30 Easy Pieces for Renaissance Lute

edited
by
Douglas Alton Smith

TREE EDITION

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TREE EDITION
Albert Reyerman

The great wealth of high quality lute music from the Renaissance has led many modern musicians to take up the lute and explore its repertory. But most of the lute´s music is not for novices.
This volume aims to make the beginner´s task easier by providing a collection of pieces that are graduated in difficulty, progressing from very simple to more demanding.
I have attempted to present music which, though not technically difficult, is nevertheless attractive.
All pieces originally in German or Italian tablature have been transcribed into the French system for the purpose of this edition.

Menlo Park, California
September 1994
Douglas Alton Smith

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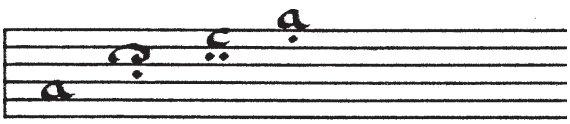
Fingering signs:

Right hand

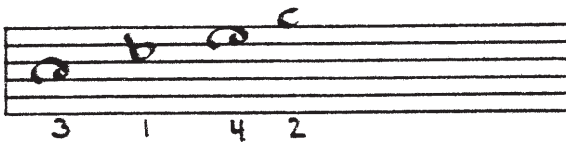


middle finger (..)

index finger (.)

thumb ( )

Left hand



little finger (4)

ring finger (3)

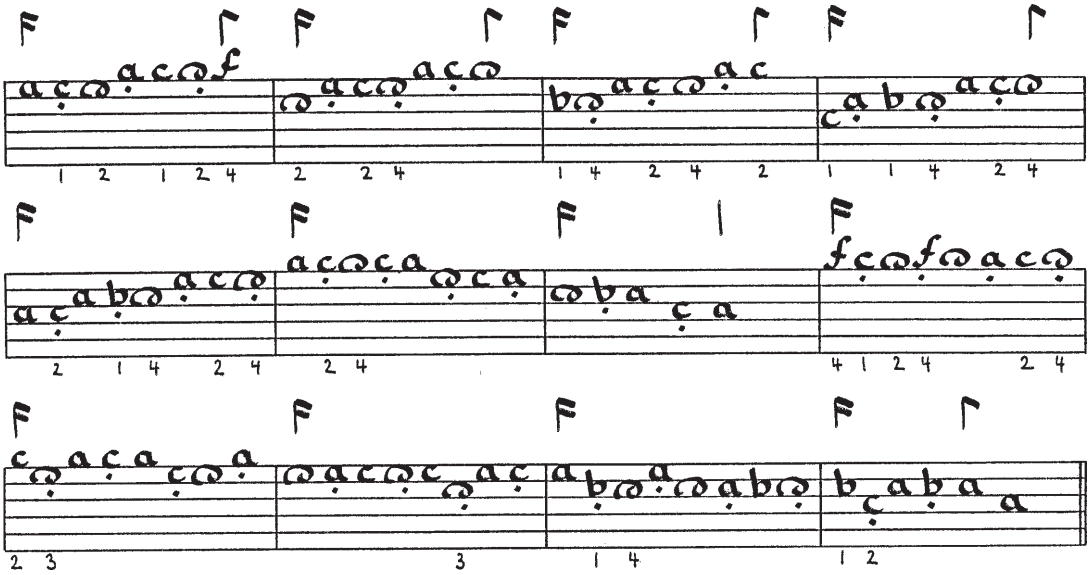
middle finger (2)

index finger (1)

No. 1

A prelude anonymous (English)

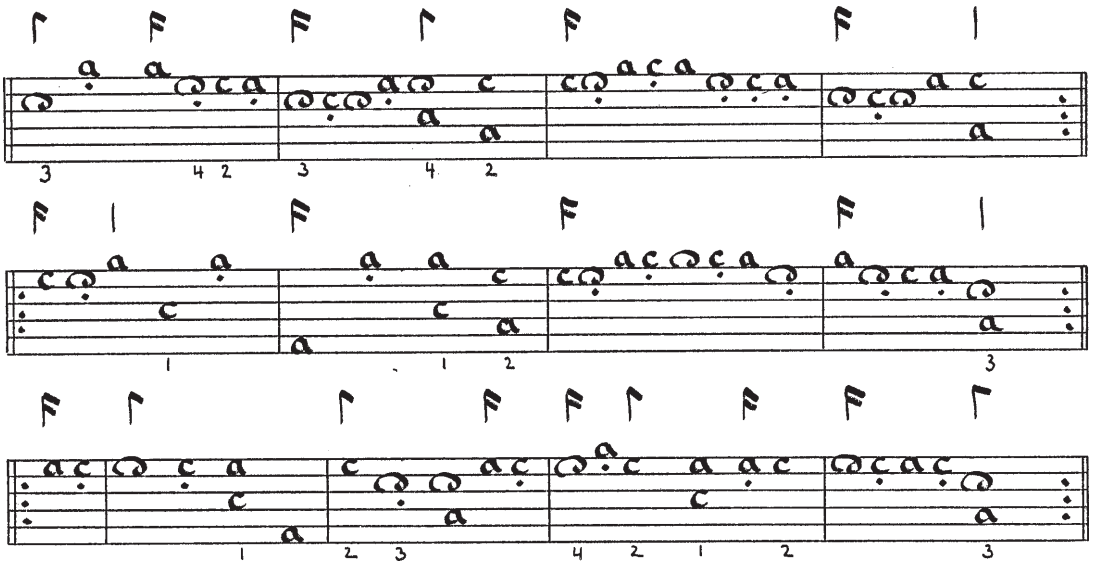
This anonymous prelude from the Sturt Lutebook in the British Library, London, is a complete piece as presented here. It is not a song, but you should nonetheless try to make the tones flow together as smoothly and vocally as possible. Practice only one measure at time, until your fingers could do the measure while you sleep. Use only the thumb and index finger of the right hand: tablature letters with a dot underneath are played by the index finger, and those with no dot (the rhythmically stronger note) by the thumb.



No. 2

Haulberroys publ. Pierre Attaignant

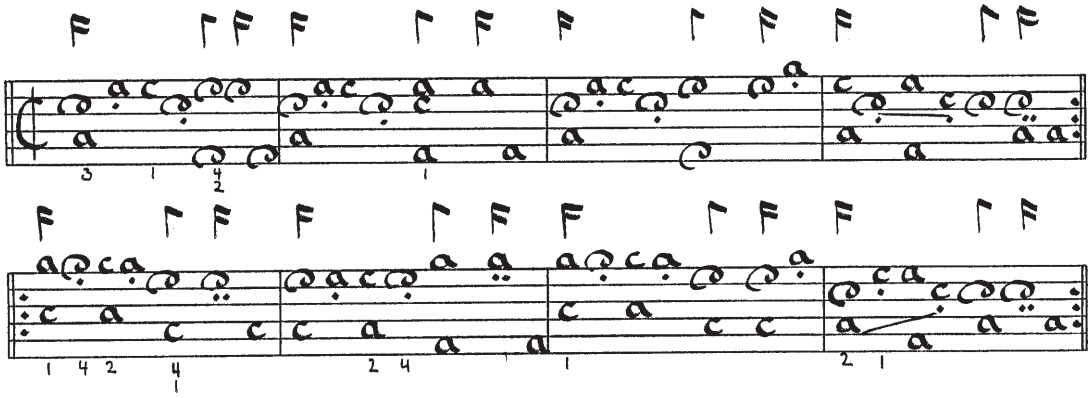
In playing pieces in two or more voices it is necessary to use the middle finger of the right hand: denoted by two dots underneath the tablature letter. The bass strings and others with a dot under them are struck by the thumb. The branle is divided into three repeated sections. Upon the repeat of the second one, treat the stem in measure 8 as a single flag. When learning the piece, subdivide the sections into one- or two-measure units.



No. 3

Si vous estes belle publ. Pierre Phalese (1549)

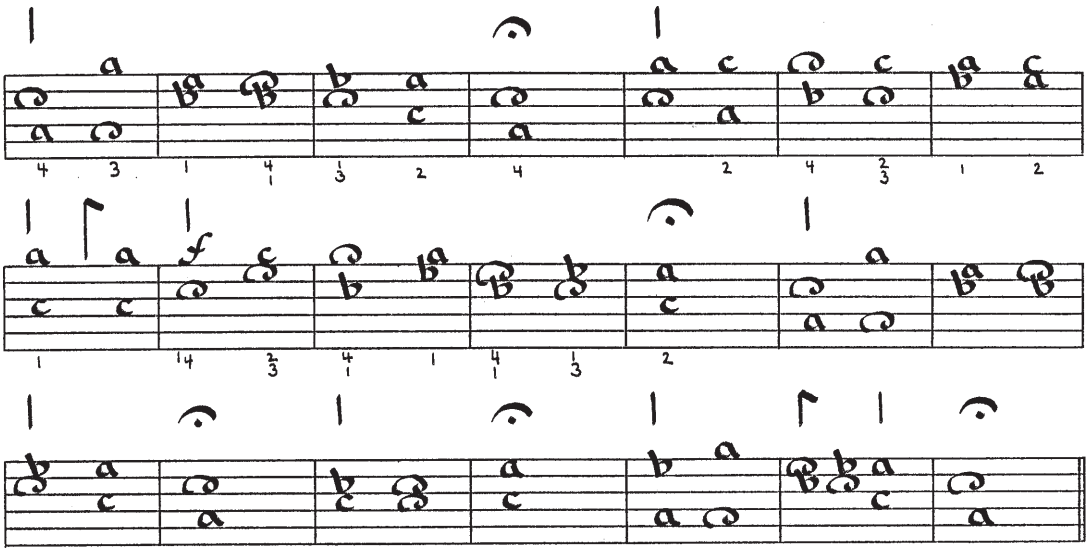
This piece poses more problems than the previous one. The thumb must move further and faster back and forth among the bass and treble courses, and several basses must be fretted. Any spot that is hard to manage should be isolated: just play the two or three notes over and over slowly until the problem is solved.



No. 4

Christ ist erstanden — Hans Judenkunig (ca. 1515)

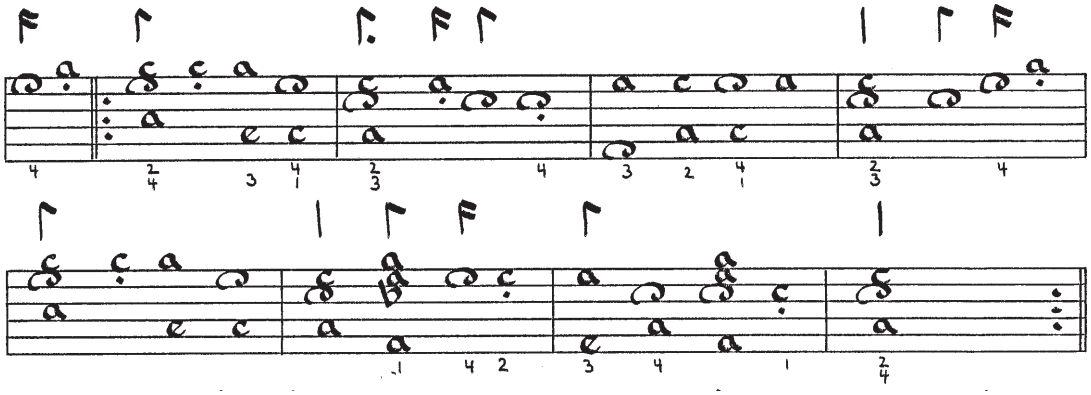
This German hymn ('Christ is risen') is a study in independence of the left hand fingers, and is also a challenge to the right hand to make the top line sing. When you play the notes in succession on the same string (as in mm. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 etc.), make certain that the right hand finger striking the second of the two does not rest on the string before sounding it, or you will make a choppy vocal line. Particularly for the left hand, it will probably be necessary to practice even smaller units than previously: one measure at time here is not too little. Keep the left hand itself steady and in place.



