
Introduction

There is no doubt that for anyone who has the opportunity to study with a good teacher much time can be saved and the initial difficulties straightened out more easily. There are still, however, many places where no teacher is available and, in this *Tutor for the Renaissance Lute*, I have attempted to set out a series of lessons which should save the beginner from the unproductive and disheartening work of trying to find a way to himself by trial and error. Without help or guidance in the early stages it is all too easy to become discouraged and, eventually, hold up further progress.

As with all instruments and music in general, the lute and its music underwent a process of change and development, a process which eventually brought about the appearance of two styles now generally known as Renaissance and Baroque. How and when these changes came about at different times in different countries, it is impossible to set out in detail, but it is possible to indicate to which the two terms can be applied.

There was, of course, an intermediate period during which both the earlier instrument and its music predominated, but changes, some of them of a radical nature, were taking place. The addition of more bass courses and some experimental variations in string tuning, began to show themselves. Eventually there emerged an instrument with differences in both shape and sound, music which retained many characteristics of the earlier style and a technique which involved a radical change in the position of the right hand.

The lessons in this book will deal with the technique from the earliest sources of information up to the end of the time when the use of instrument and its music can, with any justification, be described as belonging to the Renaissance.

The technique which will be taught is based on many years of study of the instructions contained in a number of books, written in various languages and in many parts of the world, having their origin in many different countries during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But one of the great difficulties of reconstruction of the technique for the Renaissance lute is the fact that, during the period of its greatest flowering, no really complete book of instruction was ever produced. Some writers provide excellent advice on certain points but on others of equal importance nothing is said and a decision may have to be made to see whether the information can be found elsewhere. Whether or not, a reason for this shortcoming, often given at the time, was that teachers were reluctant to disclose fully the secrets of their own mastery of the instrument. Another reason may have been that the basic facts were so well known that it was considered unnecessary to mention them. Such instructions as do exist are generally placed at the beginning of the book, but except in the case of some of the early German masters such as Peter Bach and Hans Gerstner, and to a certain extent the Spaniard, Luys Milan, there is hardly any pedagogic system and no attempt is made to lead the beginner gently from the simple pieces to those of more technical difficulty.*

The instrument

If you have not already bought a lute it is most desirable that you should first seek expert advice. You can waste both time and money by buying an instrument which is not well adjusted in all details or which is unsuitable for your purpose.

*Thomas Mace, in his *Musick's Monument* (1676; facsimile reprint, C.N.R.S., 1966), gives more detailed and precise instructions than any other writer on the lute. Unfortunately, by his time, the tuning, the fashion in music and the style of play had all changed so radically that much of what he says is inapplicable to the earlier period. *The Burwell Lute Tutor* (facsimile reprint, Boethius Press, 1974), being almost contemporary with Mace, has the same drawback.

In trying to trace the development of the lute it becomes clear that changes of fashion occur in different countries at different times, but even so, these changes are not necessarily consistent since preferences between one player and another can also be clearly seen. For example, evidence suggests that at the beginning of the period with which we are now dealing the lute had six courses, each course consisting of two strings, except in the case of the top course which could be either single or double. Hans Newsidler, the great teacher from Nuremberg, in a book printed in 1536, shows a diagram of a six-course lute with a single top string. In a diagram of an Italian lute in an instruction sheet by Michele Carrara, printed in Rome in 1585, all the courses are double. In Adrian Le Roy's lute which appears in an English translation under the title *A Briefe and easie instruction* (1574) shows a lute of six courses with a single top string. Yet Thomas Robinson in 1600 appears that his lute was strung with double courses throughout and John Dowland, in 'The Necessary Observations belonging to the Lute' in *Varietie of Lute-Lessons* (1610) says that his lute also had a double top course.

As early as 1511 a seventh course was mentioned but no diagram of a lute includes its use. By 1585 eight courses are shown on the previously mentioned instruction sheet by Michele Carrara. These extra courses were known as diapasons. For the time to come, however, the greater part of the lute repertoire was written for the six-course instrument. By the beginning of the seventeenth century nine courses were used and a tenth course was added soon after. This was the limit of the true Renaissance lute.

Stringing

Until the introduction of small-wound nylon strings for the lower courses in the 1660s (their invention first mentioned by John Playford in 1659), the lute was strung throughout with gut. Although it is true that the sound of gut is much sweeter than that of nylon and the uncovered strings on the lower courses give a different sound, it is advisable for the beginner to start with nylon since, once the instrument has settled in tune, they are far less susceptible to changes in temperature and humidity than gut. Later, the choice remains with the player. Professional players, indeed, who find the extra tuning problems are compensated for by the sweetness and authenticity of the sound.

Tuning

The tuning of the six-course lute is made up of fourths with a third in the middle. Lutes of seven courses, to be tuned at different pitches, were in use during the Renaissance period and, if necessary, they are made today, but the tuning in most general use consists of the following courses reading from the sixth course upwards: G c f a d' and g'.

