly learn one new thing than to jump from thing to thing.**

But keep in mind that we also don't want to let our lists make us inflexible. If I'm working on a difficult spot and starting to feel frustrated, I will take a break and move to some easier material. I can either come back or return to it at my next practice session. These goals are loose guidelines to give our practice a general shape for the day, they are **not** inflexible roadmaps. You will notice that I don't write times next to them. Why? First, I have no idea how long it is going to take to solve that problem or how much energy I will have that day to work on it. Strict scheduling looks nice on paper, but can be very constraining in practice.

While working on a problem spot or a new skill, it is very important that we try to **stay relaxed and approach it like a fun puzzle.** Additionally, mindless repetition will not solve your problems, but thoughtful changes can. This applies to everything from ear training to working on that nasty leap in m.37 of that saltarello you are working on. Look and listen to what you are doing, analyze where the problem is occurring, and then experiment with changes until you find a solution. ONCE you have a solution, thoughtful repetition can help to turn a difficult moment or concept into an old friend that you can rely on.

Finally, I will just say that it is important to keep an eye out for avoidance behavior. It is human nature to want to ignore our weaknesses and problems and though I think it is wonderful to take breaks, we should make our best effort to face problems head-on. This is especially true if your teacher or other players are consistently pointing out a weakness.

In addition to working on pieces, all of these topics are legitimate areas to practice and improvements in them will improve your overall musicianship and playing:

1) Ear Training
2) Sight-reading
3) Music theory
4) Music history and performance practice
5) Dance
6) Singing and playing other instruments
7) Listening to recordings (both critically and passively)
8) Ensemble playing

Warming Up

Relevant video: Fundamentals Episode 9: How to Practice

Warming up is a very personal thing. Some players use some simple exercises, others might use a few familiar pieces, and still others have very complicated and extended warm up rituals. Without judging anyone else's warm-up method, I'm going to share some advice that has been *extremely* helpful for me. It has made practicing much more efficient and performing much more reliable. Here are the key ideas:

1) Warming up is simply the physical and mental transition between what you were doing and what you are about to do, which is practice or perform. In general, I have found that 95% of warming up can be done in your mind. When most people sit down to warm up, they use that time to mentally transition to a *playing state*. Their first notes are sloppy, their sitting position is bad, they are tense, etc. They *slowly* transition as they play. If you can prepare your body and your mind *before* you make that first pluck, everything after it will go better.
2) If you can get into a *playing state* faster, then your warm up can be shorter. Less warm up means more time to practice. Of course, this takes practice in itself and you won't necessarily be able to go cold turkey. But if every day you try to get ahead of issues and really prepare your body and mind for that first pluck, it gets easier and easier.
3) At some point, I think it is a good idea to experiment with not actually physically warming up. Today, the only time I spend "playing" the instrument before I practice or perform, is while I tune. While this might seem quite odd, it has made my playing more resilient. As a performer, there have been countless times where I have been put in situations where I was not able to warm up before a performance. For example, a radio interview where you talk for 40 minutes and then they suddenly ask you to play something or a prism concert where you sit on stage for an hour while other people perform and then suddenly it is your turn. The point is that if you get used to having a long warm up, your body is going to expect and need one in order to perform well. If you acclimate to having no physical warm-up, then the conditions are the same and things generally go much better. As I said, I have found that it has made a huge difference for me and it is wonderful not having to worry about finding some space to squeeze in warm up time.

I acknowledge that there are some controversial statements above and that some might accuse me of promoting risky behavior that could lead to injury, but allow me to clarify: I'm not saying you shouldn't warm up, I am just saying that you should make a concerted effort to do as much of the warming up as you can before your first pluck. Examine your posture, your arms, your hands, your fingers. Check your breathing, your shoulders, everything. THEN pluck that first note. If that goes well, you have set the tone for the day and it makes it that much easier to play the next note well. When you feel good and your hands are moving well, then you are done warming up. All of this takes practice but over time it gets easier and easier.

A note for beginners and intermediate players: Read everything I wrote above and do your best to mentally prepare but cut yourself some slack. At this stage you are still getting acquainted with the instrument, so mental preparation will be much more difficult for you. My suggestion is to jump right into your practice, **BUT PLAY VERY SLOWLY** for the first few minutes. Don't push and don't worry about playing at tempo or "being where you were yesterday." Allow yourself some grace and just make it a goal to play clean, beautiful notes. You will slowly warm up and you can get some great work done by examining your movements for any issues or weaknesses in the passage you are playing.

Sight-Reading Tablature

Relevant Video: Fundamentals Episode 19: Sight-reading

Sight-reading, or the ability to play a piece of sheet music that you are seeing for the first time at sight, is probably the only skill in music that came "naturally" to me. I think this is simply the result of the fact that I had so much fun reading through my dad's old guitar method books when I first started learning (even before I had a teacher). It was just a blast to hear the ink on the page become sound. When I am tired, bored, or sad, sight-reading is my balm, my go-to for feeling better. Now, I know that for many people this is not the case. There are whole method books and instructional videos on improving your sight-reading with countless tips on how to avoid roadblocks. This is understandable because good sight-reading skills can make learning pieces exponentially easier and faster. It is an extremely desirable skill. It may be controversial but I do believe that this view of sight-reading may cause unneeded stress and actually impede one's improvement in this area. If you have already read the chapter above on practice, then you know that I firmly believe that we learn best when having fun. Instead of thinking of sight-reading as an "important skill" that will aid in learning difficult pieces, think of it as a chance to explore new music without the pressure of having to learn it seriously. Sight-reading is NOT the instantaneously *perfect* playing of a piece. Great sight-readers make lots of mistakes when first reading a piece, but we learn to keep the rhythm and minimize the impact of the mistakes on the overall sound of the music. I will give some tips below on how to make sight-reading more fun below:

1) Start by sight-reading LOTS of easy things but push yourself occasionally
2) Practice sight-reading a piece in your head before actually playing it with your instrument. Yes, this is technically not sight-reading but it is something most great sight-readers do.
3) Be flexible with tempo. Read things slowly but also push yourself to try and read a piece at tempo occasionally.
4) Don't simply focus on the technique or mechanics of playing. It may seem counter-intuitive, but thinking about dynamics, articulation, and color can actually make reading easier and more enjoyable.
5) **Pick a couple days during the week to *just* sight-read**. Doing only a little bit every day will not improve your skills greatly. Instead, really dive into it. Once the skill is developed it is VERY easy to maintain (this is actually true for most skills).

Finally, don't be hard on yourself if you don't enjoy sight-reading or if you struggle to develop it. We all have strengths and weaknesses and we all learn how to work around our weaknesses while emphasizing are strengths.

Exercises

In this method, I have repeatedly made it a point that I prefer developing technique through playing and working on repertoire. When I do utilize an exercise to solve a problem, it is almost always based directly upon an issue that I have encountered in a piece that I am playing. In my current state and when working with students, I find this to be more productive than working on generic exercises, With all that said, I would like this book to be as comprehensive as possible and, admittedly, I don't know of any professional musician who has not dedicated some amount of time, however brief, to "mechanical" exercises, myself included. For this reason, I would like to discuss what I think is the best way to approach them.

First, let's discuss what an exercise is. An exercise is usually a set of physical movements centered around the right hand, the left hand, or both in coordination. More rarely, an exercise might encompass something larger like breathing or relaxation. Exercises are generally used to do one of three things:

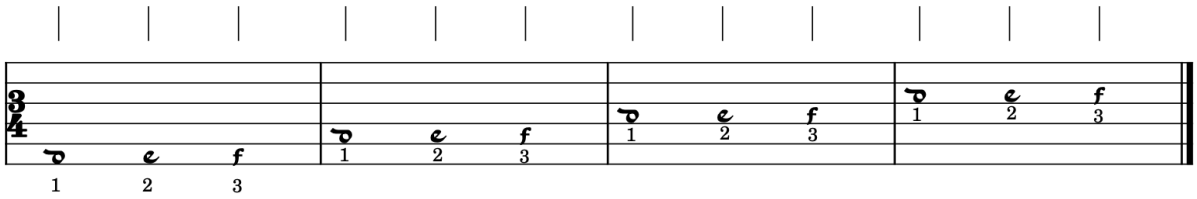
1) warm up

2) isolate and resolve a weakness

3) develop a new technique (shifts, extensions, barrés, etc)

For the purposes of this chapter, we will focus on the second two, since I consider the use of exercises to warm up a personal choice and the goals involved with warm up exercises to be very different. Generally, with a warm up exercise, the goal should simply be to move from a "cold" state to a "warm" state. With the other two categories, the goal is to improve or develop something. This means that when we are working on an exercise, we must keep this goal in mind and seek to actively improve what we are doing. In a nutshell, this means that we need to avoid mindless repetition, something that can be challenging when playing a mechanical exercise. That said, exercises are usually simpler than pieces and afford an opportunity to work out a problem in the "woodshed" before testing it in the wild. This advantage must be weighed against the non-musical nature of most exercises that can lead to the student losing focus or getting bored, bearing in mind of course that students can get bored and distracted playing music as well! Let's discuss a common problem that students often use exercises to solve.

Imagine a student who is struggling to control their left hand pinky while using their other fingers to fret notes. Whenever they play, their pinky flies away from the fingerboard and they swear they have no control over it. While the student's initial instinct might be to choose an exercise that develops the pinky, what would actually be more productive is to choose an exercise where the other three fingers are carrying out simple tasks so that you can practice controlling the pinky while doing them. Here is an example:



In this example, the goal is to keep the pinky relaxed, curled, and close to the fingerboard while playing the pattern using the first, second, and third fingers. One of the most difficult things for beginners to come to terms with is the fact that whenever we are playing the lute, we need to not only think about the fingers that are actively doing something, but also the fingers that are not currently being used. This is discussed in greater detail in the chapter on "Economy of Motion and Preparation."

