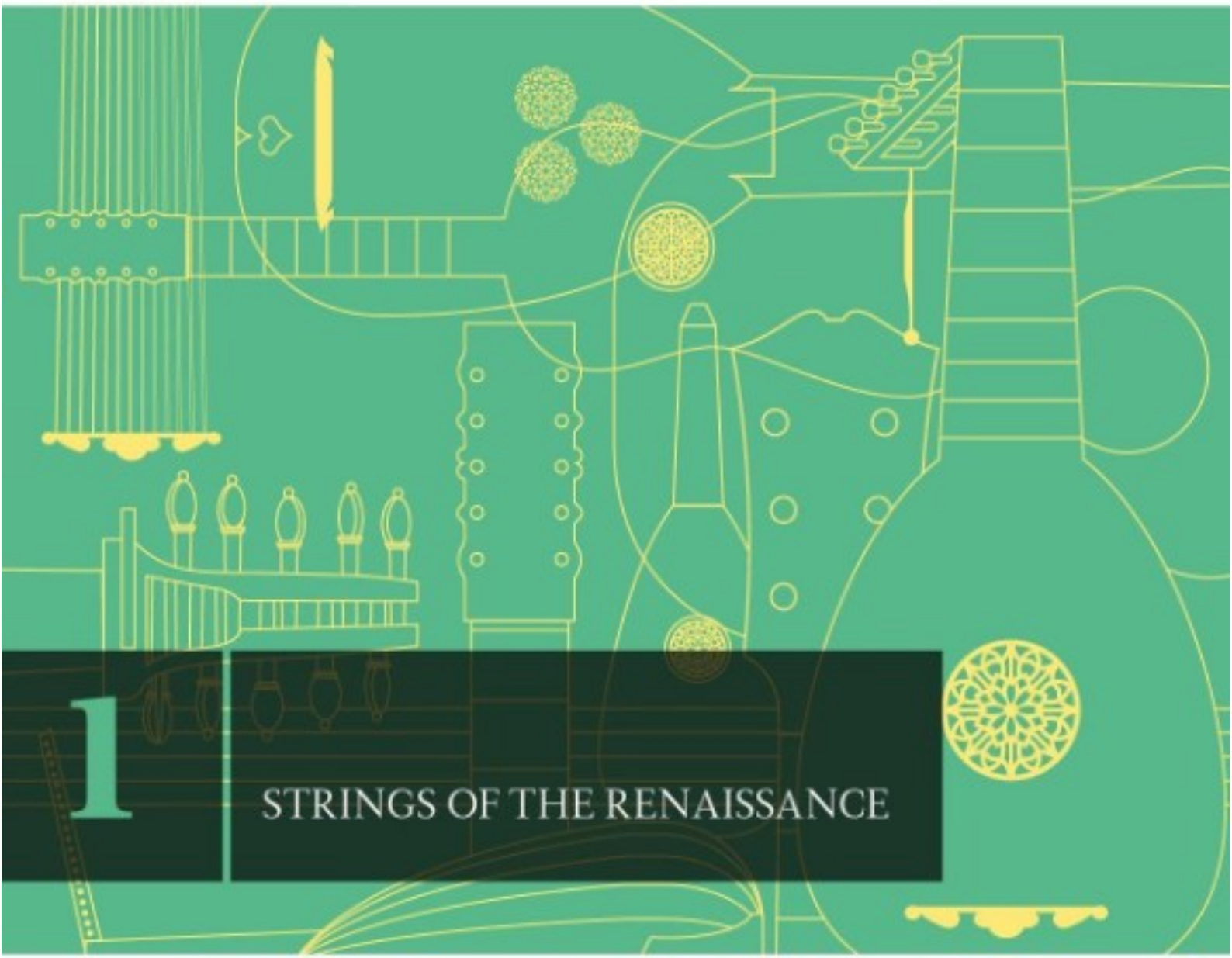
MUSIC FOR GUITAR, LUTE AND VIHUELA

THROUGH THE AGES

LANCE BOSMAN

CHAPTER PREVIEWS



1 STRINGS OF THE RENAISSANCE

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THROUGH THE AGES

VOL 1: STRINGS OF THE RENAISSANCE

CHAPTER PREVIEWS

Contents

'The month of May.' By the Flemish painter Martin de Vos (1532–1603). Engraving, Crispin de Passe the Elder (1564–1637).

1. The Renaissance.
Its flowering 1450–1600

Wellsprings of renewal

Literally a rebirth, the Renaissance was an era of cultural and scientific discovery – and rediscovery, heralding a revival of ancient architecture, sculpture and literature. Though blurred the Renaissance's dawning, early stirrings of this regeneration surfaced in 14th century Italy. Certain poets and visionaries saw themselves at the threshold of an enlightened future, kindled by the achievements of their classical ancestors. Extending their vision backwards beyond the 'time between' of the Middle Ages, they sought inspiration from the grandeur of Roman and Greek architecture, sculpture and classical writings. Looked on as eternal exemplars of wisdom and art, these were models for emulation, a rejuvenation of ancient ideals. Scholars of the 15th century scooped manuscripts from Greece and Italian monastic vaults, rejuvenating the wisdom of the dead. Onward and through the 16th century, *cinquecento*, the Renaissance came into broad splendour with music, artefacts and experimentations.

Concerned with the here and now, and less for some divine hereafter, visionaries of the day sought to express their renewed self-awareness through individual achievements. The earth and sky were opened to exploration through advancements of science. This was the heyday of the polymath, the all-round cultured man and woman. From Venice, Florence and Rome they hailed. Such figures are epitomized in Michelangelo, the scientific and artistic genius of Leonardo da Vinci, the architect Leone Alberti. Revived antiquity is pronounced in the columned symmetries of Brunelleschi's church facades and the classical stance of Donatello's bronze of David.

2. Music of the Renaissance.
An Overview

From church to court, parlour to village green, Renaissance music abides for its vigorous diversity and ranging invention. Across Europe it proliferated with grand choral works, songs of all kinds, instrumental consorts and countless solo settings. Composers celebrated at home then turned their gaze to foreign lands. Crossing European borders they exchanged ideas, drawing national and regional strains into an ever-expanding international mainstream.

Renaissance composers also extended the margins of their music with enhanced heights and greater depths of pitch. In substance too it gained from contrasting densities, of narrowed linework at one moment to broad collective sweeps the next. For added perspective, certain melodic statements were thrust to the foreground, others accordingly subdued. By these means Renaissance composers gave vent to rejoicing, sorrow, expressions of religious devotion and carefree irreverence.

Renaissance ensembles vibrated to the sound of brass instruments, silvery toned flutes, recorders, nasal and blaring woodwinds. Court jesters played bagpipes, which were also heard in the open by rovers at fairgrounds and greens. At these events visitors would be treated (or assaulted) by a hurdy gurdy, with its miniature keyboard and strings whining to a turned wheel.

