POLYPHONIC INTABULATION
FOR
THE LUTE AND VIHUELA

by Daniel Wolff

The craft of recreation, of using pre-existing material as a source for a new work of art, is replete with examples in the history of music. From the use of plainchant in the Middle Ages and Renaissance to twentieth-century Neoclassicism, composers have always been inclined to rework the music of a past era in their own ways. Great masters such as Mozart and Beethoven were no exception, as both adopted the contrapuntal textures of Bach in their later works.

In instrumental music, examples of keyboard arrangements of vocal polyphonic pieces date back to the first quarter of the fourteenth-century. Technical limitations of plucked instruments prevented them from joining this tradition until the early sixteenth-century. But throughout the sixteenth-century, and up to the early years of the seventeenth, examples abound of arrangements of vocal polyphonic works, both secular and sacred, for the lute and the vihuela.

Although different in tuning and construction, technique and writing for lute and vihuela were quite similar. While the vihuela was the preferred instrument in Spain, the lute dominated in the rest of Europe. Therefore, I shall make little distinction between the two instruments, rather concentrating on their similar aspects when dealing with arrangements of vocal music.

The popularity of the lute and vihuela during the Renaissance and Baroque periods was shared with another similar instrument: the guitar. Two types of guitar existed at the time, one with four and another with five pairs of strings called courses, which were tuned either at the unison or at the octave. The repertoire and technique of the guitar, especially of the four-course type, were somewhat simpler than that of the lute and the vihuela. Most pieces were written in the *battente* style, consisting of strummed chords and used primarily for accompaniment of simple songs. Even pieces written in the more elab-

orate *punteado* (plucked) style, called *pizzicato* style in Italy, were much less contrapuntal in texture than their lute and vihuela counterparts. This situation led to some prejudice against the guitar in the so-called serious music circles, as can be seen by the following account of the British diarist Samuel Pepys, describing his meeting with the famous Italian guitarist Francesco Corbetta (c.1615-1681):

> *August 5, 1667*
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> *After done with the Duke of York, and coming out through his dressing room, I there spied Signor Francisco tuning his guitar, and Monsieur the Puy, with him who did make him play to me which he did most admirably - so well that I was mightily troubled that all that pains should have been taken upon so bad an instrument.* [1]

As a result, the guitar acquired a repertoire of its own, quite distinctive from that of the other plucked instruments. The printed books of guitar music contain mostly original works, while arrangements of vocal polyphonic pieces are rare. The limited nature of the instrument accounts for this; polyphonic playing on four-course guitar was quite impractical. Thus, I will exclude the early guitar from the present study. Instead, I will discuss the origins of instrumental transcriptions of vocal works for lute and vihuela, as well as the technical procedures involved in the arrangement process. Examples of arrangements of works by Josquin des Prés made by outstanding vihuelists and lutenists will serve to demonstrate in practice the main topics of discussion.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The arrangements of vocal pieces for either keyboard or plucked instruments made during the Renaissance period were called intabulations. These were written in the tablature notation system and were probably first intended for instrumental doubling of the vocal parts in performance. The fact that the original works were written in part books rather than in full scores made reducing all voices into a single tablature staff extremely useful and practical, and may have served as the purpose of the earliest intabulations.

The first known example of intabulation appears in the Robertsbridge Manuscript, dated from about 1320. Here, two motets from the *Roman de Fauvel* are arranged for keyboard and written in a combination of staff notation and letters. But regarding intabulations for the lute, the first example did not appear until the early sixteenth-century, when Petrucci published Francesco Spinacino's *Intabulatura de Lauto: Libro*

Primo, in 1507. This is not only the first extant example of lute intabulation, but also the first book of lute music ever printed. Petrucci also published two more lute books by Spinacino and a fourth one by the Milanese lutenist Joan Ambrosio Dalza in 1508. The fact that lute intabulations appeared almost two-hundred years after their keyboard counterparts is due to technical and constructional changes that happened in the late fifteenth-century, making the lute more suitable for polyphonic playing. These included the change in technique from plectrum to fingers and the addition of a sixth string which expanded the range of the instrument.

