



## Transcribing White Mensural Notation and Lute Tablature

A guide to transcribing period musical sources into modern notation for performance

by Lord Tristan d'Avignon





## Contents

Introduction	5
Why Should We Transcribe?	5
White Mensural Notation	
The Basics	5
<i>Project: Arbeau Melody</i>	8
Transcribing Simple Parts	8
Score Formatting	9
<i>Project: Cela Sans Plus</i>	12
Time Signatures	12
Imperfection	14
Alteration and Dots of Division	14
Ligatures	15
Text Underlay	16
<i>Project: Ave Regina Celorum</i>	16
Lute Tablature	
Basic Lute Theory	17
Notation Guides	19
Transcribing Lute Parts for Recorder Ensemble	19
<i>Project: La Caccia d'Amore</i>	20
Conclusion	20
Manuscript Paper (4 pages) *	22
Answers Section *	26
 Original Source Examples:	
Arbeau Melody	6
"Cela Sans Plus" – Josquin des Prez	10
"Ave Regina Celorum" – Guillaume Dufay	18
"La Caccia d'Amore" – Cesare Negri	21

© 2007 Lord Tristan d'Avignon. Freely distributable for the purposes of the SCA.

All images and examples shown in this paper are either available in the public domain, or were created with Finale 2006, except the original sources for "Cela Sans Plus" and "Ave Regina Celorum", which are used by permission.

This paper is available online at: <http://stdionysius.sca.org.nz/collegeprojects/twmnlt.html>.

\* The manuscript paper and the answers section are available as separate downloads on the page shown above.



# Transcribing White Mensural Notation and Lute Tablature

A&S Class, As Presented at Rowany Festival 2007, AS XII  
Lord Tristan d'Avignon

## INTRODUCTION

One of the most difficult challenges facing an aspiring early musician is finding new and exciting repertoire for their group to sing or play. They typically have two choices: they can either look to material that has already been transcribed, in order to pass judgement on an edition authored by someone else, or they can venture into the original manuscripts on their own, on the off-chance that they will find something extraordinary.

While there are hundreds of “hits” within the early music community, it seems grossly unfair that the academics of the world should be the ones who decide which Renaissance composer becomes the next big thing simply because they possess the skills necessary to decode their manuscripts. My intention, both through this class and subsequent teaching, is to put the music back in the hands of the musicians themselves by showing them the art of musical transcription from period sources.

In this class, we will cover the basic elements of transcribing from white mensural notation, which is the standard notational form for choral music in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, and French and Italian lute tablature, the most popular instrument for accompanying singers and dancers in the Renaissance.

## WHY SHOULD WE TRANSCRIBE?

So why should we subject ourselves to hours in front of a computer screen or a composer’s desk just to transcribe a piece that may not even sound interesting when all the work is done? The answer to this question is twofold. Firstly, as mentioned before, there is the opportunity to find the next original piece of music for their group. It is entirely possible for a music group to process through the extant editions of music that has been notated in accordance with modern conventions, but this relies on groups like the King’s Singers or the Indiana Medieval Institute having made it popular in the first place. A permanently closed musical manuscript is of no use to anyone except as a large doorstop, and the music within it has no audience.

Secondly, and more importantly, multiple editions of a work are the only way to ensure accuracy. Indeed, many editions of early music published during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have been shown to be categorically wrong, either due to primitive notational conventions or due to laziness on the part of the editor in question. In addition, in groups like the SCA, an erroneous transcription can lead to errors being taken as law, and becoming “just the way we do things here”, even upon the presentation of a more accurate transcription. Quite simply, two or more people able to work on a transcription together are infinitely better than one.

## WHITE MENSURAL NOTATION

### THE BASICS

To begin with, take a look at the excerpt from the original printed edition of Arbeau’s “Orchesographie” on the next page. There is nothing here that is difficult to manage if you can understand the preparatory symbols at the start of the piece.

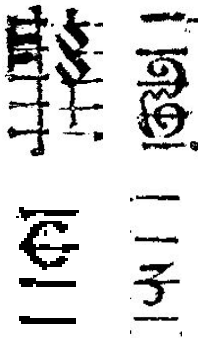
For example:



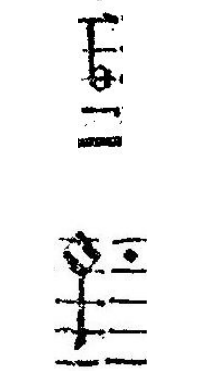
This is a C clef, and is the most common indication of pitch in Renaissance manuscripts and printed books. Just like a regular “alto” clef in modern terminology, this clef shows that the pitch of middle C is represented by the middle line on the five-line staff, and that all other notes shown on the staff are relative to their vertical position with the C line. Clefs can appear on any line in the staff, and may change unexpectedly during the piece. We will learn how to deal with this in just a moment.