My general advice is that once you have solved a problem with an exercise, drop the exercise. Many students, fearing that they will lose a skill, overload their practice sessions with exercises that are no longer necessary or that failed to solve the problem. Some students may decide to set aside a period of time when they ONLY work on exercises. It is said that J.S. Bach would make his students spend 6 months to a year working on exercises before allowing them to move onto repertoire. I spent a period of about 3 months doing just exercises in my mid twenties. All this is to say that there may be some value to this and here is some general advice if you decide to do this:

1) I don't think this is good for absolute beginners unless they are very motivated and have some well thought-out long term goals. This sort of practice is better reserved for intermediate and advanced students.
2) Try to make this period **finite** and be sure to come up with very specific goals. Use the principles that are discussed in the sections below on practicing and learning pieces to keep the quality of the work high.
3) Technique is not perfected until the mechanical elements are merged with the musical. For this reason, I would not encourage students to spend too much time doing this but to simply solve the problem and then start to find examples in the literature/repertoire in which to test your solutions. For example, if you decide to spend three months working on exercises, you could spend the fourth month applying what you learned to phrases that contain those techniques or problems. This also makes a nice transition back to working on the repertoire.

One final reminder: problems are not solved by mindless repetition, but they can be solved with thoughtful experimentation. Engage with whatever you are doing and make sure that you don't keep repeating errors. In the appendix of this book, I am including what I consider the "ultimate etude," a consort piece by Daniel Bacheler (1572-1619). It can be used to work on weaknesses in your playing.

Learning the Pieces

The most important thing when preparing a piece of music for performance is to listen to your playing critically and to pay attention to your body and the movements you are making as you practice. All the advice below and in the videos is potentially useless if you are not doing this. A player with great critical listening skills and awareness of their body may not even need any of the methods below. Also, keep in mind that the pickier you are, the better your playing will get, so developing your "musical ear" is essential (see chapter above on "Your Musical Ear").

On the next page, I have listed some skills that will make learning a piece of music much easier if they are well-developed.

1. Sight reading ability
2. Fundamental technique and economy of motion
3. Your musical ear (relative pitch and critical listening skills)
4. Knowledge of performance practice
5. Understanding of Counterpoint

TEMPOS FOR BEGINNERS AND MOST INTERMEDIATE STUDENTS

At this stage in your development as a musician you should not be too concerned with your speed. Your primary goals should be to develop your technique and your musical awareness. Sitting position, right hand position, left hand position, economy of motion, preparation, tone, your musical ear, music theory, etc. should be plenty to keep you busy. Do **not** expect to be able to play your pieces at the tempos you may be hearing in recordings. Instead, choose a goal tempo that is pleasant but allows you to stay relaxed and focus on these other areas. If you are interested in developing your speed, read the section above on “Speed and Tempos.”

TEMPOS FOR INTERMEDIATE AND ADVANCED STUDENTS

Most Renaissance pieces have a fairly wide range of acceptable tempos. Start with a tempo that is comfortable for you and then work on your economy of motion and your fundamental technique to raise the tempo if needed. When I use the phrase *at tempo* that is meant to mean your chosen tempo for the piece which is within a comfortable range for you. We should try to be relaxed when playing 95-98% of the time, only accepting some level of tension when we are “testing” something. Also, keep in mind that the character of the piece is generally more important than the actual tempo. Use articulation, color, dynamics, and attack to convey the energy of the piece while you work on your fundamental technique to improve your speed (see chapter on “Speed and Tempos” for more information).

As we progress in our studies and develop skills, the way we learn pieces should change. For example, I would not expect a beginning student to be able to read a piece at sight or sing directly from the tablature. I also wouldn’t necessarily expect an intermediate level student to be able to immediately identify imitative counterpoint within the context of a dense contrapuntal fantasy. For this reason, I am providing three different methods for approaching learning pieces, one for beginners, one for intermediate and advanced players, and one for pre-professional and professional players. Do NOT feel any pressure to move from one method to the other. While I do believe there are real benefits to eventually using the more advanced methods, I think you can learn most, if not all, of the pieces in this book using the method for beginners.

The three methods below can be broadly differentiated by the amount of material you are expected to take in at a given moment:

The beginning method has you learn one note at a time.

The intermediate method has you work on problems and then learn by phrase.

The advanced method has you reading through the entire piece, gaining a general sense of the music before you fill in the details.

Before diving in, I’ve included some terms on the next page that you should know.

Chaining is a wonderful learning tool that comes in a variety of forms. It simply means that you work on a small segment of music, usually 1, 2, or 3 notes at a time and master it. You then work on the next segment, master it, and then "test" it with the previously mastered material. You simply continue this process until the phrase/passage is learned. This is an excellent technique for beginners and can also be helpful for more advanced students when you have to re-learn a passage with new fingerings.

Analytical Play[2] is when we take a moment or passage in the music and work on the mechanics of the motions necessary to make it successful. This is done **without a time constraint**. Essentially, we work on the passage without concern for the rhythm/timing. This could be a single moment (chord change, leap, etc.) or it could be a challenging passage (counterpoint, runs, etc.). We examine the motion each finger makes, the angle of the wrists and arms, the position of the shoulders and torso, basically EVERYTHING. We are looking for a choreography of movements that allow us to play the music comfortably. Obviously, we are also looking for anything inhibiting us (unnecessary finger movement, poor angle of the wrist or arm, etc.) from playing the passage. It can be very helpful to go through the movements multiple times tracking each individual finger and the other elements listed above, essentially going down a "checklist" looking for issues.

Beyond mechanics, we also need to be expressing our musical goals when using analytical play (dynamics, articulation, color, etc.). **The musical interpretation should be integrated into the movements and is just as important as the purely technical elements**. Once you have a solution, we then test it at tempo. If it is successful, we then test it in context by backing up a measure or so and playing through it. It is best to be as relaxed and engaged as possible when using analytical play. I try to make it into a fun puzzle and I put myself in front of a sunny window with a cup of coffee or tea by my side whenever I am doing it.

Relevant Video: Fundamentals Episode 40: Accommodation

Accommodation is when we change a note position or remove a note to make a passage easier to play or for a musical reason. When all else has failed, it is worth considering making an accommodation. If a note must be removed, I recommend carefully picking which note will have the smallest impact on the music. For example, if it is a passage with imitative counterpoint, avoid removing a note that is part of the imitative phrase (fuga). If you are playing a ground bass, avoid removing a bass note that is part of the ground. I treat this as a solution of last resort but it is important for students to understand that most professional musicians will make occasional accommodations to their music!

Research- I will just gently remind you that while you are learning and performing the piece, you should be taking in whatever information you can about it. Listen to recordings or other pieces by the composer and by other contemporaneous composers. Vocal music can be especially inspiring! Read books, attend lectures, compare sources, etc. There are no limits to what you can read, listen to, or play to help inform your knowledge on how to interpret your piece. Continue to be open to new information and seek out new sources whenever possible. Don't just copy someone else's performance. Make your own decisions and produce something unique.

It can also be extremely helpful to take the time to sit down and create a standard notation score of the piece that you are learning. For many students, this makes the structure,

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[2] **Analytical Play** is my own term and while I don't use it in the videos (I hadn't decided on it yet!), I give a good demonstration in this video: Fundamentals Episode 18: Learning a Piece starting around the 17 minute mark.

harmonies, and voice leading much clearer. You may discover “hidden” aspects of the music such as imitation or quotations. It can also make it easier to sing the individual voices (though you should learn to do this from the tablature eventually!).

For beginning and intermediate players:

If you are not already acquainted with standard notation and music theory, I recommend reading the chapter above on music theory. At this stage, you should be making standard notation scores of all your pieces. If you are not able to, set aside some time to develop the skills necessary to be able to.

For advanced and pre-professional players:

At this stage it would be good to start getting comfortable with analyzing certain pieces directly from the tablature. Simple dances, grounds, and toys make for good practice at this. Reserve full score creation for more complicated contrapuntal works (Fantasies and intabulations, etc.).

For professionals:

At this stage you should be fairly comfortable analyzing most pieces directly from the tablature. Some pieces, such as complex fantasies and intabulations certainly could still warrant a standard notation score. That said, it never hurts to make a standard notation score….just make sure you aren’t doing it because you don’t know the notes well without it!

Method for Beginners

The video below will take you through a step-by-step process for learning your first pieces. While the process may seem somewhat slow and cumbersome, it is a phenomenal way to build a strong foundation for your future playing. The higher a standard you hold yourself to in the beginning, the easier things get as you progress. Even if you are an experienced classical guitarist, I would still recommend following the method in the video, at least for the first few levels of this book. Treat this early period as an opportunity to really sink in and get to know the instrument. Once you have progressed in your playing and in your general skills (particularly sight-reading), you can then move on to using the intermediate level of learning pieces.

Fundamentals Episode 8: Learning your first piece

Many of the pieces in the first level of this book are preceded by exercises. I recommend using the method in the video above for learning these exercises as well as the pieces they are attached to. Taking the exercises seriously and learning them well **WILL** make the pieces themselves much easier to learn.

Method For Intermediate and Advanced Students

This method pushes the student to start thinking about music in a more holistic way. It involves research and score preparation, as well as some new and more detailed ways of approaching difficult moments in the music. While you don't need to be an absolutely fluent sight reader or have an expansive knowledge of music theory, this method does rely a bit more on these skills than the previous one, so make sure that you have gained some comfort in these areas before trying it. Keep in mind that you can always revert back to the method for beginners if you are not ready for this. The video below will take you through the steps that are involved:

Fundamentals Episode 18: Learning a Piece

A note: I did make a handout for this episode and will include it in the appendix of this book.

Maintenance

Once you have learned a piece really well, there is absolutely no need to play it every day. In fact, that can be harmful. I will usually play a piece in my repertoire 2-3 times a week but it just depends on how fresh it is or how difficult it currently feels. When playing through a piece for maintenance, I do think that most of the time you should stop if you
make a mistake and correct it. If I make a mistake, I will:

1) Stop and identify where the mistake occurred and how it occurred.
2) I will take a moment to play the spot correctly a couple times.
3) I will then make sure I can play through the spot, first starting a measure back then two measures back. Both times I make sure that I can play it ~3x without mistakes before proceeding.

