



# Making the Transition from Guitar to Lute

A reference for students of the classical guitar wishing to know more of its  
Renaissance and Baroque predecessor  
by Tristan d'Avignon



Stultus  
p plateas  
nocturno  
semper cur  
rit Larmē  
et excussus  
flebile cā-  
tar amās.



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## INTRODUCTION

There are many and varied reasons for the unwillingness of many performance classical guitarists to take the next logical step into lute performance. It is true that the market for lutes is still very small, and that the cost of even a second-hand lute can be very daunting. It is also true that learning music for the lute requires adapting to a whole new style of notation. However, I feel that such reasons are not adequate to fully account for the lack of mainstream understanding of this wonderful instrument, and I feel that more must be done to encourage scholarship in it.

It is thus my intention, with the authoring of this paper and subsequent articles, to promote understanding of the lute, its music and its rhetoric, as a viable extension to the theory and practice of the modern guitar. Here, I will present as concise and as comprehensive a guide to the Renaissance lute as possible, such that any classical guitarist that reads it will have a basic understanding of the techniques and methods involved in playing the lute, and will perhaps take more of an interest in the lute in the future.

## WHY PLAY THE LUTE?

The basic reason that I was particularly drawn to the lute initially was the astonishing amount of extant, yet somehow almost universally ignored, repertoire for the instrument. Being so closely aligned to the guitar, I should have thought that transcriptions into guitar music and/or tablature were readily available, but this was not the case. My hope is that someone in the near future will be willing to take up the challenge and begin publishing modern transcriptions of lute music for the guitar, in an effort to bring around 200 years' worth of repertoire back into the mainstream for guitarists.

But ultimately it was the characteristic sound of the lute that won me over. Richard Barnfield once praised the lute as the instrument of Phoebus, the Queen of Music, and that it could "ravish human sense". Indeed, in the hands of a skilled performer, the lute carries a far more distinct and pure sound than that of the guitar; a kind of sound which possesses a warmth and romance all of its own. I cannot adequately describe to you the emotions that were conjured up within me upon listening to a live lute performance, but afterwards I determined that this was the direction I wanted to be heading in.

There is no denying that the lute is an underappreciated instrument in this day and age, and that it is not yet adequately promoted to the mainstream musician. I hope that my efforts here will go some way towards amending this sad state of affairs.

## BASIC CONSTRUCTION OF A RENAISSANCE LUTE

The Renaissance lute evolved from the Moorish 'ud, which had been introduced into Spain during the 700s. A number of Spanish and Byzantine carvings from around the 10<sup>th</sup> century show an instrument very similar in construction to the lute being played by Arab musicians using a large plectrum. It is likely that the lute first became popular in Europe during the Holy Crusades of the Middle Ages, and then undertook its own evolutionary course in the hands of European musicians, separate to that of the 'ud.

Featured on the next page is a sketch of a standard six-course lute, and its various important parts.

