

30 Easy Pieces for Renaissance Lute

edited
by
Douglas Alton Smith



TREE EDITION

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TREE EDITION
Albert Reyerma

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

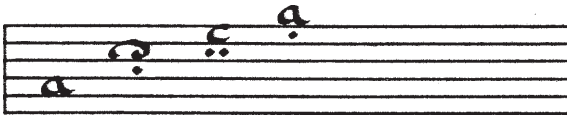
Douglas Alton Smith

Contents

No	Title	Composer/Publisher
1	A prelude	Anonymous (English)
2	Haulberroys (branle)	Pierre Attaignant
3	Si vous estes belle	Pierre Phalese
4	Christ ist erstanden	Hans Judenkunig
5	Villancico e Spagnoletto	Cesare Negri
6	Pavane	Pierre Blondeau
7	Ich klag den Tag	Hans Gerle
8	Pavana alla veneziana	Pierre Attaignant
9	Ain niderlendisch runden dantz	Hans Judenkunig
10	Gallarde	Pierre Phalese
11	Fantasia	Pierre Phalese
12	Fecit potentiam	Morales/Fuenllana
13	3 Branles de Bourgoingne	Pierre Phalese
14	Hunerschrai	Anonymous (German)
15	Paduana	Pierre Phalese
16	Tourdion to 'La Magdalena'	Pierre Blondeau
17	Galliarda 'Chi passa'	Pierre Phalese
18	Tant que vivrai	Pierre Phalese
19	Pass'e mezzo e Saltarello	Anonymous (Italian)
20	Io vorrei pur fuggir	Anonymous (Italian)
21	Doria colonna	Fabritio Caroso
22	Canario / Bianco Fiore	Cesare Negri
23	Ein guts hofftentzlein	Hans Newsidler
24	Der hupf auff	Hans Newsidler
25	The parlement / Coranto / Toy	Anonymous (English)
26	Fantasia No 4	Luis Milan
27	A Galliard	Anonymous (English)
28	4 Branles	Pierre Phalese
29	A duet	Anonymous (English)
30	Finale	Albert Dlugoraj

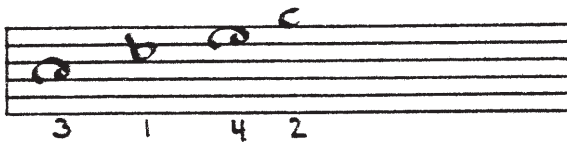
Fingering signs:

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.

The image shows a handwritten lute tablature for a piece titled 'No. 1'. The notation is written on a single staff with five lines. The letters used are a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, k, l, m, n, o, p, q, r, s, t, u, v, w, x, y, z, and dots. The letters with a dot underneath are played by the index finger, and those without a dot are played by the thumb. The piece is divided into three systems of four measures each. The first system has a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The second system has a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The third system has a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, and A-flat). The piece is written for a single right hand, using the thumb and index finger. The rhythmic values are indicated by numbers 1, 2, 3, 4 below the letters. The piece is a prelude from the Sturt Lutebook in the British Library, London.

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.

The image displays three staves of musical notation for the piece 'Haulberroys'. Each staff consists of a five-line system with a treble clef and a common time signature (C). The notation is written in a style typical of early printed music, using letters (a, b, c, d, e, f, g) on the lines and spaces to represent pitches. Above the staves, there are various musical symbols, including flags and beams, which likely indicate specific playing techniques or fingerings. Below the staves, there are numerical figures (1, 2, 3, 4) that correspond to the letters on the staves, possibly indicating fingerings or rhythmic values. The first staff has a total of 12 measures, the second staff has 12 measures, and the third staff has 12 measures. The notation is arranged in a way that suggests a three-part setting or a complex rhythmic pattern.

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.

1 4 2 4 2 4 1 2 1

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.

The image displays a musical score for a guitar piece titled 'Christ ist erstanden' by Hans Judenkunig. The score is written in three systems, each consisting of a treble and bass staff. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and bar lines. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4 below the notes. The first system has 7 measures, the second has 7 measures, and the third has 7 measures. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is common time (C). The piece is a study in independence of the left hand fingers, as noted in the text above.

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.