I recognize that we may need to occasionally practice “playing through” our mistakes so that we don’t get in the habit of stopping during a performance. Before you sit down to play the piece, simply decide if you are in practice or performance mode. If you are in performance mode, make sure you do not stop. I don’t think that for most people this needs to be overdone (though of course there are always exceptions!) and usually a couple practice “performances” before a real performance is plenty, so I believe remaining in practice mode most of the time is best. **By correcting errors, we reinforce good habits.**

Nerves

Many people, even professionals (myself included), have to deal with nerves. There really is no replacement for playing in front of people, but here are a few tips you may find helpful if you struggle with nerves:

1) Make sure that you are taking the time to truly prepare your pieces.

2) If you are a nervous performer, spend some time performing pieces that are *well below* your technical capabilities. Treat nerves as a technical element that must be isolated and worked on.

3) Try to play a number of performances in a row. For example, my first tour was five concerts in five days. By the third or fourth day, I was feeling great and could have just kept going.

4) If you are a player who gets sweaty palms and fingers, some of my students have found chalk dust (like for rock climbing) to be very helpful!

THE PIECES

Navigating the Pieces

Before diving into the pieces, I just want to reiterate a few points:

1) This book was not designed for sight-reading (though it is an important skill to develop). Allow yourself at least 4 weeks to learn each piece. Many pieces in the later levels will take much longer. If you maintain a high standard for every piece you learn, not only will it make the next piece easier, but you will also progress much faster.
2) Focus on quality, not quantity. When working from this book, I recommend doing one piece at a time. Choose other sources for sight-reading and playing for fun, both things that I encourage you to do! **In fact, I recommend spending 1 or 2 days every week just working on sight-reading.**
3) If you have not read the introductory chapters on technique and practicing (or watched the videos), I recommend doing that before proceeding.
4) Before each lesson, I will provide some background information on the piece. **Some pieces may be proceeded by exercises. These exercises are meant to be mastered before playing the piece. Use the same process you use to learn pieces to learn them!**

At the beginning of each level are one or two "trebles." Make sure that you master each of these, in addition to the other works, before proceeding to the next level. **In fact, if you want, you could learn all of the trebles first before proceeding to the other pieces.** There is evidence to indicate that 16th century lutenists began their training with trebles and I think it is a wonderful way to develop many of your technical and musical skills before adding additional voices. This is generally my preferred approach for students!

I have arranged the pieces in each level so that they gradually increase in difficulty. Bear in mind that what some people find challenging, others may find easy, so you may disagree with my ordering and that is okay. In any case, I recommend mastering every piece in a level before proceeding to the next. As you advance in your studies, I think it is always a great idea to spend a little time going back to earlier levels and polishing pieces that you learned when you were less experienced.

Each level is divided into four categories: **Contrapuntal works, Intabulations, Dances, and Grounds**, with two pieces in each category. Additionally, each level begins with 1 or 2 treble ground pieces.

FINGERINGS: I have provided fingerings for the first level of this book. They are only a suggestion to help students working alone. There are often many fingering possibilities and students can make changes if needed but do try the provided fingerings first. The most common change that students need to make is exchanging the 3rd finger of the left hand for the 4th, or vice versa. Depending on the size of your hand, you may need to change one for the other.

A NOTE TO INSTRUCTORS: I designed this book for students working mostly alone. Please feel free to deviate as you wish, I fully recognize the supremacy of in-person lessons when it comes to teaching the lute!

LEVEL I

When I originally conceived of this book, I imagined having 8 pieces for each level but I understand that for many students, especially absolute beginners, this makes for a fairly steep learning curve. In order to soften this a bit, you will notice that this first level has some extra pieces. These are designated by the usual number and then the letter 'b.' For example: 5b. If you are coming from a classical guitar background, you may not find these pieces necessary, but absolute beginners may find them helpful. They are all beautiful pieces, so there is no harm in learning them all!

0a. A toy

This attractive little piece comes from the Jane Pickering Lute Book (f.15b). The book is from around 1615, but the owner was very conservative in her musical tastes. Most of the pieces are from the late sixteenth century and this source contains some of the best copies of them. A toy was generally a short, light lesson, often found in manuscripts that were used by amateurs playing the lute. There are very few truly simple pieces from the 16th century. It may be that students just didn't bother writing down their early pieces and exercises and so here I have simplified the piece so that it is just the melody. There are no shifts and the entire piece is in second position, meaning that the first finger aligns with the 2nd fret, second with the 3rd, third with the 4th, and fourth with the 5th. This is nice because second position is generally easier to play in than first, which requires the fingers to stretch a bit more to play the frets.

I have provided some introductory exercises to help you prepare for playing this piece. Please make sure that you have mastered them before attempting the toy. Even a piece this simple will be very complex for absolute beginners and so the preparatory exercises will help you to prepare.

In addition to giving you instructions on how to learn all the pieces in this first level, this video also discusses this specific piece, and discusses a few spots to take note of. If you have not watched it already, or need to review it, here is the link:

Fundamentals Episode 8: Learning your first piece

PREPARATORY EXERCISE 1

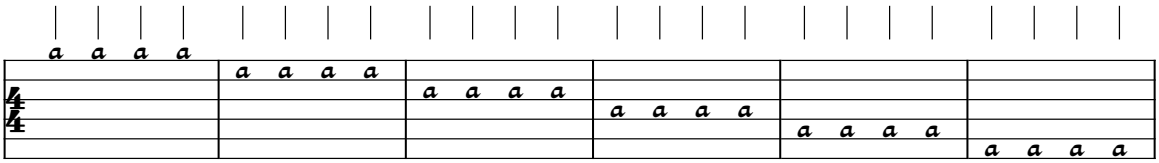
In this exercise, use only the thumb to pluck. Work on maintaining a steady pulse and getting a clear, clean sound. The videos on basic right hand technique and tone will be very helpful if you have not seem them already:

Relevant videos:

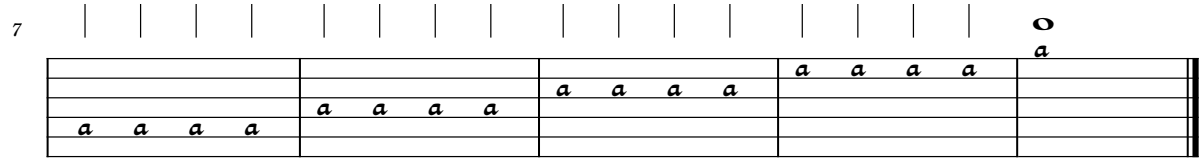
Fundamentals Episode 5: Basic Right Hand Technique
Fundamentals Episode 8: Learning your first piece
Fundamentals Episode 29: Tone

0a. Toy

Preparatory Exercise 1

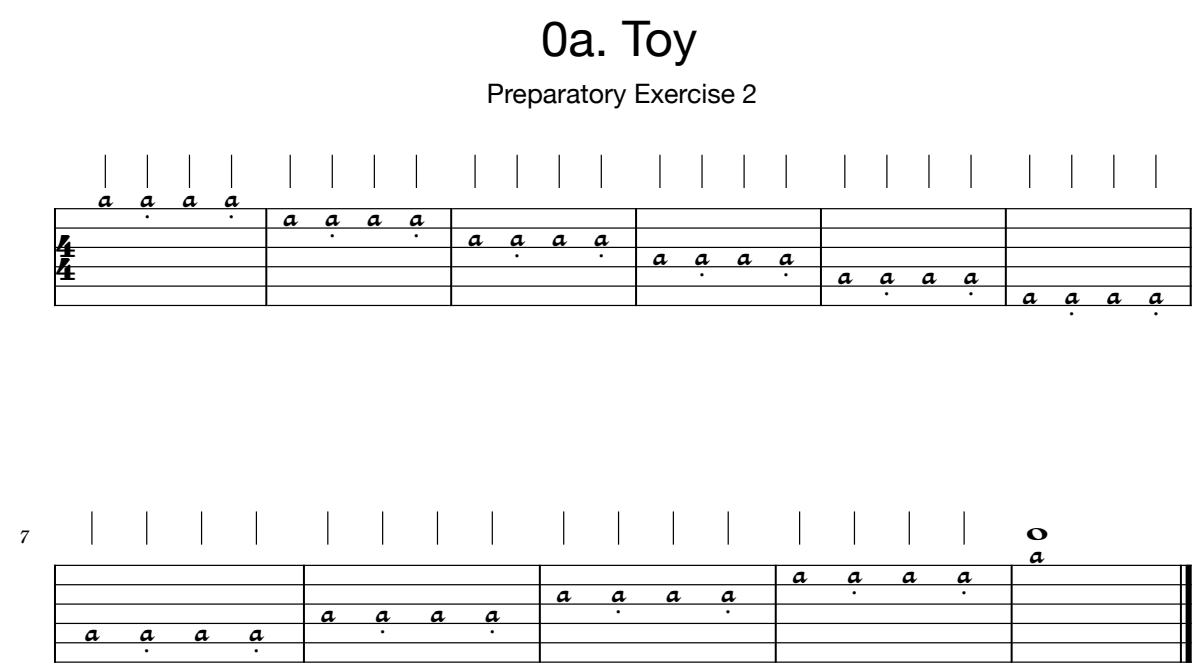


All thumb strokes



PREPARATORY EXERCISE 2

This exercise is exactly the same as exercise one, but introduces the index finger on beats 2 and 4, indicated by a dot (.). Make sure that both the thumb and index finger are producing a clear and clean sound, and make sure that you are maintaining a steady pulse.