Ex. 1: The melody of a dance from the Arbeau Orchesographie. Bonus points if you can guess which one it is!



Also possible are F and G clefs. F clefs (left) function like a regular bass clef, and indicate the line that holds the F below middle C. This clef is the most common part for bass or low tenor parts. G clefs function like a regular treble clef, and indicate where the G above middle C is situated. This clef is rarer than the other two in Renaissance music, but is periodically used in Superius parts. Remember, it doesn't matter what clef the original is in for your transcription; you should always use modern clefs. Treble-G, treble-G-8 and bass clefs are the way to go for all parts.



These are time signatures; we would notate the one on the left represents duple time, and the other represents triple time. As you can see, the piece above is notated in triple time, and is therefore in 6/2, as shown by the barlines.



It's a flat. I kid you not. More accurately though, this is a key signature. This is something a composer may put in if they're being extremely nice to you. Don't count on them being there for the majority of sources you will end up working with. Flats only occur on B's in these sources, so if you find a flat on a funny pitch like F, it doesn't signify F-flat, but instead indicates the appropriate hexachord to use when the range of the melody progresses beyond the range of the normal gamut. Depending on which clef is being used and where it is placed on the staff, there may sometimes be two flats at both the high and low B's.

Just like in modern music, a note with a dot after it indicates that the note be lengthened by half its value. Be warned! For the purposes of this piece and others like it, this is indeed the case, but for more advanced work, you will need to be able to distinguish between a *punctus additionis* and a *punctus divisionis*. I will explain this in greater detail further on.

This is a custos, and can be one of the most useful (or most pointless) tools available to the performer or transcriber. It bears no musical value, but exists simply to tell you where the first note on the following line is, relevant to the clef on the current line. This is vitally important in pieces where the clef is prone to changing, as it is a means of preventing singers spiralling off into a strange harmony through missing a clef change. However, in the above piece, there are no clef changes, so the custos becomes something of a formality.



This is a rest. I will talk in greater detail about the values of notes and rests shortly, but for the purposes of this piece alone, I can tell you that this rest is equivalent to a minim in length.

This is a basic repeat marking, meaning that everything up to the marking, from either the start of the piece or the repeat marking that preceded it, is played twice. A lot like the modern one, really.

Current musicological practice for new transcriptions dictates that the value of each note is either retained or halved. If you choose to retain the printed note values, you have the advantage of treating each and every note and rest as if they were strangely drawn modern notes. If you choose to halve the note values, you may gain some space and legibility, but you'll need to be careful to transcribe all the notes at a half of what they look like; otherwise, you may end up with a bar that has a strange number of beats in it. In addition, you would need to give an indication at the start of your score saying that you had reduced the original note values to something more convenient.

In terms of the above piece, this would mean:

<i>Marking   Method</i>	Note Values Retained	Note Values Halved
Reduction Indicator	None Required	

Note how the minim rest in the original resembles that of a modern minim rest if you retain the note values instead of halving them. This is the case for most rests: a semibreve rest hangs from the bottom of the line, just like a modern one, and a breve rest takes up an entire space between two lines, just like a modern one.

I am personally in favour of retaining the length of all note values for most intents and purposes, but when notating older manuscripts, which typically use longer notes, you may find that halving the note values is a more appropriate option.

#### PROJECT

With all of these symbols now learned, you should be able to transcribe this piece onto the manuscript paper at the back of this handout. For beginners, leave the note values as they are so you can treat each and every note as its modern equivalent, and use a time signature of 6/2 so you can match the barlines in the original.<sup>1</sup> If you are sufficiently confident you can halve the note values and not get confused along the way, use a time signature of 6/4 instead. The answer for this melody is not included in the answer section, but I will be glad to have a look over your work for you in a class.

#### TRANSCRIBING SIMPLE PARTS

We now move on to polyphonic music, which is the main function of this form of notation. The polyphonic scores of this period provide a virtually infinite array of challenges to the aspiring transcriber, but we shall stick to the main ones at this point.

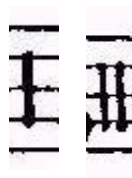
Our next project will be a three-part chanson by Josquin des Prez named “Cela sans plus” (see pages 6 and 7). In this score, taken from Ottavio Petrucci’s “Odhecaton A” published in 1501, we meet that funny flat I mentioned earlier, which indicates nothing more than an extension of the hexachord above the normal range of the gamut. We also meet the following features for the first time:



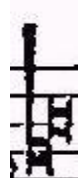
The breve, which is the length of two semibreves in *tempus imperfectum*, as its name implies.