No. 5

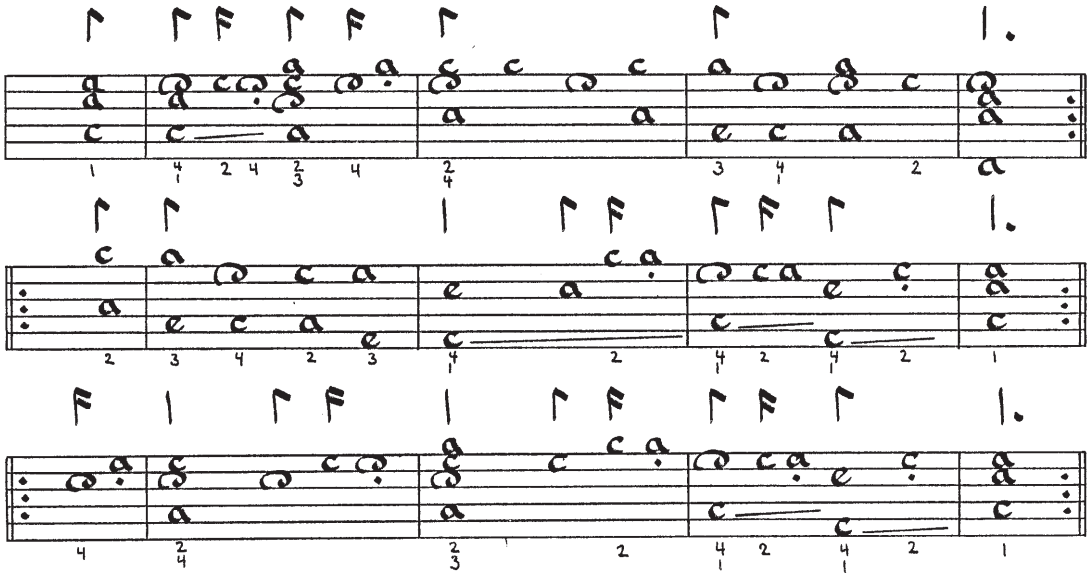
Villancico Cesare Negri

This villancico introduces several three- and four-voice chords. In the latter, the chanterelle is played with the ring finger of the right hand, and the second string with the middle finger. Play all the notes in the chords simultaneously. Originally a Spanish song form, the villancico is used by the early 17th-century Italian dancing master Negri as a dance accompaniment. Thus you should make the articulation lively. In the first and fifth measures, make the first 'c' on the chanterelle shorter than the second one by lifting your left hand middle finger very slightly off the fret after the string has been sounded. There should also be a gap between the two third-string 'd's in m.2.



Spagnoletto Cesare Negri

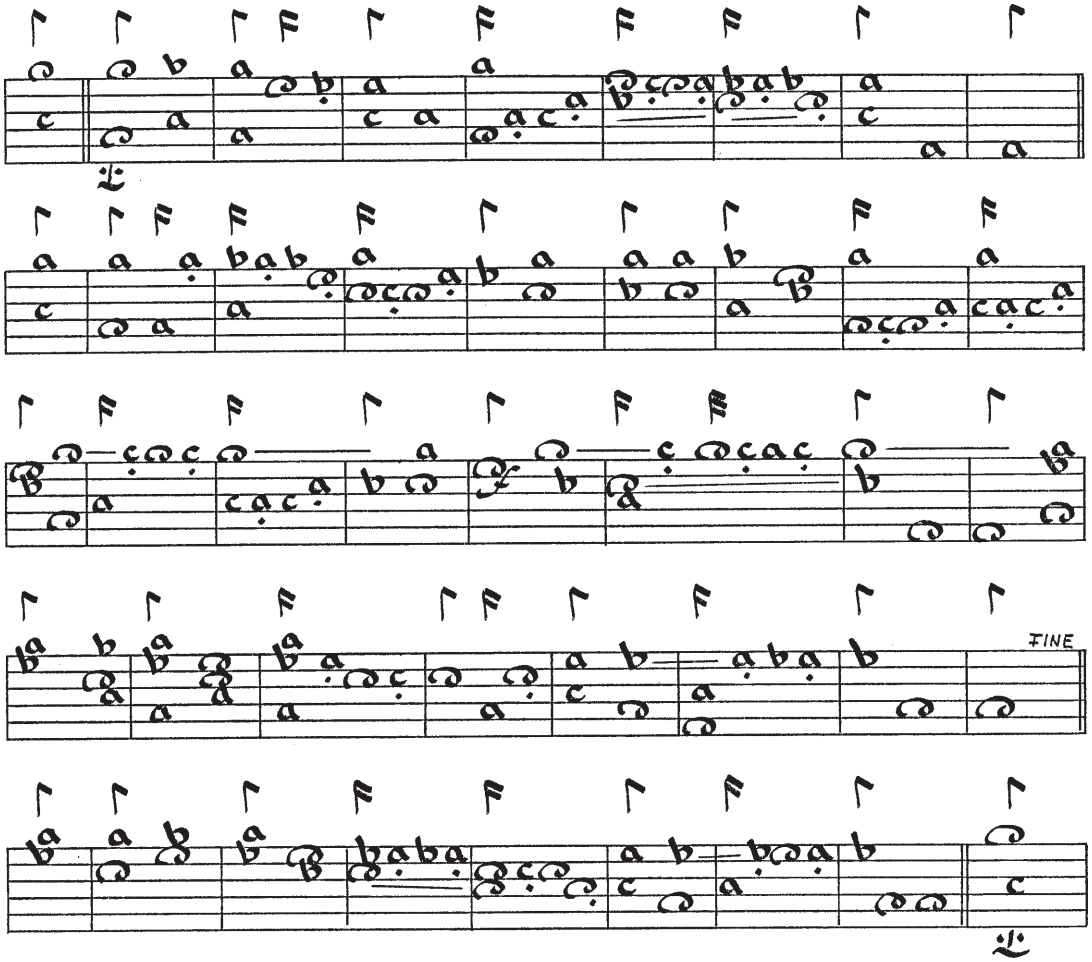
Tune your seventh course to 'F': if you have a six-course lute, ignore the seventh-course bass in m.4. Renaissance instruction books caution the novice to hold bass notes as long as possible. Unfretted basses are easy to sustain, but the 2nd-fret holds in this spagnoletto - indicated here editorially by diagonal lines - require extra concentration. Practice the bass line alone (the supporting melody on the 4th to 6th courses) occasionally so that you are sure all notes receive their proper value and so that you develop the bass´s melodic interest.



No. 6

Pavane — Pierre Blondeau (ca. 1530)

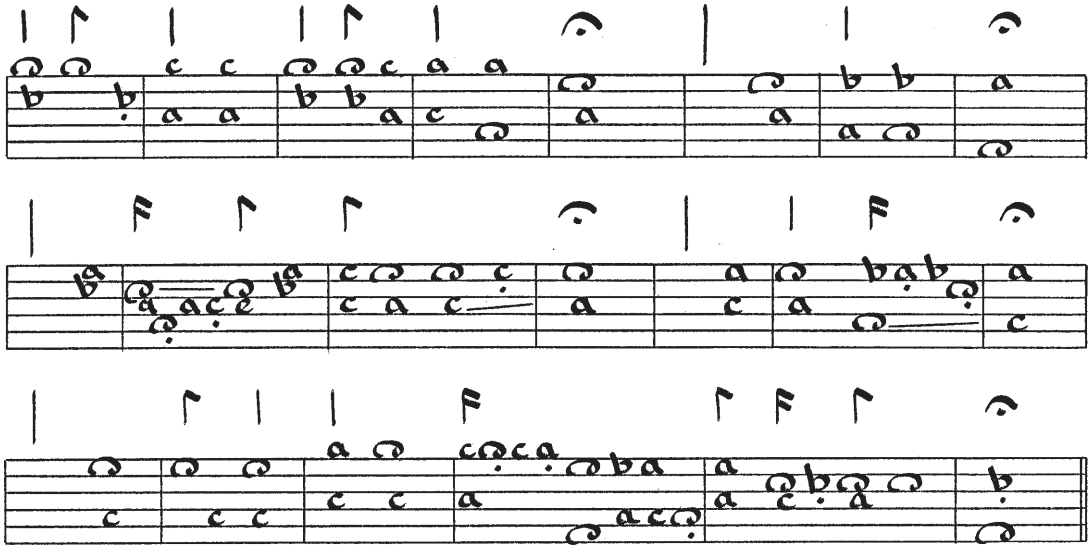
Blondeau´s pavan has a bass line that trades runs with the top voice: the thumb/index alternation is used in both cases. Editorial hold lines remind you not to forget one voice when the other leaps into prominence. Each section between double bars can be repeated. After you have played the whole piece, the sign indicates to return and play 'da capo al fine'. Though not too difficult, this is a rather long dance for a beginner. Practice it section by section for several weeks if necessary before playing through the entire piece.



No. 7

Ich klag den Tag set by Hans Gerle

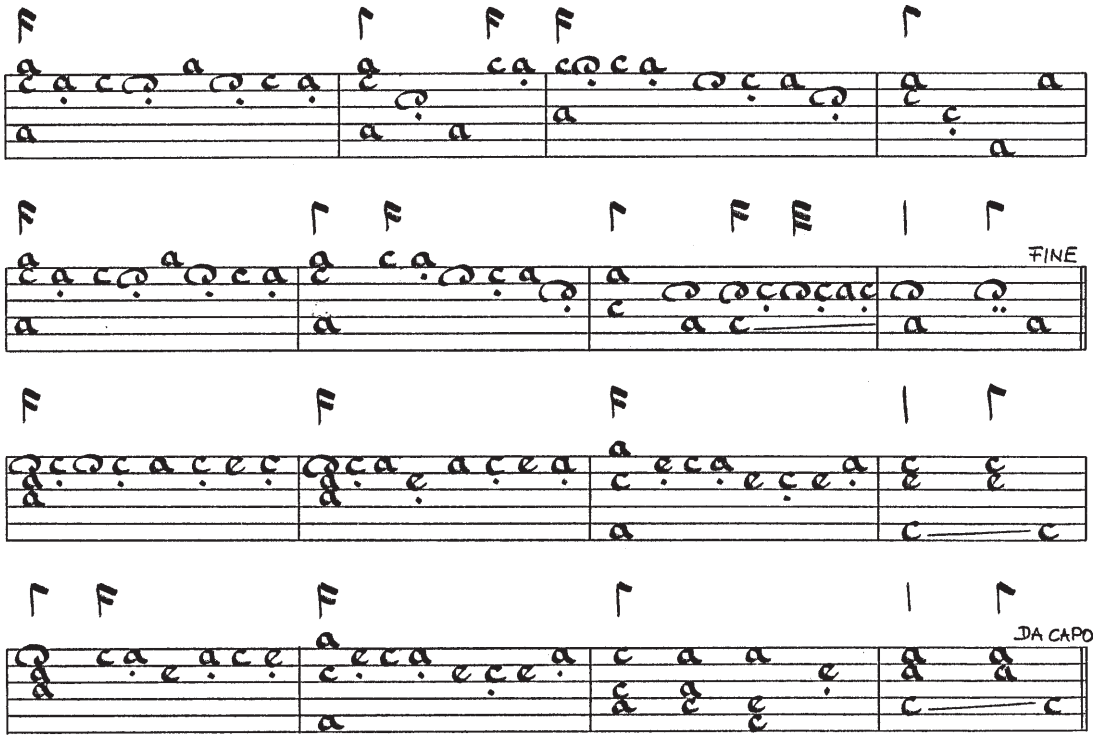
Gerle´s setting von 'Ich klag den Tag' ('I rue the day') is an example of an embellished song, a genre that was very popular throughout the 16th century. Here the top line must sing out, even im m.10, where the bass diminutions should be played very lightly. Think about sustaining the 'd' on the 3rd course in this spot: if you concentrate on the embellishments they will dominate the measure.



No. 8

Pavana alla Veneziana publ. Pierre Phalese

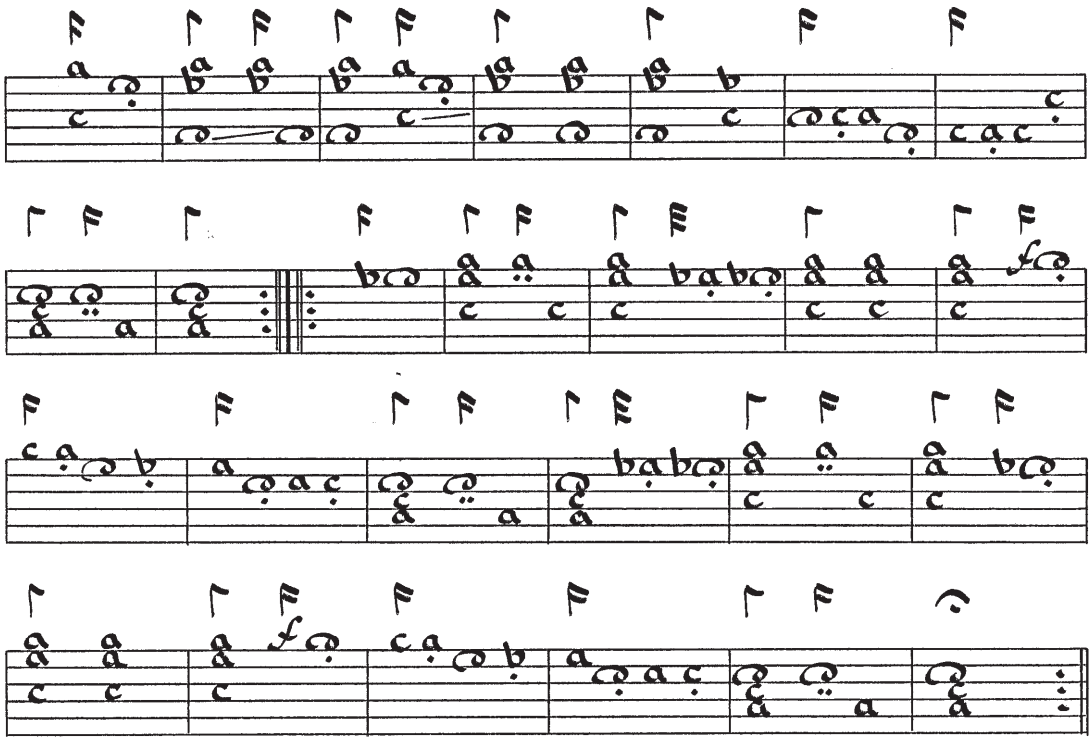
This pavan has two sticky spots. The first is the cadential ornament in m.7. This is one of the most common embellishments in Renaissance lute music, so it must be mastered now. The triple-flagged notes must eventually sound like a burst from a machine gun: practice them alone, until the passage is easy.



