

“He who shall Neglect, or be Ignorant in the Way of the Right Playing such Compositions ... must needs be counted Deficient in Judgment, and Skill; and not fit to be owned, as a Master, or Teacher.”

—Thomas Mace, *Musick's Monument*, 1676

A century ago Dr. Henry Watson of Manchester, an enthusiast of old music, purchased from an amateur musician of Kew a manuscript even then nearly three hundred years old. It contained more than two hundred solos for the lyra-viol meticulously organized and transcribed by an unknown hand. History has preserved neither the details of the transaction nor the provenance of the manuscript, but it provides us with both excellent music and a window into a time dominated by an instrument now all but forgotten.

Watson himself wrote: “This much can be said of the viol that cannot be said of any one who plays the small tune of historian to it: that it lived some hundreds of years ago, a happy, generous, cheery, domesticated life; that it died lamented; and that it left behind it not only a pleasant memory, but an offspring and an offshoot that have enriched the world of music beyond all estimation.”

The Manchester Gamba Book

The manuscript volume that Dr. Watson purchased was left, after his death in 1911, to the City of Manchester, England, where it resides today. In 1978 Paul Furnas completed a transcription and analysis of it while he was a graduate student at Stanford University, and the facsimile, with his introduction, is available from Peacock Press. His investigation of ornamentation is especially useful for anyone approaching this music. The collection draws on the compositions of the brighter lights of the time—John Jenkins, William Lawes, Alfonso Ferrabosco—as well as those more obscure. At least one composer is known to history solely through the six pieces in this manuscript. The pieces are organized in groups, progressively, by tuning—22 different systems in all.

Lyra-viol

Just a few issues ago, *Soundboard* (Vol. XXXV, No. 2) included an article about the lyra-viol by Olga Amelkina-Vera. That excellent introduction for guitarists obviates a lengthy description here. (Readers who do not have access to that issue can find the article, in the form of her DMA dissertation, at her website: www.kitharaduo.com.)

One characteristic—perhaps even a defining one—of lyra-viol music is the use of many different tunings. While “Viol Way” tuning, identical to that of the Renaissance lute, was common, many other exotic forms were tried—more than 60 are known today. Despite Mace’s claim that all possibilities had been exhausted, modern guitar tuning was

apparently overlooked. The closest one seems to have been the modern guitar variant in which the fifth string is tuned to G and the sixth to D. The music of Tobias Hume, described and transcribed in Dr. Amelikina-Vera's article, used Viol Way tuning, which is familiar to most guitarists from the rich legacy of the Renaissance lute.

However, over time lyra-viol tunings evolved toward more resonant ones, that is, tunings that sounded the notes of triads and that fingerstyle guitarists today call "open" tunings. This probably occurred because of the idiosyncrasies of the lyra-viol itself. As a bowed instrument, its polyphonic capabilities were rather restricted. Specifically, any simultaneous notes, whether in a chord or through the coincidence of contrapuntal voices, had to be played on adjacent strings. Tunings were selected to minimize this constraint and to maximize the sympathetic resonance from the other strings.

Also characteristic of the lyra-viol was a technique that went by the name of "The Rule of Holds." Christopher Simpson explained it like this in 1659: "When you set a Finger down, you are to let it rest there, (Playing the following Notes with other Fingers) until some occasion require the removing of it. This is done ... to continue the sound of a Note when the Bow hath left it." Thomas Mace, in his typically dyspeptic way complained that performers "seldom Hold their Hands according to the Propriety, and Necessity of the Composition ... This Error ... is the Grosest that can be Committed in the Kind ..."

So both the selection of tuning and the Rule of Holds helped in two ways: to allow sounded notes to continue to ring—thus facilitating independence of voices—and also to promote general resonance of the instrument. This limitation of the lyra-viol is especially significant for guitar transcriptions. After all, every sound that issues from our instrument happens after "the Bow [or in our case, finger] hath left it," and since we cannot rummage around to find obliging tunings, close attention to the assignment of notes to fingers and strings is essential.

Tuning systems

Before turning to specific transcription examples and solutions, a brief explanation of notation is in order. Lyra-viol tablature uses letters to indicate frets: a= open string, b=first fret, c=second, etc. Tuning systems use these letters to list the frets at which strings are stopped to produce unisons. For instance, on the guitar we stop the second string at the *fifth* fret to make a unison with the first string; we stop the third string at the *fourth* fret, and so on. Shorthand for our guitar tuning could thus be written **54555** or, using letters for the frets, **fefff**. Similarly, "drop-D" tuning is **feffh**, and Renaissance lute tuning is **ffeff**. Without a lot of familiarity with these tunings they can be obscure to compare in writing, so for this article I will also translate them into actual note pitches. Guitars are normally tuned "e¹bgdAE." For easy comparison I will always start with the first string and assume that it is the note "e¹" that we normally use. Please note that this is only to make tunings easy to compare and should *not* be literally tried on your guitar. Some tunings written in this form would pitch some strings high enough to cause damage to strings or bridges. If you want to try different tunings, and I strongly recommend you

do, adjust the actual pitches lower, starting a whole step lower with “d¹” works well in most cases.