The long, which is the length of two breves in *tempus imperfectum*. Any square note with a stem going upwards or downwards from its right-hand side is considered a long.



These are essentially breve rests stacked one on top of the other. The one on the left lasts for two breves or one long, the one on the right lasts for four breves, two longs, or one maxima.



This is a ligature, and represents something slightly different from how it looks. This particular one is known as a *cum opposita proprietate*, or “c.o.p.” ligature, and represents two semibreves one after the other. We will look in greater detail at ligatures later in this class.

<sup>1</sup> The normal time signature used here is 3/2, but since Arbeau has provided barlines, 6/2 will cause less confusion for the new student.



## SCORE FORMATTING

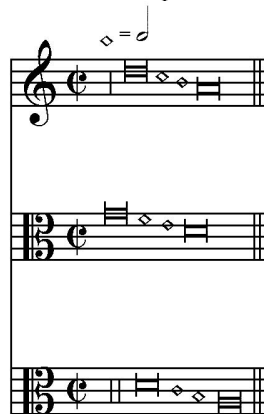
As you can see, this music is not formatted in score, but rather has each part printed out in full on its own across two pages. This is for the sake of performance convenience above all else: as there would typically be only one or two singers per part, these books would have been made for everyone to gather around and sing their relevant part from. So, in a three-part work like this one, the “superius” and tenor singers would read from the left hand page (verso) and the contratenor from the right (recto). Note: The top part with the big fancy initial and the melody is seldom marked with a part name, but is usually known as “Superius”.

For the transcriber, this makes life quite difficult. Aligning the parts into a score is often tricky, and occasionally calls for “tweaking” to make it sound acceptable. In addition, some parts do not always end at the end; they instead hold their final note through while the other parts finish their lines. This is something to be aware of, but for this handout, all parts within a piece end in the same place.

It is commonplace in most transcriptions of period music to give an “incipit” of the original as your starting bar. You can do this by:

- Giving the original clef, key and time signature
- Noting the first few notes of the piece, especially if the notes are common to all (or most) parts
- Adding the common material to the bar, along with any rests the part gives before its music starts
- Giving an indication of note value reduction, if you want to use it
- Giving a double barline, then commencing your transcription

Hence, for this piece, the incipit may read as follows:



The image shows three staves of musical notation. The top staff is for the Superius part, the middle for the Contratenor, and the bottom for the Tenor. Each staff begins with a double barline, followed by a clef, a time signature, and a long rest. The Superius part uses a treble clef, the Contratenor and Tenor parts use alto clefs. A diamond symbol with an equals sign and a note is placed above the first note of the Superius part.

Original semibreve = modern minim, implying the editor has halved all note values (optional)

Superius part: Treble (G) clef, alla breve time, long rest, musical material, double barline

Contratenor part: Alto (C) clef, alla breve time, musical material, double barline

Tenor part: Alto (C) clef, alla breve time, maxima rest, musical material, double barline

Once your incipit is finished, you should use modern clefs and symbols in all parts.

In addition to the sharps and flats marked in the music (there is one flat in the contratenor part), the possibility exists of adding editorial *musica ficta* to your transcription. Although the accidentals do not occur in the music, it seems to have been the standard practice for singers to add them when they deemed it appropriate, since they would just “know” when a harmony had to be changed to make it sound right. Hence, in accordance with this logic, a *musica ficta* accidental occurs when you personally deem that, to make a cadence or certain harmony sound more appropriate, a sharp or flat needs to be added to the note to make it sound acceptable. To do this, you would write your note and then add a small sharp or flat above it. For this piece, add them only at clear cadence points.

This edition is known as an “incipit version”, as only the first line of text is given. These would probably have been used when it was assumed that the people using the edition would just know the words to the rest of the piece. Unfortunately, this is rather unhelpful to us, since we don’t know the rest of the words. Thus, for your transcription, simply write the first words “Cela sans plus” beneath the first note.

The image displays two staves of musical notation from a 15th-century manuscript. The upper staff, labeled 'Superius', begins with a large, ornate initial 'C' and the text 'Cela sans plus'. The lower staff, labeled 'Tenor', begins with the text 'Tenor'. Both parts consist of a single melodic line with a complex rhythmic structure, characterized by numerous beamed notes and rests. The notation is in square neumes on a four-line staff. The Superius part has a more intricate and varied rhythmic pattern compared to the Tenor part, which appears more regular in its phrasing.

Ex. 2a: The Superius and Tenor parts from "Cela sans plus", a motet by Josquin des Prez, printed in the Petrucci publication "Odhecaton A" in 1501.