Pl. 2.4. Details from the illuminated manuscript, *Luttrell Psalter*, commissioned by Sir Geoffrey Luttrell (1276–1345). English (c.1325–40).

3. Ascendancy of the Vihuela, Lute and Guitar.

Apace with their times, the repertoires of the vihuela, lute and guitar offer telescopic vistas into the broad musical traditions and advances of the age. With their wealth of dances settings, song arrangements and original works, they not only kept abreast of the musical mainstream of the 16th century, in certain ways they nourished it. Applying the harmonies and techniques of composition in general circulation, players and composers of plucked strings also extended their reaches with novel brands of composition.

The vihuela

Receiving scant acknowledgment in the annals of musicology, the Spanish vihuela is nevertheless cherished still for its treasury of solo compositions and song settings. Preserved in books printed in the 16th century, these volumes also contain illustrations of vihuelas. Of various shapes and sizes, most have incurved bodies resembling the outlines of the present-day guitar (Pl. 3.1). They are strung with six courses of double strings and normally have ten looped gut frets. References to the vihuela occasionally carry the suffix *de mano*, indicating that its strings are plucked. It is thus distinguished in its manner of playing from vihuelas stroked with a bow, *de arco*.

For all its bountiful repertoire, the vihuela's fortunes were woefully short-lived. Towards the end of the 16th century, publications of its music ceased, but for occasional items which clung on in later lute books. As yet there has been little revival of the instrument itself, but its music endures, and not least at the guitar fingerboard. So wide-ranging is the repertoire of the vihuela, and come to that of the lute not least, we can gain a fair measure of music at large.

Pl. 3.1. 'A vihuelist in attendance' by an unknown illustrator from Sebastián Fernández' *Tragedia Policiano* (1547).

The lute

Acclaimed as the pre-eminent solo instrument of the Renaissance, the lute was esteemed as an object of culture and musical accomplishment. Its symbolism aside, it is captured in snapshots from all walks of life, in the laps of the well-to do, minstrels, observed in tavern scenes, domestic music making and outdoor recreations.

4. The Vihuelists

From the vihuela comes the most perfect and deepest music,
the gentlest and sweetest concord, that most pleases the ear
and enlivens the mind.
Enríquez de Valderrábano. Valladolid, 1547.

When in 1535 a courtier from Valencia, Luis Milán, rested his pen beside the closing page of his tutor *El Maestro*, he had set down the opening chapters for what was to be a remarkable musical legacy of Spanish Renaissance – the printed volumes of vihuela music. With this book Milán revealed the vihuela's capacity for ranging melodies, breadth of harmony and its potential for interweaving linework. This collection was the first of seven by Spanish vihuelists active from the 1530s. Between them they forged a prolific repertoire of solo compositions with variations on popular themes and fantasias in many guises. Alongside these are their vocal settings in which they provided accompaniments for Latin and other classical texts, Italian poetry and Spanish popular and ancient balladry. The erudition of these composers was also brought to bear on their intabulations of extracts from masses and motets.

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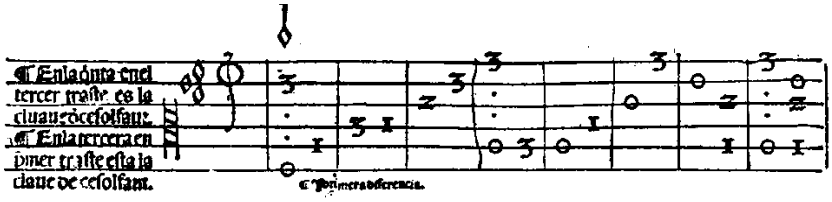
5. Variations for the Vihuela

Setting variations have challenged composers from all ages to both vent their imaginations and focus them. While successively embellishing a given melody, trace elements from it are retained within releases of fresh ideas. For the listener, charting a course of variations is like undertaking a kind of aural excursion. Where memorized residues of the tune re-emerge in later cycles, a sense of satisfaction is derived from perceiving familiar features within changing plays of lines.

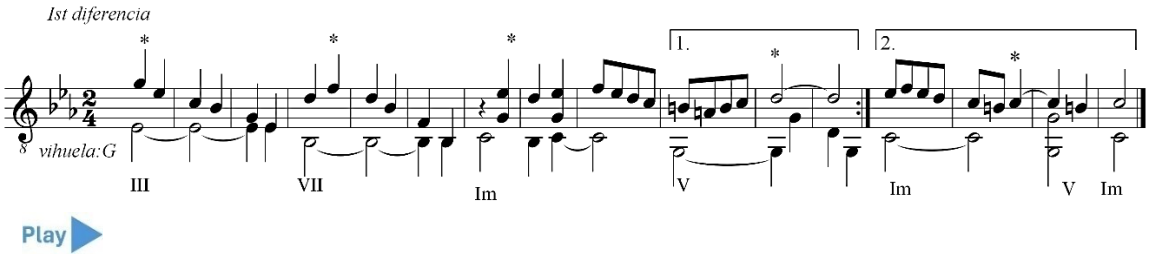
Tunes aside, variations are also strung around bass line sequences. To each rotation of these, fresh passages are overlaid. Another means still of spinning variations is from the component notes of familiar chord progressions. There are occasions too when a melody with its harmony and bass line collectively stake out the initial ground. Should the tune be singled out for elaboration, its escorting bass line and harmony might well continue more or less unchanged. Be the melody preserved intact, the harmony and bass line are dispersed. On these foundations Spanish vihuelists and lutenists refined the art of variation setting.

Spanish composers of the Renaissance called variations *diferencias*, 'differences'. Narváez in 1538 is credited as the first composer to apply the term in print (though instances of instrumental variations arise earlier in works by Milán and even before him in the first lute books). Among those specified for vihuela the following are based on a traditional tune with its associated bass line and emergent chord progression. Exx. 5.Ia-b shows two approaches to the Spanish folksong *Guárdame las vacas*.



Pl. 5.1. Luis de Narváez, *Guárdame las vacas*, 1st *diferencia.* Dots are visual alignments of part-writing. From *Los seys libros del Delphin de música* (Valladolid, 1538).