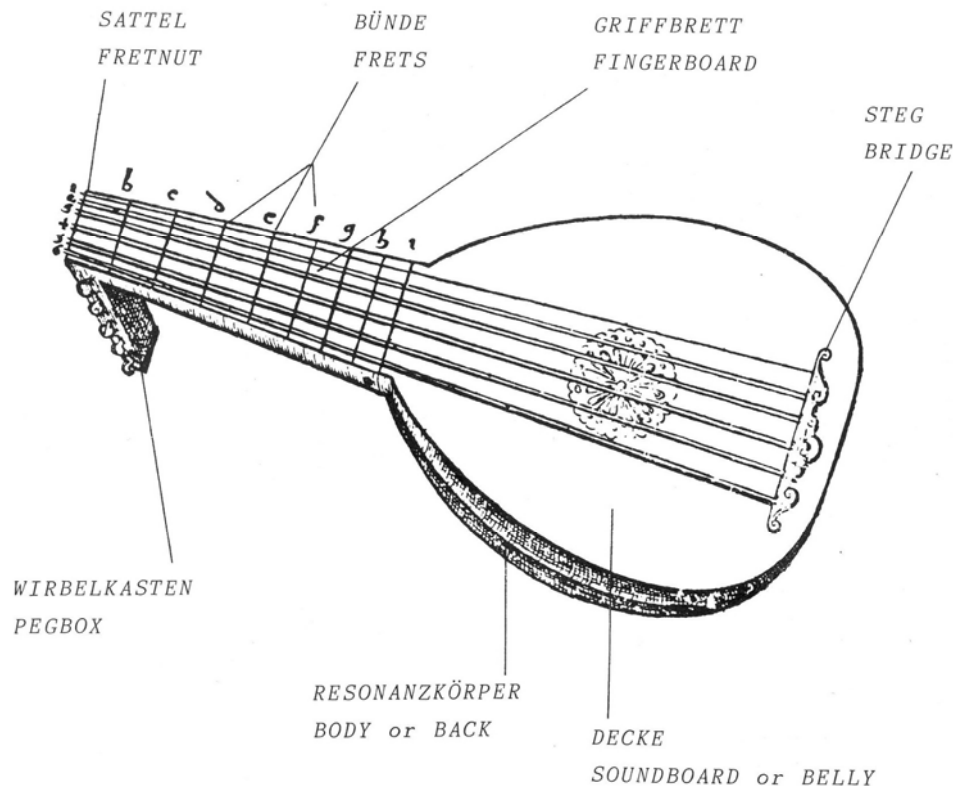


Fig. 1

It is easy to see why the lute is the natural predecessor of the guitar, as all of the features listed in this diagram have guitar equivalents. There are only four major points of difference:

- The lute is a much smaller and lighter instrument, with a bowl-shaped back, but with a wider fingerboard, which many guitarists may find disconcerting at first.
- The pegbox is bent backwards to retain tension in the gut strings.
- Five of the six courses shown here are double-strung. This is entirely optional, and any or all of the courses may be “double” or “single” according to the preference of the player, but this setup is considered standard.
- The frets are editorially numbered from “b” to “i” instead of 1 through 8 as they would be on a guitar; I shall explain this in greater detail in the “Lute Tablature” section.

#### PURCHASING A LUTE

The first issue – often the most difficult – is the purchase or acquisition of a suitable instrument. Lutes are nowhere near as common in today’s musical marketplace as the classical guitar, and are still unreasonably expensive, even at second-hand level. It is certainly a wise idea to buy second-hand for your first lute, but remember to bear in mind the following things:

- Ask the seller if the tuning pegs are firm and will not unwind under normal pressure. If they do unwind, ask if there is a trick to them, such as pushing the pegs into the neck to stop movement.
- Ask if the frets are made of gut. This is important, as a loose or unsuitable fret may result in buzzing of the strings.

- Ask if the frets are firmly in place. This can also result in string buzz, and a very loose fret can also be dislodged by the left thumb during performance.
- Ask about the framework in general: its weight and feel, its bodywork, and whether anything at all is missing or broken. If you decide to buy a slightly damaged instrument, you should be prepared to fix it yourself, or to find someone who can.
- Ask for a comprehensive series of digital photos of the instrument from several different angles, to back up their description of the instrument and its current condition. In today's digital world, proof-checking is much easier than it used to be, and there is no harm at all in verifying that the instrument is well-conditioned, not to mention proofing yourself against a dishonest seller.
- If in doubt, don't risk it! A lute is a very pricey investment at any level, and it is important to find an instrument that is well-made and well-kept, such that you may continue using it for years to come.

### SETUP AND TUNING

One of the many bonuses for a lutenist is that they may select any number of setups which conform to their needs most closely. Although no medieval lutes survive to this day, it is believed that they were typically constructed with four or five courses, and were played with a plectrum in the right hand. In the Renaissance, the standard was six courses, and the instrument was then played with both hands, using the thumb-under technique. By the late Baroque, there are instances of lutes being made with as many as fifteen courses, with the strings below the standard six – the diapasons – commonly used for low bass notes, which were commonly played using the thumb-over technique. Any setup between six and fifteen courses is possible, and the performer should choose that which suits them best. For the performer already skilled in the classical guitar, the standard six-course Renaissance lute is the obvious choice for a simple and immediate transition. Hence, this setup is assumed in all cases for the purposes of this paper.

There are numerous ways to tune the six-course lute according to the preference of the performer, but the current convention is to have the open courses resonate at the following pitches, from lowest to highest: G-c-f-a-d<sup>1</sup>-g<sup>1</sup>. Most lute music of the Renaissance era is written to match these intervals. Guitarists should note that the major third in the tuning pattern is here found between the third and fourth courses, rather than the second and third as it occurs on a standard-tuned classical guitar.<sup>1</sup> This may result in some early confusion, and perhaps some interesting chords if reading from notation, but ultimately, most guitarists making the transition to lute will find little challenge in adapting their chord fingering to suit the music.

The seated playing position for the lute is much more compacted and balanced than for the guitar, as the instrument is much lighter, and may be prone to rolling backwards if not correctly held. The student must be careful not to place any weight directly on the instrument with the arms as they might with a guitar, and to position the instrument in their lap in such a way that they can still look across to view their chord fingering if necessary. It is also acceptable for the student to use a table to rest the lute on while playing, as this is a documented practice of the time.<sup>2</sup>

For guitarists with limited or no access to a lute, their classical guitar only requires the third string to be tuned down from g to f# to act as a substitute. When playing lute music on a classical guitar using this setup, the resulting sound is a minor third lower than what we

<sup>1</sup> The standard setting for classical guitar tuning is, from lowest to highest, E-A-d-g-b-e<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Web reference: <http://yoyo.cc.monash.edu.au/~mongoose/gtl.html>

consider “standard” lute tuning to be, but otherwise correct. If the guitarist wishes to hear the music at its true sounding pitch, ie. as it would be produced from a lute, they may also apply a capo to the third fret of the guitar.