No. 9

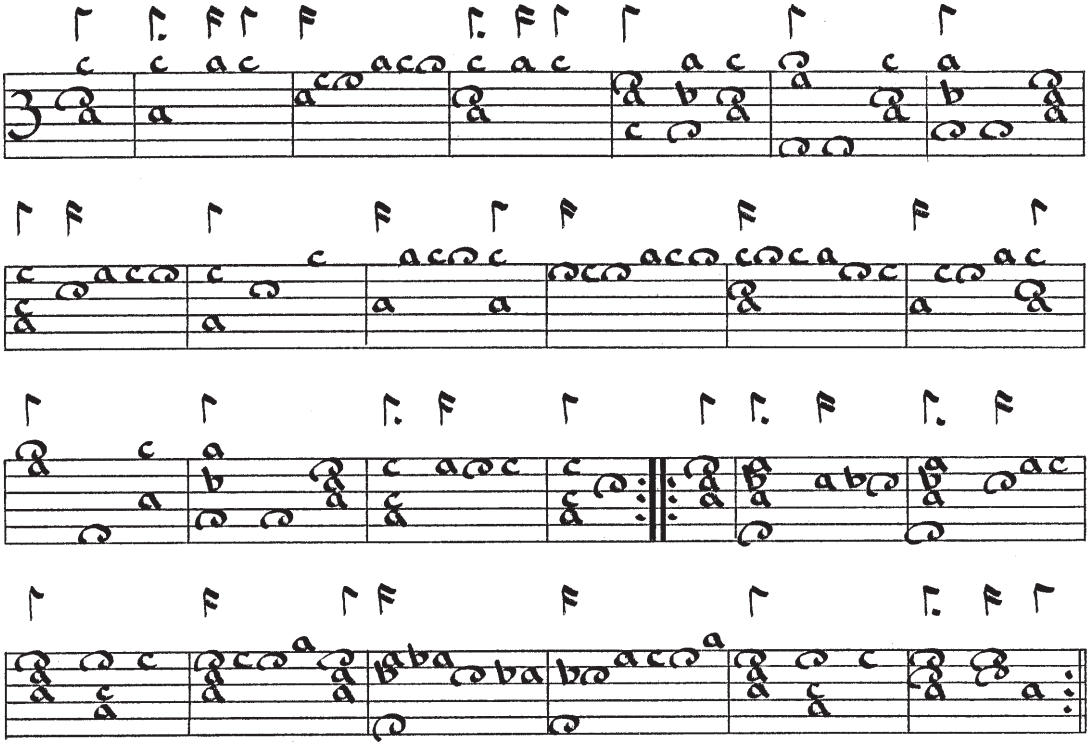
Ain niderlendisch runden datz — Hans Judenkunig (1523)

Be careful that the ornaments in mm. 10 and 16 of the 'Dutch round dance' are crisp and rhythmically precise. Contrast the two halves of each 8-measure phrase by playing the first half louder, the second softer. The first chord in each group of three (as in mm. 1-2, 3-4, etc.) should be louder than the subsequent two: the first is the point of arrival and the others are rhythmically fillers. Right-hand fingerings are Judenkunig´s own.



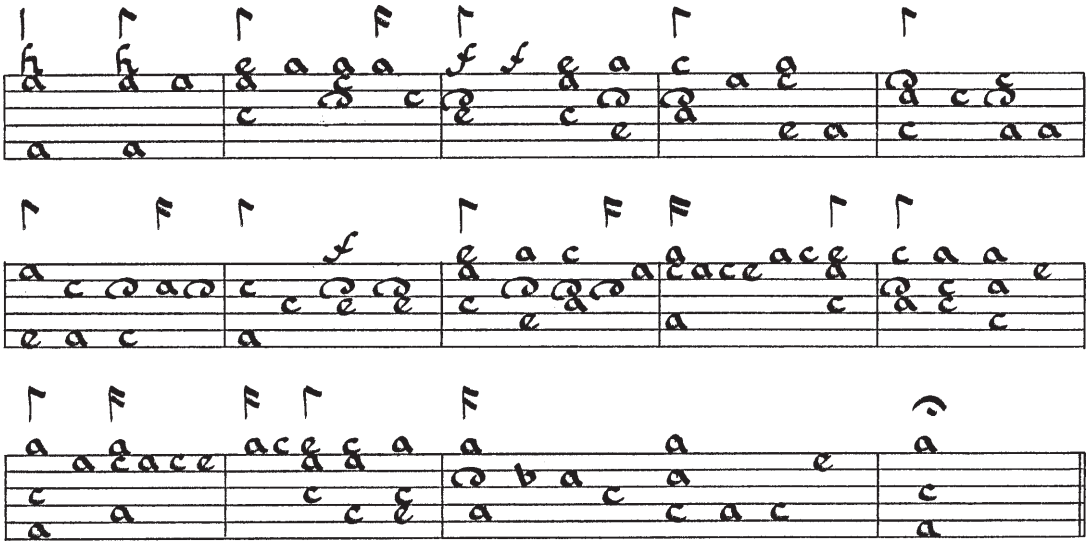
No. 10

Gallarde publ. Pierre Phalese (1549)



No. 11

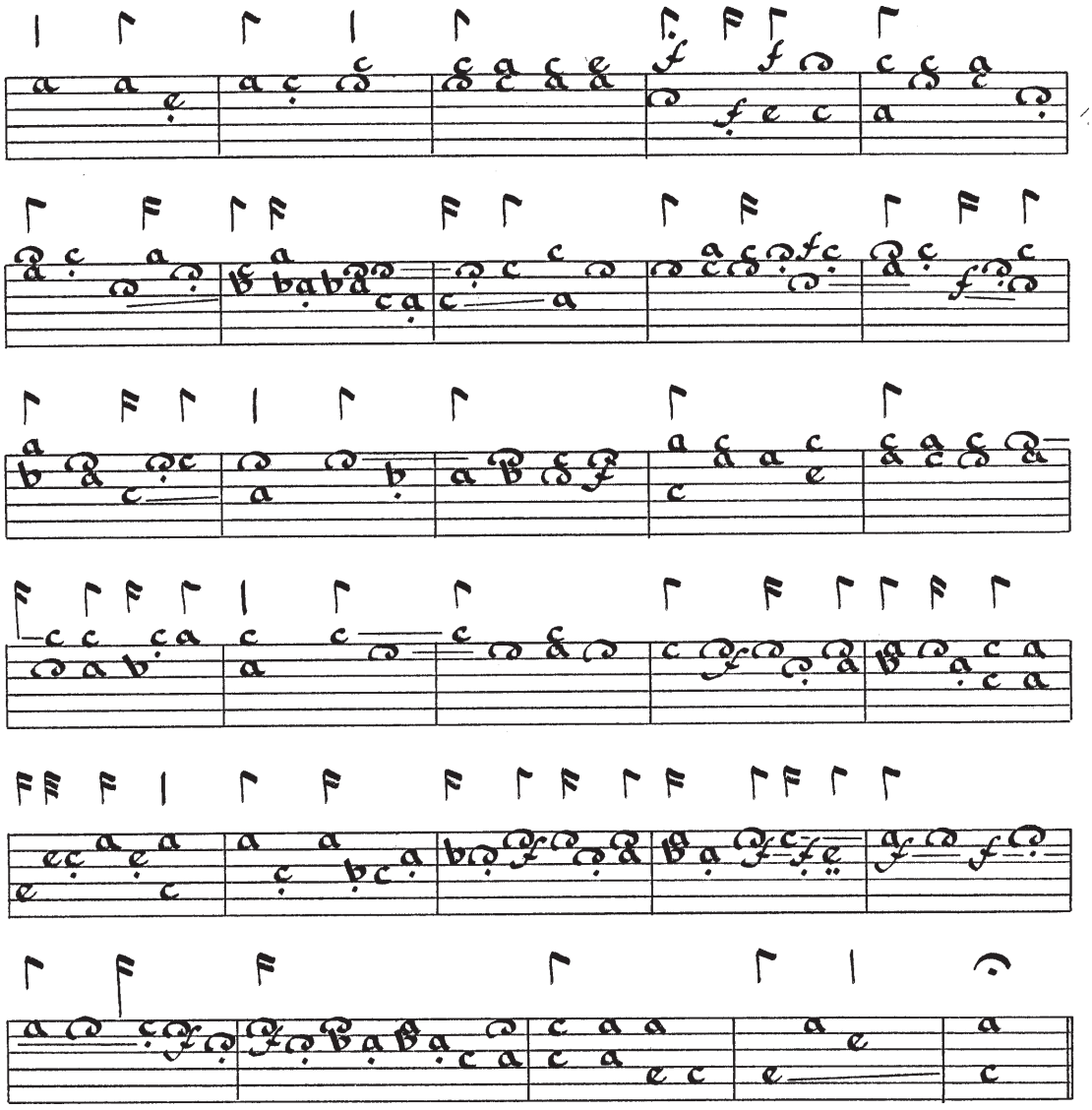
Fantasia publ. Pierre Phalese (1549)



No. 12

Duo: Fecit potentiam Morales/Fuenllana (1554)

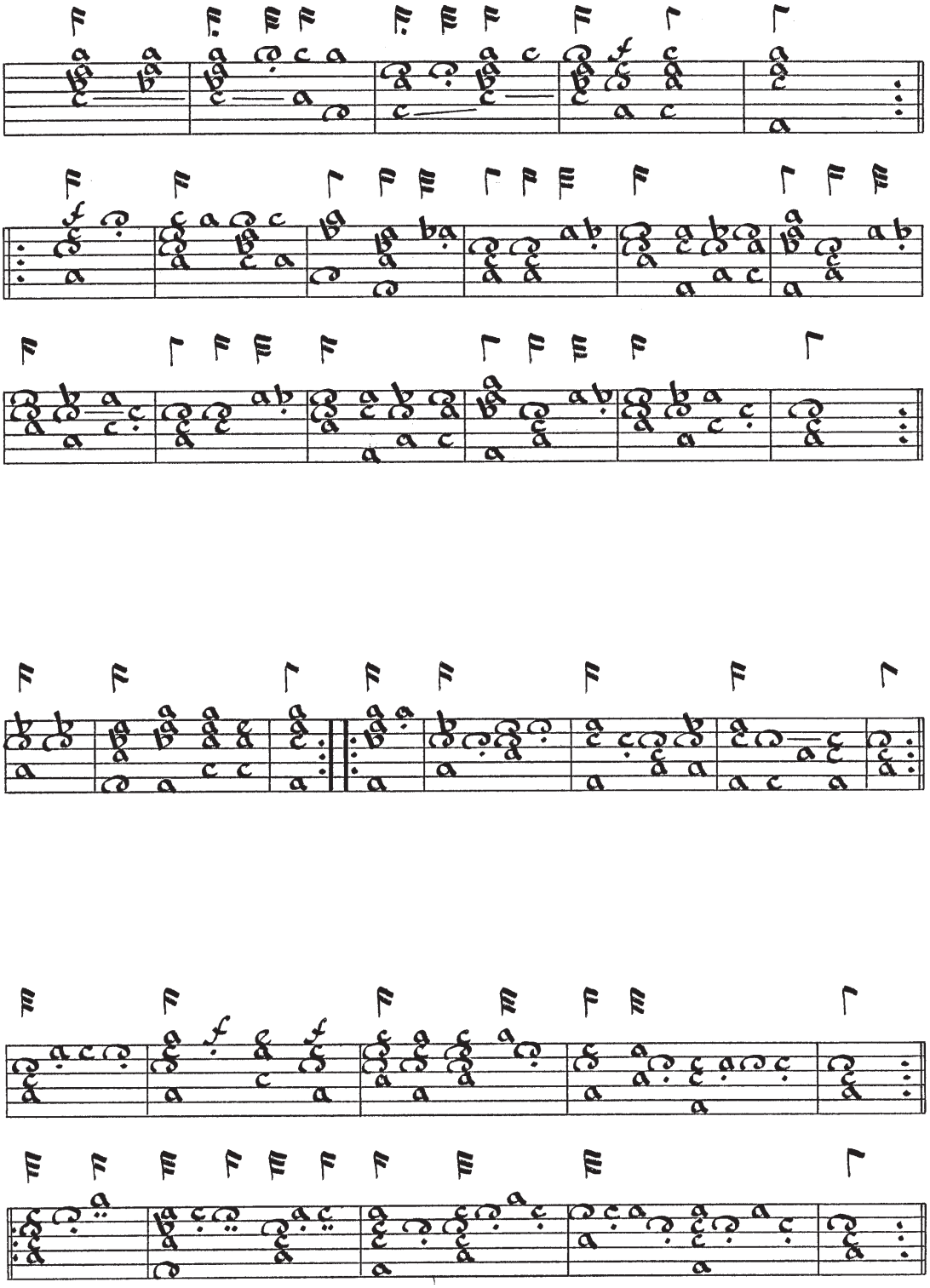
'Fecit potentiam', composed by the great Spanish contrapuntist Cristobal de Morales and arranged for vihuela by Fuenllana, is a two-voice fantasia in which both voices have equal importance. Part of your practice should consist of playing the voices singly so that you can better hear and control the horizontal aspects.