Ex. 5.1a. L. de Narváez: *Guárdame las vacas* (1538)

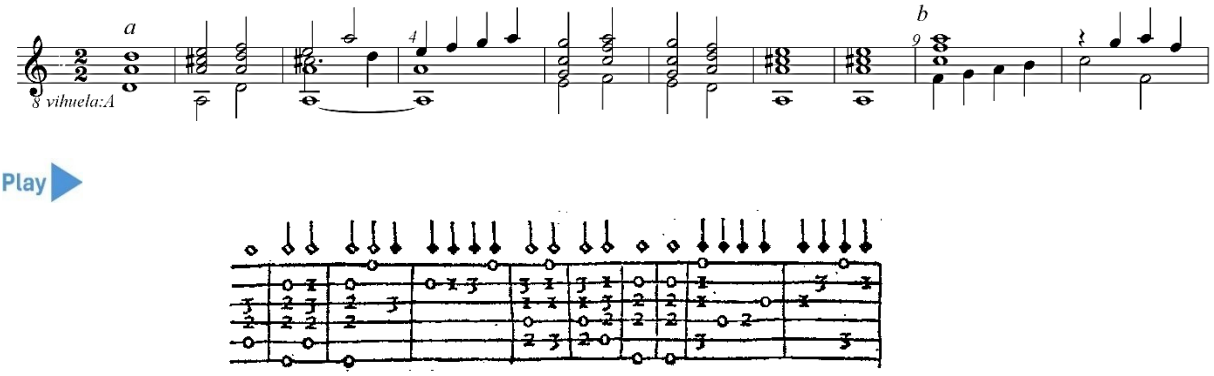


6. Pavans and their *diferencias*

As further tangents on variations for the vihuela are those listed as dances. Though few in number they merit note for their lyricism and individuality. Out of many floor-stepped motions in circulation then the one favoured by vihuelists was the pavan. Conducted in the halls of aristocracy, this stately dance is at one with ceremonial processions. At the fingerboard certain pavans commence accordingly with a measured footing; others though take off with a spring. At whatever tempo, pavans are engaging for their striking melodies and balanced proportions. Discernible still are these features in their variations.

With enduring appeal the six Pavans of Luis Milán (1536) have about them a timeless quality, reminiscent of ancient dances yet with a ring of yesteryear's folksongs. Engagingly lyrical, they endure for their captivating tunes and pleasing harmonizations. Movement answers movement, as one passage is met in rhymed exchange with another. Arched phrases, inner echoes, balancing counterpoints, timely pauses, all contribute to their elegance. Indeed, four of the six were intended to convey the grace of this dance. Milán stated as much in *El Maestro*, seeking to capture within them the spirit of Italian pavans, while ornamenting traditional tunes as the last two.

Ex. 6.1. L. Milán: *Pavana I* (1536)



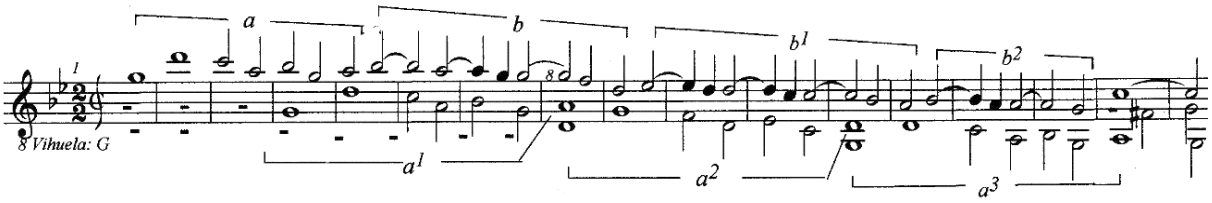
Pl. 6.1. Luis Milán, *Pavana*, No. 1. From *El Maestro* (Valencia, 1536).

Fantasias for Vihuela

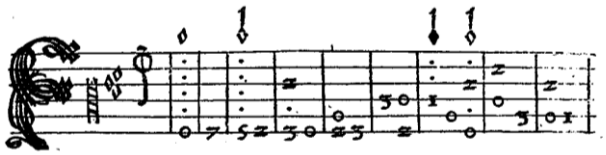
Given to flights of imagination, instrumental fantasies could be described as crystallizations of musical caprice. By turns they are animated, calculated, ruminative and even at times dancelike. Some seem as if whipped up on the spur of the moment; but more so are they finely crafted, as showcases of a composer's scholarship and inventive powers. Those written for accomplished performers venture from the lower reaches of the fingerboard to its upper extremes. Others, intended for novices are relatively facile; but even so, these prove their worth as incentives for learners to explore individual tangents of the vihuela repertoire. For fantasias are fickle things, of captured ideas owing little to everyday song or dance forms. Such are their peculiarities they elude pat definition; but as mediums of unbridled creativity, fantasias have given release to most imaginative instrumental compositions of the Renaissance and beyond.

Those for the vihuela well outnumber other genres in its instrumental listings. All collections feature them, and together they amount to around a third of the titles indexed without vocal attachments. Yet for all their diversity, many bear similar features. To set them off and spur them on are received procedures and applications. Through these composers can channel their thoughts and fine-tune ideas. Imitation, for one, is an animator. Motioning a fantasia off, successive entries trace the profile of the leading line. In this way too are subsequent themes within the composition led by one line and then shadowed, Exx. 7.1–2:

Ex. 7.1. L. de Narváez: *Fantasia del primer tono* (1538)



Play



tono. From *Los seys libros de Delphin, de música* (Valladolid, 1538).

8. The Vihuela and Vocal Music

... that minstrels and singers came with their lutes and vihuelas so that they might play and sing the ballads that were devised to tell of celebrated knightly deeds.

Diago Rodriguez de Almela, Compendio historial (1479).

Pl. 8.1. A woodcut from the title page of *Chistes de Muchas Maneras* (Valencia c.1550).

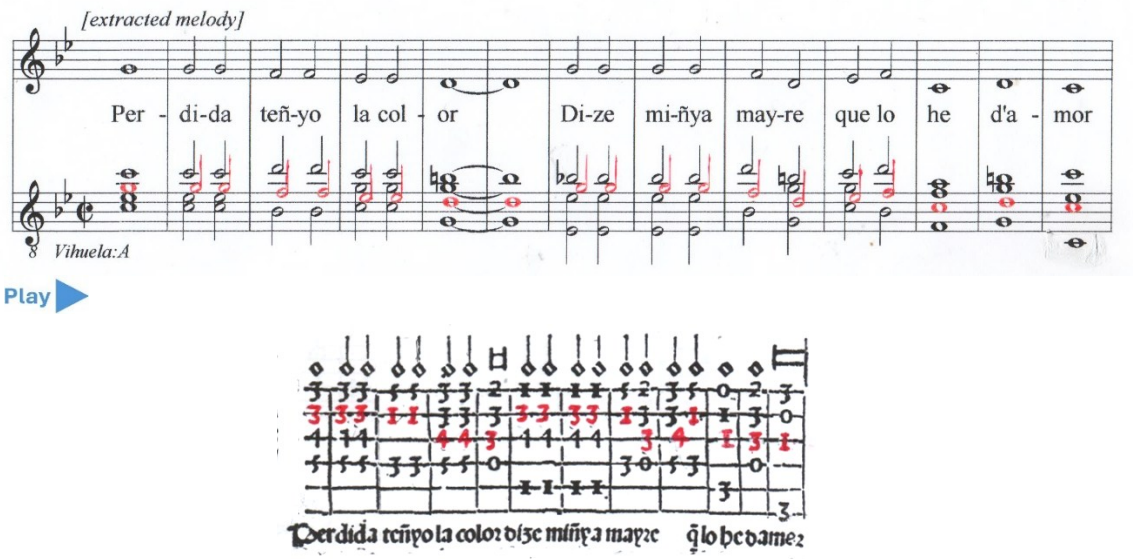
Drawing on popular songs, tales from olden times and ancient verses from home and abroad, vihuelists garnered a cosmopolitan repertoire of vocal settings. To Spanish, Portuguese and Italian lyrics, biblical verse and Latin texts, their songs tell of heroic exploits, legends and of love's yearning. Ghosts of the Moors loom in their ballads and images of dark-eyed beauties. Though the lyrical narratives that minstrels once intoned at court and public gatherings have passed into thin air, traces of their tales endured through the medium of the vihuela. In addition to a wide variety of solo song settings, vihuelists also extended their reaches into the provinces of polyphony. Transcriptions of extracts from masses and motets were honed at the fingerboard, faithful to the original voicings when not embellished.