#### **THE LEFT HAND**

There is not much that needs to be said here for those already familiar with the left hand technique for the guitar. The fingers are held over the courses, with the thumb supporting behind the neck.

As the lute is double-strung for most of the courses, it is important that the technique of the left hand is very precise. If the student does not yet own a lute, an ideal method of training their left hand fingers for the lute is for them to practice on a twelve-string guitar, in order to gauge the pressure and accuracy needed to hold down both strings on a course with one finger. Alternatively, the student should practise making as clean a sound as possible for each note on their guitar, checking for finger coverage and close finger proximity to the frets. The chords in lute music resemble those used on the guitar, with the aforementioned exception that all notes on the third course (sounding pitch: a) must be played a fret higher. The tuning issue takes some time to get one’s head around, but is soon overcome with practice.

Barré and half-barré chords are perfectly possible in lute music, and the student should be aware that they will not always be given a clear indication of a barré chord, although this does tend to happen more often in tablature books of a slightly later period. Never use the left thumb to wrap around the neck and fret notes on the lower courses, as this may result in fret buzz and the eventual loss of balance of the instrument, not to mention it being a very bad habit.

#### **THE RIGHT HAND**

In my experience, implementing the slightly more “correct” right hand technique for the playing of the Renaissance lute is very difficult. Most classical guitarists, including myself, are familiar with what is known in the context of the lute as “thumb-over” technique. The hand is held perpendicular to the strings, the thumb plucking the bass notes and the fingers plucking the treble. The natural shape of the hand using this technique dictates that the thumb is nearer to the fingerboard than the fingers; hence the thumb is “over”. This technique did not become popular until the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, but cannot be completely ruled out as “wrong”.

The acknowledged method for playing music of the Renaissance is known as the “thumb-under” technique. This is based more on the medieval style involving the use of plectrums, and requires the thumb and lower arm to be far more active. Here, the fingers of the right hand are held parallel to the strings and the palm is arched over the bridge, with the little finger resting against the soundboard for additional support if required for the sake of balance. The thumb and index finger alternate between all single notes on a tablature except where specifically indicated, and the lower arm provides the impetus for plucking and strumming. The thumb plucks the strings both upwards and downwards, using the side of the thumb (and not the tip) to create a pure tone, while the fingertips rest on the courses or the soundboard, plucking inwards and upwards (sometimes alternating with outwards and downwards in the case of a shake) when required. The natural shape of the hand here requires the fingertips to be positioned further towards the fingerboard than the thumb; hence, the thumb is “under” the fingers. This method is more commonly taught by lute



tutors, as it appears to be most consistent with the practice of the time. An example of the “thumb-under” technique in practice is shown below.

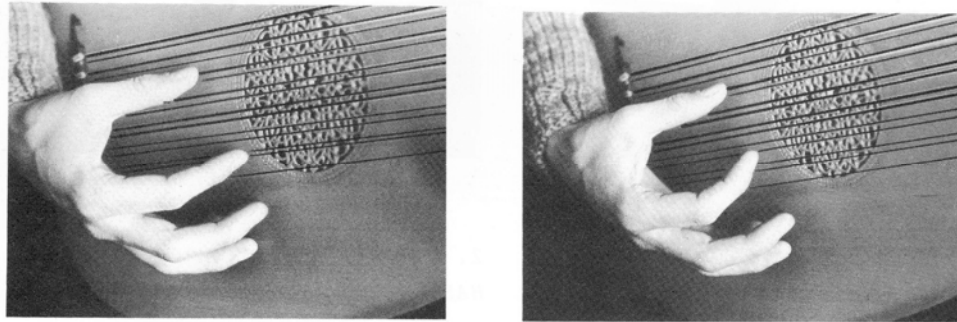


Fig. 2

## TABLATURE

### Generalities

Tablature is the standard system of notation for the lute. It is easy to adapt to once understood, and most guitarists should already have some knowledge of how tablature functions as a method of musical notation.

In all extant tablature systems, notes are given according to their rhythmic occurrence in the piece, usually with an indicator of rhythmic value shown above the note. For the lute, notes may appear as either letters or numbers, depending on the system being used. The French and Italian tablature systems are the most dominant and are equally common. Both have their merits and drawbacks for the modern guitarist.