The duration problem

Tablature does not show how long to hold notes in contrapuntal textures so it is common to read that in order to render a score in standard notation one must “infer the implied counterpoint.” While this is true enough as a general procedure, there are pitfalls as well. The transcription of Melchior Neusidler’s *Salterello (antico)* in the same issue of *Soundboard* noted above gives examples of the ways this general plan can diverge in various hands. And that happens with Renaissance lute tablature where the tuning is quite close to the guitar. Transcriptions of that music nearly always retain the same relative key and simply realize one implied voice in one place while losing another nearby. The task is more complicated when transcribing tablature in more distant tunings.

Also, transcribers looking for implied counterpoint sometimes assume there is a real counterpoint to uncover, lurking among the notes. As Henry Watson himself put it, “We are apt in music as in other things to discover causes and to trace sequences where none exist.” So a slavish tracing of an implied contrapuntal voice may infer far more than the composer conceived. In *style brisé*, counterpoint is often a compelling illusion, not simply a concession to the instrument’s limitations.

Still, it is necessary to figure out when and how to “Hold [our] Hands according to the Propriety, and Necessity of the Composition,” and close attention to the assignment of notes to strings is a key. In lyra-viol music it is rare to find one voice cut too short by another voice intruding on the same string. The skill of these composers was in integrating tuning systems with composition in order to facilitate counterpoint. Their cleverness is one hallmark of lyra-viol music and undoubtedly the motivation for so many different tunings. I will elaborate on this with examples in the notes for each piece.

Selected pieces

The seven pieces presented here were selected to highlight a variety of different tunings. They are all small in scale and of relatively low technical difficulty. While some lyra-viol music benefits from a filling out of harmonies to compensate for the original instrument’s limitation of playing simultaneous notes being on adjacent strings, I felt that the pieces here stand well on their own. Indeed, they demonstrate how skillfully that limitation can be overcome. The Roman numerals in parentheses refer to the section of the manuscript from which they were drawn. The original tuning is given in tablature shorthand as well as modern pitch names.

Saraband, John Jenkins, X-9 (*efdef*), e¹c¹gecG, French Sette

John Jenkins (1592–1678) was one of the best known musicians of his time, specializing in consort music, much of it for viols. His *Saraband* is a little primer in the Rule of Holds. The tuning forms an open major triad quite different from guitar tuning, and is designed to emphasize the over-ringing of notes to form vertical sonorities. The

assignment of notes to strings in the tablature, combined with the Rule of Holds, can help guide the transcription. Taking the Rule of Holds literally gives this result:

Figure 1

While this is more detail than is needed or practical in a guitar transcription, I did it this way to demonstrate the Rule of Holds and to give a feel for the style and technique of playing these pieces. The full score is more restrained in its notation although the fingering is the same. The bass notes at the asterisks were transposed up one octave.

Untitled, Anonymous, XVI-1 (*edeff*), e^1c^1afcG

Scarcely longer than a ring tone, this charming piece presents no special problems in deciphering its texture. The inversion of the arpeggio figures from the first half to the second makes a pleasing symmetry. Certainly, the intent is to allow the notes of these arpeggios to ring over each other. A fussy separation of the durations in the notation is not necessary, as holding these notes is second nature to guitarists.

Coranto, Alfonso Ferrabosco (ii), III-8 (*fefhf*) e^1bgdGD , Lyra Waye

Ferrabosco (1575–1628) was an English composer and viol player of Italian descent. Of his generation in England, he was arguably the most accomplished, innovative and influential composer of chamber music for viols, and of songs for court masques. This *Coranto* has a muscular, driving momentum. The tuning system, “Lyra Waye,” is not entirely foreign to guitarists.

Almaine, John Jenkins, XI-24 (*edfhf*), e¹c¹aeAE, Harpe Sette Flat

The tuning was used primarily for minor key pieces. A related tuning used the equivalent of a C sharp for the second string and was called, unsurprisingly, “Harpe Sette sharp”.

In measure five the asterisks mark two notes that were probably errors in the tablature, where they were written for the open fifth and fourth string instead of for the sixth and fifth. This is one of the most common errors in tablature manuscripts—the right symbol on the wrong string.

Untitled, Stephen Goodall, I-16 (*ffeff*) e¹bf#dAE, Violl Waye

There are six pieces by Stephen Goodall in *The Manchester Gamba Book* but, aside from this small sample, nothing else is known about his life or music. The untitled piece included here is the only one in Renaissance lute tuning. Because of the similarity to guitar tuning, transcription is usually straightforward (but this does not imply that it always works well!). The interesting feature of this piece is that it avoided the first string of the lyra-viol entirely. The tuning of the remaining five strings is *ffeff* which is identical to the first five strings of the guitar! This meant that transcription required no changes to the original at all, just that it be transposed a perfect fourth higher. The result is a remarkably delicate set of divisions that I find reminiscent of the clavichord and that would be marred by a pedestrian addition of lower bass notes to “fill it out.”