But the lute's lack of sustain represented a further obstacle for the transcription of vocal pieces. Here the solution was the use of ornamentation, replacing the original long notes with smaller rhythmic values, a practice already found in the earlier keyboard intabulations. The resulting textures would lead to a new, independent instrumental style, as opposed to the long existing vocal style (we will return to this aspect later). Example 1, taken from *The New Oxford History of Music*[2], illustrates the use of ornamentation in intabulations by comparing the opening of Spinacino's arrangement of the *Christe* from Obrecht's *Missa Si Dedero* with the original version.

Example 1

Let us now turn to the vihuela. There are only seven surviving books devoted entirely to vihuela music, all published within the small time span of thirty years (in addition, there were collections which, although not consisting exclusively of vihuela music, did include a few pieces for vihuela). In chronological order of publication, the seven books are:

1. *El Maestro*, by Luis Milán (Valencia, 1536);
2. *Los Seys Libros del Delphin de Música*, by Luys de Narváez (Valladolid, 1538);
3. *Tres Libros de Música en Cifras para Vihuela*, by Alonso Mudarra (Seville, 1546);
4. *Silva de Sirenas*, by Enriquez de Valderrábano (Valladolid, 1547).

5. *Libro de Música de Vihuela*, by Diego Pisador (Salamanca, 1552);
6. *Orphenica Lyra*, by Miguel de Fuenllana (Seville, 1554);
7. *El Parnasso*, by Esteban Daza (Valladolid, 1576).

They were all published in Spain, where, as mentioned earlier, the vihuela was preferred over the lute. Except for Milán's *El Maestro*, they all included intabulations of vocal works along with original compositions.

The repertoire used for intabulation, both by vihuelists and lutenists, included most of the current vocal genres, such as Masses. motets, chansons and madrigals. A large number of composers served as sources for the intabulations, but it seems that the Franco-Flemish school was preferred, as explained by Zayas:

> The musical language of France had already become universally known during the Middle Ages, but never as much as when the famous Franco-Flemish school appeared: the purely French composers were in the forefront with such universal geniuses as Josquin des Prés and Clément Janequin. The Spanish musicians were very conscious of the style these polyphonists wrote in, already during the fifteenth century - therefore long before the Hapsburgs came and dispersed the royal chapel of the Catholic Kings to replace it with the Flemish musicians of Charles I.[3]

But the vihuelists and lutenists did not restrict themselves solely to those two examples. Works by other outstanding composers such as Gombert, Obrecht, Willaert, Sermisy and Arcadelt were arranged, contributing to the vast amount of intabulations produced in the Renaissance and Early Baroque eras.

So far we have seen that intabulations of vocal polyphonic pieces were made in large scale, first for keyboard instruments and later for plucked ones. We have also seen that, due to the particular nature of instrumental playing, some adjustments had to be made when transferring a piece from a vocal to an instrumental medium. We shall now take a closer look at how this was actually done, as well as point out the importance of these intabulations for today's performers and musicologists.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTABULATIONS

As mentioned earlier, intabulations were notated in tablature. The system of tablature consisted of four to six parallel lines (depending on the instrument), similar to the modern staff, upon which either letters or numbers were placed to indicate left-hand fingerings. But unlike today's staff system, in tablature each line represents a specific string. For example,

Title page from the Orphenica Lyra by Fuenllana

the top line may represent the highest sounding string, the line below the second string, and so forth (this was reversed in some countries, where the top line represented the lowest sounding string). Also, according to the country in question, either letters or numbers indicated the frets upon which the player had to position his fingers. For example, an open string was indicated by a "0" or the letter "a", and the first fret by the number "1" or the letter "b". Finally, beamed stems placed above the tablature indicated the rhythmic values.

Compared to the staff system, tablature offers both advantages and disadvantages. First of all, one must understand that tablature is a notation of action: it shows the performer what to do (i.e. where and when to place his fingers) in order to achieve the desired musical result, but does not show the music itself. Staff notation, on the contrary, is a notation of result: it gives the performer the actual music, but leaves him with the task of

discovering what to do physically with his instrument to achieve the written musical result. It is clear then that tablature has the advantage of indicating the string upon which a note is to be played, but it falls short in indicating voice-leading and the exact duration of each note (it merely denotes the time distance from one note to the next). That is why it is important, when transcribing an intabulation from tablature to modern notation, to study the original vocal piece on which the tablature was based, therefore clarifying possible confusions concerning the voice-leading and duration of the notes.