Rhythmic attributions are shown in one of two ways in a standard manuscript. The first is where the appropriate rhythmic stem is placed above the first note to which that value corresponds. If a piece featured a run of semiquavers, the first semiquaver-valued note would be represented with a double-flagged stem above it in the tablature. The double-flagged stem would then apply to all the following notes until a rhythmic change occurred, at which point the new rhythmic value would take over. The second is to write all the stems out in full, usually beaming rhythmic values into groups in relation to the rhythmic pulse of the music. Occasionally a stem will be given with no note value below it; this indicates a rest. The longest rhythmic value in a tablature is normally a crochet, or a non-flagged stem, hence we normally quadruple all note values when transcribing a lute tablature into modern notation, so that the music may be easily read in cut-time (2/2).

Metres and tempi in lute tablatures are largely unassigned, leaving much to the performer's common sense and intuition. Nevertheless, they do exist. The most common metre sign is 3 for triple time, with  $\text{c}$  for common time being used very rarely, as it may be confused with the similar tempo indication. Tempo markings can be helpful in discerning not only the tempo of the piece it is assigned to, but also the tempi of pieces of a seemingly similar genre or structure. The most common tempo markings are  $\text{O}$  (fast),  $\text{C}$  (neither fast nor slow) and  $\text{c}$  (slow).

The tablature systems presented here are listed in order from easiest to hardest, based on my own experience.

### Spanish Vihuela Tablature

The vihuela is the sister instrument to the lute, and was more popular in Spain than anywhere else in Europe. It was a flat-backed instrument, in contrast to the bowl shape of the

lute, and all of its courses were double-strung, but is otherwise equal in all respects. The standard tuning for the vihuela is considered to be one tone up from the Renaissance lute, but the music of either instrument may easily be played by the other, as their fingering patterns are exactly the same.

Though this is not music expressly written for the lute, the tablature for the vihuela is an excellent place to start for guitarists wishing to make the transition to lute, as the tablature is exactly the same as its modern equivalent: it uses number notation and is “right-way-up”. Hence, Spanish vihuela tablature is an excellent vehicle for guitarists to gradually adapt to playing melodies and chords using a slightly different tuning to their classical guitar. An example showing an excerpt of a fantasia by renowned vihuela composer Luys Milan is given below. If you do not yet have access to a lute, try playing it on your modern classical guitar with your third string detuned to f#, and with a capo at the fifth fret if you wish.

No. 35

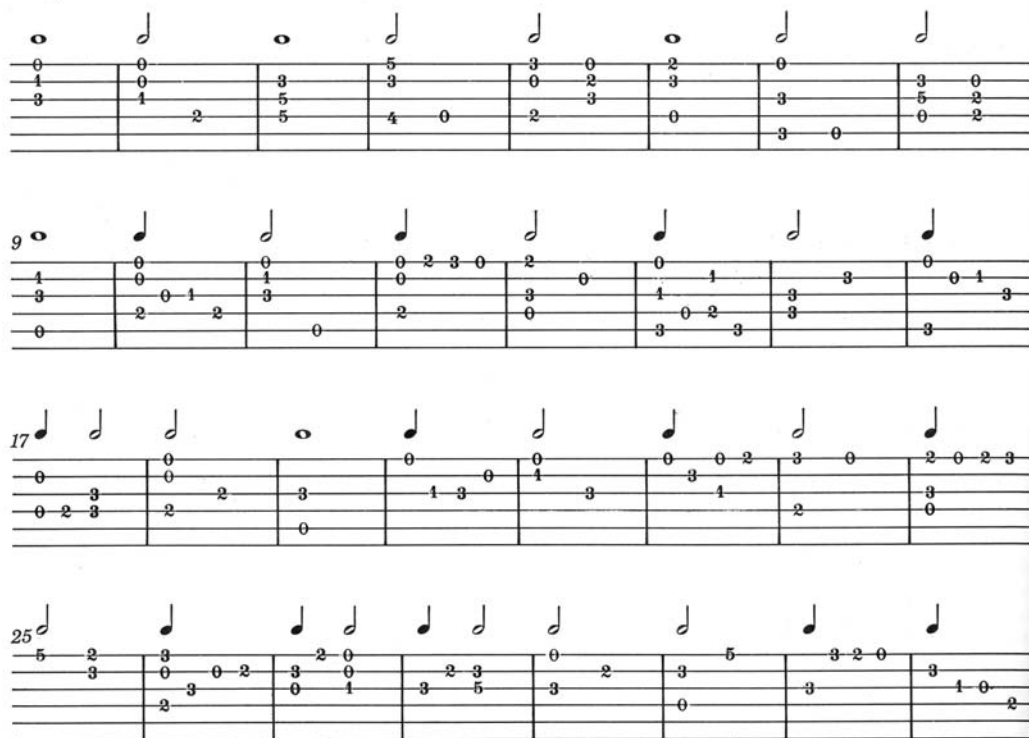


Fig. 3

Sadly, Spanish tablatures are not immediately comprehensive in their level of detail; they do not give indications of voice-leading or even held notes, and feature almost no use of graces that are a common occurrence in French and Italian tablatures. Because of this lack of detail, many editions of Spanish vihuela music come with a transcription into modern notation, with editorial additions of slurs and ties across barlines to clearly indicate multiple layers.