**Contra**

The image shows a musical score for a contratenor part. It consists of three staves. The top staff is labeled 'Contra' and contains the lyrics 'Cela sans plus'. The middle and bottom staves contain musical notation. The notation is a form of square notation with stems pointing downwards, characteristic of early printed music. The lyrics are written below the notes. The score is oriented vertically on the page.

Ex. 2b: The contratenor part from "Cela Sans Plus".

When determining which parts should go where, you should ideally look at the final note of each part, followed by the clef the part uses. In this case, the contratenor ends higher than the tenor part, therefore it goes on the middle line in the score. However, even if the part name is something that is normally a lower sounding part by modern conventions, e.g. “Bassus” in relation to “Tenor”, you should still check to make sure. It may well be that the Bassus uses a higher range than the Tenor, and would therefore be positioned higher on the score.

*PROJECT*

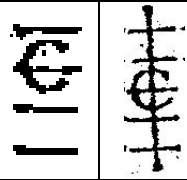

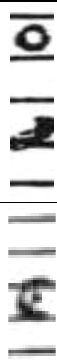





You should now have enough information to transcribe “Cela sans plus”, as shown on the previous two pages, into a full choral score on your manuscript paper at the back of this handout. Mark “London, British Museum / Petrucci ‘Odhecaton A’, 1501, ff. 19v – 20” as your source material, beneath your title by the left-hand margin, and “Josquin des Prez (c. 1440 – 1521) as the composer, beneath your title by the right-hand margin. There are a few strangely thorny harmonies in this piece, but as long as all your parts finish in the same place, you should be fine. Use 2/2 or  $\text{c}$  for your time signature, and don’t use a modern key signature. When you’re finished, compare your answer with mine in the Answers section.

*CHECKPOINT: How’s your head?*



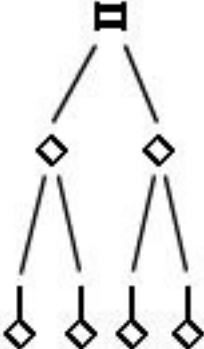
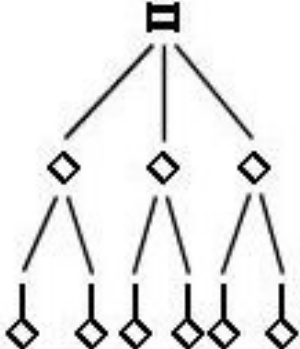
How are you managing with all this? If you feel as if your head is full, you should have a go at transcribing “Cela sans plus”, but probably not go any further for now. If you are dealing well with this, then feel free to continue. When I am teaching this paper as a class, we will split the people off who have had enough, so that they can work as a collective on the one transcription.



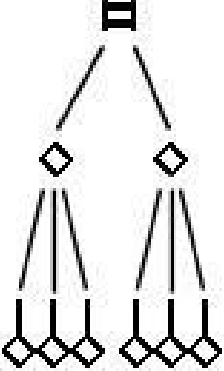
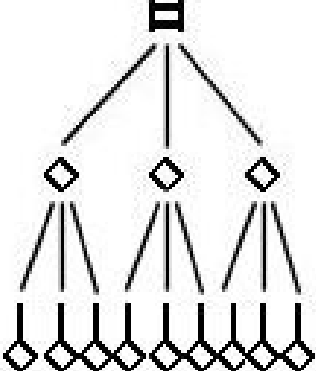
**TIME SIGNATURES**

You may not have recognised the term *tempus imperfectum* which I used earlier. This term essentially refers to the time signature being used in the piece. In 15<sup>th</sup>- and 16<sup>th</sup>-century manuscripts and printed books, there are five common time signatures, each with slightly different meanings:

Symbol	Description	Modern Time Signature
	Tempus imperfectum, prolatio imperfectum Imperfect time, imperfect prolation Right: Alla breve (twice as fast)	
	Tempus perfectum, prolatio imperfectum Perfect time, imperfect prolation	
	Tempus imperfectum, prolatio perfectum Imperfect time, perfect prolation	
	Tempus perfectum, prolatio perfectum Perfect time, perfect prolation	

This means that the note values in the score divide downwards as follows:

Symbol		
Tempus	Imperfectum	Perfectum
Prolatio	Imperfectum	Imperfectum
Divisions	 <p>1 long = 2 semibreves = 4 minims</p>	 <p>1 long = 3 semibreves = 6 minims</p>

Symbol		
Tempus	Imperfectum	Perfectum
Prolatio	Perfectum	Perfectum
Divisions	 <p>1 long = 2 semibreves = 6 minims</p>	 <p>1 long = 3 semibreves = 9 minims</p>