However, tablature had the advantage of precisely indicating accidentals. It is well known that during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, accidentals were often omitted from editions of vocal music. It was assumed that the singer would supply the necessary accidentals according to the rules of *musica ficta*. The intabulations of vocal works thus serve as precious treatises in performance practice, while documenting the transition from the modal to the harmonic systems. Trend comments on the subject:

> The interesting value of lute tablature lies in the fact that in the sixteenth-century it was the most accurate form of musical notation in existence. The vocal music of the time, both secular and sacred, was written in separate parts; each voice, and sometimes each singer, had either a separate part-book to sing from, or else (as in the case of the immense choir-books which stood in a revolving lectern - the facistol of Spanish cathedrals) had to keep his eyes fixed on a particular corner of the page. The music in tablature, on the contrary, is printed in score; all the parts may be read together.

> Again, in sixteenth-century vocal music, the accidentals were generally left to the discretion of the singers, who supplied them according to certain conventions, well known to every musician at a particular time, but changing as the years went by. In music printed in tablature there is seldom any question about an accidental; the note that would be produced by putting down the finger in the place indicated is the right note; whether it is a flat or a sharp is not shown by any special sign, but by [a] different number, since it would be played on a different fret and with a different finger from the natural note.

> It will be seen then, that music preserved in lute tablature is (or should be) a more accurate record of what the composer intended, and how his compositions sounded, than is to be found in the part-books of vocal music. The vihuelistas who followed Luis Milán transcribed a number of madrigals and church compositions for their instrument; and from these transcriptions can be seen which notes underwent "chromatic alteration" and where the sharps and flats went, even if the actual run of the individual parts is not always easy to determine.

These facts are of great importance in musical history. During the sixteenth century there was a gradual transition from the ancient modes to the modern major and minor [scales]. The transformation of the older tonalities towards the firmer tonality of succeeding centuries was largely determined by the music written for the lute, the melodic quality of which began to make the chord an essential element of musical construction.[4]

It is interesting to point out that whereas the practice of supplying accidentals not indicated by the composer took place especially at cadential points such as ends of phrases, or else served to avoid a dissonance like the tritone, in many intabulations we find examples of accidentals added where not really necessary. These may be attributed to the particular taste of the arranger, or otherwise they represent the difference in performance practice between the time and geographic location of the composer and arranger. The following example, from Mudarra's transcription of Josquin's *Gloria* from the *Missa Faisant Regretz*, will illustrate.[5]

Example 2

* *Mudarra omitted one beat in this measure.*

THE TRANSCRIPTION PROCESS

The technical procedures involved in arranging vocal works for the lute and vihuela were for the most part standard, regardless of the arranger and his particular country. One aspect that every arranger had to deal with was the impossibility of performing all the contrapuntal lines contained in the original, especially in pieces for four or more voices. Thus Brown elucidates:

> The technique of intabulation remained essentially the same throughout the [sixteenth] century. In an ideal arrangement, according to Adrian le Roy and Vincenzo Galilei, who both describe the process in treatises on lute playing, the performer takes over as much of the vocal music as the technique of his instrument allows, although in practice the arrangers sometimes omitted one voice or rearranged the part writing.[6]

Often the omission of a less important voice alone made an impractical passage playable (although some cases demanded

more substantial changes, and the vocal parts had to be redistributed to better fit under the hands of a single player). However, an omitted voice might occasionally contain isolated notes that were indispensable for the vertical chord structure; in such instances, two voices could be combined into a new one, containing the most important notes from each of the original voices, thus resulting in a new voice-leading structure. Here is another section of Josquin's *Gloria* from the *Missa Faisant Regretz* arranged by Mudarra. Notice how Mudarra combined the two inner voices into a single one, using one note from each voice in turn, thus eliminating the octave doublings and reducing the passage to a three-part texture.