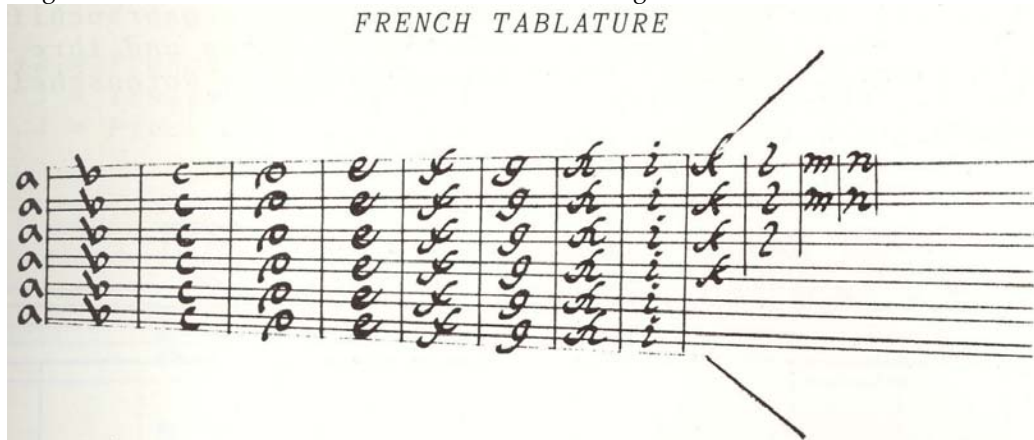
The Spanish system does feature at least two unique elements. The first is the use of what we would consider to be “regular” rhythmic notation, instead of the substantially shortened values found in other tablatures. The second is the “coronada”, which is essentially an early fermata, indicating a perceptible pause in the music.

### French Lute Tablature

The French system is typically written using a six-line stave, with the highest sounding string represented at the top of the stave, as with modern guitar tablature, but using letter notation rather than numbers. Whereas the number 0 is given on a modern guitar tablature to signify

- “a” for the seventh course
- “/a” for the eighth
- “//a” for the ninth
- “///a” for the tenth

*FRENCH TABLATURE*



Where a horizontal or diagonal line is given following a note, this indicates a held note. Regardless of the following notes or the rhythmic values attributed to them, the note (normally in the bass) is held with one finger of the left hand, acting as a short pedal.

In terms of right hand fingering, if a single dot is given beneath a single note, then it should be played with the index finger. If two dots are given, the middle finger plays the note. Also possible – though much rarer – is three dots for the ring finger. Where no finger indication is given, the bottom note at least should be played with the thumb, along with the other notes if possible.<sup>4</sup> The equivalent system in guitar notation is “p” for the thumb, “i” for the index, “m” for the middle and “a” for the ring. Most of the standard features of French tablature are demonstrated in the example on the next page: a courante for a seven-course lute.

<sup>4</sup> The vertical line given beneath some notes in the following example is an editorial addition for thumbled notes; this is not consistent with the original tablatures.

No. 14

1 2 a a 4 a a a a

9 a a a a 4 a 4 a a 3 2

17 a 3 4 a 2 4 a a 4 a a

25 a 2 1 3 1 1 1 3 1 4 1 4 1 3 1 2 a 1 2 2 1 2 1 a

*Curent*

Fig. 5

The learning curve for this system is slight, and most aspiring lutenists should have very little trouble adapting to this style of notation.

### Italian Tablature

The Italian system also uses a six-line staff, and conveniently uses number notation which is written on the lines rather than between them, as with modern guitar tablature. Beyond the ninth fret, the Roman numeral X is used; no dots overhead indicates the tenth fret, while one or two dots overhead indicate the eleventh or twelfth fret respectively. However, the order of strings is here reversed, with the lowest sounding string presented at the top of the staff. This has probably been done because of the fact that, in looking directly at the front of the lute, the lowest string is at the top of the neck. This seems logical enough, but it is completely at odds with what most guitarists are already familiar with. In addition, while right hand fingering indications are given by dots beneath the notes, in a similar manner to French tablature, no left hand fingering can be given, as this would cause confusion with the numbered notes. Thus, the learning curve for Italian tablature may be slightly greater than for French tablature. Two diagrams, the first of the standard Italian fret attributions, and the second of a simple “contrapasso nuovo” as an example of Italian tablature, are given on the next page.