At the beginning of the period with which we are dealing the three lower courses were tuned in octaves. Towards the end of the sixteenth century, however, some players began to use unison stringing throughout and, by 1610, John Dowland, in *Varietie of Lute-Lessons*, comments that octave strings were considered to be 'irregular to the rules of Musicke'.

The tuning of the diapasons varies greatly. It can be arranged in any of the following ways for a seven- to a ten-course lute:

7th course	F or D
7th and 8th	F and D
	F and E (or E flat)
	F and C
7th, 8th and 9th	F E (or E flat) and D
	F E (or E flat) and C
7th, 8th, 9th and 10th	F E (or E flat) D and C

Very rarely the 10th is lowered to B or B flat.

In the case of the seven-course lute, if the seventh is strung to be tuned at D it will only be possible to raise it to F if gut strings are used, but the D tuning is probably the most useful since in many cases it is possible to obtain the F by stopping the third fret. This was often done. Nevertheless, as will be seen later, some pieces are written for the F tuning and in such a way that the desired effect is almost impossible to produce if the F does not come from the open string.

Directions for the tuning of the diapasons are seldom given in original sources, where they do appear, before playing a piece it is necessary to examine the chords or notes under which they occur in order to determine to which note each one should be tuned.

Some practical advice on tuning

The following hints are intended only for the student who has had previous experience of tuning a musical instrument.

It is not uncommon to find a beginner wrestling with the early intricacies of tuning, with pegs in a condition which makes success doubtful. If the pegs are in a reliable preparation can be bought from most musical instrument dealers. A powerful lubricant can be used. If they stick, a little French chalk can be used. The strings are must not be tightened too much. Sometimes it will be found that when a peg is turned the string either does not move or it moves with a sudden jerk. This means it is not slipping properly over the fret-nut. This can be cured by loosening the string and rubbing the groove with a piece of soft lead pencil.

There will be the same number of pegs in the peg-box as there are strings, and on these pegs the strings should be arranged in the following order: with the sound-board of the lute facing you, the pegs on the right-hand side will be the strings highest in pitch. Assuming that you are using single courses, the first string should be wound on the peg nearest the fret-nut; the first string of the second course on the second peg; the second string of the second course on the third peg. These should follow in exactly the same way from you down the right-hand side and towards you up the left-hand side ending with the lowest course on the two pegs nearest the fret-nut. The exact order is essential. For example, if it is important to know by touch the exact point where each string is pulled, if the order of the stringing is altered it will greatly increase the difficulties.

In the case of winding the string onto a peg, be sure that the winding ends on the side of the peg nearest your cheek of the peg-box so that the tension is pulling inwards. If the winding ends on the thinner end of the peg the tension will press the peg outwards.

It will often be found in books in which polyphonic vocal music has been arranged for solo voice that the soprano vocal line is given in the original key. If this were to be followed exactly, at three, or even four pitches, would be required. That this was not the intention, however, is made clear by Francisco Bossinensis in his *Libro Secondo*, printed in Venice in 1603. Here he gives an instruction before each vocal line as, for example, to tune the voice 'to the fifth fret of the lute', i.e., the highest course. In any case, it would probably have been necessary to give the singer (if it were not the lutenist himself) the starting note, since evidence suggests that during the sixteenth century pitch for instruments of the lute family was far from standardized. Even as relatively late as the early years of the seventeenth century, lack of a standard pitch was still common. For example, Thomas Robinson, in *The Schoole of Musicke* (printed in 1603), gives the instruction 'first set up the Treble, so high as you dare venture for breaking, setting them both in one tune or sound called an unison'.

Today it is the usual practice to have a lute for solo playing tuned to a nominal G, although some performers prefer to tune to F sharp or F according to the length of the strings and whether or not gut is used. Whichever note is chosen for the highest string the most convenient way for the beginner to tune is to take each note from a well-tuned keyboard, if one is available. If not, a tuning fork should be bought for the note of the third course, relative to the note chosen for the top string. For a top string at G it will be A440; for F sharp it will be G sharp, at F it will be G.

Start with one string of the third course. The tuning fork will sound an octave above the note to which it must be tuned, but your ear will soon become accustomed to this. There are several

good reasons for starting with this string. Now bring the next string of the course into tune with it. Then you should proceed upwards with the second course and then with the first. Should you, to begin with, find difficulty in hearing the intervals, you can help yourself by using the gut frets which are set at semitonic intervals on the neck of the lute. With a finger of the left hand stop the course you have just tuned on the fifth fret. When you play this string with a finger of the right hand it will give you the note to which the second course should be tuned. First tune one of the strings and then bring the other into tune with it. Similarly, the fifth fret of the second course will give you the note to which the top course must be tuned. Stop the third course on the third fret and bring the fifth course into tune. Stop the fourth course on the fifth fret—and this will give you the note to which the sixth course should be tuned. The note to which the sixth course has to be tuned can be found (an octave higher) on the second fret of the fourth course. This should then be exactly two frets below your first fret. If your lute has octave stringing on the three lower courses, follow the instructions for the lower string of the course and then bring the higher octave into tune.