Villancicos

Very much songs of Spanish soil, *villancicos* are solo ballads, chorals and carols. Covering a range of styles and subjects, *Guárdame las vacas* is one. Those by Milán have Castilian and Portuguese lyrics. Lighthearted, melancholy, Ex. 8.1 relates a rueful tale of a lass bemoaning …

> I have no more a living colour:
> My mother tells me that I have the colour of love.

Ex. 8.1. Luis Milán: *Perdida teñyo la color* (1536)



From *El Maestro* (Valencia, 1536).

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9. The Renaissance Lute

Pl. 9.1. In fashionable garb of the 1590s, this resplendent fellow answers to the cryptic monogram GWAHXB.

One of the most cherished musical instruments of the Renaissance, the lute flourished in 16th century Europe with an international repertoire of dance arrangements, song settings and solo compositions. Prospering in all walks of life, the lute's popularity is testified by its presence in numerous 15th and 16th century paintings. At the hands of angels, monarchs, within homes of the wealthy, in domestic scenes, it is also portrayed by minstrels at rural entertainments. While so often the focus of these pictures, the lute seems to adopt a different image each time, taking on a particular significance in keeping with its location. In devotional scenes lutenists are featured serenading the Madonna and Child (Pl. 9.2). Churches, cathedrals are the sanctuaries of mortified lutenists. At porches in stone, as wood carved bench ends within, they stand immutable. From stained glass windows they are seen glancing heavenward or peering down (Pls. 9.3–6). By their abstracted looks the lute for them seems as a medium of harmony, complementing the holders' elevated thoughts

Pl. 9.3. An angel in a stained glass window in the tower of Rattlesden church, Suffolk (c.1400–40).

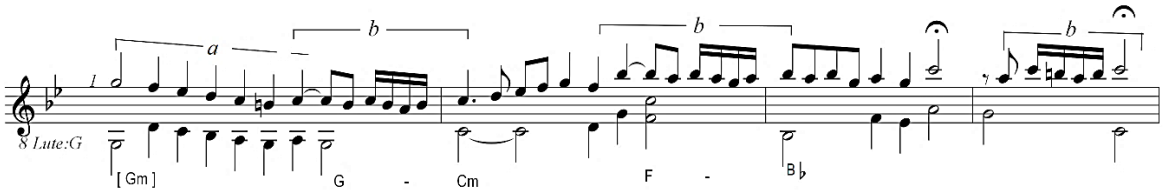
10. The Lute Ricercare and early Preludes

For the first printed lute music we look to Venice and the books Petrucci released during the first years of the l6th century. Containing dance arrangements and vocal intabulations, these volumes also offer a variety of solo works that were then unique to both the lute and music at large. Meandering, explorative, they capture the spirit of an improvised tradition. They are, however, far more than just doodlings harking of bygone impromptu music-making. With flighty passagework and spells of counterpoint punctuated by swept chords, they reveal much of the instrumental command and musical resources of Italian lutenists from some five centuries ago. Each going their own way, they differ in mood swings, impulsive, drifting, languishing. On hearing them it's as if we are eavesdropping on a lingering musical reverie of a long-departed composer with his lute.

Called *recercare, recerchar* or generally *ricercare*, these names allude to the Italian term 'seeking out'. By way of scale passages and chordal tracts, ricercares sift the lute's sonorities, and in the process probe out a prospective axis note, a tonality for the composition in hand. Foreshadowing fully-fledged fantasias, by no means though are ricercares all mere tasters. As whim dictates they can range from brief warm-ups to works of some breadth.

Ricercares stand alone or preamble a song setting or dance movement. They also figure after one just played. Those for lute made their earliest appearances in Italian manuscripts, the 'Pesaro' (c.1490–95) and 'Thibault' (c.1500).

Ex. 10.1. Pesaro Ms.: *Recercar* (c.1490–95)



Play

11. Dance and the Lute

Pl. 11.1. *Emblemata, cum aliquot nummis antiqui operis: Industria naturam corrigit*. 'Industry corrects nature' (1564) by János Zsámboki (1531–84).

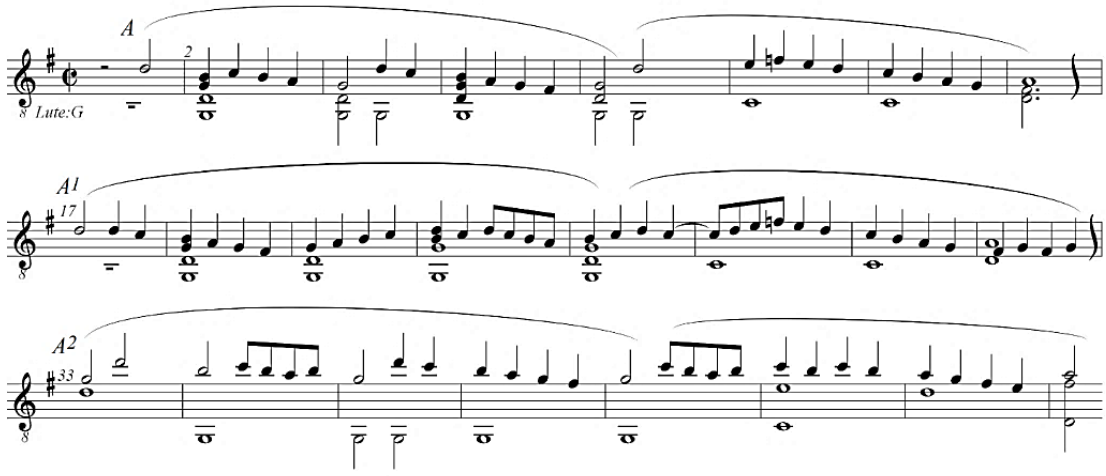
For indoors and out, at country fairs, courtly revels, village festivities, Renaissance dances were stepped, leapt, skipped as solo spectacles, taken two-by-two and in processions. Through dance young blades could display fancy footwork and damsels air their graces. Eager to peg social rungs, court aspirants would be well versed in ballroom decorum, to comport themselves with dignity, for men to limit their spitting, for ladies to flutter an eye but not bare a leg. Mirroring Renaissance recreations in the raw too, some dances overstepped propriety. Flirtatious motions were acted out, coy and modest. Pecks on cheeks were par for the course with some; but a suggestive gesture at an unguarded moment would surely incur disapproving pouts from onlookers. As we later note, demonstrably lewd ones, shocking displays were observed on the streets of Spain with guitarists in tow. Yet as the century drew on, dances with roots in the soil ascended to the floors of upper society. Moderated with a veneer of elegance, those once taken at a running lick became tempered in pace; clog hops that before shook the ground now took on a dainty step. Restrained if so, but not always in lofty circles even were they totally refined.