Fig. 6

No. 26

Contrapasso nuovo

Fig. 7

### Cifra Nueva Tablature

A curious but very scholarly addition to the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century repertoire of the vihuela is the "cifra nueva" style, originally pioneered by Luys Venegas de Henestrosa in a theoretical treatise first published in 1557. The tablature is written on a four-line staff, such that each "voice" receives its own line. All the notes in the lydian mode are assigned a pitch, with the F being 1 and e being 7, repeating every octave. Three octaves of the lydian mode are covered:

- notes in the first octave of the mode are given a small tail to distinguish them slightly from the same pitch in another octave
- notes in the third octave are given a dot in order to distinguish them
- notes in the second octave are not decorated at all

In addition:

- any notes below the first octave are given a tail and a dot
- any notes above the third octave are given two dots
- flattened degrees of the scale are indicated with a "b"
- sharpened degrees of the scale are indicated with two small parallel lines
- rests in a part are indicated with a "p"

While this may sound like more trouble than it is worth, the following original diagram makes the system more clear, despite containing a few errors.

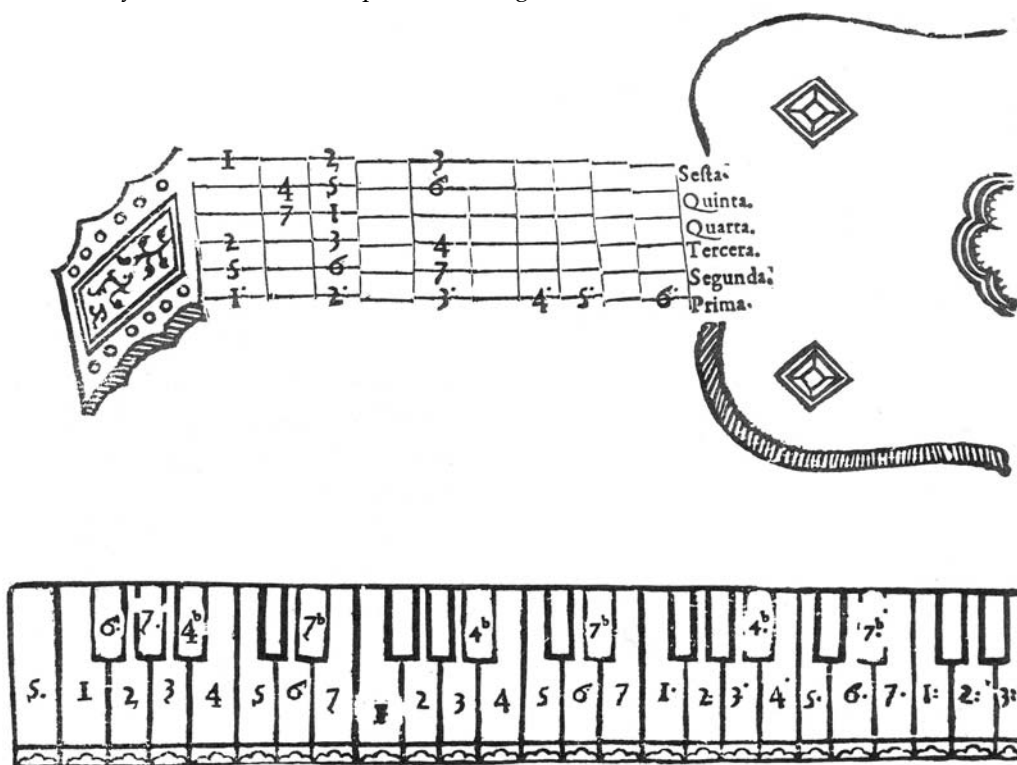


Fig. 8

From this diagram, despite the vihuela being strung the wrong way round, we can see that a tuning of E-A-d-f<sup>#</sup>-b-e<sup>1</sup> has been assumed for the vihuela in comparing the equivalent pitches to those found on a keyboard. For example, the F on both instruments is 1 with a tail, the f is a standard 1, and the f<sup>1</sup> is a 1<sup>·</sup>. The beauty of this system is that the tuning of the instrument can realistically be anything within the confines of the standard intervals, and yet the notation makes voice-leading remarkably easy to discern while sight-reading. An excerpt from a fantasia written by Venegas and notated in cifra nueva is given below.



Fig. 9

However, as one can see from the excerpt, there are no indications of rhythm given, meaning that the student must be very careful how they interpret the rhythm of the work. As with original Spanish vihuela tablature, editions of these works will often contain an editorial transcription of these works into modern musical notation to combat this.

This system is one for a more advanced student to tackle, but can be very enjoyable to play once the relevant finger positions for each numerical symbol have been learned.