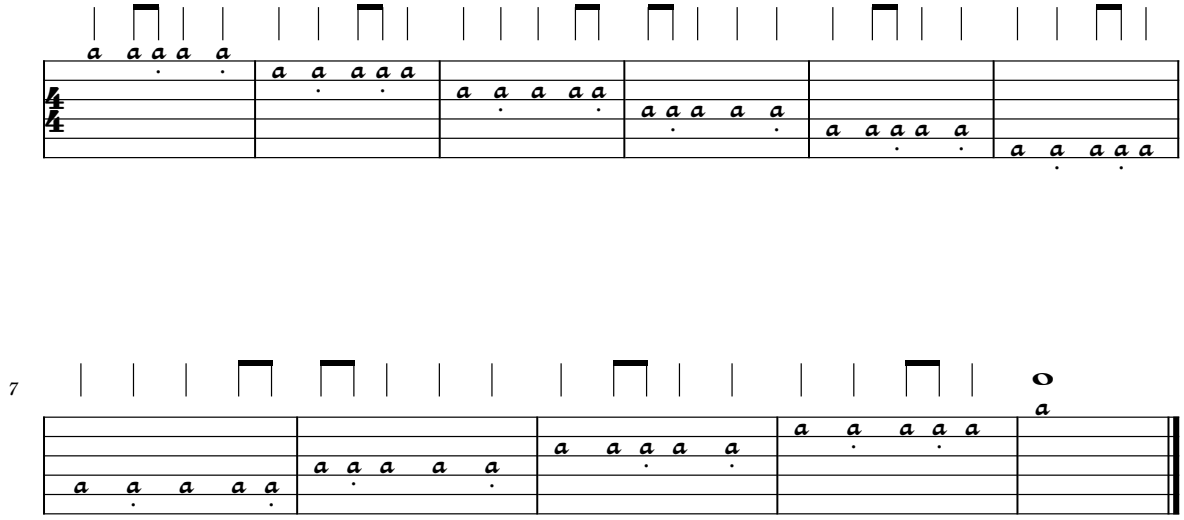


PREPARATORY EXERCISE 3

This exercise introduces some more complex rhythms. Make sure that you carefully follow the right hand fingerings. If you are having trouble coordinating the right hand fingerings with the timing, you can temporarily play the exercise with just your thumb. Once you really have the timing, make sure that you then work the right hand fingerings back in. If you are confused by the fingerings, please review the chapter earlier in the book on accent-based fingerings.

0a. Toy

Preparatory Exercise 3



PREPARATORY EXERCISE 4

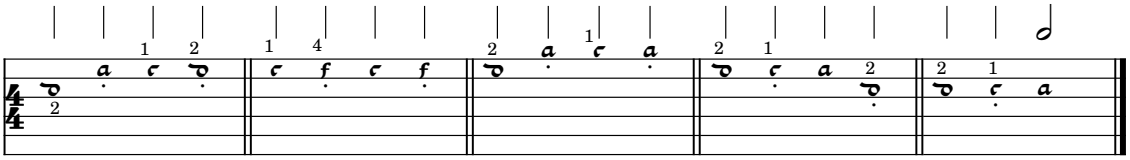
In this exercise, the left hand is introduced. These short exercises focus on two things: getting comfortable with the fourth finger and changing strings. Master each segment before attempting to combine them.

Relevant Videos:

Fundamentals Episode 6: Basic Left Hand Technique
Fundamentals Episode 47: Economy of Motion and Preparation

0a. Toy

Preparatory Exercise 4



0a. A toy

From the Jane Pickering Lute Book, f.15b

Anonymous



0b. Prelude

This prelude, found in ms Add 38539, also known as the John Sturt lute book (1620), is one of the most common introductory pieces given to students. This is because it is an attractive and relatively simple piece, a rare thing in the surviving repertoire. Like my simplified version of the toy, this piece is essentially a “treble,” or single voice piece. Many trebles are intended to be played as duets (the others in this book are) but this is a rare solo treble, a complete piece by itself.

There are a couple of subtle shifts in the prelude that beginners might find challenging. The first is in the second measure. In this spot, I have provided two fingering options (one in red) but you can certainly explore others. The next shift occurs between measure 7 and measure 8. Here you have an entire half note to prepare so make sure that you are using that time! Using my fingerings, the final shift occurs in measure 11, though if you change the fingerings, the shift can occur earlier. If you have not watched the episode on shifts, please do so before working on this piece. The ornaments, both shakes (#) and falls (x) can be ignored or you can read the earlier chapter on *graces* and try to incorporate them.

Relevant videos:

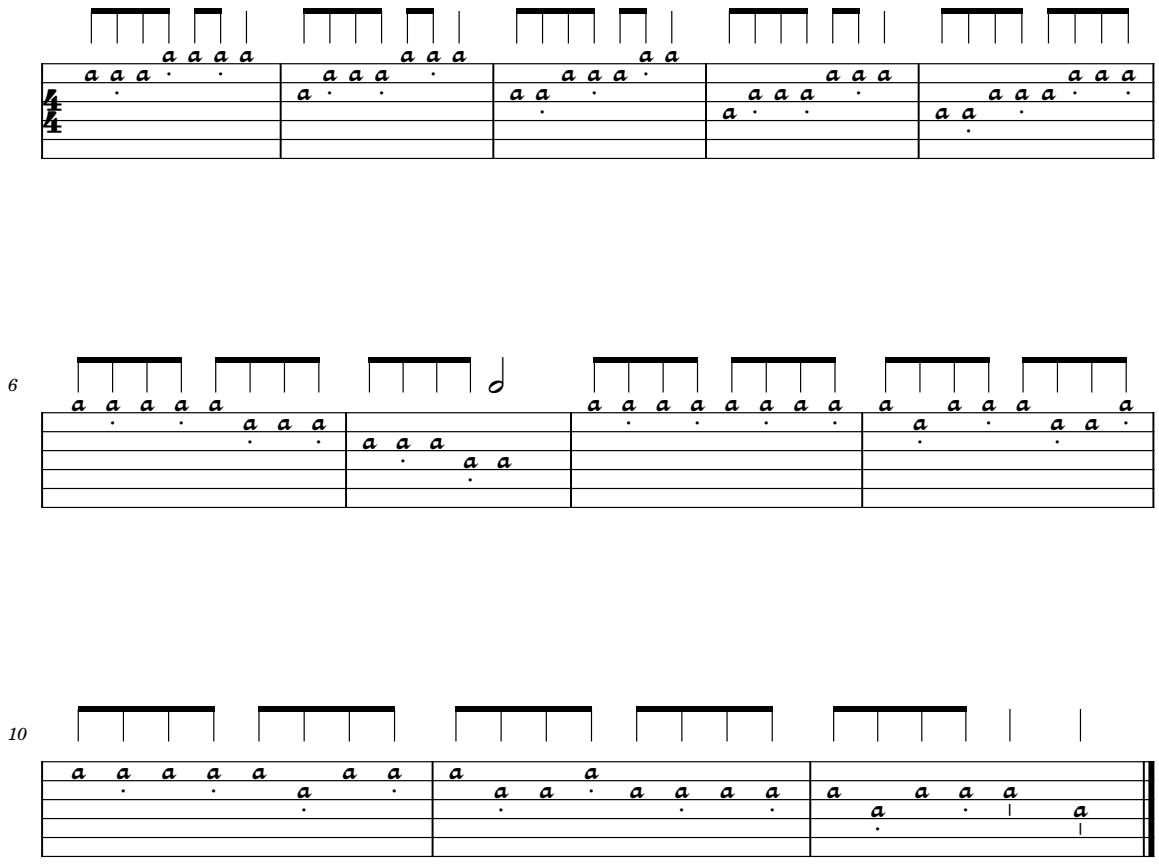
Fundamentals Episode 10: Left Hand Shifts

In addition to the video, I am providing a preparatory exercise. It is simply an exercise that isolates the right hand. There are a lot of string changes in this piece, so getting comfortable with them can be helpful before adding in the left hand. Make sure that you are counting and that you are always aware of what course you are playing on. **The vertical lines under the last two notes simply indicate that they are to be played with thumb strokes.**

0b. Prelude

Preparatory exercise 1

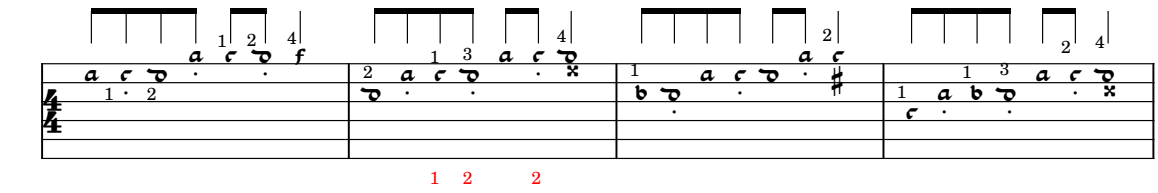
Anon.

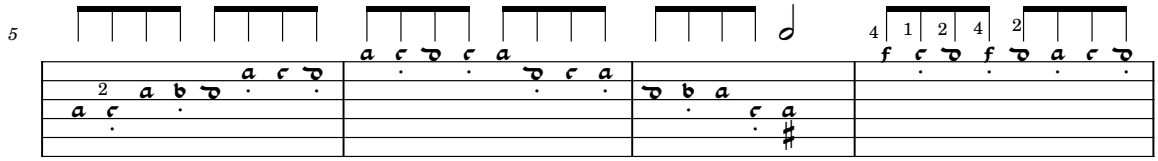


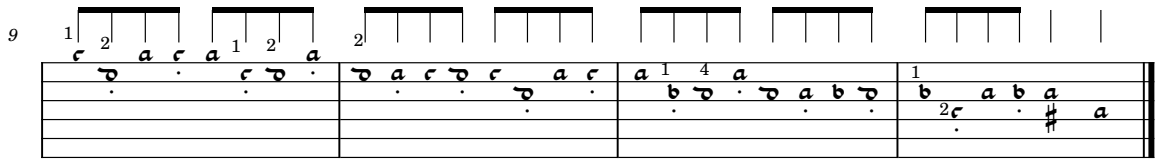
0b. Prelude

(ms Add 38539: John Sturt lute book, 1620)

Anon.







1a. Buffons (Simplified)

I chose this attractive piece from the William Ballet Lute Book because all of its bass notes are opens strings and so it serves as a great introduction to playing two notes at the same time (concentus/chords). I have removed the inner voice to make it more beginner-friendly. This piece is based upon a ground, or ground bass, a repeating bass line that composers/ improvisors would create variations over. This ground is called a *passamezzo moderno.* Grounds could be written in different keys, but the intervals between the bass notes would be the same. The basic pattern for this passamezzo moderno is: C F C G|C F C/G C (all major chords). I have provided a standard notation score of this piece. For future lessons, I expect the student to create their own. If you have not watched the episode on how to play two notes at the same time, here are the relevant right and left hand videos:

Relevant videos:

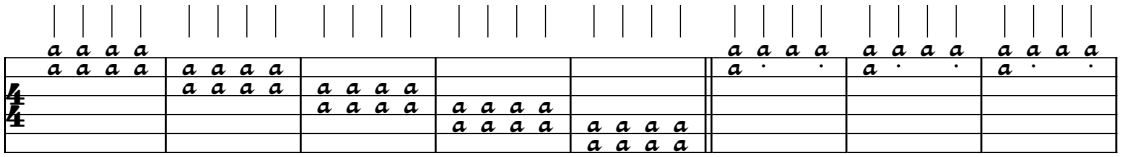
Fundamentals Episode 15: Right Hand (Part 2)
Fundamentals Episode 16: Left Hand (Part 2)

I have provided a series of exercises to prepare the right hand. Additionally, I have isolated the soprano (located after the piece) so that you can practice it before adding the bass line.