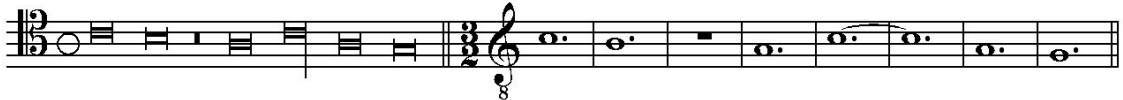
This can get slightly confusing, but bear with me here. Modern music always uses imperfect time and imperfect prolation; the only time three of these values fit in to one of its superior value is in a triplet, where a "3" and a bracket is written across the top of the note. Perfect time and/or prolation saves the need to do

this, as the *tempus* and *prolatio* together constitute a time signature within themselves, and the relevant rhythm is always inherent in the notes.

#### IMPERFECTION

But this is generally not the way things work out either. In perfect time and/or prolation, notes can be “imperfected” by the note values that succeed or precede them. There are a number of basic rules for imperfection:

1. A breve is considered “perfect”, i.e. the length of three semibreves, if it is immediately followed by any note or rest with a value of a breve or greater.



2. A breve is considered “perfect” if it is immediately followed by a group of two or three semibreves, or any group of notes that can be taken at an equivalent length of three semibreves itself.



3. A breve is considered “imperfect”, i.e. the length of two semibreves, if it is immediately followed or preceded by one or more than three semibreves.



4. If there is a semibreve both preceding and following a breve that can make it “imperfect”, the breve is imperfected by the following semibreve.



5. A breve rest can never be imperfected, but a semibreve following a breve rest can still imperfect a breve that follows it.



These cannot be taken as hard-and-fast rules that applied everywhere, but seem to function as a set of general guidelines. No rule is exclusive from exceptions, especially since the conventions can often vary from one manuscript to another. However, for our next project, our manuscript source follows all these conventions.

#### ALTERATION AND DOTS OF DIVISION

You may recall that the second rule of imperfection is that a breve is considered “perfect” if followed by two semibreves, but what if the two semibreves are in turn followed by another breve? This would make for a very strange case of hemiola at the least. Fortunately, the answer is simple: the second semibreve is altered to be as long as two semibreves to compensate for the rhythmic gap.



Occasionally, however, if the scribe is being particularly nice, they will have added a *punctus divisionis*, or “dot of division”, in areas where there is the distinct possibility for ambiguity. As you saw from the Arbeau melody earlier, the dot of addition, or *punctus additionis*, does exist in period manuscripts, and telling the difference between one and the other can sometimes become complicated. Our next project uses *punctae divisionae* exclusively, so you won’t need to worry about them for now, but some manuscripts chop and change between them. All I can really say here is firstly to read ahead a little bit while transcribing, and secondly to use your good judgement when you see a dot placed in the score.

## LIGATURES

Ligatures are frightfully annoying little things that I personally believe scribes invented to piss us off. Seriously though, ligatures are not only a good way for a scribe to save space, they also clearly demarcate where a syllable of text is to be held through to the next note. This is one of the cardinal rules of transcribing ligatures, and you should avoid placing extra syllables on them if at all possible.

Today we will look at the *ligatura binaria*, or ligatures with two notes. We have already seen the *cum opposita proprietate* ligature in the Josquin project, but several more designs are common, each with their own meaning.

When looking at ligatures with two notes, we must first consider what the first note has a downward stem to the left (*proprietate*), and then whether the second note has “perfection” (*perfectione*). There are no immediately practical ways to remember all the ligatures and their note values, but there are a set of guidelines that you can try to follow to remember which is which:

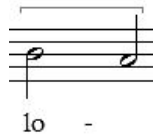
<i>Proprietate</i>	<i>Perfectione</i>	Descending Symbol	Ascending Symbol	Note Values
<i>cum</i> (with)	<i>cum</i>			Breve-Long
<i>sine</i> (without)	<i>cum</i>			Long-Long
<i>cum</i>	<i>sine</i>			Breve-Breve
<i>sine</i>	<i>sine</i>			Long-Breve
<i>cum opposita proprietate</i>				Semibreve-Semibreve

1. The first and most basic set of symbols are the *cum proprietate*, *cum perfectione* ligature, which are direct descendants of the “clivis” and “pes” neumes from Gregorian chant. Note the stem for the descending symbol and no stem for the ascending symbol.
2. The *sine proprietate*, *cum perfectione* ligature has its stems reversed from the standard Gregorian chant neumes: the descending symbol now has no stem, whereas the ascending one does.
3. The ligatures “without perfection” are slightly modified in “neumatic” construction from their “perfect” counterparts. The descending ligature is now a slanted line (only the top and bottom notes are sounded), while the second note of the ascending ligature folds outwards to the right. As with the earlier *cum proprietate* ligature, the descending *cum proprietate*, *sine perfectione* ligature holds a stem, the ascending does not.
4. For the *sine proprietate*, *sine perfectione* ligature, the stems are reversed once again.
5. The *cum opposita proprietate* ligature is far and away the most common ligature in white mensural notation, and stands for two semibreves.