Example 3

Original Gloria

Vihuela Transcription

Besides the inability to handle multiple voices comfortably, another major problem faced by the lute and vihuela intabulators was that of sustaining pitches, as explained by Trend:

> Luis Milan and the earlier lutenists thought entirely in terms of counterpoint, and not in terms of harmony. They regarded music as made by a number of voices moving horizontally; they did not think of it vertically as a succession of chords. Viols and wind-instruments could take the place of voices (as indeed they frequently did) and make music in the same way; they could play all the notes sung by the voices, and hold them for as long as the voices themselves. The early organs could do the same thing; but the virginals and clavichord, through their inability to sustain a note after it had been struck, were suggesting rather than copying the effect of voices singing together.
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> This was one of the beginnings of the instrumental style in music as distinct from [the] vocal, and in this differentiation the lute, the vihuela and the guitar led the way. They could not even play all the notes sung by voices, much less sustain them, and thus, when a composition for voices was transferred to the lute, it was not reproduced, but only suggested.[7]

One possible solution for suggesting sustained pitches was to re-strike long or tied notes, making them audible once

Josquin des Pres

again. Nevertheless, that procedure alone would result in a rather monotonous succession of repeated notes. Therefore another feature had to be brought in: that of adding ornamentation. We have already seen how lutenists such as Spinacino and Dalza furnished their intabulations with ornaments during the first decade of the sixteenth-century (see example 1).

Usually relying on stereotyped figuration like trills, runs and turns, the amount of ornamentation varied from one player to another, and sometimes even within different arrangements done by the same player. "Repeated whenever possible, these ornamental clichés form[ed] a superstructure, so to speak, over the given vocal piece, a network of motives completely independent of the original conception."[8] Often that resulted in a constant eighth or sixteenth-note motion, obscuring the original contours underneath a series of scale fragments. But "the greatest virtuosi of the century, like Valentin Bakfark and Francesco da Milano, went further than lesser musicians in transforming the original composition into an idiomatic and virtuoso instrumental piece by means of a profusion of ever-varying runs, turns and trills."[9] That is the case with the French lutenist Adrian le Roy, whose transcription of Sermisy's chanson *Je n'ay point plus d'affection* is excerpted below. Observe how le Roy, while ornamenting the original chanson heavily, still keeps its melodic contour clearly audible.

Example 4

Original Chanson

Lute Transcription

But ornamentation was not always employed extensively. Fuenllana's arrangement of the *Pleni* from the *Missa Hercules dux Ferrariae* by Josquin, for example, makes no use of ornamentation at all. Instead, the vihuela version remains completely faithful to the original, with the exception of a few re-struck notes and the transposition to a key more suitable to the instruments' characteristics.

It is then important to keep in mind that the art of ornamentation, employed for the sake of adapting a piece from one medium to another, also served a compositional purpose. Once the arranger realized that ornamentation was needed to suggest sustain, the idea that he would need to supply his own ornamentation enabled him to exercise his compositional skills, with the score serving as a basic framework upon which he could develop personal ideas. To illustrate various approaches to ornamentation, example 5, taken from Chiesa's edition of Francesco da Milano's lute works[10], compares three different lute intabulations of Josquin's *Pater Noster*.

Thereupon, it is possible to assert that the ornamentation style was directly related to that of the original compositions of the arranger. For instance, the vihuela fantasias by Luys de Narváez were basically free from homophonic and scale passages. His style was purely contrapuntal, and that is reflected in his intabulation. A small portion of his arrangement of Josquin's chanson *Mille Regretz* is given in example 6.

Example 6

Original Chanson

Vihuela Transcription

Notice how Narváez's ornamentation is set in imitative style, corresponding to the imitations of the original chanson.

Example 5

JOSQUIN DES PRES

FRANCESCO DA MILANO

SIMON GINTZLER

PIETRO TEGHI

Consequently, the ornamentation switches from one voice to another, resulting in a more balanced and varied texture. Narváez's musical personality is also apparent through his boldness of harmonic treatment. In the second to last measure, the tenor voice contains the notes F#-G-F#-G in quarter-notes, all set in consonance with the bass line. Narváez transforms the last G into a dissonant note by delaying the bass note G by one beat.