12. Variation Settings for Lute

Among their accomplishments lutenists could claim credit as forerunners of variation setting. Past-masters of this tradition, their talents for embellishing tunes stretch back to the days of Medieval minstrelsy. To recitations of legends then, it came as second nature to spin roulades from their lutes around an intoned verse. For solo instrumental renditions equally, a spontaneous flourish here and there lent individual touches to a delivery. As readily they could turn their hand to impromptu music-making in dance bands. Having set the gathering into its swing with a well-known tune, rounds of improvisations, otherwise variations, would keep the dancers on their toes. This practice of creating music on the spot was carried over the 15th century and then relayed in prints. Released just into the 16th century these publications herald the first of countless variations composed at the Renaissance lute.

For their initial flickers are those of the pioneering Italian lutenists. Spinacino's name again arises now for the florid overlays he etched on tenor themes in his book from 1507 (see Ex. 14.1b). Perpetuating age-old ways, his settings recall those erstwhile lutenists playing by ear, weaving passages around a sparse old tune or given bass line. Within Dalza's ricercares too are dashes of seemingly off-the-cuff embellishments. Earlier-heard phrases return now paraphrased and ornamented. Instrumental dances of the time likewise reveal glimmers of variations, as those within the following pavan:

Ex. 12.1. J. A. Dalza: *Pavana alla venetiana* (No. 2) (1508)



Play.

Play

13. Free Spirits: the Fantasia.
Later Ricercares and Preludes

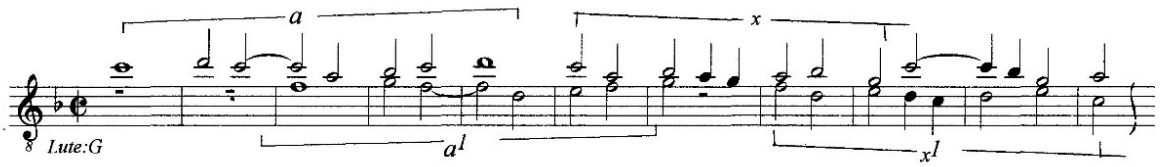
The most principall and chiefest kind of musick
which is made without a dittie is the fantasie,
that is, when a musician taketh a point at his
pleasure, and wresteth and turneth it as he list …
In this may more art be showne then in any other
musicke, because the composer is tide to nothing but
that he may adde, diminish, and alter at his pleasure.

Thomas Morley. *A Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke* (London 1597).

Springboards for musical explorations, fantasias have given release to compositions of ranging breadth, variety and originality. Through the medium of a fantasia promising ideas and flashes of inspiration are harnessed which otherwise might not have seen light of day. With no fixed procedures or boundaries to constrain them, each and every one is shaped at will. Drawing on a variety of components and resources, they take in their sweep imitative exchanges, strings of sequences, running scale passages and meandering chordal tracts. Any of these facets can be brought into play, and all within the breadth of a single composition.

From portrayals of solitary lutenists, it is tempting to read into their absorbed looks a fantasia in the making. So engrossed do these players seem in their reverie, sifting lines and sonorities. Yet such is the capricious nature of a fantasia, it may suddenly perk up and scoot off. Indeed there are moments where passages unfurl to such extent it's as though the composer had got carried away in a frenzy of improvisation. Then, like a restraining hand, a steadying pattern takes hold and composure is restored.

Ex. 131. F. da Milano: *Fantasia del divino F. da Milano* (1546)



Play

14. The Lute and Vocal Music

Orpheus with his lute made trees
And the mountain tops that freeze,
Bow themselves when he did sing:
To his music plants and flowers
Ever spring, as sun and showers.
There had made a lasting spring.

William Shakespeare: *King Henry the Eighth.*
Act. III, scene 1

Pl. 14.1. Apollo and the nine Muses from Phalèse's *Des chansons reductz en tabulature de luc* (Louvain 1546).

To their yields of ricercares, dances, variations and fantasias, lutenists extended their reaches through the seams of vocal music. As vihuelists, they sifted and sized popular songs, choral settings and sacred polyphony to sing to the lute or as instrumental recastings. From such initiatives the lute repertoire prospered immeasurably. Erstwhile listeners of songs became singing performers. Indeed, the lute was the most favoured accompanying instrument in the 16th century. Popular refrains and folksongs proved winners; and just as receptive were chansons. For those whose vocal cords weren't quite up to the mark, better for all that the song be conveyed through the dulcet tones of a lute alone. Moreover, engaging in songs at the instrument proved musically instructive. Combing the scores of these arrangements, players of plucked strings gained insights into the ways of part-writing, the placement of cadences and other compositional procedures. Paying further dividends still, vocal intabulations well served the beginner's repertoire. Selected not least for their tunefulness and familiarity, many adaptations were pared down for novices. Presented as a few manageable lines or so, the more enticing are they for their brevity.

Then are those challenging undertakings. Chansons and madrigals were reworked and excerpts from devotional music. Distilling their polyphony, arrangers at times assiduously condensed the original note for note; otherwise some components were omitted and others

15. The Elizabethan Lute

Now is the winter of our discontent
Made glorious summer by this sun of York …
And now, – instead of mounting barded steeds
To fright the souls of fearful adversaries, –
He capers nimbly in a lady's chamber
To the lascivious pleasing of a lute.

Richard's entrance soliloquy.