No. 13

3 Branles de Bourgoingne publ. Pierre Phalese (1574)

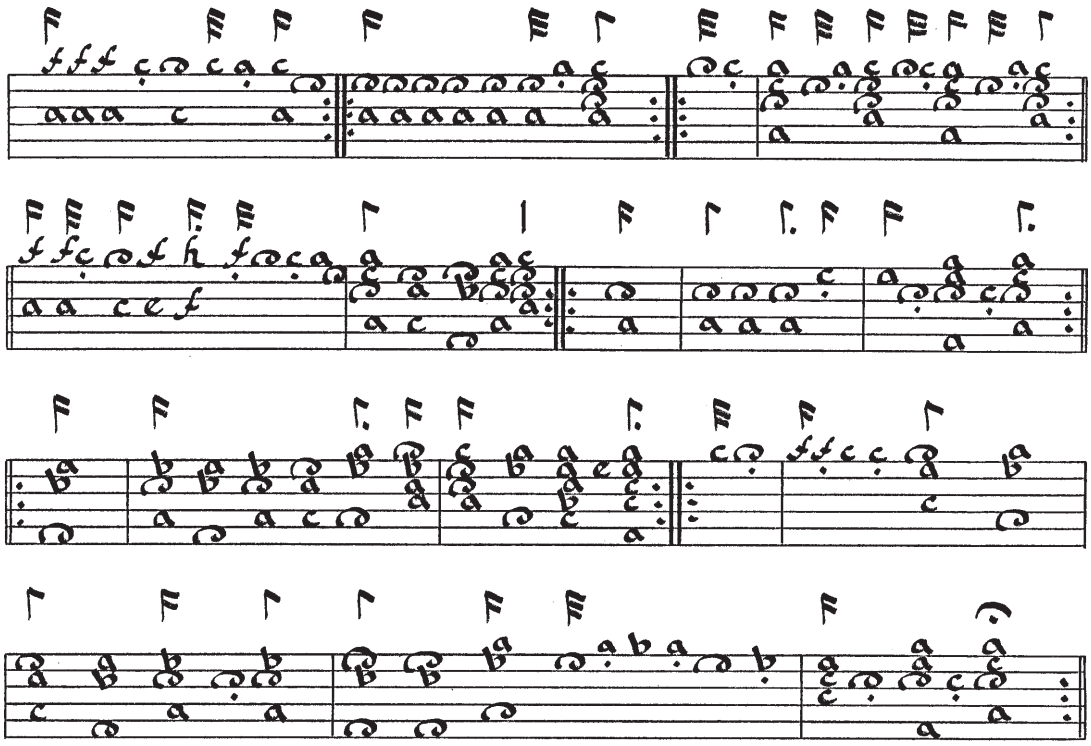
These three branles are typical of much lute music in that they do not maintain a consistent number of voices: the top voice in each branle is supported by a rudimentary bass line, and one or two other voices intermittently fill in the harmony and contribute to volume and rhythmic accentuation. The most important elements for the player to concentrate upon are first, to bring out the melody in the top voice, and secondly to tie the chords together smoothly.



No. 14

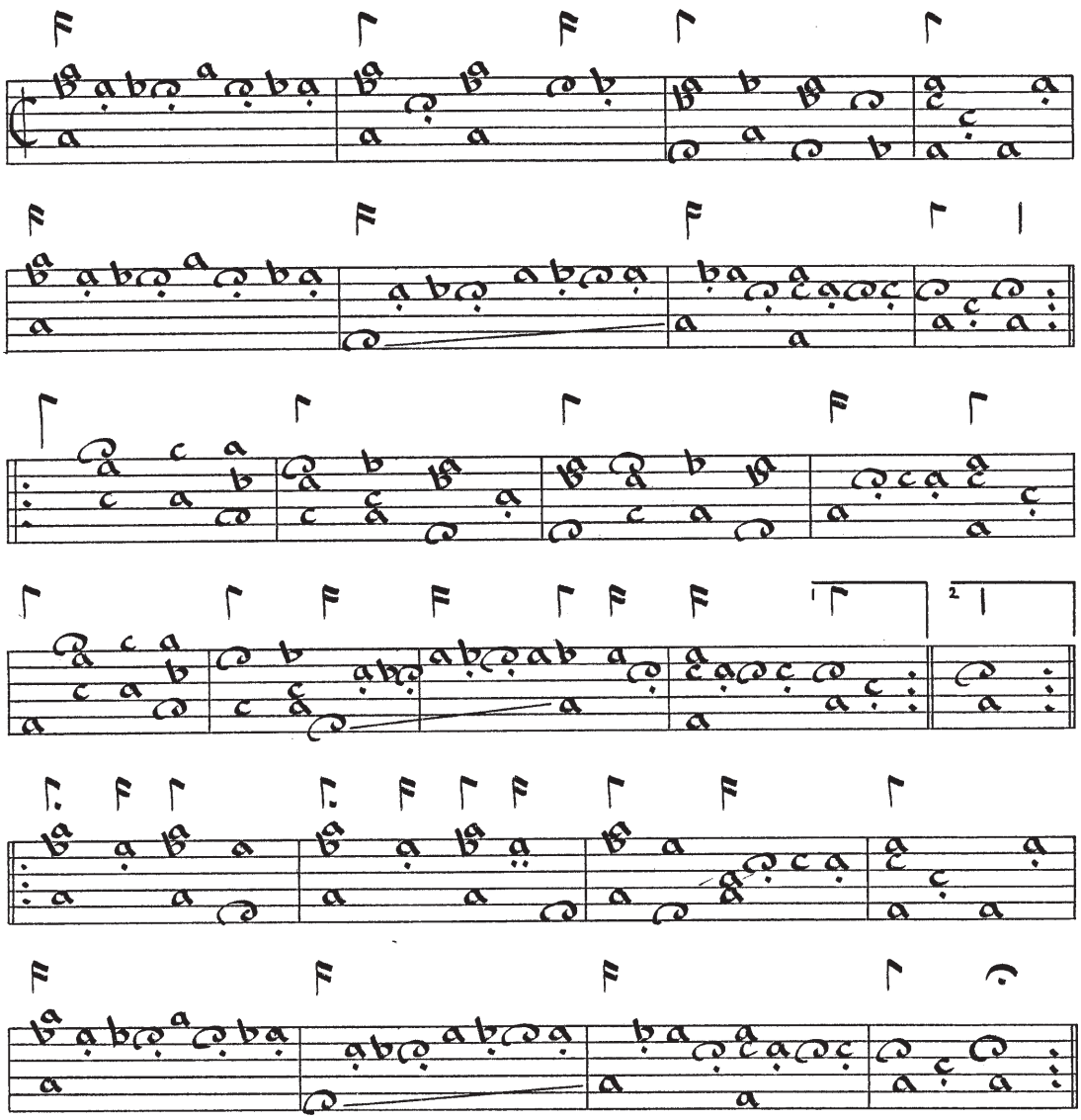
Hunergschrai — Anonymous (German)

This South German character piece ('chicken cackling') from the lost Chilesotti lute book demands idiomatically instrumental articulation to make a humorous effect. Play the repeated notes and the chord sequences very staccato to imitate hens at breakfast. All sections are repeated. The 2nd, 3rd and 4th sections will have two endings: the longer one is indicated here, and you must shorten the last rhythmic value in each when you finish the first strain of the third section and the repeats of the second and fourth sections.



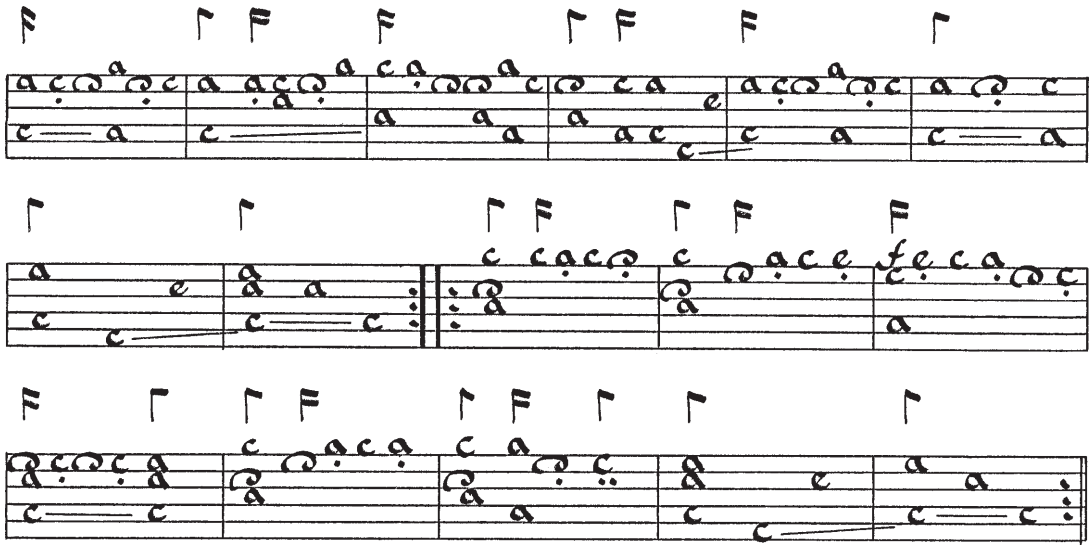
No. 15

Paduana publ. Pierre Phalese (1545)



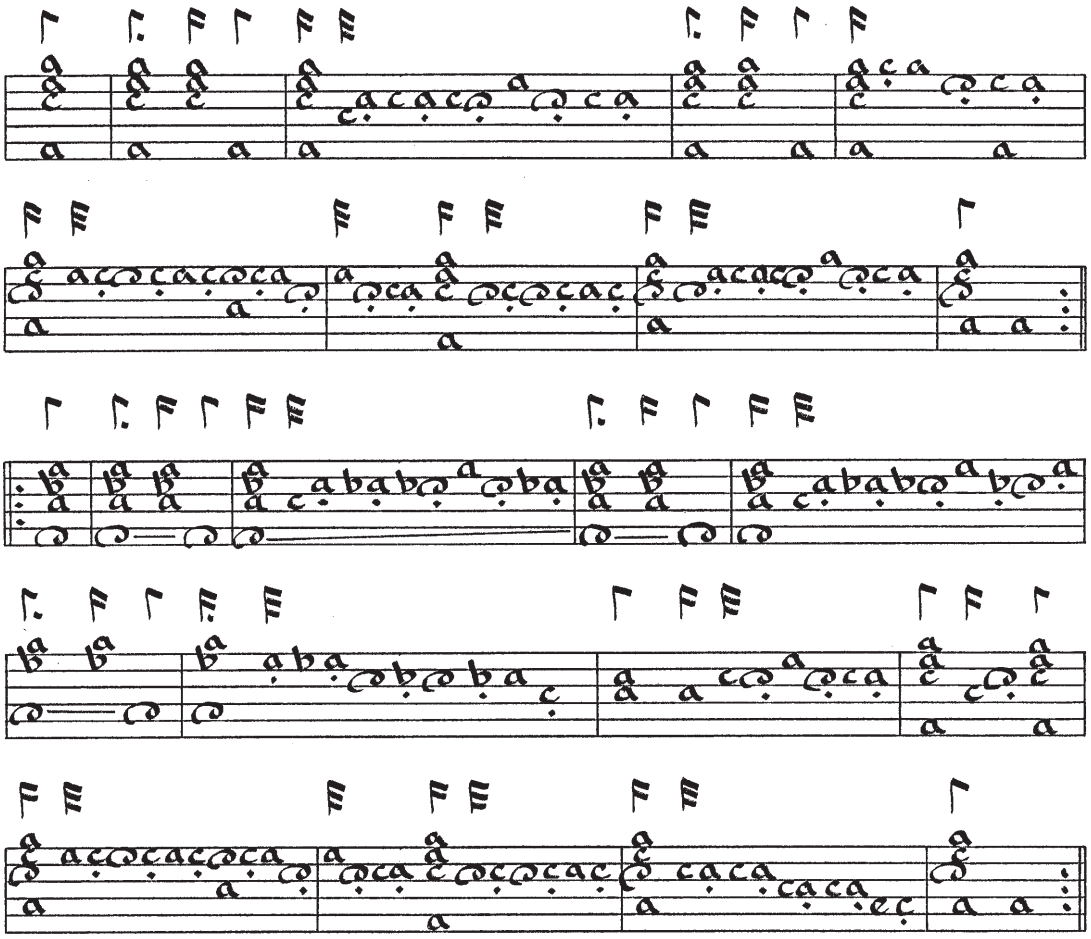
No. 16

Tourdion to 'La Magdalena' Pierre Blondeau (1530)