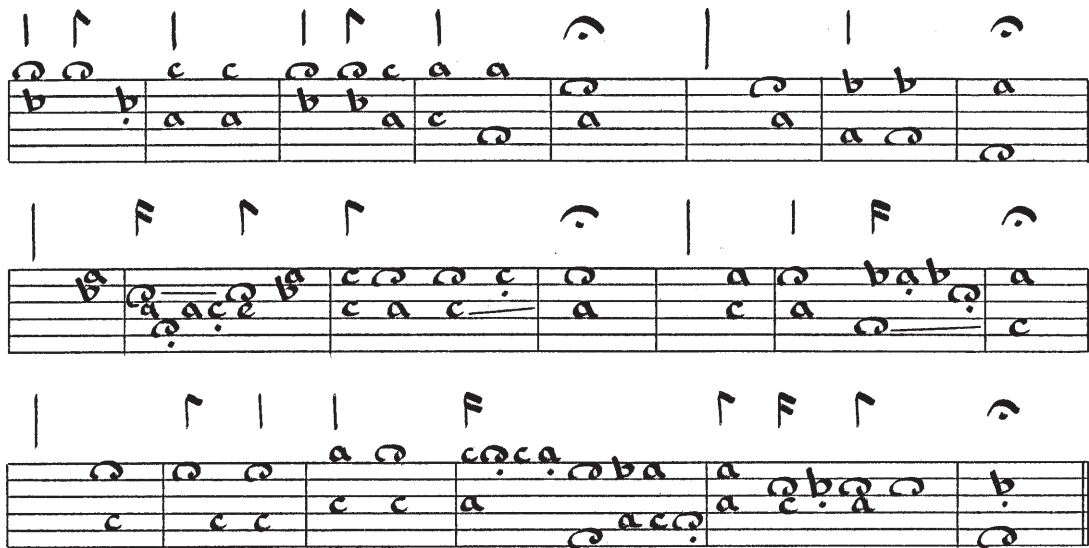
The musical score is presented in five systems, each consisting of two staves. The notation is in mensural style, with various note values and rests. Editorial markings include double bar lines to indicate repeatable sections and a 'FINE' marking at the end of the fourth system. A da capo symbol is located at the bottom right of the page, below the fifth system.

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 in 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.

The musical score for "Pavana alla Veneziana" is presented in four systems, each consisting of two staves. The notation is in a historical style, featuring various note values and rests. Above the staves, there are several ornaments: a cadential ornament (a small '7' shape) and a triple-flagged note (a note with three short horizontal lines above it). The first system contains measures 1-4. The second system contains measures 5-8, with the word "FINE" written above the final measure. The third system contains measures 9-12. The fourth system contains measures 13-16, with the words "DA CAPO" written above the final measure. The score is written in a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a 4/4 time signature.

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.

The musical score is presented in four systems, each consisting of two staves. The notation is in a historical style, likely from a 16th-century manuscript. The first system contains 8 measures, the second 8 measures, the third 8 measures, and the fourth 8 measures. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and ornaments. The first system has 8 measures, the second 8 measures, the third 8 measures, and the fourth 8 measures. The notation is in a historical style, likely from a 16th-century manuscript.

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.