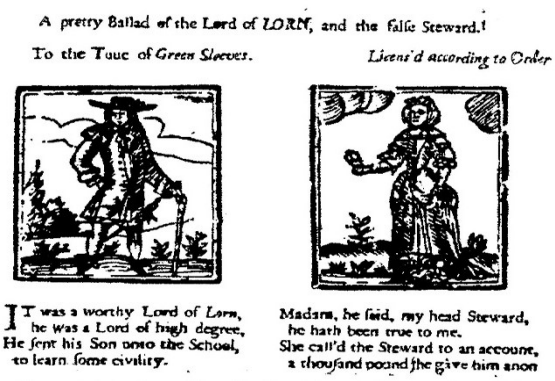
As the Renaissance era waned in Italy it rose to a further summit in England. The Golden Age of literature and music was to resonate beyond the reign of Elizabeth I and into the 1600s of James I. Music played, whistled and crooned seized the popular imagination in all its grace and exuberance. It emanated from England's 'singing birds' at ground level, and upward through court ensembles and into the expanses of polyphony. A wealth of songs circulated, of poetic and folk ayres down to peddlers' calls. Instrumental music burgeoned for consorts, virginals and lute. Pavans and galliards were written in dedication to monarchs, almains paid tribute to adventurers, and jigs were popularized through the antics of celebrated clowns. At the theatre between bouts of a drama, bands would strike up a dance for light relief and to fill intervals of scene changes. Music heightened the sense of theatrical occasion, adding an extra edge to the atmosphere of a plot. Eerie wails and ominous percussion offstage sent shivers through the audience as doom struck and supernatural events unfolded. Fanfares from the gallery heralded actors' entrances, trumpet blasts from the aisles summoned calls to arms. For inside and outdoor entertainments there was music to cater for all. The nobility and gentry had their refined ayres and consorts, the populace their dance tunes and street vendors their broadside ballads.

The lute was well to the fore in all this. Though late its printed matter here – remembering that Italy had a headstart in publications from nigh a hundred years before – English lutenists had long since left their mark with a plethora of manuscript collections. From the mid-16th century, sheets and anthologies scribed in neat and spidery hands hailed from Scotland and proliferated south of the border. This bountiful legacy brims with dance arrangements and songs, from lighthearted rounds to solemn tributes. The lute encapsulated them all with facile to commanding pieces that surely rank alongside the most accomplished instrumental music of the day.

16. Elizabethan and Jacobean Ballad Variations for Lute

For their vitality and charm Elizabethan song and dance settings abide as enduring beacons of English music. Played and sung to the lute, they echoed the nation's irrepressible music-making. From palaces, theatres, taverns and street balladry came elegant ayres, irreverent ditties and doleful love refrains. Alive with sentiment and wit, they charmed the Golden Age with lyricism and animation. The Devil had no sole claim to the best tunes: the Elizabethans held them dear besides.

Exchanged by ear and jottings, songs reached wider audiences still through penny-apiece broadside sheets. Headed with a gothic font known as Black Letter along with illustrative woodcuts, they relayed the latest news, topical events, shipwrecks, scandals, treachery and fables, all garnished in verse and doggerel. Wherever crowds gathered, at markets, fairs, ale houses, balladeers rhymed good and ill tidings to tunes of familiar folksongs. As street vendors would have it, 'all the news that's fit to be sung.' From town squares to village greens, these narratives circulated. Indulging a little graphic journalism in 1562 was this headline grabber: 'The Discription of a Monstrous Pig, which was Farrowed at Hampsted besyde London.' Given a vocalized delivery it's unlikely that this choice ditty would have been accompanied by the dulcet tones of a lute. Bawdy tales unfolded by their reams of robbery, murder, the indiscretions of royalty and of military conquests. To which were the 'Damnable Practices of three Lincolnshire witches' [would love to know what they got up to]. Be they accurate accounts, fanciful or fantastic, the newscaster would hold the audience from the first by his declaration 'all sworn to be true.' With their raucous vending cries leaving something to be desired, an observer scathingly remarked 'as harsh a noise as ever a cartwheel made.'


A pretty Ballad of the Lord of LORN, and the falſe Steward.

To the Tune of *Green Sleeves*. *Licens'd according to Order*

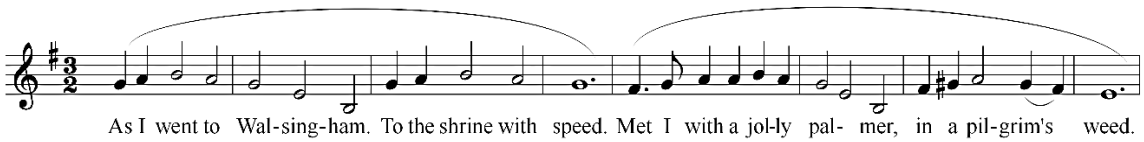
IT was a worthy Lord of *Lorn*,
he was a Lord of high degree,
He ſent his Son unto the School,
to learn ſome civility.

Madam, he ſaid, my head Steward,
he hath been true to me.
She call'd the Steward to an account,
a thouſand pound ſhe gave him anon

Pl. 16.1. 'A pretty Ballad to the Lord of LORN and the false Steward.' Early 17th-century Broadside Ballad 'To the Tune of *Green Sleeves*.'

broadsides and tunesmiths in Shakespeare's plays. Through his narratives folksongs also remained at large, as the moving lament 'Willow, Willow' and pastoral 'Where the Bee Sucks'. Doleful too, Shakespeare's Ophelia recalls the tune of 'Walsingham' lamenting over an unfaithful lover while in her nadir of madness.

Ex. 16.1. Traditional: *Walsingham*



Play

17. Dance Settings of British Lutenists

Enduringly tuneful, Renaissance instrumental dances from the British Isles glimmer still, undimmed by the passage of centuries. For all tastes, they range from the exuberant, lusty, serene ‘gentyl behaving’ to dolorous. For their melodies popular ayres were often recast instrumentally. ‘Walsingham’ at Dowland’s hands became a galliard for solo lute. From him again, ‘Now my needs must part’ matches the tune of the ‘Frog’ galliard which we hear was parodied on the dance floor with hops and leaps. Alongside reworked tunes came an upsurge of new ones. Self-penned, they too cast the same spell for their captivating melodies. From an old traditional battle theme, fanfares resound from the lute to the ‘King of Denmark’s Galliard’. Almains paid homage to military worthies and plaintive pavans served as tributes to nobles and the departed. Enlivening the repertoire as well are miniature varieties, jig-like ‘toyes’. With perky melodies and suggestions of buffoonery, their headings carry dedications to stage entertainers and clowns. And as if local varieties weren’t plentiful enough, others came from wider afield, the folia and Spanish Pavan. French branles also made up numbers, and with them is the buoyant la volta during which the underskirts of prancing ladies might just be glimpsed.