Back to the subject of ornamentation, an inverted approach was occasionally employed by Francesco da Milano. In his arrangement of *Fort se Lament* by Josquin, the first three measures embody the usual procedures of ornamentation and re-struck notes. But in measure four, da Milano does the opposite by de-ornamenting the original version even though the passage would be easily playable on the lute as is.

Example 7

Original Chanson

Lute Transcription

Francesco da Milano

surprisingly, such patterns are also to be found in the instrumental intabulations from that period. Another type of variation form much used by the vihuelists was the *diferencias*, a form similar to the *glosas*, but this time based on a secular ground or tune, like *Conde Claros* and *Guárdame las Vacas*. The distinction between both terms, however, seems to have not been a very precise one, for Narváez calls his set of variations on the hymn *O Gloriosa Domina diferencias*.

Finally, one last aspect must be mentioned concerning the contribution of intabulations to the emergence of a purely instrumental style. We have already seen how the *Parody Masses* carried procedures common to those of intabulations as well. But a *Parody Mass* was not always a mere re-working of the piece upon which it was based. Instead, often only the themes and motives from the original composition were preserved, and an entirely new polyphonic piece was based on them. Similarly, some vihuela intabulations, especially those by Mudarra and Fuenllana, were radically different from the originals, from which only the opening bars were preserved. The rest of the intabulation was set in *fantasia* style, again based on themes and motives extracted from the original. Fuenllana went further to follow some of his intabulations with original *fantasias* based on their same motives, which he called *fantasia que la remeda* (that imitates it) or *que se sigue* (that follows it).

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, the art of intabulation resulted in a vast repertoire of lute and vihuela pieces whose contribution to the study of performance practice rivals that of contemporary treatises on the subject. Equally important as a valuable source for historical research, intabulations documented the transition from the modal to the harmonic systems, while portraying the birth of the instrumental style.

Today's performers, be their instrument the lute, the vihuela, or even the modern guitar, will likely benefit from these precious treasures, a large portion of which still remain to be explored. It is the hope of the author that the present study will inspire the readers to further research the subject, bringing to the attention of today's performers and scholars this most attractive repertoire. ❏

It is interesting to point out that a vocal genre, the *Parody Mass*, made use of technical procedures similar to those found in intabulations. Likewise, redistributing the voice-leading and adding ornamentation were common features in *Parody Mass* settings. But here, the changes made to the original proceeded from the composer's wish to vary (enhance) a pre-existing piece, whereas in the case of intabulations they served the practical need of overcoming instrumental limitations. An exception to this case was the use of *glosas*.

A term often used by sixteenth-century Spanish musicians, *glosas* referred to variations on a religious theme or hymn. Masses by Franco-Flemish composers frequently served as a basis for *glosas* by such leading musicians as Mudarra, Valderábano and Venegas de Henetrosa. The *Tratado de Glosas* by Diego Ortiz, published in 1553, lists several ornamentation patterns to be used when writing a set of glosas. Not

NOTES:

[1] James Tyler, *The Early Guitar: A History and Handbook* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 45.

[2] Dom Anselm Hughs and Gerald Abraham, ed, *The New Oxford History of Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), III:442.

[3] Rodrigo de Zayas, "The Music of the Vihuelists and its Interpretation," *Guitar Review* 38, (Summer 1973):11.

[4] J.B. Trend, *Luis Milan and the Vihuelists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925), 38-40.

[5] In order to make a comparison between the intabulation and the original easier, in this and some of the following examples the vocal version has been transposed to match the key of the transcription, as well as reduced to one or two staves. The intabulations are transcribed into modern guitar notation.

[6] Howard Mayer Brown, *Music in the Renaissance* (Englewood, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1976),261.

[7] Trend, op. cit., 31-32.

[8] Brown, op. cit., 262.

[9] Ibid, 262-63.

[10] Francesco da Milano, *Opera Completa per Liuto*, ed. Ruggero Chiesa (Milano: Edizioni Suvini Zerboni, 1971),II:ix.

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