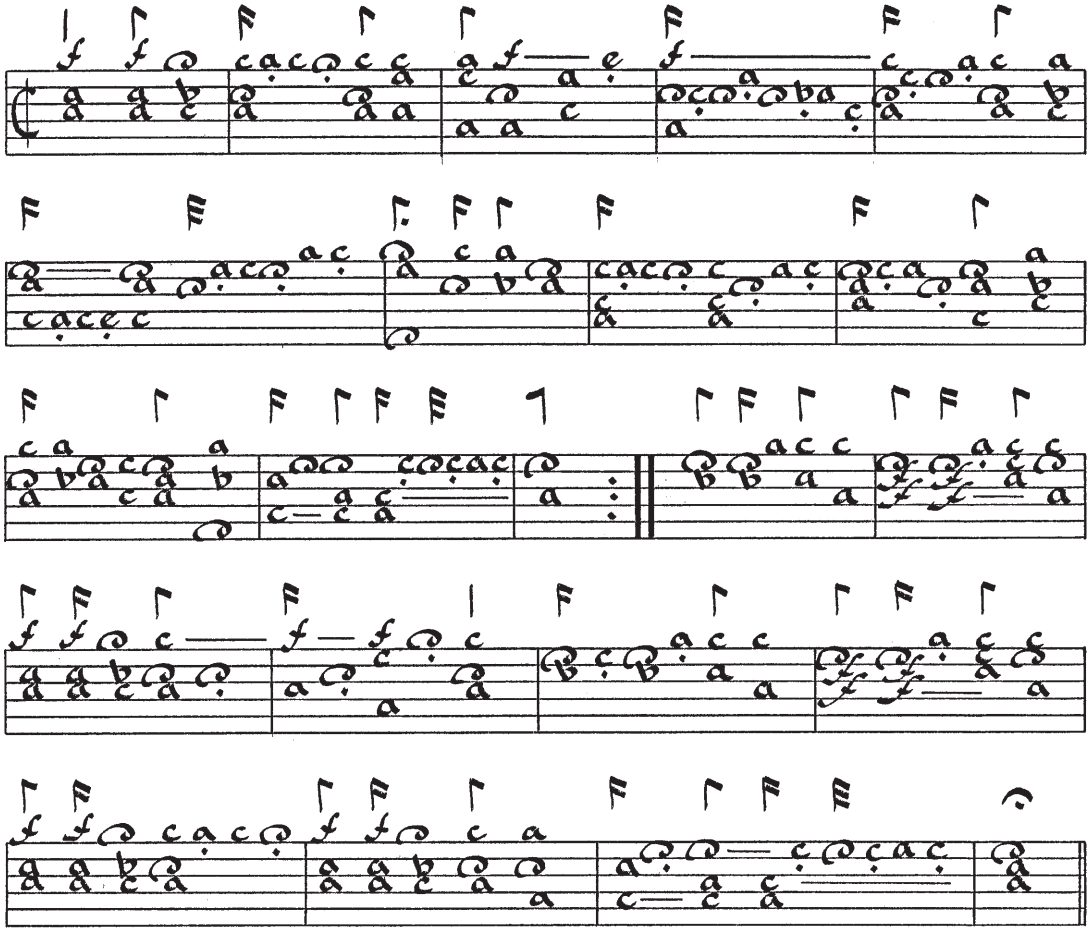
No. 17

Galliarda 'Chi passa' publ. Pierre Phalese (1574)



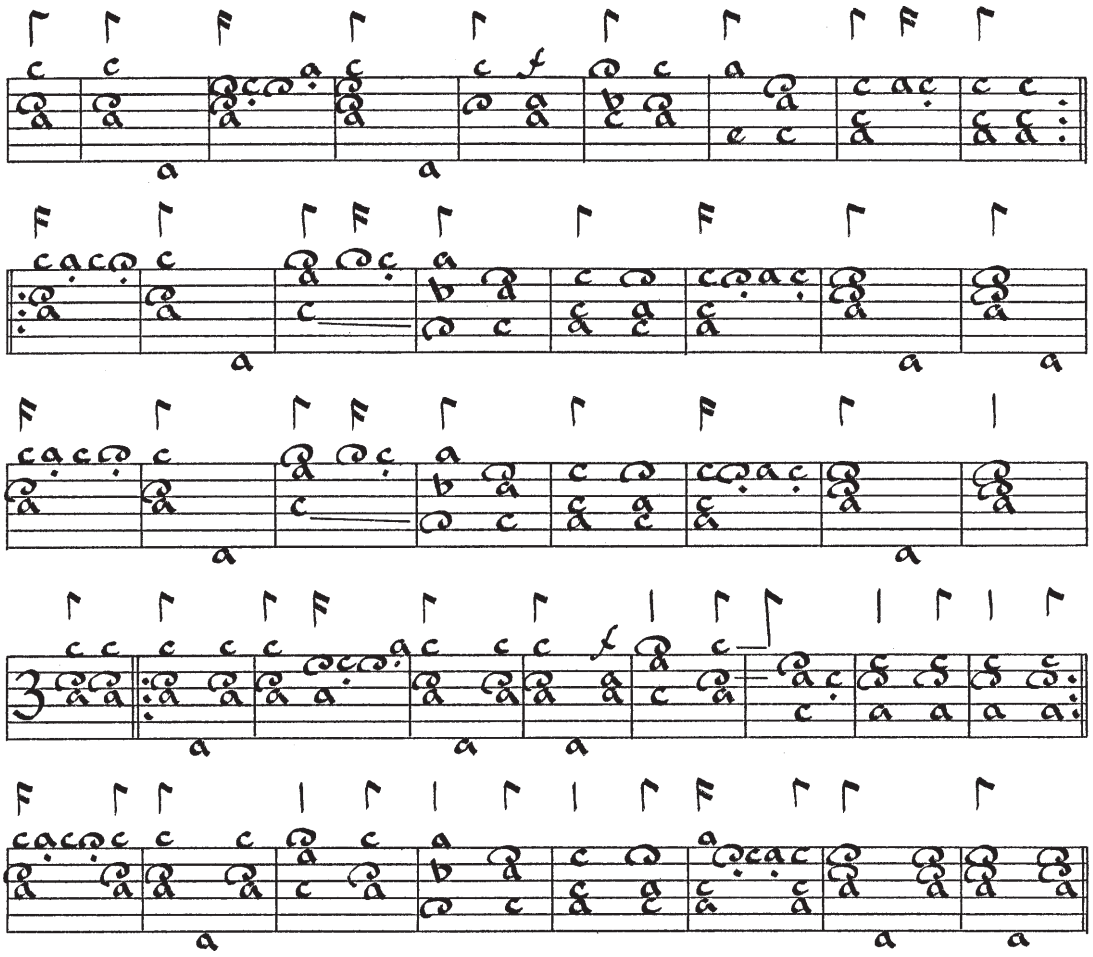
No. 18

Tant que vivrai publ. Pierre Phalese (1547)



No. 19

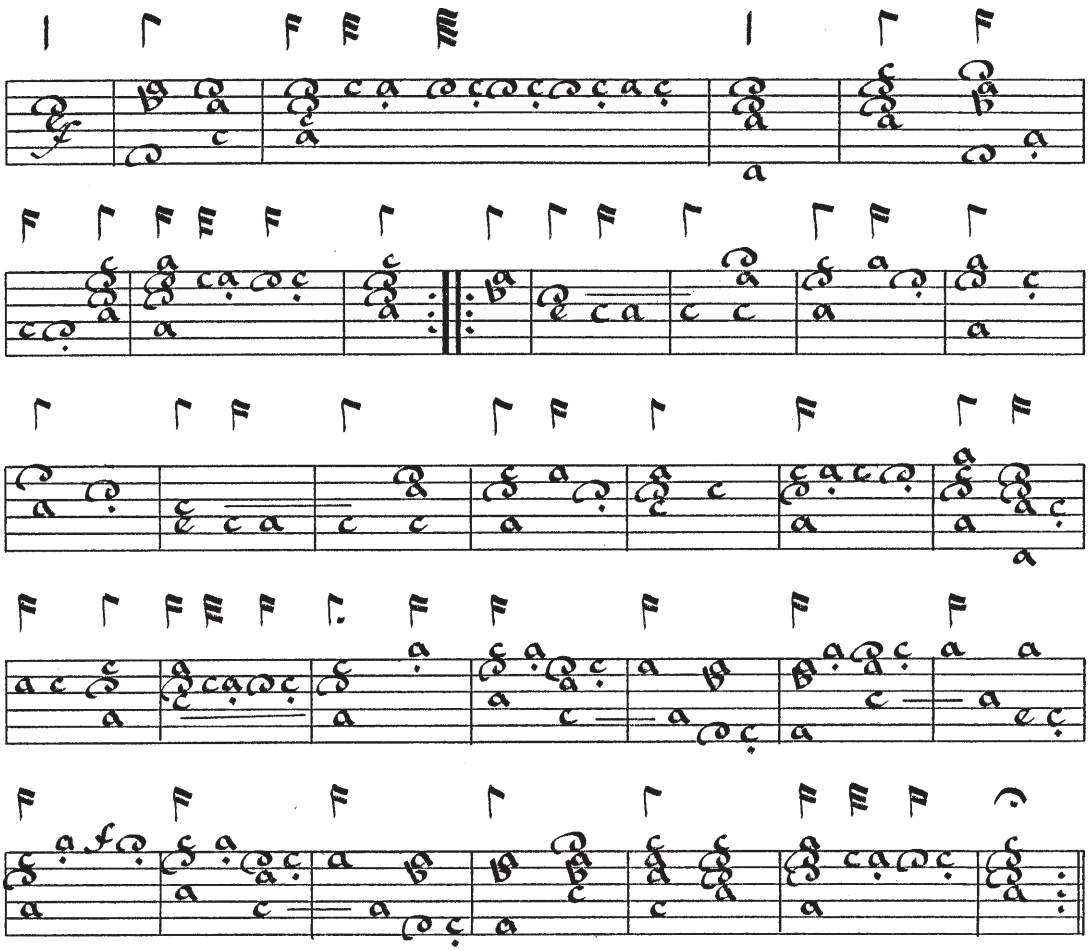
Pass' e mezzo e Saltarello — Anonymous (Chilesotti lutebook)



7th course = F

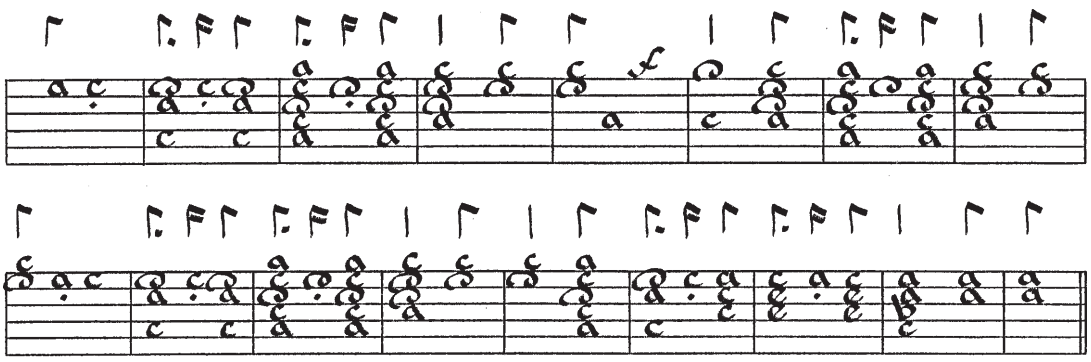
No. 20

Io vorrei pur fuggir — Anonymous (Chilesotti lutebook)