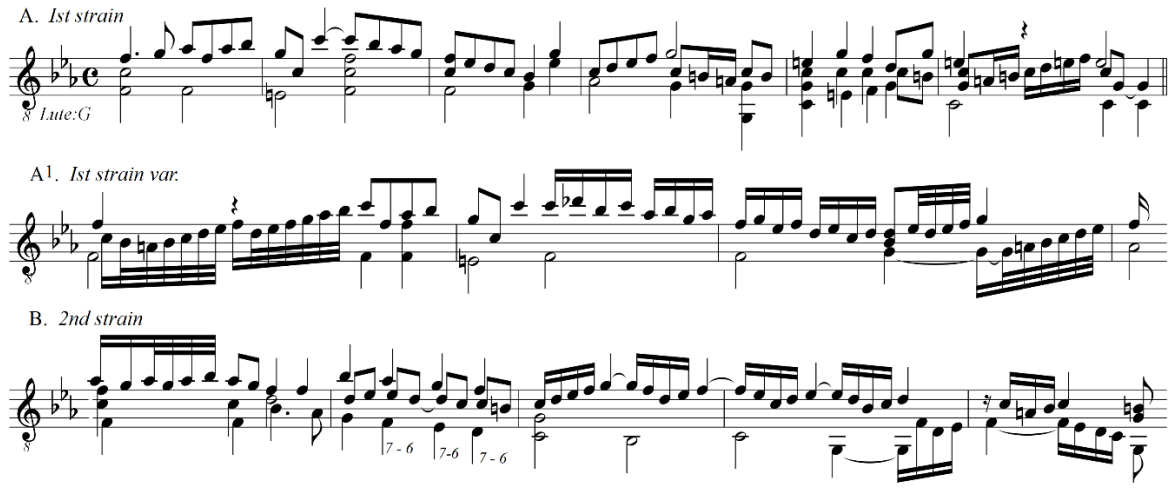
Like ballad settings at this time, the Elizabethan instrumental dance repertory is recognisable for its memorable tunes and florid variations. Such features grace pavans with their undulating lines, galliards for their springiness, and no less so almains and hotchpotches of lighter fare. All were to take on new depths of expression, colouring and vitality in this, the Golden Age of English lute music.

Pl. 17.1. A depiction of Apollo playing his lute-like lyre while the Graces dance. Detail from an oak-carved overmantle in the The Wingfield Room of Christchurch Mansions in Ipswich, Suffolk dating from 1547.

Pavans

A stately procession of caped courtiers and ladies in long gowns enter the hall to the strains of a pavan. For such a ceremonial occasion, a consort issues forth at a measured pace to a solemn beat. Just so poised are English pavans for lute, with their swooping melodies to steady metres. Among the first in this vein are those of John Johnson noted in Willoughby's collection. Pavans with galliards then attained their peak of refinement at the hands of Ferrabosco I, Cutting, Holborne, Dowland and fellow lutenists bridging the late 16th and early 17th centuries. To duple or quadruple time, they frequently begin with a sustained note or chord. Flowing lines follow, pausing here, speeding there, sweeping to cadences. Ferrabosco excelled at pavans of this kind as Ex. 17.1 with its haunting opening line:

Ex. 17.1. A. Ferrabosco I *Pavin* (1610)



Play

18. Fantasias of the English Lutenists

For what did he who with his ten-tong'd lute
Gave beasts and blocks an understanding ear.
Orchestra, a poem by Sir John Davies (1596).[1]

By its other name 'a fancy', an English lute fantasia might well suggest a lighthearted play of musical whimsy. While this impression is fitting for some, it is hardly in keeping with English fantasias at their most impassioned. Whatever fancies they harbour have a wry twist to them. Like pavans, their opening themes convey the very solemnity of that graceful dance. Even when aroused from introspection, they often seem more audibly flustered than uplifted. English lutenists excelled at these musical reveries, the stately pavan and dolorous fantasia. This was music that commanded rapt attention. It was intended for the avid ears of connoisseurs, to be heard in closed surroundings.

Fantasies by English lutenists reached their apex nearing the close of the 16th century and over the first decades of the 17th. Lutenists with a hand in these were Ferrabosco I, Bacheler, Cutting, Robert Johnson, Dowland and Rosseter. Exploiting the instrument's enwidened pitch compass, the fantasias of these master lutenists burgeoned in breadth and content. Sombre themes loom from the lowest extremes, piercing entries ring out from uppermost reaches. With up to ten courses at hand, English lutenists also had an extended tonal palette of enriched harmony underpinned by deep-set bass lines.

Hearing these reveries, it is tempting to draw associations with the brooding image of a Renaissance courtier. By their glum countenances, steeped they seem in melancholy. Pictured against a shadowed background, alongside them are symbols of mortality, the omnipresent skull, a portent of death. A lute often reposes there its strings still, indicative of life's transitory pleasures.

Giving voice to the sentiments of these dispirited souls, are the vocal laments in rhyme. Yet apart from the descriptive impact of a narrative, there are other means of conveying heartfelt expression. A pent turn of line by itself can be weighted in gravitas. Inexplicitly sorrowful to those in hearing it unfailingly elicits their sympathy. And the medium above all for its transmission, a fantasia. As whim dictates their unfolding, these are most amenable to shifting temperaments. Given their volatile changes of gesture and mood, we detect within them a sense of yearning at one moment, vexation another, and at times elation. Through their opening lines especially English lutenists seem to have found common purpose in communicating their most solemn thoughts; for so often to these moving announcements is there a presence sensed of a forlorn spirit, Ex. 18.1:

Pl. 18.1. 'Inamorato', a detail from the frontispiece of Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) 'I'th' under column there doth stand / Inamorato with folded hand / Down hangs his head, terse and polite / Some ditty sure he doth indite / His lute and books around him lie / As symptoms of his vanity.

[1] Grosart 1876, Part 3, Section 78, 188.

19. The English Ayre

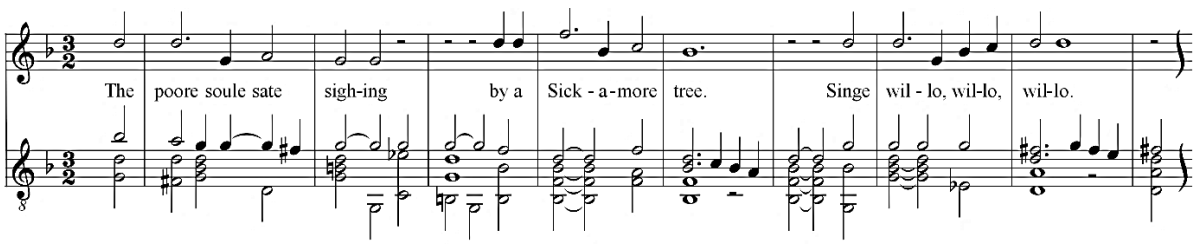
When to the lute she sung.
And made the night-bird mute.
William Shakespeare, *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*.