There are only two types of ligatures in our next project though, so you shouldn’t have too rough a time of it if you paid careful attention to the guide above. Ligatures make the issue of text underlay slightly easier, but you must remember that ligatures are still subject to imperfection and alteration by the notes that follow

or (very rarely) precede them. In either case, look for a *punctus divisionis* that will tell you definitively whether to modify the contents of the ligature.

In modern editions, ligatures are indicated by placing a square bracket over the notes that are encompassed within it, for example:



The ligature bracket shown above is sufficient to demonstrate a ligature of any length. A similar marking is used for coloration, where all notes are reduced to their “imperfect” values in perfect time. If you continue transcribing music after this class, you will inevitably run into longer ligatures and coloration. We have no need or time to cover these in this class, but bear in mind that they exist, and that you may need to consult other guides for additional information.<sup>2</sup>

#### TEXT UNDERLAY

The last thing we need to cover before setting into our work is the issue of text underlay. A full-text version of a piece is extremely useful, but can only really be made use of if you know where to put the syllables. I shall cover this briefly so that we can get straight on with our next project.

Remember to keep the following things in mind:

1. If a pitch is repeated, a new syllable must follow.
2. If a ligature is given, the syllable must be held unless circumstances dictate otherwise.
3. The last pitch of a piece almost always has the last syllable on it, except in exceptional circumstances.
4. You should avoid putting new syllables on short notes if at all possible unless it is clearly marked as such. Wait until the next note of a reasonable length – usually a semibreve or greater.
5. Words should never be interrupted by rests if it can be avoided. If you find that your words are not fitting in with the notes and rests, retrace your steps.

#### PROJECT

Excellent! Now you should have all the information you need to have a go at the last white mensural notation project for this class. The piece is “Ave regina celorum” by Guillaume Dufay (1397 – 1474), and the page record reads: “MS Oxford, Bodleian Library / *Canonici misc. 213* (ca. 1450) / f. 62”.

This piece starts and ends in the same place, and the lyrics are almost entirely homophonic, meaning that all but one of the syllables should occur at exactly the same time as the others. Remember your formatting, your imperfection rules, your ficta and your ligature markings, and make sure you write out all of the music before you start the text underlay.

The text reads as follows:

A-ve re-gi-na ce-lo-rum,  
A-ve do-mi-na an-ge-lo-rum,  
Sal-ve ra-dix sanc-ta,  
Ex qua mun-do lux est or-ta.  
Gau-de glo-ri-o-sa,  
Su-per om-nes spe-ci-o-sa.

---

<sup>2</sup> The single most invaluable source of information on this subject is William Apel’s “Notation of Polyphonic Music 900 – 1600”, *Mediaeval Academy of America*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, 1938. I thoroughly and whole-heartedly recommend it as a new editor’s introduction to the world of old manuscripts.



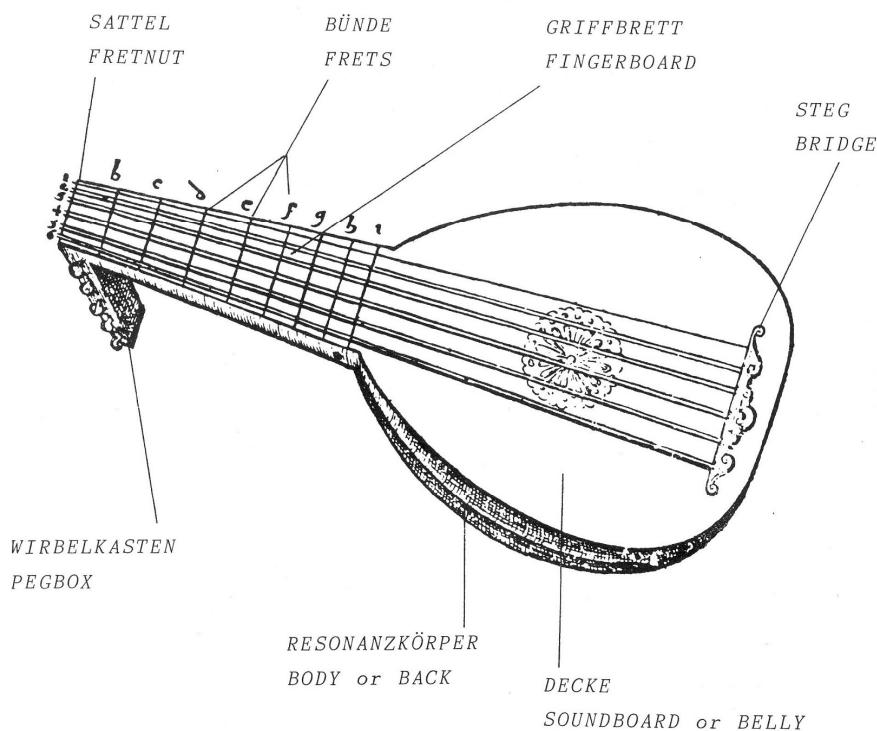
Va-le, val-de de-co-ra,  
Et pro no-bis sem-per Chri-stum ex-o-ra.  
Al-le-lu-ya.