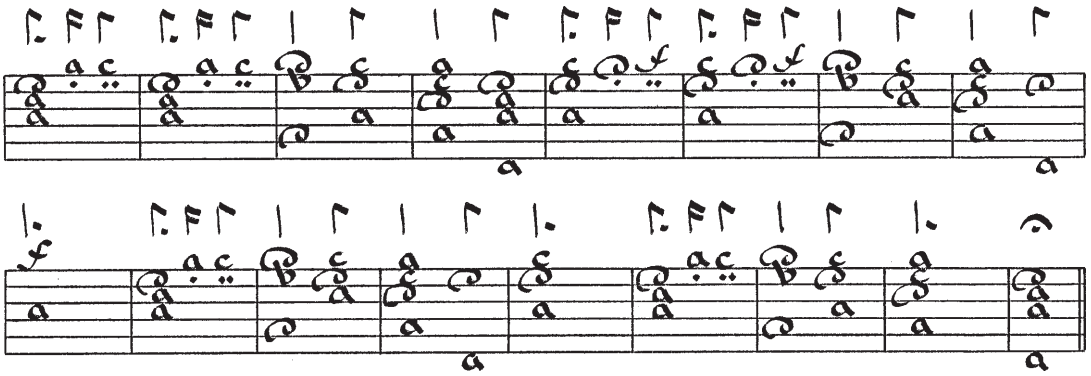
No. 21

Doria colonna — Fabritio Caroso

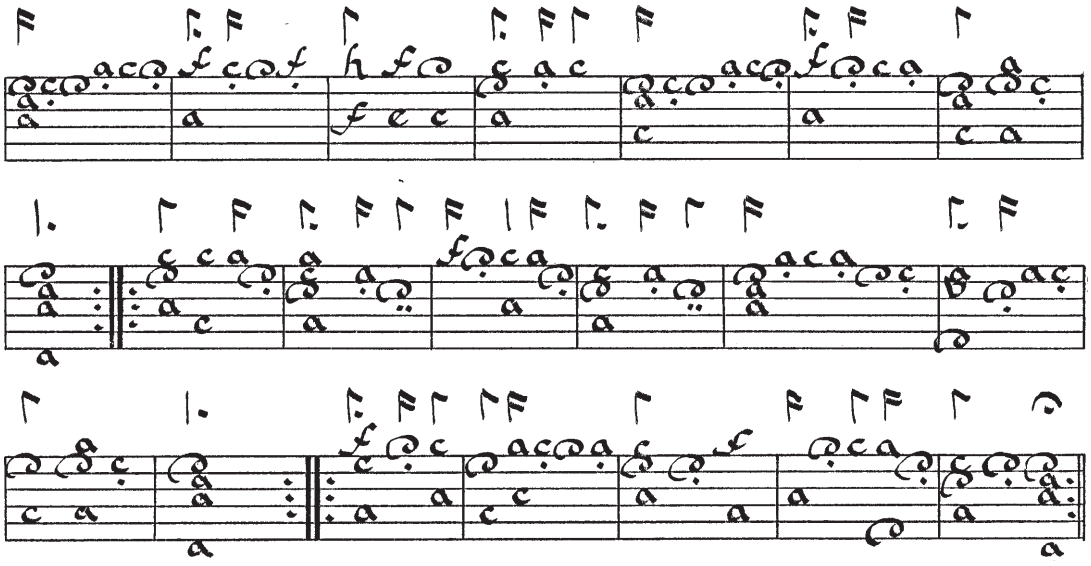


No. 22

Canario — Cesare Negri

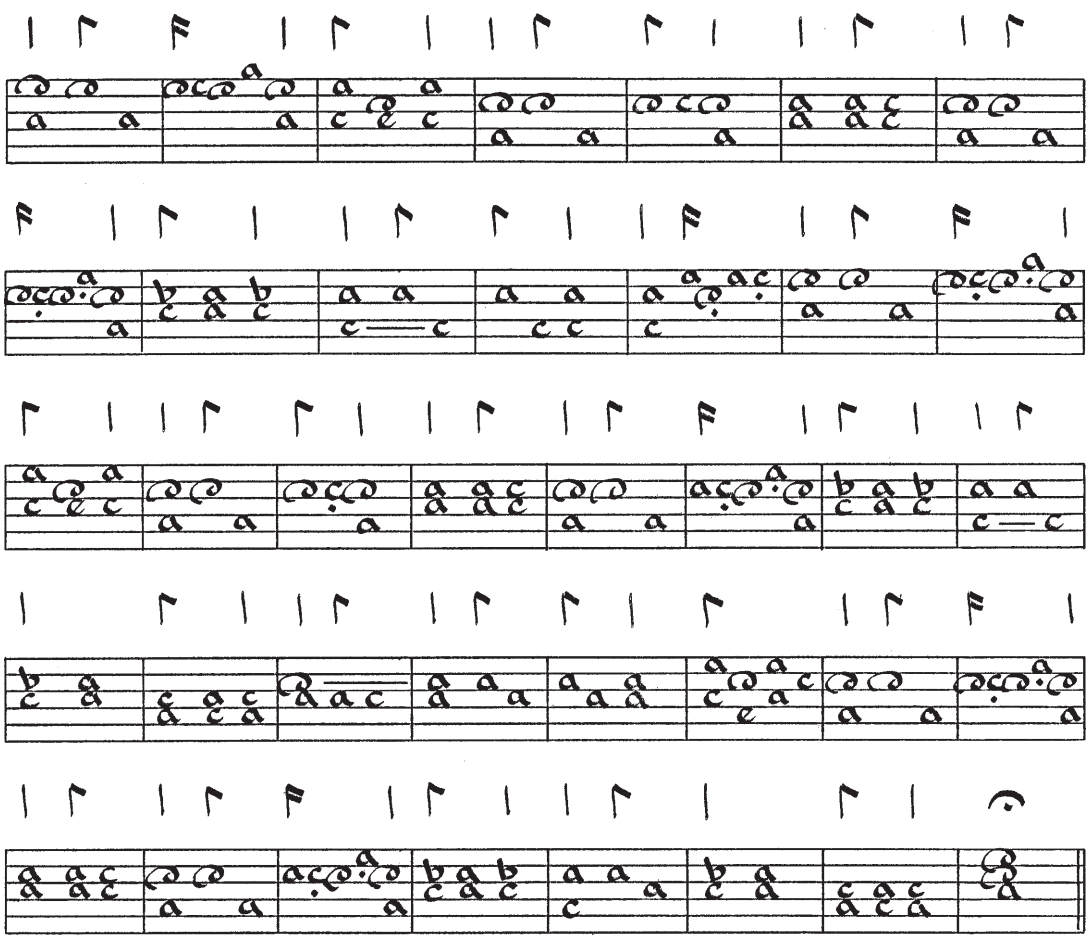


Bianco fiore — Cesare Negri



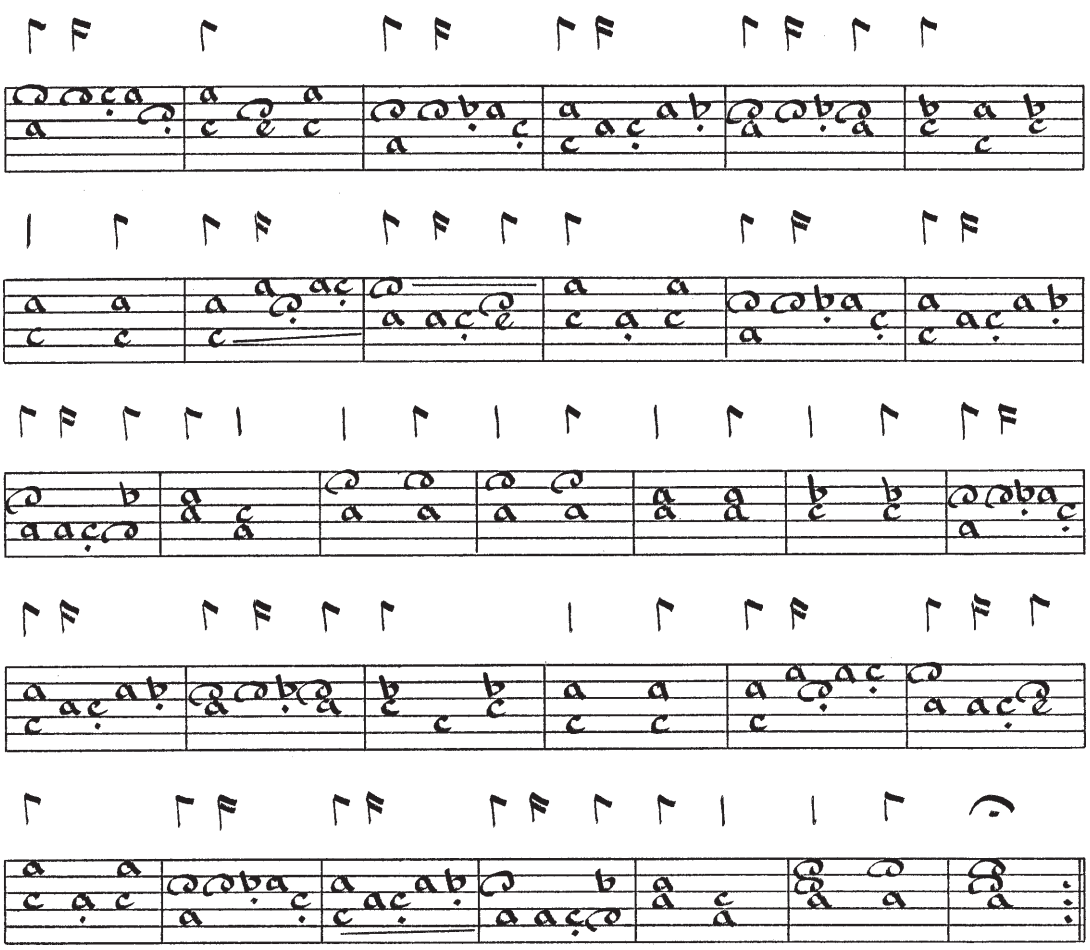
No. 23

Ein guts hofftentzlein — Hans Newsidler



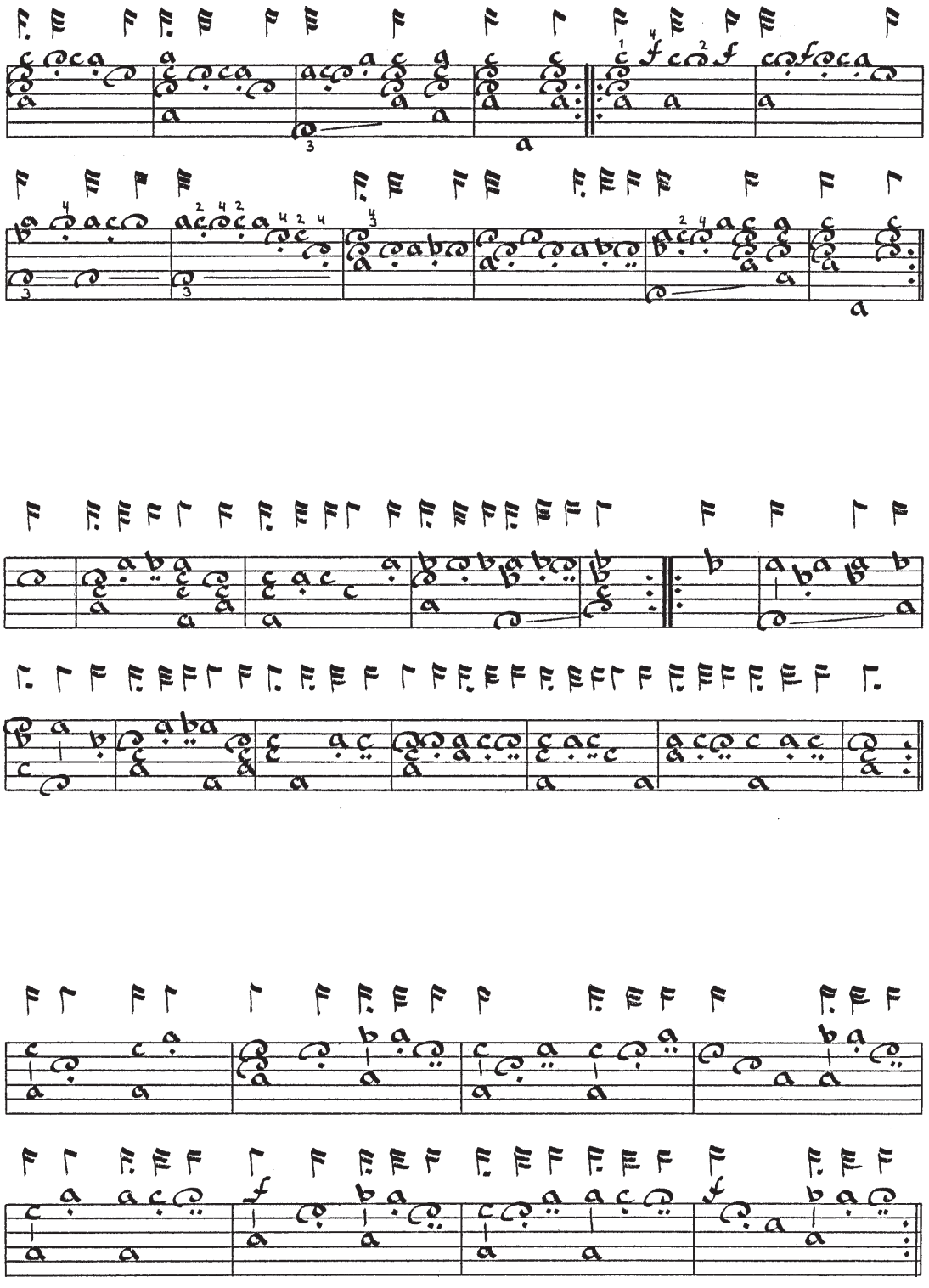
No. 24

Der Hupff auff — Hans Newsidler



No. 25

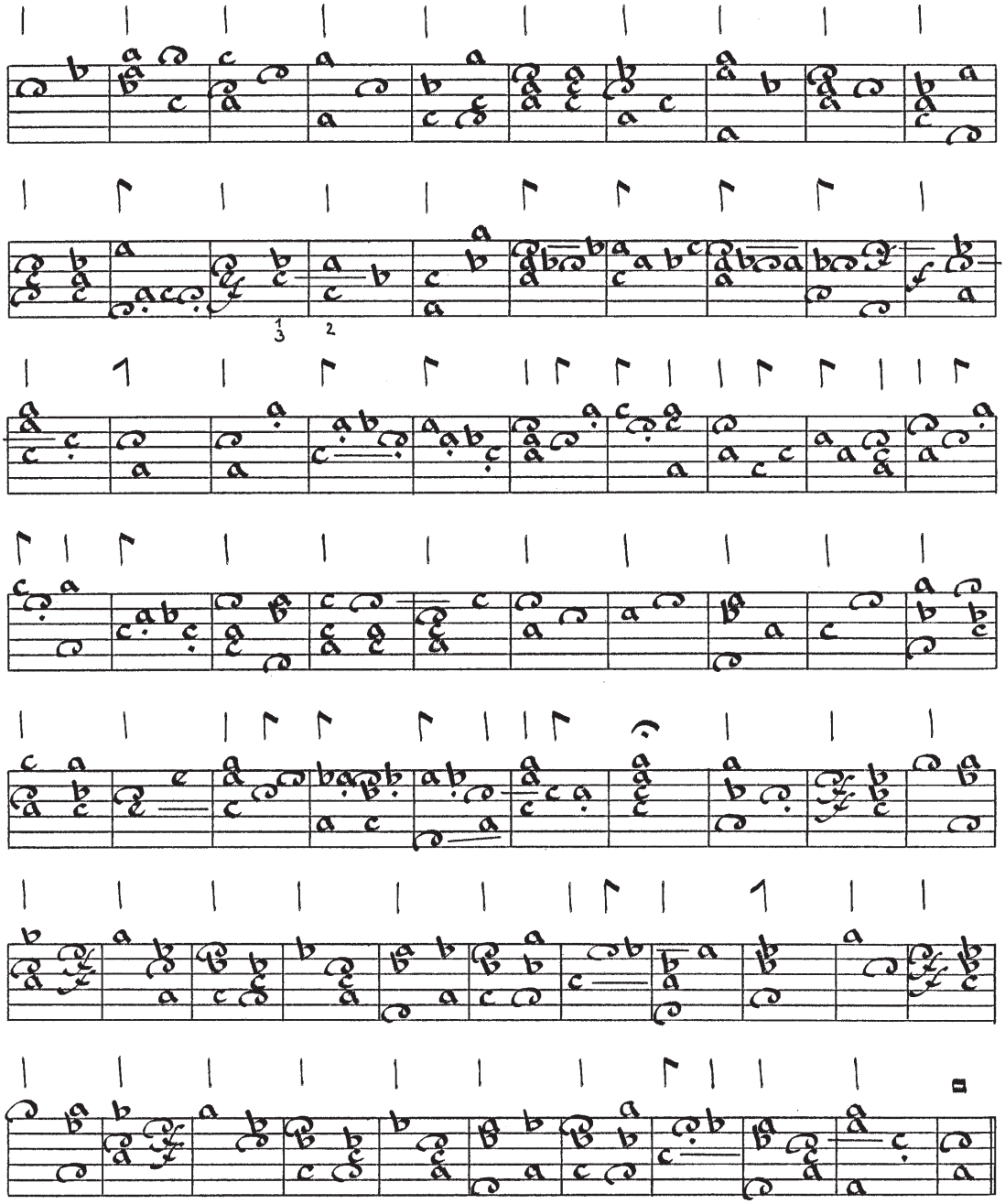
The parlement — Anonymous (Folger Dowland Manuscript)
Coranto — "
Toy — Anonymous (Jane Pickering Lute Book)



No. 26

Fantasia No.4 Luis Milan

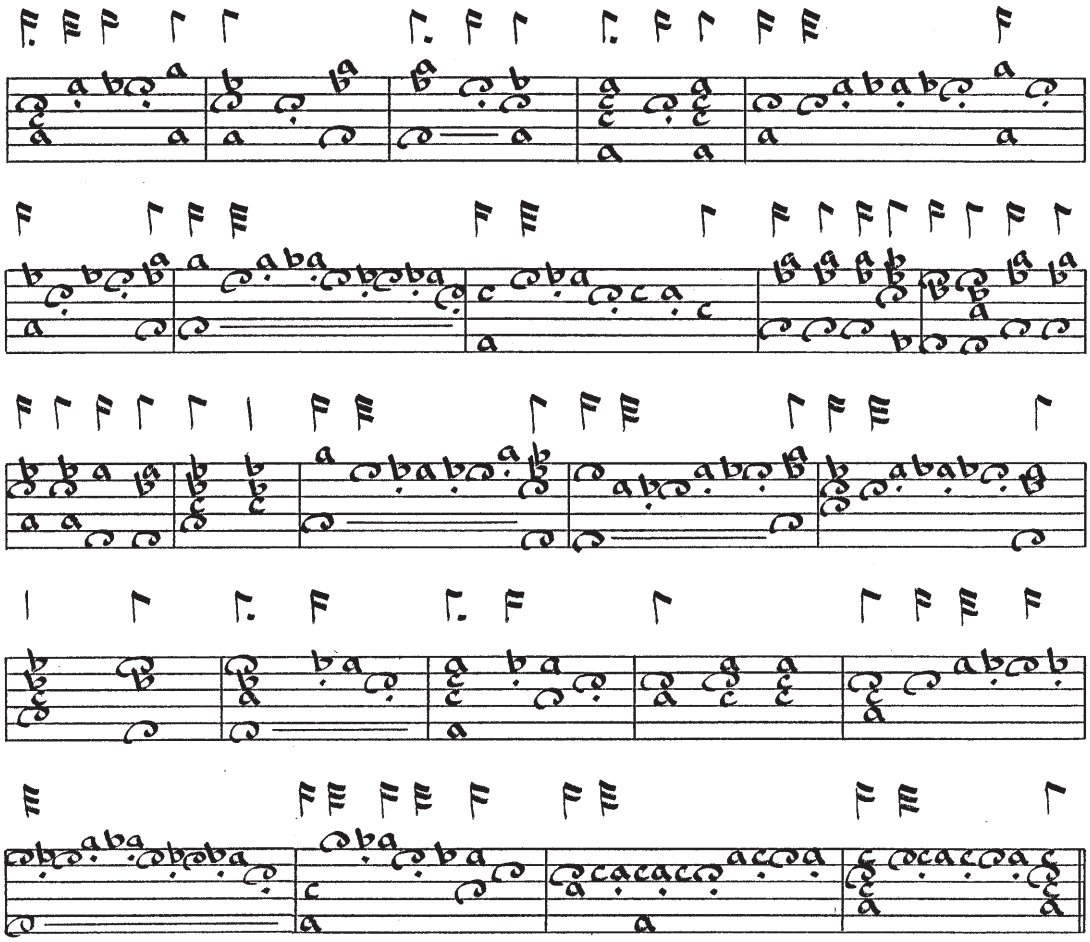
The following fantasia by Luis Milan is a good exercise in playing 3-voice chords, but it should not be performed as a mere succession of chords. Concealed within the chordal texture are melodic motives in the treble, bass, and within that must be brought out or the piece falls flat. Where there is a suspension cadence, the suspension has been indicated editorially by a short line so that it cannot be overlooked. Cadences are musical landmarks and they should be the goal of your phrases.