Once you have tuned your lute, check regularly with a tuning fork to ensure that the pitch is maintained exactly.

However, in music written for a lute, whatever pitch is chosen, the notes have to be thought of as G c f a d' g', otherwise, from staff notation, unless another pitch is actually stated, the notes will come out wrong as they are on the fingerboard and in transcribing from tablature the music will be in the wrong key. From now onwards whenever notes of the scale are mentioned they are referred to as they would occur in the G tuning, unless some other pitch is indicated by the original source.

Tablature

Music for the lute is written in a form of notation called tablature. Tablature for other instruments exists, but this form came into use in answer to the special needs of the lute and other stringed instruments of the same kind. For this purpose it has many advantages over the staff notation. It is almost as easy to read onto the lute than staff notation.

There are several different forms of lute tablature all of which will be explained in due course. The English lute normally used a system known as French tablature, and this will be explained first.

Unlike the staff notation, tablature deals only with the positions of the fingers and not with musical notes. The six-line staff represents the six main courses of the lute. The letters written on or between the lines denote the positions in which the fingers are to be placed on the strings and the frets. In French tablature the letters are generally written above the line on which they are to be played, although this is not invariably so. The top line of the staff represents the first course—that is the course highest in pitch. The second line represents the second course, the third line the third course, and so on down to the lowest line which represents the sixth course. All the open courses are represented by the letter *a*. All courses when stopped on the first fret are represented by the letter *b*; on the second fret by *c*; on the third fret by *d*; on the fourth by *e*; on the fifth by *f*, and thus the alphabet is followed up to *g*, *h* and *i*. No *j* is used so *i* is followed by *k* and as many other letters as are needed. Some lutes have extra frets made of wood and glued to the soundboard, but others may have none, in which case the high notes have to be found with the fingers alone. By these means a precise plan is given of where the fingers of the left hand are to be placed, and which courses are to be played with the right hand. On the following page is a diagram, going up to fret *f*, which will make this clear.

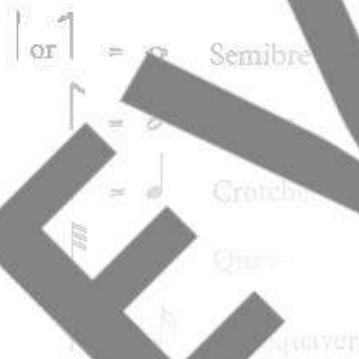
The diapasons are indicated in a number of different ways:

7th course	<i>a</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>a</i>
8th course	/ <i>a</i>	/ <i>a</i>	/ <i>a</i> <i>a</i> /
9th course	// <i>a</i>	// <i>a</i>	<i>a</i> //
10th course	/// <i>a</i>	/// <i>a</i>	<i>a</i> ///

1	a	b	c	d	e	f
2	a	b	c	d	e	f
3	a	b	c	d	e	f
4	a	b	c	d	e	f
5	a	b	c	d	e	f
6	a	b	c	e	d	f
Course	Open	1st fret	2nd fret	3rd fret	4th fret	5th fret

Jean-Baptiste Besard's use of signs in the *Théorie des Harpes* (1603) can be rather confusing. He uses ♯ for the seventh course and capital A for the eighth course. When he wants the notes D, E and F he uses the capital letters Δ, C and F. For D sharp he uses ACE. For the note C he uses a specific type of sign.

The duration of the note or chord is indicated by a time-mark placed over the staff. In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century books of instruction the time-marks are given the following values:



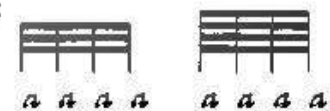
Very frequently a dot is added to the stem which divides the note by half. No time-mark longer than | (a semibreve) is used. The tails which are added to the stem have no other significance at all in relation to this basic time value. They give no indication of speed. Thus four | in a bar represent the very moderate 4/4 of a pavan, and six of them in a bar can represent the very lively 6/8 of a jig. In a great quantity of lute music, particularly in the manuscripts, no time value is given at the beginning of a piece. Careful consideration therefore has to be given to the form and character of the piece before its speed can be determined.

A dot following one of the time-marks has precisely the same significance as in staff notation, i.e., it prolongs the note by half its duration.

The way in which the above signs were actually written varies considerably. In printed tablature it is more usual to find the 'signal' type of sign, as in the examples given above. This type holds good for the note over which it is placed and all those that follow until a new sign is given.

Thus indicates four minims followed by four crotchets.

In manuscripts, however, a kind of gridiron is often used. In this system four quavers followed by four semiquavers would be expressed like this:



Where the value of a single note is to be expressed the 'signal' type is used.

In many modern transcriptions the value of these signs is halved.