The original source can be found on the following page. There are two errors in this manuscript that you should be aware of. First, the first note on "Salve" in the contratenor part should be a breve and not a semibreve. Second, all parts end on the last note, on the last syllable of the word "Alleluia"; ignore the ligature in the Superius part for your text underlay, but mark it with a ligature bracket nevertheless. Once you are done, compare your answer with mine in the back of this handout. Good luck, and well done!

## LUTE TABLATURE

### BASIC LUTE THEORY

Fortunately, you will be pleased to know that lute tablature is by and large a much simpler proposition, and that they are normally easy to read and understand once you have an idea of how a lute works.



While you probably know about the basic construction of the lute, take a close look at the letters running along the fretboard of the lute. This tells us that the first fret of the lute is known as "b", the second as "c", the third as "d" and so on. Given that lute tablature is then split into six lines, it then follows that any letter written on a line on the corresponding line would represent the plucking of the string while the left hand held the string down at the relevant fret position. The rhythm above the tablature then gives the length for how long the note should be held before moving on to the next one.

The only thing it is really necessary to know after this is that the standard tuning for a lute, from the lowest to the highest course is: G (an octave below middle C), c, f, a, d<sup>1</sup>, g<sup>1</sup>. From the original bass G, the tuning for each course increases in fourths, except between the third and fourth courses, where the interval is only a major third. With this in mind, all the letters on the tablature do is indicate how many semitones up from the open string pitch the desired note is.

Guillemus Dufay

De regina celo tu ave domina angelorum salve radix pueri ex qua mundo hinc  
 est orta gaudere gloriosi super omnes speciosa vale ualde decora et precoribus semp  
 eris. Ave. Agnus dei

De regina celorum tu ave domina angelorum salve radix pueri ex qua mundo hinc  
 est orta gaudere gloriosi super omnes speciosa vale ualde decora et precoribus semp  
 eris. Ave. Agnus dei

De regina celorum tu ave domina angelorum salve radix pueri ex qua mundo hinc  
 est orta gaudere gloriosi super omnes speciosa vale ualde decora et precoribus semp  
 eris. Ave. Agnus dei

Ex. 3: "Ave Regina Celorum", a sacred work by Guillaume Dufay, published in the *Canonicus Misc.* 213 codex around 1450.

## NOTATION GUIDES

The image shows a musical staff with a treble clef and a common time signature. Below the staff is a guide for French lute tablature. The guide consists of five horizontal lines, each labeled with a letter on the left: g, d, a, f, c. The letters a through n are placed on these lines to indicate which note they represent. The letters are: g (a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i), d (a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, k), a (a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, k, l), f (a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, k, l, m, n), and c (a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i).

If you are truly stuck trying to figure out a note in a French tablature, simply use this guide. For example, if you see an “h” on the second course from the top in the tablature, look along the second line in the guide until you reach the letter “h”. The note above the “h” on the second course is an A above middle C. Check to see if it fits in with the harmony you already have. As long as the piece uses the standard lute tuning (there are very few that do not), the guide should always be accurate.

Italian tablature functions in a similar manner, but uses numbers rather than letters, and is transcribed comparatively “upside down”. This can actually work to the advantage of the performer, as looking over the lute means that the lowest sounding course now looks like the “top” string. Hence, all the strings connotations are reversed.

The image shows a musical staff with a treble clef and a common time signature. Below the staff is a guide for Italian lute tablature. The guide consists of five horizontal lines, each labeled with a letter on the left: G, c, f, a, d. The numbers 0 through 9 are placed on these lines to indicate which note they represent. The numbers are: G (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8), c (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8), f (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9), a (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, X), and d (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, X, X, X).