If you feel like you want more time playing single-line pieces (which is wonderful!) you are welcome to focus on the trebles provided at the beginning of each level in this book before proceeding on to pieces with two or more voices.

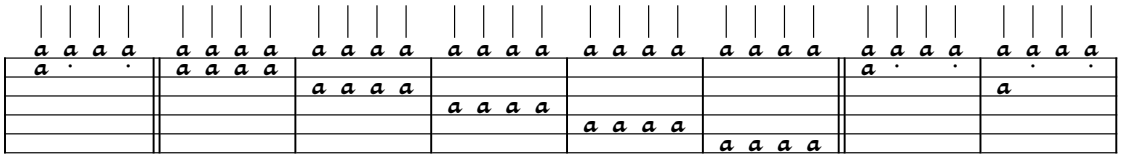
1. Buffons

Preparatory Exercise 1

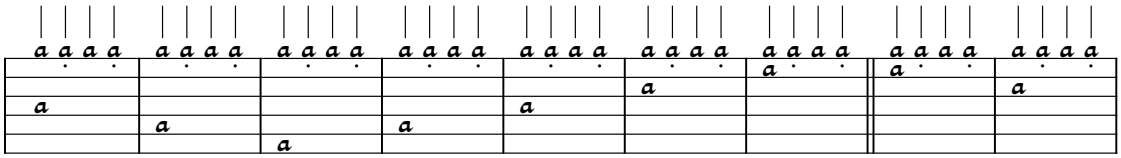


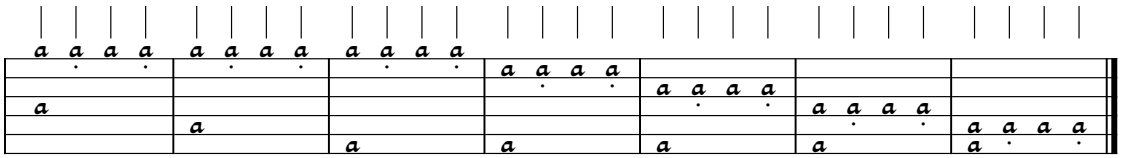
Use either P and i or P and M for adjacent courses.

Switch to P and i on low strings if using P and M on high.



If using P and i for adjacent courses, switch to P and M for non-adjacent.





1a. Buffons (Simplified)

William Ballet Lute Book

Anon.



1b. Basse dance (Tourdion)

Pierre Attaignant (c.1494-1551/1552) was an important early publisher in France. In addition to lute music, he published a tremendous amount of vocal music by some of the most important composers of the period. This *basse dance*, a courtly couples dance that may have had peasant origins, provides another opportunity to work on a two-voice piece with open bass strings before moving on to a piece with fretted bass notes. Couples held hands and kept their feet quite close to the ground, indicating that the tempo may have been fairly quick.
The piece can be found in Attaignant's Dixhuite basses danses (1530).

As with the *Buffons*, feel free to isolate the soprano (melody) and work on that before adding the bass notes.

A note: In measure 15, the bass note may be a mistake. I have reproduced it as it was written in the source but it could also be a D (tablature letter C on the fifth course). I kept it as written because I thought it made for an attractive and unusual cadence!

1b. Basse dance (Tourdion)

Attaingnant, Dixhuit basses danses (1530), f.13

Anonymous



2. Branle

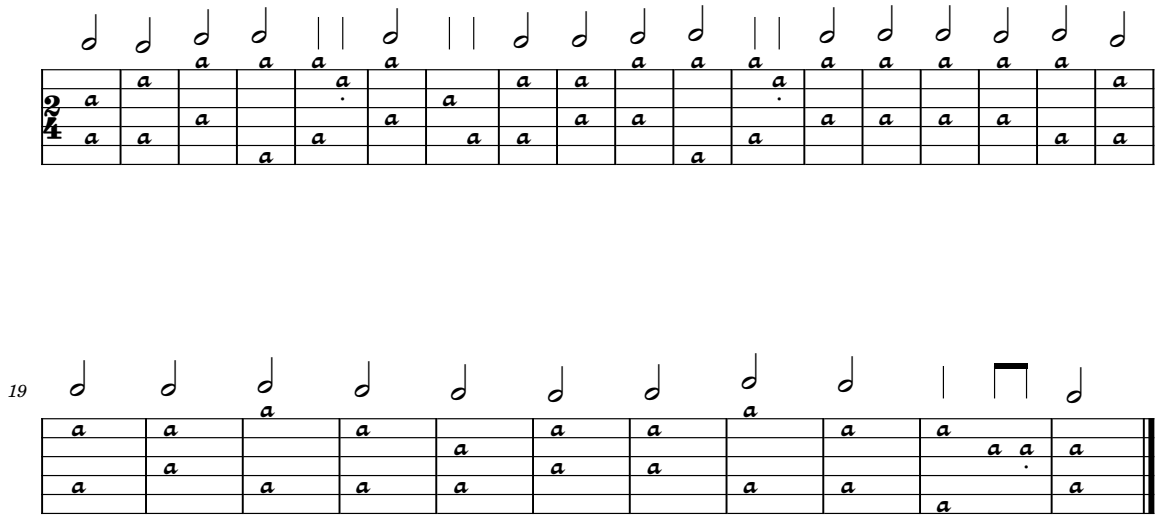
A *branle* was a French dance, originally a country dance that was adapted to court (similar to the *basse dance* above). Couples held hands in a long line or a circle, swaying (the French verb for sway is *branler)* as they made large steps to the left and small steps to the right, gradually causing the entire group to move to the left. The term branle is fairly generic and they came in a great variety of forms, some in duple and some in triple time. They were often grouped together to essentially form suites of dances. Like the *basse dance* above, this particular branle is from Pierre Attaingnant's Dixhuite basses danses (1530), an excellent source for fairly easy pieces. We don't know the intended tempo of this branle and I chose it intentionally because I think it sounds good either slow or fast. Bear in mind that minor keys were not necessarily associated with sadness at this point in history. Minor keys (or minor thirds) are often described as "smooth" and "sweet," while major are "harsh" or "bright." That said, I think slower interpretations of this piece are lovely, especially with a few ornaments thrown in!

I have provided three preparatory exercises that I think will get you in excellent shape for playing the branle. The better you learn them, the easier the branle will be. I recommend treating each one as a "piece" and taking it through the *Beginning Method* of learning pieces. **This represents a bit of a leap in difficulty so don't rush learning this one!**