No. 27

A galliard — Anonymous (Marsh Library munuscript, Dublin)

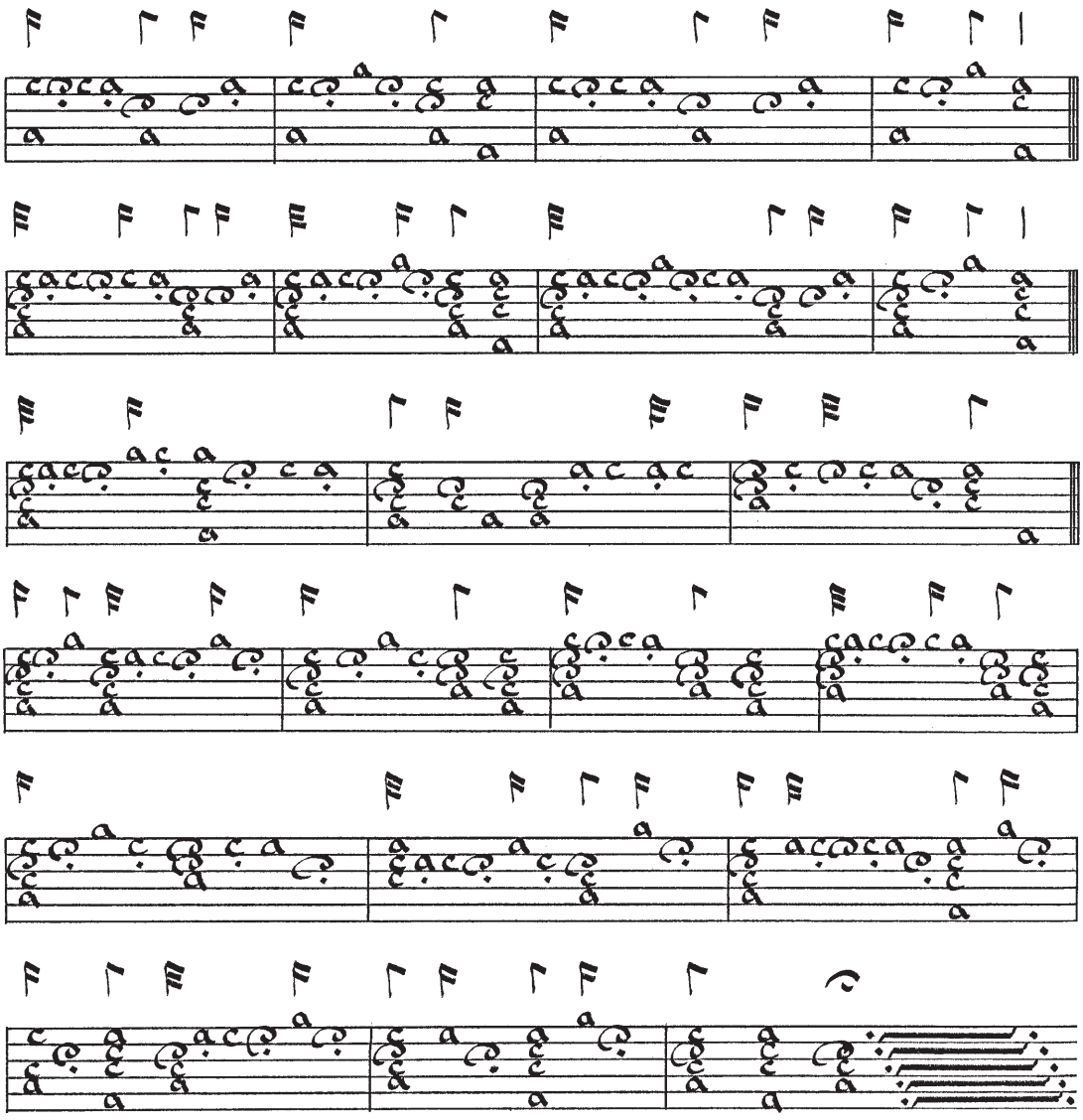
The following galliard is a typical example of English divisions. Here each group of four measures is repeated, varied with divisions. The divisions comprise a serpentine version of the melody, preserving its essential tones and its general outline, but the chords are necessarily thinned down, in most cases to simplify the bass and melody tones. This procedure is not a rigorous one: the same melody probably would not have been embellished in exactly the same way twice, even by the same lutenist.



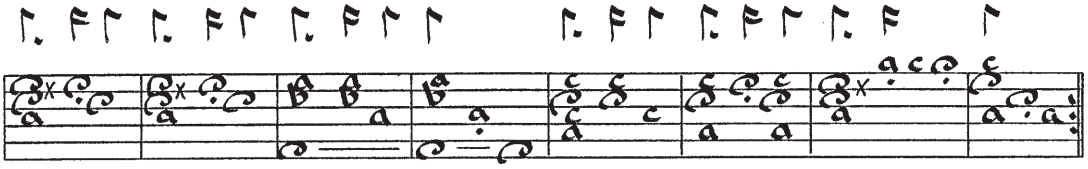
No. 28

4 Branles publ. Pierre Phalese (1546)

The four branles published by Phalese appeared in many other renaissance prints arranged for other instruments. The first section is my reduction of the first branle to its basic tune, in order to show how the ornamental version of Phalese functions. One good way to play the pieces would be to play each branle once without the diminutions, then repeat the dance with ornamentation.