This guide for Italian lute tablature actually says exactly the same thing as the French guide in terms of the physical position of the notes in relation to the strings. So, if you see a 6 on the second line from the top in your tablature, look along the second line in the guide until you reach the number 6. The note that corresponds to this is an F# below middle C.

As far as the rhythm of the notes is concerned, you need only to look at the note values given above each note, and remember that if the rhythmic value for the note or chord is not given, then the closest previous rhythmic value applies. For example, if a piece starts on a chord with a crochet beat assigned to it, but has a series of chords following with no rhythmic value assigned, all those chords are worth a crochet beat, until a new rhythmic value is given.

### TRANSCRIBING LUTE PARTS FOR RECORDER ENSEMBLE

The two things a transcriber needs to consider when writing out a lute tablature for a recorder ensemble are the issues of held notes and “new” music. Most lute parts do not continue on in four or five parts continuously, but rather have moments of melodic frivolity interspersed with the chords that make up the majority of the work. This will mean that you will need to decide whether to hold a bass note for extended periods of time or whether to let the descant recorder players have their moment. There are cases for both approaches, and neither is necessarily right or wrong.

However, from my personal experience with modern transcriptions, I would advise against adding any set variation which may be taken as law by the musicians who read your transcriptions. If you wish to fill out all of your parts so that you can have a full, rich sound, try not to add any notes that are not already in the transcription. For example, if you come across an G chord spelled G-d-b, try doubling the root of the chord to fill out the sound.

Do not add notes that are clearly not part of the chord, like unnecessary sevenths (in this case “f”), for any reason! Not only is ornamentation a practice meant to be left solely to the instrumentalists for this kind of music, doing this too often has the potential to make your transcription sound very out-of-period in practice. Call me a purist, but I believe that you too will find that a good transcription of nothing beyond the notes already found in the transcription is always superior to deliberately embellished ones.

#### PROJECT

As your final project, transcribe the piece on the following page into modern notation, first into one line, and then into three or four lines. Make as many voice exchanges as you wish, as long as the range of each part does not extend overly far. This piece is “La Caccia d’Amore”, by Cesare Negri (c. 1535 – c. 1605), found in his dance manual “Le Gratie d’Amore” (what is it with Italians and “d’Amore”?), published in 1602. After you have written down the transcript “as read”, look for places where you can safely embellish the original and add to its texture. Ignore the rests in the first bar and treat the first chord as a crochet beat anacrusis. Remember, if you are having problems, consult the Italian tablature guide printed earlier on.

There are two additional symbols that may not yet make sense. The first is the minim rest with a tail at the top of it; this is a crochet (semiminim) rest. The second is the dot beneath some of the quicker passing notes; this applies to fingering, and is not a staccato marking, so you may ignore it.

In addition, the final five bars give an unclear indication of how the notes need to be treated. The following rhythmic values should be used to make it all work:



There is no answer to this section, for the simple reason that I would like to see more working transcripts of this piece out there! “La Caccia” is a great deal of fun to dance, but only really works with musicians and a convincing edition of the original music. Have a go at it, and who knows, maybe your version could even become the standard in Lochac. Best of luck!

#### CONCLUSION

As a youthful musician, I would think it absolutely wonderful if more people were to take up the challenge of transcription so that early musicians, not to mention the SCA game, might benefit greatly from it. Unfortunately, as you have just experienced, the rules and regulations can be a big put-off for people attempting to go it alone. The reality is that much of these rules have to be learned by rote, but once they are lodged in your memory, it makes it much easier to “see” and “hear” the music jumping out from a manuscript or printed book, and you will find that the process becomes easier and more involving with time.

As with all A&S classes, this can really only be a brief rundown on the procedures involved with the practice, but my hope is that the information here is clear and concise enough for you that you may take it away with you and put it to good use in the future. If you have any questions about the content of this class, or if you run into difficulty with a new transcription, feel free to e-mail me at [tristandavignon@gmail.com](mailto:tristandavignon@gmail.com), and I will be happy to assist you.

(5,715 words)

284

# Le Gratie d'Amore,

The image displays three systems of lute tablature. Each system consists of a single staff with six lines, where numbers 0-7 represent fret positions. Above the first two systems are diamond-shaped ornaments with stems pointing downwards. The first system contains 12 measures of music, the second system contains 12 measures, and the third system contains 4 measures. The tablature includes various rhythmic and melodic patterns, such as triplets and sixteenth notes, indicated by the numbers and the placement of the diamond ornaments.



BRE-

Ex. 4: The lute tablature to accompany the dance "La Caccia d'Amore", by Cesare Negri, from his dance manual "Le Gratie d'Amore", published 1602.