Together with the vigorous growth of music in Elizabethan and Jacobean England came another cultural outpouring – of the written and recited word. Literature flourished from the great dramatists Christopher Marlowe (1564–93), Ben Jonson (1572–1637) and William Shakespeare (1564–1616). Odes, comedies and tragic dramas for all and sundry were spouted from courtyards, theatres, makeshift venues. From one commentator we learn how riveting these shows could be, and to the rabble not least. Falstaff spoke of the 'groundlings' – those in the pit, the cheapest area of the theatre – who stopped munching nuts to catch every word.

Pl. 19.1. The stage in the Red Bull Playhouse. Clockwise from upper right: Simpleton, French Dancing, Clause, Kostes, Falstaff, Changling.

In Shakespeare's plays the instrumental interludes weren't intended merely to offer the audience a moment's diversion; they were relevant to the action or character. Songs were rendered by leading roles, clowns, rustics, knaves, tradesmen. To the wistful tune of 'Walsingham' Ophelia pines for her false-hearted lover. For a rural setting from *As You Like It* what better chosen title could there be for a lover's serenade than 'Under the Greenwood Tree'. Enduring tunes, they have become immortalized, at one with the Bard's name. Robert Johnson, musician to the Globe theatre, leaves us with 'Full Fathom Five' scored for *The Tempest*. On hearing this or 'Where the bee sucks' and Thomas Morley's 'It was a lover and his lass', romps in haystacks spring to mind. Going the rounds too from *Othello* 'The Willow Song' haunted Desdemona in her lamentation of unrequited love.

Ex. 19.1. Ms. Add.15117: *The Willow Song* (c.1615)



Play

20. The Renaissance Guitar

Out of a variety of plucked instruments in circulation during the Medieval period and early Renaissance the guitar ultimately emerged. Coming into its own around the middle years of the 16th century, it widened its hold through publications of its music. Released in the 1550s, their pages illustrate the guitar as it was then. Much smaller than today's instrument, and with just four courses, the little Renaissance guitar nonetheless held itself to good account with its yield of fantasias, variation settings, song arrangements, dances and sundries. Ear-catching for its silvery tone and percussive strum, guitarists accompanied singers, dancers and also chipped into instrumental ensembles. Once settled into Renaissance musical life the guitar thereon thrived, to outlive the vihuela and lute on the strength of its ready accessibility and grasp of popular and learned idioms.

Tracing the guitar's forerunners prior to its emanation in the mid-16th century as an instrument with a figure-eight profile, we are met with a confusion of interchangeable terms for small handheld instruments. One is the flat-backed 'citole'. Dating from the Medieval period, the citole had receded by the time of Chaucer's death around 1400. Even so, a significant exemplar survives that has recently been defined as a citole (Pl. 20.1). Previously called the 'Warwick Castle gittern' since it was once held in that bastion, it's thought to have been made in East Anglia around 1320. This dating is extrapolated from its style and carving, in particular its dragon headstock. Later modified as a violin with a silver-gilt plate engraving, it bears the arms of Elizabeth I and Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, with an inscription dated 1578. Turning a blind eye to the later modifications to its soundboard stringing mechanisms, and hence left with its intact body, carved headstock and trefoil foot, it abides as a treasured relic of Medieval stringed instruments.[2]

[2] For the origins and subsequent renovation of this citole-gittern see Egerton 2009.

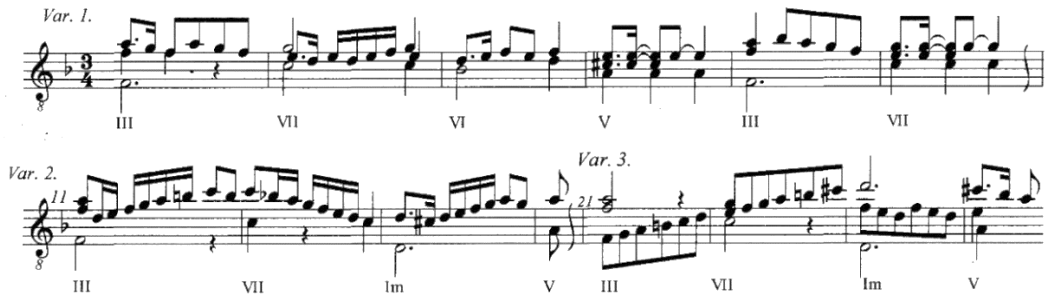
21. Music for the Renaissance Guitar

Notwithstanding its narrow pitch range, the Renaissance guitar took in its stride dance settings, variations, vocal arrangements and fantasias. Narrowed to this diminutive instrument, in no way though do these sound like stunted reductions of the self-same genres issuing from the guitar's more imposing plucked-stringed cousins; for it holds its own in melody, counterpoints and harmony. Since those composers who turned their hand to the guitar had in most cases already applied their talents to the vihuela or lute, it was just a matter now of channelling their compositional techniques through the four-course guitar.

Variations

Ostinatos as ever have energized rounds of dance tunes and songs – and no less for the Renaissance guitar. Agreed that the romanesca and folia require purposeful bass lines to define them, pretty much absent on the present instrument, the pivotal tones of these sequences are still latent in the guitar's chordal grasp, if only by implication. Rounds of successive variations, however flurried at the guitar, are nevertheless distinguished by their differing textures and patterning. Such is Mudarra's charming setting of the romanesca wherein each round skirts the subject in individual ways:

Ex. 21.1. A. Mudarra: *Romanesca o Guárdame las vacas* (1546)



Play

22. The Renaissance. A Retrospective

Come the closing years of the Renaissance, new musical currents were astir. Gathering momentum at the beginning of the 17th century, they ushered a fresh epoch. At this stylistic crossroad, lutenists and guitarists stood. From such a vantage they could take stock of their past and present accomplishments and, if the spirit moved, venture ahead. Before they and we press on, a pause for reflection would not come amiss across the reaches of music for the Renaissance lute, vihuela and guitar. Certain compositions flagged in this flashback endure as masterpieces. Around them are other findings, not outstanding but merit reminding as prime examples of their genres from this time.

As the frontiers of the Renaissance widened, lutenists and vihuelists strove in step with the musical trends at large. They also forged initiatives of lasting effect. From the first years of the 16th century we recall their headways through the prints of Petrucci from 1507. These volumes proved a revelation in casting light on the instrumental command and inventive flair of Italian lutenists then. Among them Spinacino and Dalza were first noted for their well-sprung dances and vocal arrangements. More telling are their ricercares. Unique to the lute, there is an air of spontaneity to these that smacks of an improvised tradition. Though for their delivery a fully-fledged finger-style technique was called for; a quill would not measure up to these multi-faceted offerings.