2. Branle

Preporatory Exercise 1

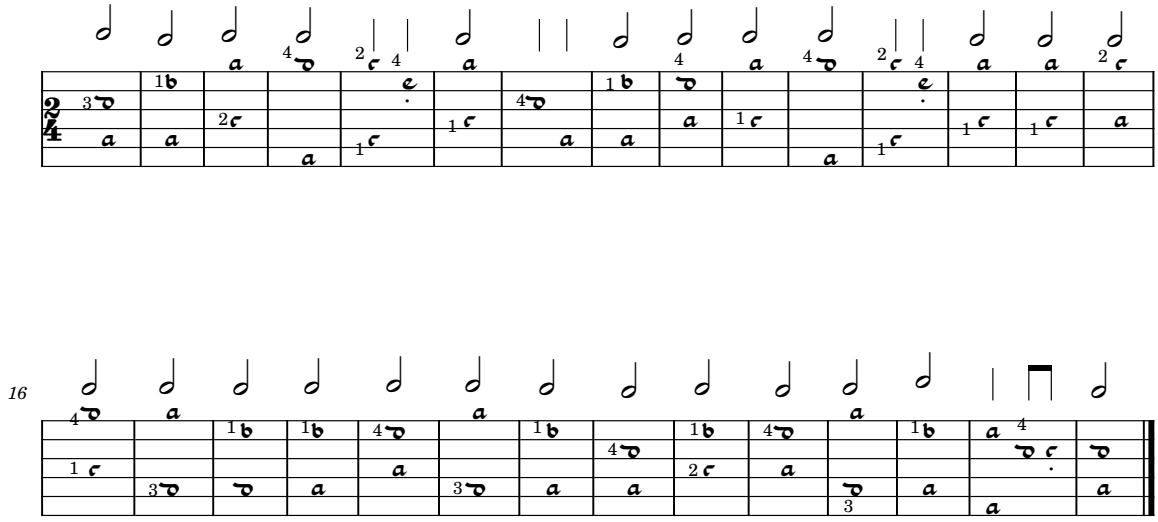
Anonymous



2. Branle

Preporatory Exercise 2

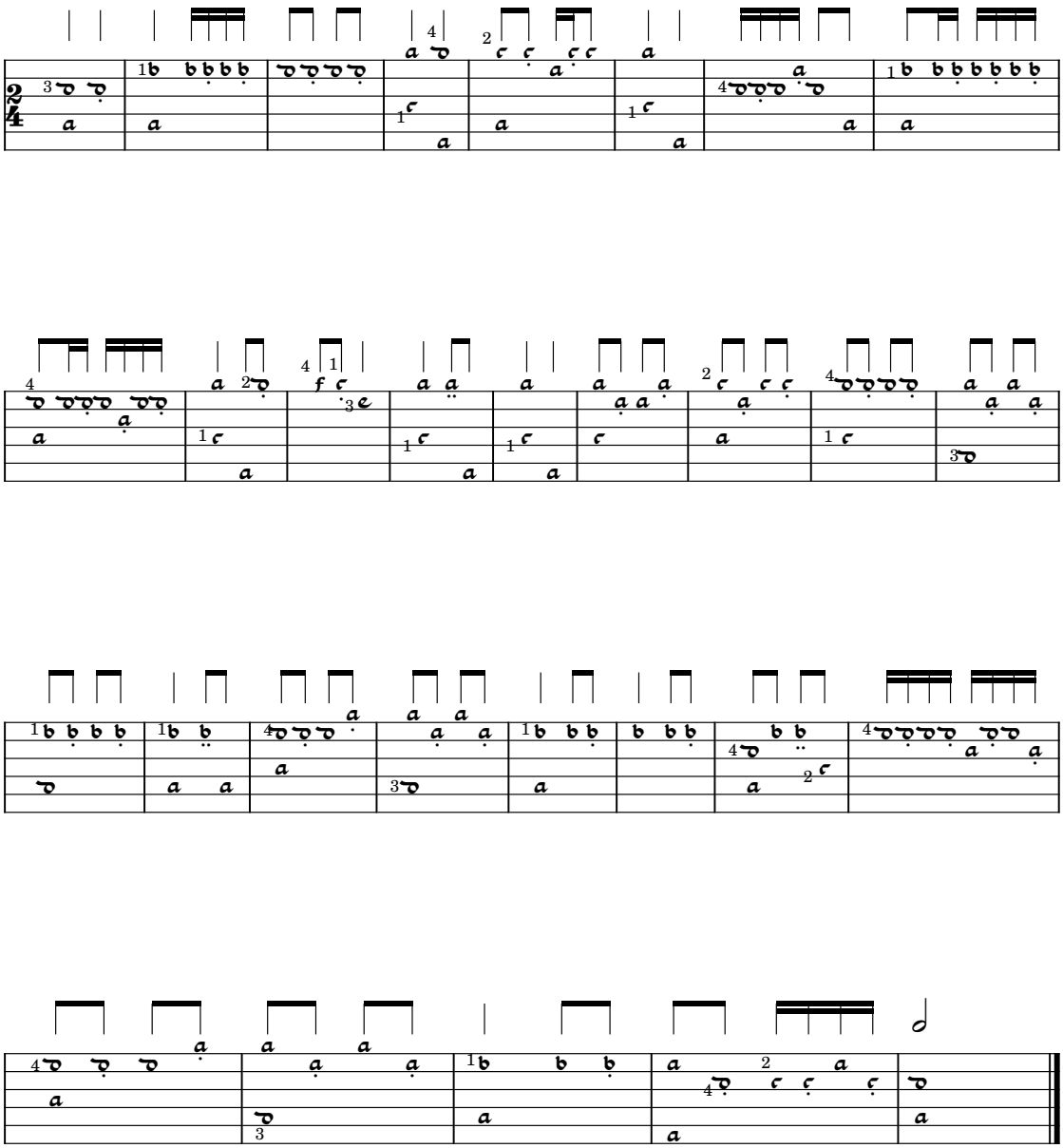
Anonymous



2.Branle

Preporatory Exercise 3

Anonymous



2. Branle

(Pierre Attaingnant Dixhuite basses danses, 1530. f.16)

Anonymous



3. Passamezzo Antico

This is another ground bass work. While the *buffons* was a *passamezzo moderno*, this piece is based upon the *passamezzo antico,* an older variant that is generally in minor. It's found early in one of the Mathew Holmes "Cambridge Manuscripts" (Dd.2.11b). Admittedly, the piece is not particularly good, but I chose it because it alternates nicely between playing divisions and playing chords. The dotted rhythms in the chordal sections are also a great opportunity to work on counting a tricky 16th note rhythm!

Relevant videos:

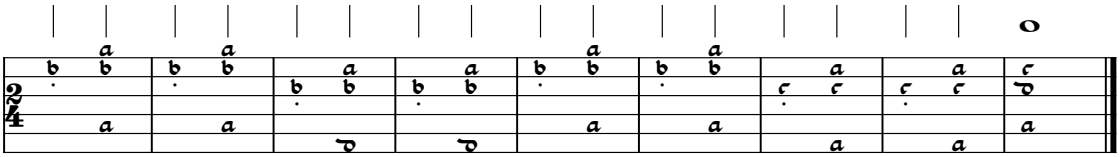
Fundamentals Episode 23: Right hand Part 3

Below are two preparatory exercises to help you prepare for the contrasting sections of this piece. In the second exercise, make sure that you are counting aloud and subdividing the beat to make sure your rhythms are correct. Review the chapter above on "Counting and Rhythm" if needed.

3. Passamezzo antico

Preparatory Exercise 1

anonymous

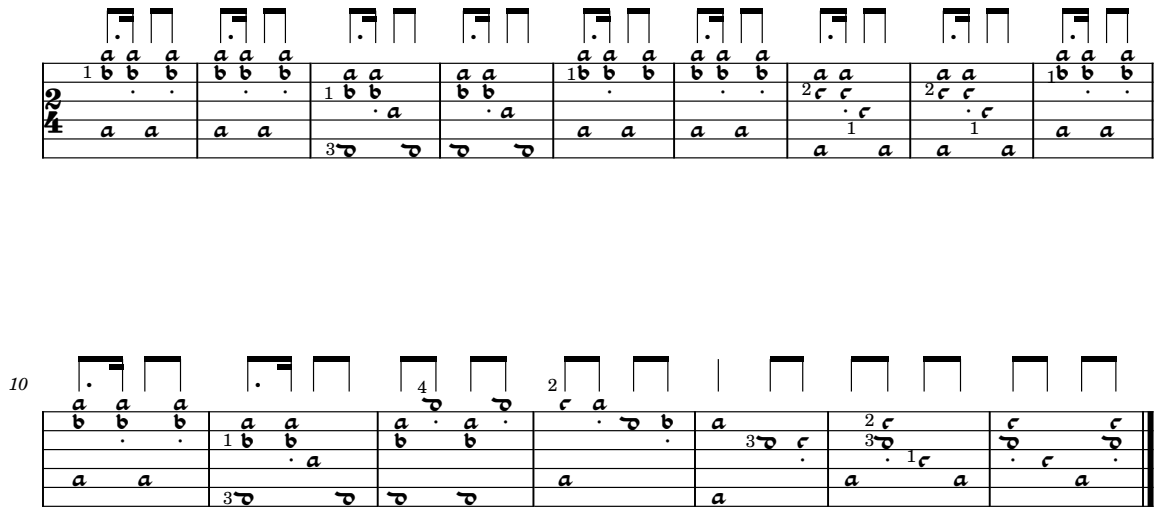


Focus on making
sure the index finger
is audible in chord

3. Passamezzo antico

Preparatory Exercise 2

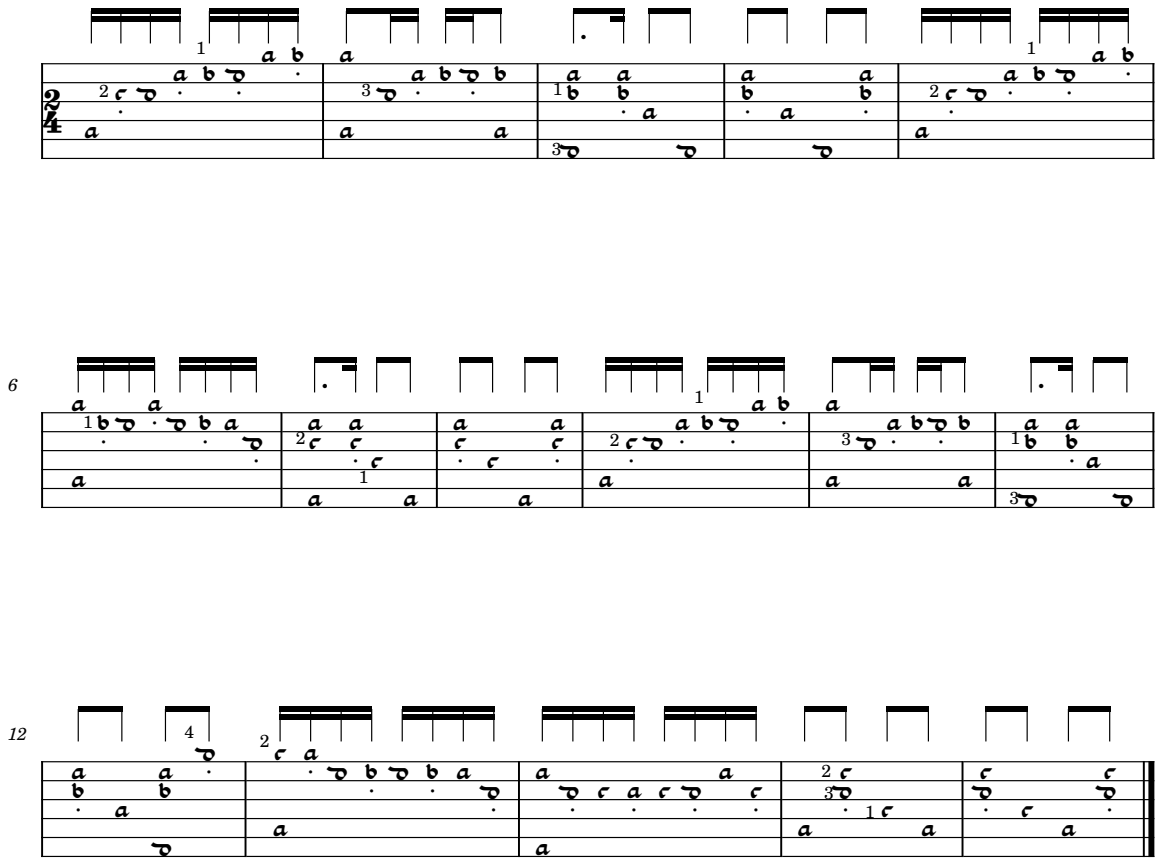
Anonymous



3. Passamezzo antico

Dd.2.11b(1600), f.2

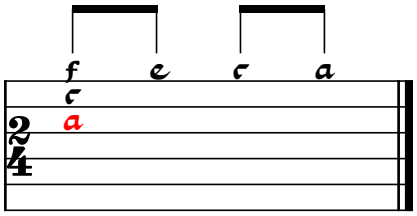
Anonymous



4. Recerchar decimo

A *recerchar/ricercar/recercar* is a contrapuntal work, similar to a *fantasy,* that showcases a composer's compositional skill and can be used as opening material before a series of dances or intabulations. Ricercars can be divided into two broad categories: contrapuntal ricercars, which contain imitative counterpoint, and non-contrapuntal ricercars, which are generally freely composed (though they may be based around existing material like a tenor or a chant). This recercar, from the Vincenzo Capirola Lute Book (1517), is non-contrapuntal. It is one of the simplest from the book, which contains some incredibly complex ricercars. I've included one of his much more challenging ricercars later in this book. Since this is also one of the most beautiful surviving sources, I'm also including an image from the book on the next page.