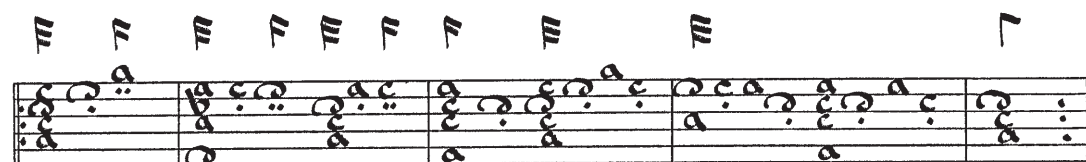
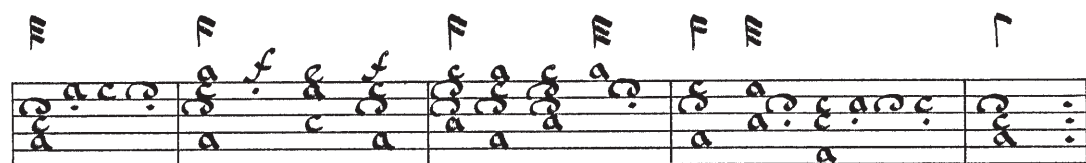
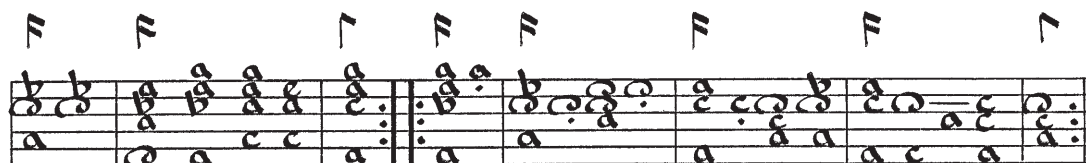
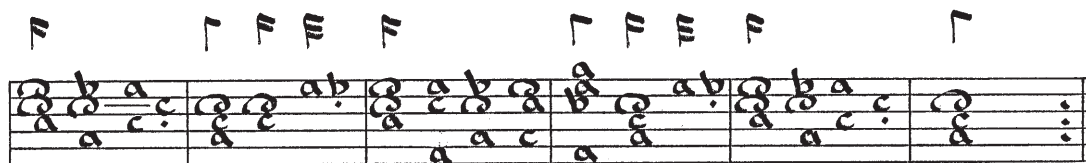
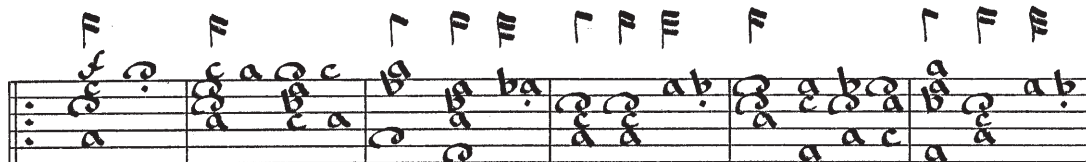
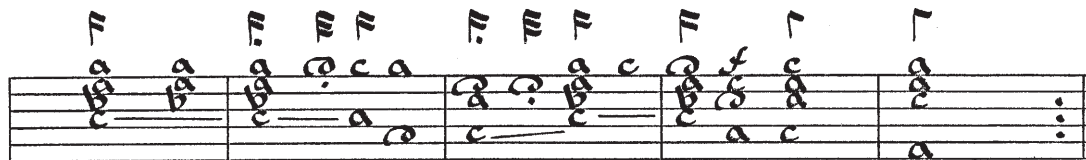
The musical score is presented in six systems, each containing two staves. The notation is a two-voice fantasia, with each voice having equal importance. The piece is in a key with one flat (F major or D minor) and common time. The notation includes various rhythmic values (minims, crotchets, quavers) and accidentals (sharps, flats, naturals). The first system shows the beginning of the piece with a treble clef and a common time signature. The subsequent systems continue the two-voice texture, with each voice having equal importance. The notation is written in a style typical of 16th-century Spanish lute tablature notation, using letters (a, b, c, d, e, f, g) on a five-line staff to represent fret positions, although here it is written as standard musical notation with notes and accidentals.

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)

The musical score consists of six systems, each with two staves. The notation is in a historical style, likely from a 16th-century manuscript. The first staff of each system typically contains a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The notes are mostly quarter and eighth notes, with some rests. The second staff of each system often contains a bass clef and a key signature of one flat. The notation includes various accidentals (sharps, flats, naturals) and rests. The score is divided into measures by vertical bar lines. Some measures contain multiple notes, while others contain rests. The overall structure is a single melodic line with a basso continuo line. The notation is in a historical style, likely from a 16th-century manuscript. The first staff of each system typically contains a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The notes are mostly quarter and eighth notes, with some rests. The second staff of each system often contains a bass clef and a key signature of one flat. The notation includes various accidentals (sharps, flats, naturals) and rests. The score is divided into measures by vertical bar lines. Some measures contain multiple notes, while others contain rests. The overall structure is a single melodic line with a basso continuo line.

No. 16

Tourdion to 'La Magdalena'

Pierre Blondeau (1530)

The musical score is presented in three systems, each consisting of two staves. The notation is in a historical style, featuring various note values and rests. The first system contains six measures. The second system contains five measures, with a repeat sign after the second measure. The third system contains five measures. The notation includes various note values, rests, and repeat signs.

No. 17

Galliarda 'Chi passa'

publ. Pierre Phalese (1574)

The musical score for Galliarda 'Chi passa' is presented in five systems, each consisting of two staves. The notation is in a historical style, featuring various note values (minims, crotchets, quavers) and rests. Above the staves, there are numerous rhythmic flags and bar lines indicating the tempo and structure. The first system shows a series of rhythmic patterns. The second system continues with more complex rhythmic figures. The third system introduces a new rhythmic pattern. The fourth system shows a variation of the previous patterns. The fifth system concludes the piece with a final rhythmic flourish. The score is written in a single system, with the two staves of each system connected by a brace.

No. 18

Tant que vivrai

publ. Pierre Phalese (1547)

The musical score for 'Tant que vivrai' is presented in five systems, each consisting of two staves. The notation is a form of early printed music, likely from a lute or keyboard manuscript. It features a variety of note values including minims, crotchets, and quavers, along with rests and accidentals (sharps, flats, and naturals). The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots. The score is written in a single system of two staves per line, with a total of five lines.