### German Renaissance Lute Tablature

The German Renaissance tablature system is far less common, due mainly to its cryptic nature and general incomprehensibility. The notes are not presented on a staff, and are usually not presented in any kind of linear format, as with cifra nueva. In addition, the notation itself is a veritable nightmare to sight-read or memorise: the lute is divided horizontally and vertically into a grid, such that each fret on each string receives its own figure. Two diagrams, the first of the more common German fret-string figure attributions, and the second of a short example of a fantasia by Hans Newsilder with its modern notation equivalent, are shown on the following page.

Courses	g	5	e	k	p	u	9	e	k	p
	d	4	d	i	o	t	7	d	i	o
	A	3	c	h	n	s	z	c	h	n
	F	2	b	g	m	r	y	b	g	m
	C	1	a	f	l	q	x	a	f	l
	G	7	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	nut	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
		Frets								

Fig. 10



Fig. 11<sup>5</sup>

All of this is further compounded by the inability of German Renaissance lute composers to agree on a standard convention for notation, and the fact that many printed extant compilations of German lute music are printed in very confusing Gothic type, while the written sources can at times verge on complete unintelligibility.

Diana Poulton gives a very clear rundown of the basics of German tablature in her "Tutor for the Renaissance Lute", using some of Hans Newsilder's original exercises to help the student build confidence in reading this system of notation. However, in accordance with my own


<sup>5</sup> The transcription of the tablature into modern notation in this example is incorrect. The third passage of quavers should read "g-a-bb-c'".

experience, I strongly recommend the student concentrates on Spanish, French and Italian tablature early on to develop their primary sight-reading skills and muscle memory.

### Ornamentation and Graces

Although the practice of ornamentation gradually faded into non-existence by around 1800, ornamentation was an essential part of the music of the Renaissance and the Baroque, especially in slow-moving pieces. This practice involves the embellishment of chords and melodic lines with a faster interjection of notes as part of the musical framework, and allows the performer to add his/her own character to the piece as written. An example of the practice of ornamentation is given on the next page.

*Original*



*Ornamented version*



Fig. 12

In special cases, a tablature may be marked with specific graces. The most common symbols found in tablatures are “crosses” (+ and ×) and “sharps” (#). Unfortunately there is no clear guideline as to which symbols mean which ornamental variant, as they tend to mean different things to different composers. The most common method of performing the “crosses” is an appoggiatura from one direction or the other. A “sharp” is typically taken as a “shake”, which more or less equates to what guitarists know as a short trill, but can also be added to with a turn.

Other reasonably common graces and tablature indications include:

- “Commas” (, and ʹ), which do not seem to have a universal meaning, but are usually found in descending passages



- Slurs, indicating either that the notes within are to be hammered-on and pulled-off following the initial plucking of the note, or that the note the slur originates from is to be held, in a similar manner to a straight line
- A dot or a small vertical line followed by a “sharp”; this is known as a “fall with a relish”, or an appoggiatura followed by a “shake”
- A double-cross, which is normally used to indicate a held note played with vibrato in the left hand

An example of some graces used in context is shown below.

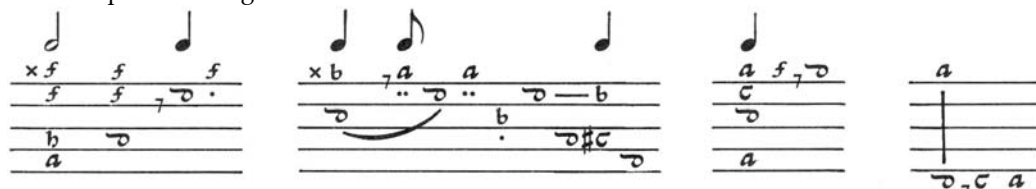


Fig. 13

This is by no means a comprehensive coverage of possible graces, as there are simply too many variants to focus on in this paper. My best advice to the student is to observe the directions given in the prefatory notes for the tablature book they are reading from, or the editorial notes in the case of a modern edition.

### MODERN READINGS

Of the modern treatises on lute performance, the current standout is Diana Poulton’s “A Tutor for the Renaissance Lute”. This treatise makes a point of covering as many bases as possible with respect to the theory and practice of the lute, and gives clear and well-balanced exercises for the aspiring lutenist to learn. Much of what I have covered in this treatise is covered in greater detail in Poulton’s book, but with more of a focus on developing performance skill. The exercises Poulton provides for beginners are well balanced and well structured, and slowly but surely lead into performance level material that would be suitable and well received at any early music concert. I recommend this book to musicians at all levels of proficiency in the lute, as even hardened experts may find themselves learning something new and intriguing.