While I haven't included any preparatory exercises for this work, I do want to point out a particularly difficult moment in the piece, mm.19-23. As you progress through this book, you will find that often your ability to play a piece is hindered by a few spots. Learning to hone in on these spots and tackle them will improve your playing greatly. This section (mm.19-23) is significantly more challenging than the rest of the work. When approaching it, I recommend examining the angles of your wrists and arms at each moment. Give yourself some time to attempt this spot as written. If it becomes too frustrating, you may make this accommodation:



M.20 Accomodation

If you end up using the accommodation, make a note to return to this piece when you are more experienced to attempt it again as written.

Photo of the source

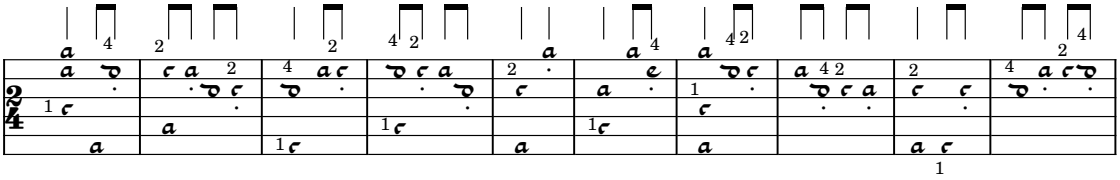


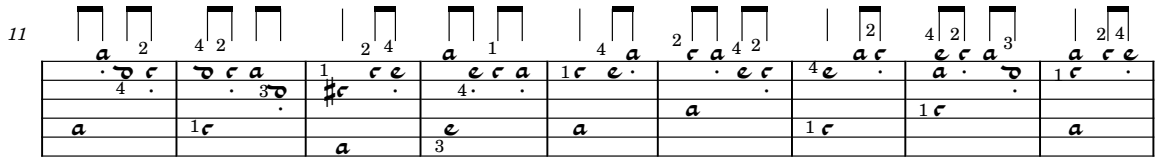
Capirola Lute Book (1517), F. 46v

4. Recerchar decimo

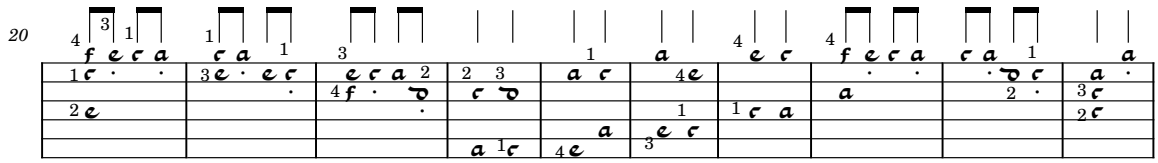
Vincenzo Capirola Lute Book (1517), F. 46v

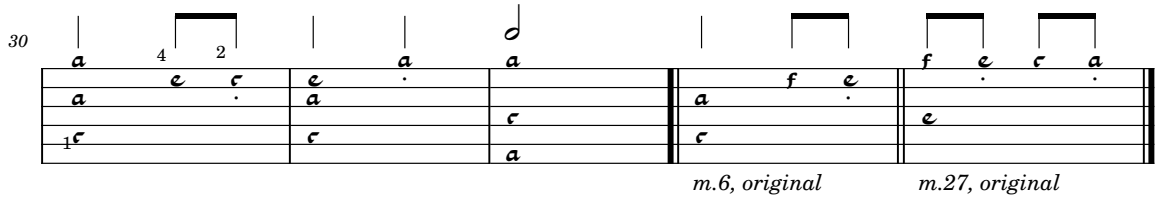
Vincenzo Capirola





shake to
upper note





m.6, original *m.27, original*

5. What if a Day?

Intabulations of vocal works make up a huge portion of the surviving Renaissance lute repertoire. Like guitarists arranging popular songs today, lutenists arranged lute songs, motets, madrigals, chansons, mass movements, and folk songs for solo lute. This was incredibly popular and a lutenist's reputation might hinge more on their intabulations than their original works. Today, this repertoire tends to get less attention because both the players and the audience tend to be much less familiar with the vocal pieces of the period. That said, I think that much can be learned from playing intabulations and they add another layer of flexibility, the text. In this case, I will provide you with the text and will point out the fact that there are many fine recordings of singers performing this work. The poem is by Thomas Campion (1567-1620), who was both a master poet and composer of lute songs. In this case, it is unclear whether the music was written by him, but it is a lovely setting in either case.

Text:
What if a day, or a month, or a year
Crown thy desire with a thousand sweet contentings;
Cannot the chance of a night or an hour
Cross thy delight with as many sad tormentings?
Fortune, honour, beauty, youth,
Are but blossoms dying;
Wanton pleasures, doting love,
Are but shadows flying.
All our joys
Are but toys,
Idle thoughts deceiving.
None have power
Of an hour
In their lives' bereaving.

Earth's but a point to the world; and a man
Is but a point to the earth's comparid centre.
Shall then a point in a point be so vain
As to triumph in a silly point's adventure?
All is hazard that we have,
Here is no abiding;
Days of pleasure are but streams
Through fair meadows gliding.
Weal or woe,
Time doth go,
In time's no returning.
Secret fates
Guide our states
Both in mirth and mourning.

This piece also introduces some new technical challenges. In addition to playing chords with four or more notes, I have also put an optional barré in measure 11. If you are an experienced guitarist, or if you want to take this opportunity to work on barrés, you can use this fingering. If you are not, feel free to just use the 2,3,4 fingering that is provided on the same chord in other places in this piece.

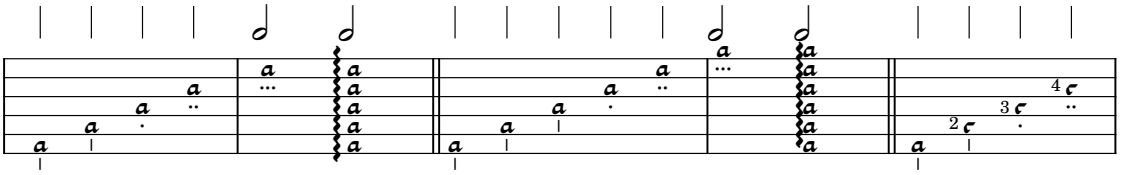
Relevant videos:

Fundamentals episode 31: Four and More Notes
Fundamentals Episode 25: Barrés (Part 1)
Fundamentals Episode 32: Barrés (Part 2)
Fundamentals Episode 36: Barrés (Part 3)
Fundamentals Episode 41: Barrés (Part 4)
Fundamentals Episode 37: Rolls

I've included some exercises to help prepare you for the chords in this piece. The squiggly line indicates that the chord should be *rolled*. If you haven't watched the video above about *rolls*, I recommend doing so. The vertical lines under some of the numbers indicate they are to be played with thumb.

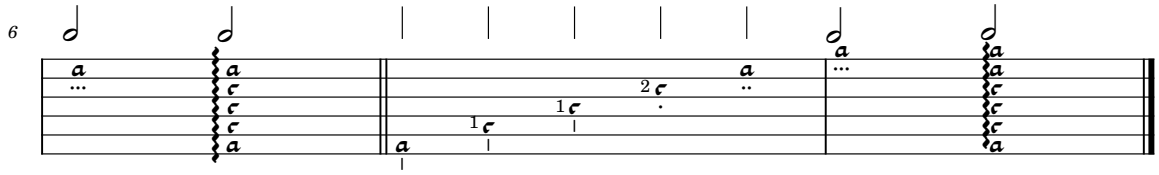
5. "What if a day"

Preparatory Exercise



Prepare each chord fully before 1st pluck

Optional fingering for measure 9. Only use if you are comfortable with barrés

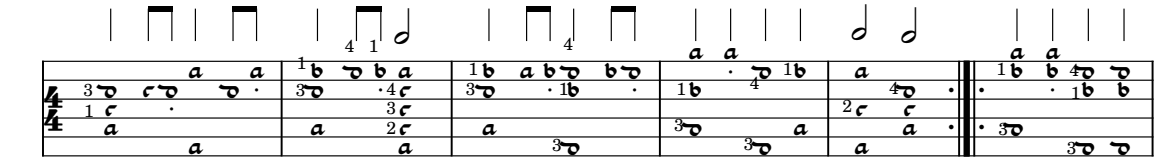


Make sure each note is clear

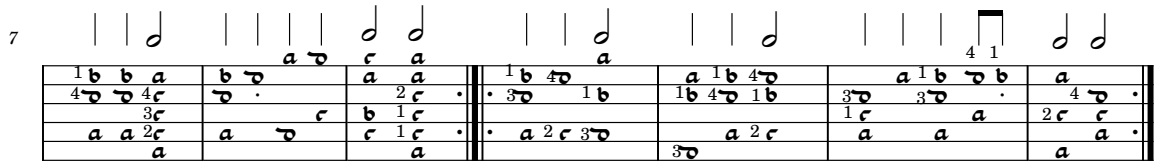
5. "What if a day"

Pickering lute book (1616), f.19

anonymous



7

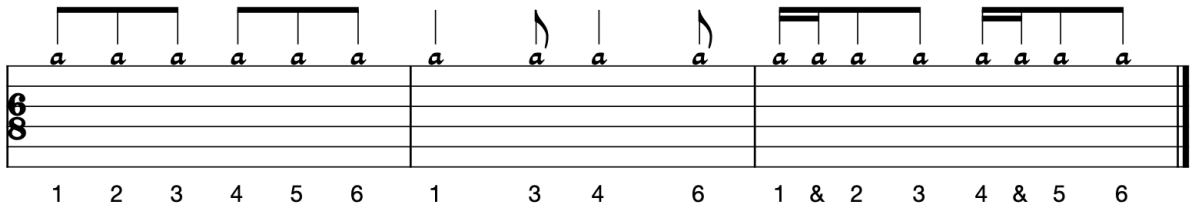


optional fingering

6. Courante (La Volta)

This is another piece from the Matthew Holmes manuscripts (Dd.2.11b, f.75). The name is a little difficult to read in the manuscript but it is likely an anglicization of the Italian *corrente.* The corrente was a lively dance in triple meter. It was related to the French *courantes* that were becoming popular throughout Europe, but was distinguished by its modest use of dotted rhythms and its frequent divisions. If this is a corrente, it may be a very early example, since it seems to retain some of the characteristics of French *courantes.* Another version of the piece is found in the Margaret Board Lute Book, but is called *La Volta*. A volta is another energetic (and scandalous) dance in triple time that made its way to England and was famously danced by Queen Elizabeth I. Finally, there is a la Volta written by William Byrd (1540-1623) for keyboard that uses the same melody. It is unclear if Byrd wrote it or made an arrangement of an existing tune, but there is a real possibility that this is an original work, written in an Italian style, by William Byrd.