No. 19

Pass' e mezzo e Saltarello

Anonymous (Chilesotti lutebook)

The musical score is written on six staves, each with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notation is a lute tablature, using letters (C, D, E, F, G, A, B) and numbers (1-6) to indicate fret positions. The first staff has a repeat sign at the end. The second staff has a repeat sign at the end. The third staff has a repeat sign at the end. The fourth staff has a repeat sign at the end. The fifth staff has a repeat sign at the end. The sixth staff has a repeat sign at the end.

7th course = F

No. 20

Io vorrei pur fuggir

Anonymous (Chilesotti lutebook)

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "Io vorrei pur fuggir" by an anonymous composer, sourced from the Chilesotti lutebook. The score is written for a single melodic line, likely for a lute, and is organized into five systems, each containing two staves. The notation is in a historical style, featuring a single-clef staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The rhythm is indicated by a common time signature (C). The score begins with a repeat sign and a first ending bracket. The first system contains two measures, the second system contains two measures, the third system contains two measures, the fourth system contains two measures, and the fifth system contains two measures. The notation includes various note values, rests, and lute-specific symbols such as natural signs and repeat signs. The piece concludes with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

No. 21

Doria colonna

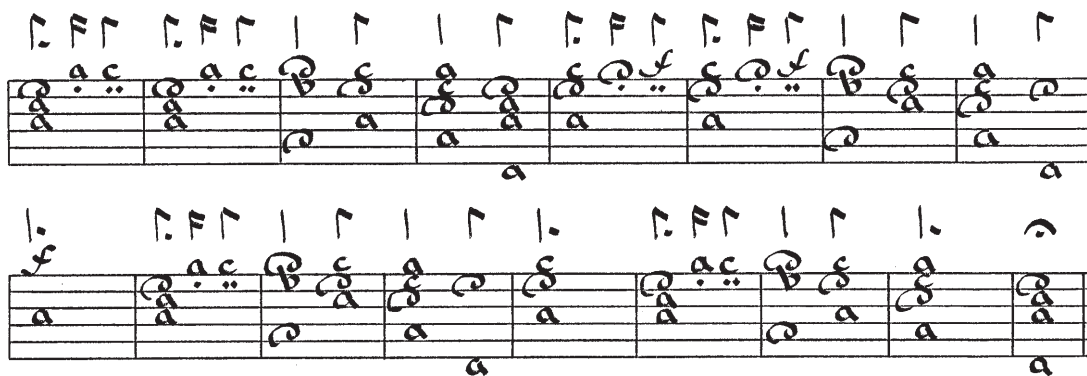
Fabritio Caroso



No. 22

Canario

Cesare Negri



Bianco fiore

Cesare Negri



No. 23

Ein guts hofftentzlein

Hans Newsidler

The musical score is presented in five systems, each consisting of a line of lute tablature (letters a, b, c, d, e, f, g) and a corresponding line of musical notation (staves with notes and rests). The tablature is written in a style typical of the 16th century, with letters placed on a six-line staff. The musical notation is in a single system with a common time signature (C) and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The score is written in a style typical of the 16th century, with a common time signature (C) and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The notation includes various note values (minims, crotchets, quavers) and rests, with some notes beamed together. The tablature and notation are aligned to show the correspondence between the fretted notes and the written notes.