Stefan Lundgren’s “Method for the Renaissance Lute” runs a close second to Poulton’s work, if only for the fact that it is briefer. Lundgren presents a similar collection of exercises and graded works for the aspiring lutenist, but here the focus is more on exercises than on wildly brilliant performance works. He concentrates exclusively on French and Italian tablature (I do not believe this to be a bad thing at all), and gives clear and concise instructions for his lesson plans. Lundgren also gives an index of addresses at the back of the book for people wishing to make inquiries about the lute. A word to the wise: while I would expect the company and society names to be the same, the addresses may have changed since 1986. It would be best to take the company name and enter it into Google Search for best results. This is an ideal book for a beginning student, and will give them a good grounding in the appropriate techniques they need to become truly competent in lute performance.

For the more advanced student of the lute, the recently published “Performance on Lute, Guitar and Vihuela” may provide some interesting insights and surprises. In particular, I found the chapters on accompanying Italian madrigals, the fifteenth-century plectrum lute and the performance practice of English lute song well worth the read. In dealing with the finer points of lute performance practice, it also served as a reminder to me of the reason why I most wanted to author this brief paper. As Daniel Fischlin writes at the end of his chapter on English lute song performance practice: “Like the lover, the performer enacts and

facilitates the intimacies of exchange, the invisible and sometimes barely audible intercourse that gives the performative expression of the lute song its elusive affect.”<sup>6</sup> Testosterone and oestrogen aside, the notion of love and romance associated so closely with the lute should never be lost on the student or the performer. Despite the rather academic appearance of much of this book, it is the little sentiments like this that truly make it worth reading in full.

In addition to all three of these books, there exist countless smaller books and journal articles dealing with special facets of lute performance in detail. None are to be discounted, but all will have slightly different opinions on a single subject. Books and articles that focus on the interpretation of a single source should be favoured above all else, as these are the closest possible academic insights we can get to the original performance practice of the time without perusing the manuscripts ourselves. But ultimately, any reading that draws the student towards pursuing the lute further is well and good in my opinion.

### **GREAT! WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE?**

Not knowing where to go after learning your first few exercises and pieces is a real hassle. There will be moments for the incipient student where they find themselves stuck in a rut with the pieces that Poulton and Lundgren offer for practice. It is times like these when they will need to branch out on their own and find something that actively holds their interest.

I can personally recommend the ayres of Thomas Campion as being reasonably simple but a lot of fun to learn and play. His first collection of ayres (1601), combined with the works of Philip Rosseter, remain a great source of inspiration and a cunning teacher of “tricks” that have done my playing a world of good in the past. Conversely, I advise new students to be wary of the works of John Dowland, as many of them are very pretty to listen to but fiendishly complex to perform.

Of the major Italian lute composers of the Renaissance, I am inclined to recommend the works of Francesco Canova da Milano. His works are well graded, from the disarmingly simple to the ravishingly detailed, and the lute books he left behind contain many a rewarding challenge for the ardent lutenist.

I do not recommend the incipient student attempt the French “air de cours” early on, as there are some issues specific to this genre in terms of tablature that are rather more specialised than most performers know. In particular, there is little or no information given us as to the meaning of many of the graces written into the score, so interpretation of these works requires a great deal of planning and forethought.

If the student wishes to attempt some Spanish vihuela tablature, the works of Luys Milan are an excellent starting point. While the pieces themselves are relatively simple, Milan is very detailed in his instructions as to how most of his pieces should be played, and he will occasionally give performance directions that are a great deal ahead of his time, such as the notion of speed fluctuations and dynamics.

Hans Newsilder is the German master of the lute, and his theoretical writings on the subject of the lute are without peer in the area. However, if the student does wish to attempt a work of Newsilder’s, they should really find an edition transcribed into French or Italian tablature, or even modern notation, as attempting to decipher the original German tablature is a risky idea.

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<sup>6</sup> Coelho, Victor Anand (ed.): “Performance on Lute, Guitar and Vihuela”. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK. 1997. p. 71.

## CONCLUSION

Within the contents of this paper, it is my hope that any guitarist who reads it will find at least one thing that interests them a great deal, and that will encourage them to at least take a look into the theory behind the lute, if not make an effort to learn about its workings, or even to attempt to learn it in practice as a secondary performance instrument. I have taken the long way towards learning more about the lute, and frankly I wish I had had more of an incentive to follow through with it. But at the end of it all, my feelings all come back to the wonderful, intoxicating sound of the lute itself, and my feelings of regret that it is not as well recognised or as well revered a sound as it was 400 years ago.

With the final few words of this paper, I encourage you to listen to some recorded lute music at some point in the future, and see what you think, and more importantly, what you feel. If I am right, there is definitely a place for the lute in the ears, hearts and minds of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century audience. All it needs is a few good people who are willing to see the cause through, and I hope I am there to see it when it happens.

(5,809 words)

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