An additional challenge to the student with this piece is counting in 6/8. When in 6/8, we treat the 8th note as the beat and so each measure can be counted as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 or as two sets of 1, 2, 3. Sixteenth notes are then counted as eighths. See example below:

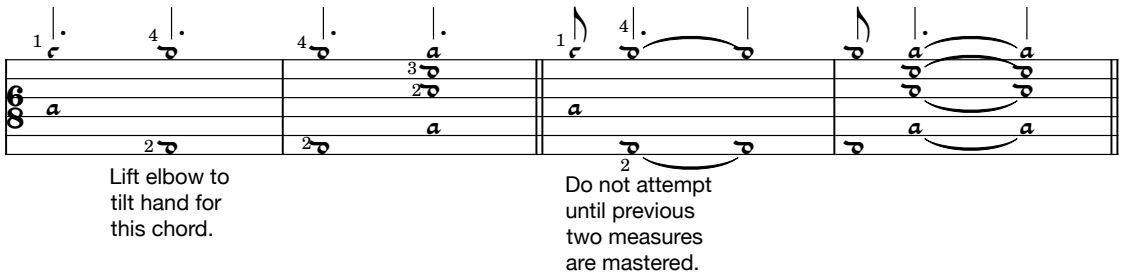


When a piece is written in 6/8 instead of 3/4, it generally (though not universally) indicates a faster tempo.

I have provided a preparatory exercise to help deal with mm. 4, 8, 12, and 16, all of which are nearly identical.

6. Courante (La Volta)

Preparatory Exercise



6. Courante (La Volta)

Dd.2.11b (1600), f.75

Anonymous



7. Cara Cosa

A *cara cosa* was another common ground bass from Italy. This one comes from the Herwarth lute manuscript (f.31vb), a fascinating and important source. It contains a great number of the surviving works of Marco Dall'Aquila (c.1480-1538), one of the most important lutenists of the early 16th century. There is no attribution attached to this piece but it is entirely possible that Marco Dall'Aquila composed it. The Herwarth manuscript is very messy and full of errors and notes that are difficult to read. If you are an advanced player, you may wish to look at the facsimile and see if you agree with my choices. I do think there are some other potential solutions but ultimately felt this worked best.

Here is a link to the facsimile: Herwarth Lute ms. (1570)

7. Cara Cosa no.11

Herwarth lute ms (1570), f.31vb

Anonymous/Aquila?



8. “Die Not sucht Weg”

This partsong intabulation of Ludwig Senfl’s *Die Not sucht Weg* from Hans Hewsidler’s Ein Newes Lautenbuchlein (1540) presents some excellent challenges to end the first level of pieces. I recommend spending some extra time playing through the individual voices so that when you start working on the whole piece, you are aware of each voice’s part and where and when notes need to be held out. Additionally, I don’t think it is a bad idea to work on each *pair* of voices before learning them altogether. I’m aware that this piece represents a bit of a leap in difficulty so don’t rush it. Make sure that it is quite comfortable before moving to the next level of repertoire. If you have not been diligent in your practicing of the pieces before this, let this serve as an indicator of whether you need to go back and re-learn some things. **There is absolutely no shame in this and I would consider it completely normal if at multiple stages in this book, students felt the need to go back and polish previous work before proceeding.**

8. Die Not sucht Weg

Ein Newes Lautenbuchlein (1540), f.d4

Ludwig Senfl/Hans Newsidler



Fundamentals Episode Video List

I'm Including this reference list of all current videos in *The Fundamentals of Lute Playing* video series so that students can easily find specific episodes. Each item in the list below is a clickable link to the video itself.

1) **The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 1: Introduction**
2) **The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 2: Sitting Position**
3) **The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 3: Essential Terms**
4) **The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 4: Basic Tuning**
5) **The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 5: Basic Right Hand**
6) **The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 6: Basic Left Hand Technique**
7) **The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 7: Introduction to Tablature**
8) **The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 8: Learning Your First Piece**
9) **The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 9: How to Practice**
10) **The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 10: Left Hand Shifts**
11) **The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 11: Your First Grace, the Shake**
12) **The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 12: Your 2nd Piece**
13) **The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 13: Accent-Based Fingerings**
14) **The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 14: Rhetoric and Interpretation**
15) **The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 15: Right Hand (Part 2)**
16) **The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 16: Left Hand (Part 2)**
17) **The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 17: Your 3rd Piece**
18) **The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 18: Learning a Piece**
19) **The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 19: Sight-Reading**

20) The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 20: The Importance of Reading Primary Sources
21) The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 21: The Fall (Ornament)
22) The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 22: Additional 2 voice pieces
23) The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 23: Right Hand Part 3
24) The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 24: Three-note chords with the Left
25) The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 25: Barrés (Part 1)
26) The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 26: First 3-Voice Pieces
27) The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 27: The Pavin
28) The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 28: Tone
29) The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 29: Legato
30) The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 30: Grounds, a General Discussion
31) The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 31: Four and More Notes
32) The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 32: Barrés Part 2
33) The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 33: Your Next Piece
34) The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 34: Injury Prevention and Treatment
35) The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 35: Finding Community
36) The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 36: Barrés Part 3
37) The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 37: Rolls
38) The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 38: Maintenance and Repair
39) The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 39: Your Next Piece
40) The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 40: Accommodation
41) The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 41: Barrés (Part 4)
42) The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 42: Vibrato
43) The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 43: Ring Finger Planting

44) The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 44: Groppi

45) The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 45: Historical Thumb-Out Position

46) The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 46: Extensions (Stretches)

47) The Fundamentals of Lute Playing, Episode 47: Economy of Motion and Preparation

List of Important Pedagogical Lute Sources

Here I am providing a list of some of the most important pedagogical sources for the lute from the 16th and early 17th century. Often these sources are the prefaces to books of repertoire. Many of them are quite rudimentary but some are fairly expansive. I have no illusions that this is a *comprehensive* list, but I do think it will get you started on examining primary sources. Each item below is a clickable link that will take you to a facsimile of the source.

1) Francesco Spinacino- Intabolatura de lauto libro primo and libro secondo (both 1507)
2) Joan Ambrosio Dalza- Intabulatura de Lauto libro quarto (1508)
3) Franciscus Bossinensis- Tenori 2 Contrabassi intabulati col sopra in canto figurato, Books 1 and 2 (1509/1511)
4) Vincenzo Capirola- The Capirola Lute Book (1517)
5) Hans Judenkünig- Utilis et compendiaria (1523)
6) Pierre Attaingnant- Tres breve et familiere introduction (1529)
7) Hans Gerle- Numerous publications (1532-1552)
8) Hans Newsidler-Numerous publications (1536-1549)
9) Berlin State Library mus ms 40588 (1552)
10) Jean Paul Paladin- Livre de Tablature de Luth (1560)
11) Bálint Bakfark- Harmonium Musicarum (1565)
12) Iselin lute book (1575)
13) Vincenzo Galilei- Dialogo della musica (1581) and Fronimo Dialogo (1584)
14) Wurstisen lute book (1591)
15) William Barley- A new Booke of Tabliture (1596)
16) Jean-Baptiste Besard- Thesaurus harmonicus (1603)
17) Thomas Robinson- Schoole of Musicke (1603)
18) Fabricius lute book (1607)
19) Robert Dowland- A Musical Banquet (1610)
20) Robert Dowland- Varietie of Lute Lessons (1610)
21) Georg Fuhrmann-Testudo Gallo-Germanica (1615)
22) Nicolas Vallet- Numerous publications (1615-1620)
23) Alessandro Piccinini- Intavolatura di Liuto, volume 1 and 2 (1623/1639)

Again, this list is not comprehensive and it is focused primarily on written instructions. A great deal of information can also be determined directly from the music, iconography, related but non-lute sources, and from surviving instruments and materials.

BIOGRAPHY

Laudon Schuett is a Renaissance lutenist and early music specialist. He has been called “a masterful performer ...[and] a brilliant educator” (*Classical Voice of North Carolina*) with “immaculate articulation and sensitive phrasing” (*Fanfare*). Laudon recently released a solo album of original compositions for the lute called *Dedications: New Works for the Lute* on the Navona (PARMA) label. He published a book of 30 original compositions for lute called *The Art of Lute Playing* with Mel Bay (2022). In addition to performing and expanding the solo repertoire, he formed the lute song duo BEDLAM with Kayleen Sánchez in 2013. They have since toured the country and recorded two albums, *BEDLAM* and *Died for Love*, both available on Soundset Recordings. Their third album, a Christmas album, will be released on the Imaginary Animals (Bright Shiny Things) label in the fall of 2025. Laudon has also been a guest lecturer and performer at numerous colleges and universities, including Cornell University, Arizona State University, Baylor University, Wheaton College, University of Kentucky, and Johns Hopkins University. He studied with Paul O’Dette, Frank Koonce, and Chuck Hulihan. He holds a BM in guitar performance from Arizona State University and the MM and DMA in Early Music from the Eastman School of Music.