No. 24

Der Hupff auff

Hans Newsidler

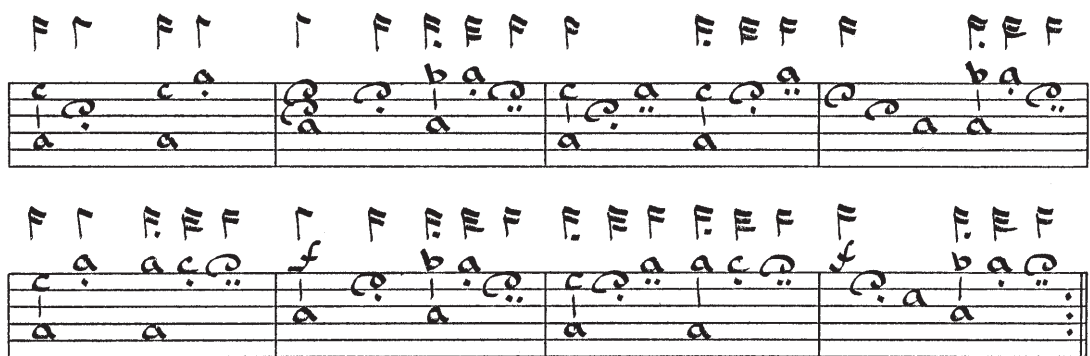
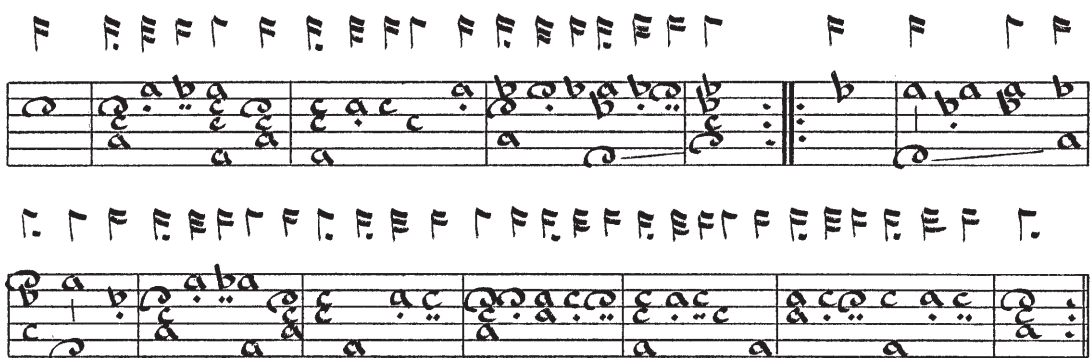
Handwritten musical notation for a piece titled "Der Hupff auff" by Hans Newsidler. The notation is arranged in six systems, each consisting of a rhythmic staff (top) and a melodic staff (bottom). The rhythmic staff uses various note values and rests to indicate the tempo and rhythm. The melodic staff contains the notes of the melody, often with accidentals (sharps, flats, naturals) and clefs. The piece is written in a single system, with the final measure ending with a double bar line and repeat dots.



No. 25

The parlement
Coranto
Toy

Anonymous (Folger Dowland Manuscript)
"
Anonymous (Jane Pickering Lute Book)



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.

The musical score consists of seven staves of music, each containing various chords and melodic lines. The notation includes notes, rests, and accidentals (sharps, flats, naturals). The first staff shows a sequence of chords with some notes written above the staff. The second staff includes a triplet of eighth notes marked with a '3' and a '2' below it. The third staff features a series of chords with some notes written below the staff. The fourth staff shows a sequence of chords with some notes written above the staff. The fifth staff includes a sequence of chords with some notes written above the staff. The sixth staff shows a sequence of chords with some notes written above the staff. The seventh staff includes a sequence of chords with some notes written above the staff.

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.

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.

The image displays six systems of musical notation, each representing a different branle. Each system consists of a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). Above each staff is a sequence of rhythmic flags, some with stems, indicating the timing and ornamentation for the piece. The notation includes various note values (minims, crotchets, quavers) and rests, with some notes marked with 'x' to indicate a shake or short trill. The first four systems show the basic tune, while the last two systems show the ornamental version with more complex rhythmic patterns and trills.

Ground to the treble (No.29)

Lute 2

x = a shake or short trill

The image shows a single system of musical notation for 'Ground to the treble (No.29)'. It consists of a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). Above the staff is a sequence of rhythmic flags, some with stems, indicating the timing and ornamentation for the piece. The notation includes various note values (minims, crotchets, quavers) and rests, with some notes marked with 'x' to indicate 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.

The musical score is presented in eight systems, each containing two staves. The notation is written in a historical style, featuring a variety of note values and rests. The top staff (Lute 1) plays the treble divisions, while the bottom staff (Lute 2) plays the ground. The piece is a duet, with the ground repeating until the end of the piece. The notation includes various lute-specific symbols, such as 'x' for natural and 'b' for flat, and a variety of note values and rests. The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat signs.

No. 30

Finale

Albert Dlugoraj

The musical score is written for two staves. The upper staff contains a complex melodic line with numerous accidentals (sharps, flats, naturals) and note values, including eighth and sixteenth notes. The lower staff provides a simpler harmonic accompaniment, often using whole and half notes. The score is divided into seven systems by vertical bar lines. Above the staves, there are various markings, including a double bar line with repeat dots, and dynamic markings such as *ff* (fortissimo) and *f* (forte). The piece concludes with the text "Finis Musicae" written in a stylized, cursive font.

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 extremely 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 being 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



TREE EDITION