Note the use of two different types of hemiola. The first one closes the opening and second statements where the 3/4 meter becomes 6/8 in measure 7. Then in the third and fourth statements, a larger-scale hemiola occurs where two measures of 3/4 become the equivalent of one measure of 3/2.

Paven, Joseph Sherlie, III-11 (*fefhf*), e¹bgdGD, Lyra Waye

Sherlie (fl. London, 1607–10) has a surviving output comprising just 20 lyra-viol pieces that are similar in style to the dances of Alfonso Ferrabosco. The *Paven* is a dance in duple meter usually with a sedate character and a regular metrical structure. It was a common form for English composers until about 1625.

Another characteristic of some lyra-viol music is a specialized set of ornaments or “graces,” although in the pieces presented here the only one is the grace note in measure three. The term for this one was a “backfall.” The trill in measure 10 was written out in this manuscript but could as easily have been written with a sign for a “shaked backfall and relish.”

Untitled, John Jenkins, XIII-4 (*fdefh*), e¹bg#eBE, High Harp Way sharp

This piece was also written for an open tuning, and was easily dissected into a through-composed two-voice texture. This means that the leaps in the top line are melodic, not contrapuntal, and the fingering can be arranged to facilitate their execution. Specifically, it is helpful to play them on a single string to prevent the ringing over of the first note that might otherwise cloud the line. And so in several spots the note E is assigned to the second string rather than the open first string. In performance, playing the first notes of these leaps a bit staccato can clarify the gesture. The trills are editorial, but characteristic.

The base line beginning at the asterisk has been transposed up an octave. It could be played at pitch with a drop-D tuning.

Further resources

For more adventuresome readers, I have posted a file of the original tablature of these pieces along with transcriptions for Renaissance lute tuning. Trying a few of the unusual tunings can give a feel for this music much more quickly than the wordy descriptions here. The file is at: www.yatesguitar.com/Manchester.pdf.

Dr. Amelkina-Vera's dissertation can be downloaded from www.kitharaduo.com.

The facsimile of *The Manchester Gamba Book* with an introduction by Dr. Furnas (there, inexplicably, spelled "Furness") is published by Peacock Press in West Yorkshire, England.

Dr. Furnas' analysis and transcription is in: "*The Manchester Gamba Book: a primary source of ornaments for the lyra viol*," Furnas, Paul Lindley, Dissertation, Stanford, 1978.

More music and information about the lyra-viol can be found at www.vdgsa.org.

Richard Yates
www.yatesguitar.com
richard@yatesguitar.com

The Manchester Gamba Book

Seven Selected Pieces

transcribed by Richard Yates

Saraband

John Jenkins
X-9 (*efdef*)

7

15

22

29

37

Untitled

Anonymous
XVI-1 (*edef*)

6

10 II

15 II₃

Detailed description: This block contains two staves of musical notation. The first staff starts at measure 10 and ends at measure 14, featuring a first ending bracket labeled '2.' and a second ending bracket labeled 'II'. The second staff starts at measure 15 and ends at measure 19, featuring a first ending bracket labeled 'II₃' and a final double bar line. The music is in a key with two sharps (F# and C#) and a common time signature.

Coranto
Alfonso Ferrabosco
III-8 (*fe/fhf*)

4 V₂

7 V₃

11 V₃

14 V₃

17 V₂ V₃

Detailed description: This block contains six staves of musical notation for the piece 'Coranto' by Alfonso Ferrabosco. The music is in 6/4 time and a key with two sharps. It includes various fingering numbers (e.g., 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) and articulation marks like slurs and accents. The staves are labeled with measure numbers 4, 7, 11, 14, and 17. The notation includes first and second endings, with labels V₂ and V₃ indicating specific sections. A circled '3' and a circled '5' are also present.

Almaine
John Jenkins
XI-24 (*ed/fhf*)

5 II₃

Detailed description: This block contains two staves of musical notation for the piece 'Almaine' by John Jenkins. The music is in 6/4 time and a key with two sharps. It includes various fingering numbers (e.g., 1, 2, 3, 4) and articulation marks like slurs and accents. The first staff starts at measure 5 and ends at measure 9, featuring a first ending bracket labeled 'II₃'. The second staff continues the piece. The notation includes a circled '3' and a circled '5'.

9 ^{-h} ^{V₂} ^{1.} ^{2.}

14

18

III

Untitled
 Stephen Goodall
 I-16 (*ff/ff*)

II₃

6

12

18

II₃

II₃

23

II₃

28

Paven
 Joseph Sherlie
 III-11 (*fefhf*)

II₃

6

8

12

8

17

8

23

8

Untitled

John Jenkins
XIII-4 (*fdefh*)

8

4

8

8

8

13

8

16

8

20

8