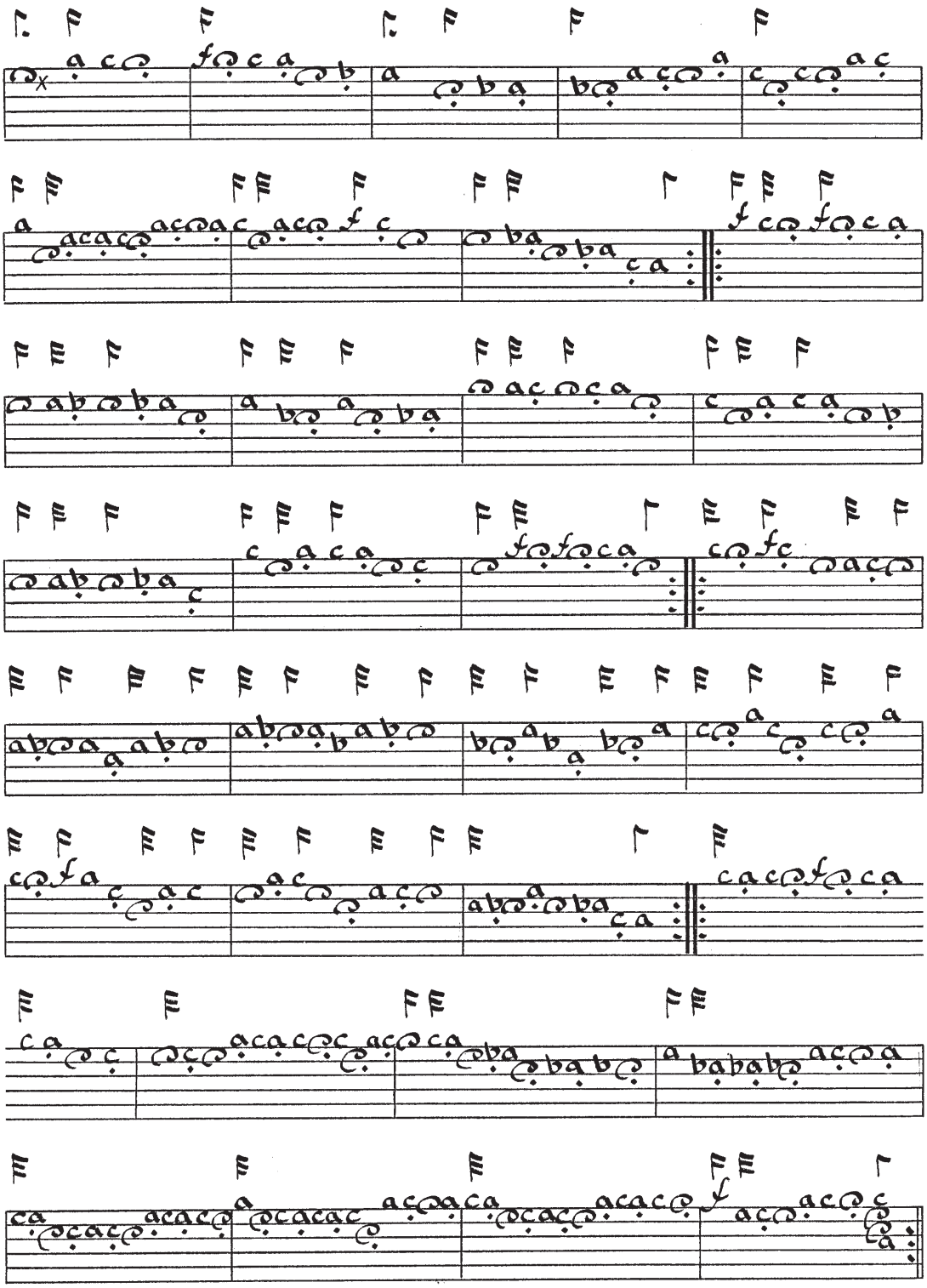
Ground to the treble (No.29) Lute 2 x = a shake or short trill



No. 29

A treble

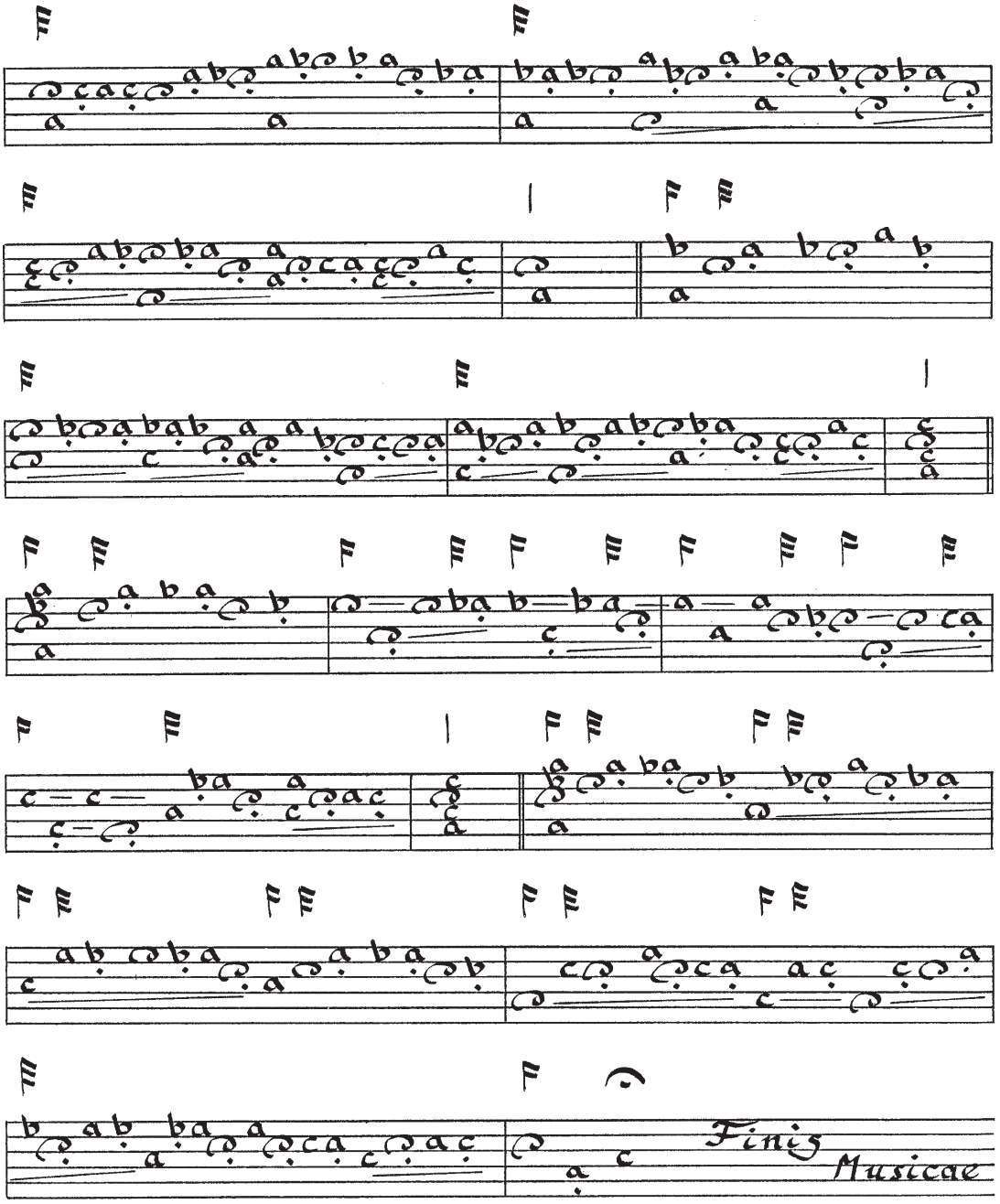
The following piece is a duet, an appealing but not too difficult example of the 'treble and ground' duets that were popular with English lutenists. Lute 1 plays the treble divisions while lute 2 plays the ground, repeating it until lute 1 has come to the end of the piece. This particular example is based upon the Bergamasca bass pattern.
It is a variant of Dump No.2 by John Johnson.



No. 30

Finale

Albert Dlugoraj



On practicing... by Douglas Alton Smith

'And if you wish to accomplish something on the lute, you must in the beginning play sharply, cleanly and slowly'

Matthaeus Waissel, 1592

'Chuse one lesson thy selfe according to thy capacitie/ which give not over by looking over others/ or straggling from one to another/ till thou have got it reasonably perfect/ and doe not onely beginne it by going through it to the end at first sight/ but examine each part of it diligently/ and stay at any point so long (though thou play it over and over a thousand times) till thou get it in some sort. The like you shall do in all parts of the said song/ till you shall find your selfe prettily seen in it. It will not little help you to get it without booke: for whilst the mind is busie searching here and there for that which is written/ the hand is more unapt to performe the Note/ and all the difficultie the Lute hath/ which for the most part is imputed to the fingers/ should rather be attributed to the varietie of the Rules/ which are in this respect to be observed/ all which doe rather depend upon the mind/ then on the hand'

Jean Baptiste Besarde 1617

There are three basic rules for learning an instrument. The first, perhaps most fundamental, is simple:

1. Practice as slowly as required to play every note absolutely perfectly.

This is the only way to master a piece, or indeed the instrument. Most lutenists practice much too fast, and often the greater the natural talent, the stronger is the urge to play a piece at concert tempo before it is really learned. However, a musician who practices too fast is merely rehearsing his bad tone and mistakes.
Behind the disarming simplicity of this rule is a very logical reason: when you practice an exercise or piece extremely slowly, you have greater control over your fingers and over the sound you produce. Your mind can absorb practically everything that is happening, and it is easy to notice poor tone and missed notes, and to analyze the causes for these errors.
Paradoxically, this is doubtless one reason why most lutenists do not heed the rule: it makes errors too obvious, and the player prefers not to hear them.
BUT EVERYBODY ELSE HEARS THEM!
Alice Artzt, the noted New York guitarist, writes on exercises:' Do them perfectly! Anything that would not do as is for an LP recording is no good and means you are going too fast!'
An extremly important, related rule is:

2. Listen carefully and analytically to the sound you are making.

Again this rule is broken by most lute students. They usually succumb to the great temptation to hear the ideal sound that they see in the tablature instead of the clumsy, embarrassing noises that are actually beeing produced. There is a good way to find out, if you are guilty of this: record a few exercises on tape, then play it back.
A tape recorder is your most honest critic.
When you practice, practice slowly and analyze each motion of the fingers and every sound of the instrument. If a string buzzes, try to determine why: was the finger too far from the fret?...did another finger touch the string?... was your right hand stroke

clumsy? If you cannot make wonderful sounds at any speed, there may be a problem with the instrument: action too high, strings too close together for your hand and so forth. In this case have an experienced lutenist or luthier examine it. Often the instrument is partly to blame. The underside of the chanterelle should not be higher than 3.5 to 4 mm from the fingerboard at the neck/body joint, but it is sometimes carelessly placed much higher. However, most of the problems are probably in your two hands, or ultimately in your attitude. Pay constant attention to both hands and your mental awareness of what is happening. You can learn to play very well if you are careful.

Finally:

3. Practice must be purposeful.

It is not sufficient, in fact it is detrimental, to just sit down and play exercises or bang off a piece. The mind must be in constant control. Your practicing should always be directed toward a goal and not be simply mechanical and unthinking. If you are rehearsing an exercise, be conscious of what skill you are attempting to develop with it and how to methodically proceed to the ultimate realization of the goal.

When practicing an exercise or piece, the first goal should be to play every single note perfectly in tone, rhythm and articulation. To accomplish this, play a short section of a measure or two over and over again, at a tempo that seems far too slow, so that it is always played just right. The more difficult a passage, the shorter the section should be and the slower the tempo. With or without a metronome, count values that are half or a quarter of what the real beat is: for instance, in a piece in which the basic pulse is one flag (equivalent to a quarter note) count the double or quadruple flag instead. This has the effect of automatically breaking the tempo. If there is ever a stumbling block in a section, stop and eliminate it. Do not ignore it: the weed will always be with you until it is consciously pulled.

If you practice in this way, as Waissel and Besarde recommend, you will soon be able to increase the speed naturally, and the piece will be as easy as it was at very slow tempo. In time, you will be able to absorb longer sections at the outset, but even the most seasoned professional must still practice slowly and purposefully and listen to the sound he is making.

'Playing cleanly is the most important skill that a player strives to attain. Each minim should be as a pearl, and great diligence is required to learn to play cleanly.'

Alessandro Piccinini, 1623

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