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Diogo Alvarez Leite Duarte
University of Denver, Diogo.AlvarezLeiteDuarte@du.edu

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Metric Organization in Modern Guitar Transcriptions of Renaissance Music

An Annotated Bibliography

by Diogo Alvarez

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The concept of meter in music has changed throughout the centuries and many related terms and concepts (such as *bar*, *time signature*, *tactus* and *prolatio*) have either emerged or disappeared from the vocabulary of the professional musician according to the mindset of each period. Consequently, the understanding of metric organization in Renaissance music by modern musicians is compromised, and so are modern editions of said repertoire, which are based in modern music notation. In informed editions, the decisions regarding the use of bar lines, if one is to avoid arbitrariness, should reflect a concern for conveying a metric idea that is as close as possible to the concept in vogue at the time and, at the same time, consider the target audience: a 21st century musician. Therefore, this essay will address the question of how to appropriately use bar lines in modern editions of Renaissance music for guitar. More specifically, it will discuss this topic in the context of transcriptions from vocal works and original music for modern guitar's predecessors.

Dictionary / Encyclopedia articles

Brown, Howard Mayer, and Claus Bockmaier. "Tactus." *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., edited by Stanley Sadie and J. Tyrell. London: Macmillan, 2001. xxiv: 917-8.

The article about *tactus* in the second edition of New Grove examines three possible meanings for the term - the first one more general and related to the concepts of *tempus*, *prolatio* and *proportio*; the second one in the context of keyboard *cantus firmus* settings; and the

third one related to frets in a lute or clavichord and keys in a clavichord or organ. Its most valuable contribution to the topic is briefly discussing different perspectives on the definition of *tactus* in 15th- and 16th-century music as a way to start navigating the topic and, at the same time, displaying lesser-known concepts for the term that can be helpful when studying primary sources in the field.

Dissertations and Theses

Blachly, Alexander. "Mensuration and Tempo in 15th-Century Music: Cut Signatures in Theory and Practice." Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1995. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Alexander Blachly's dissertation investigates the notation of 15th-century music, regarding mensuration, tempo and the concept of *tactus*. By examining the notation used in both 14th and 15th centuries, analyzing the views of theorists from the period with special attention to Tinctoris' writings and reviewing modern editions of this music, Blachly provides a comprehensive study in how the concept of *tactus* and mensuration signs were thought of at the time. On the topic discussed in this bibliography, his chapter reviewing modern editions as well as the transcriptions provided in one of the appendixes are of particular interest. Furthermore, the analysis of theoretical primary sources are also helpful for understanding what *tactus* represented at the time.

Harder, Thomas Lee. "The Vihuela Fantasias from Miguel de Fuenllana's *Orphénica Lyra*: Introduction and Guitar Transcription of Nine Representative Works." D.M.A. diss., Arizona State University, 1992. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Thomas Lee Harder's dissertation is a thorough discussion on Fuenllana's only published work, completed by guitar transcriptions of selected pieces from *Orphénica Lyra*. Harder presents a review of scholarly literature related to his topic of research, a biography

of Fuenllana, a description of his published work, a section on the instruments he composed for, a discussion about the issues concerning the transcriptions, and an analysis of the history and the compositional and improvisational aspects of the fantasia. The author also addresses mainly technical performance practices with special emphasis on the performance with the modern guitar. The dissertation still includes a bibliography, the location of copies of *Orphénica Lyra*, a thematic index of the fantasias transcribed, facsimile reproductions for the pieces and a last transcription and facsimile of an intabulation of a vocal piece. The most relevant aspects of Harder's study for the topic are the review of scholarly works addressing the issues of modern transcriptions of tablature, Harder's own arguments on the matter, and his transcription, which uses no barlines whatsoever.

Journal Articles

Thomas, Bernard. "Renaissance Music on Modern Notation." *Early Music* 5, no. 1 (January 1977): 4-11. JSTOR Arts & Sciences III.

In this article, Bernard Thomas discusses some of the issues modern editors face when editing Renaissance music. Even though the very first sentence in his article states that it does not target musicologists and editors, but the performer using such editions, the discussion of advantages and disadvantages of usual decisions in editions of works from this period is very fruitful for scholars navigating this topic. After a brief introduction, Thomas moves on to discuss note values, barring, *musica ficta*, pitch, scoring/performing medium and underlay of the text. The section about barring, the longest in the article, evaluates four different approaches to barlines, with some examples of problematic passages. Even though the examples and some of the discussion do not fully contemplate the issues of single-staff notation and tablature notation, the bibliography is also of interest to the topic, since it indicates sources related to the lute.

Scores

Daza, Esteban. *The Fantasias for Vihuela*. Edited by John Griffiths. Recent Researches in the Music of the Renaissance, edited by James Haar and Howard Mayer Brown, vol. 54. Madison, WI: A-R Editions, 1982.

This edition by John Griffiths presents both a two-stave transcription of the first book in Daza's *El Parnasso* and a re-engraved edition in tablature notation. His work is helpful for providing a cleaner and reader-friendly version of the tablature notation in the original source. The two-stave transcription is relevant as a different example of barring, in which Griffiths defines barlines for every two *compases* in Daza's work. The preface provides a translation to English of the introductory text in *El Parnasso* as well as some biographical information on the composer, notes on performance practice and editorial notes.

Milan, Luys. *El maestro*. Valencia: Francisco Díaz Romano, 1536. IMSLP.

Luys Milan's *El Maestro* stands out among the vihuela collections of the time by mentioning not only proportion in its explanatory introduction, but also the Spanish term *mesura*, which relates to mensuration. Milan's use of actual mensuration signs throughout *El Maestro* is another important point of investigation on the topic, as much as it is his apparent flexible treatment of the *tactus*, or *compás*, when discussing *consonancias* and *redobles*. The fifth *quaderno* introduces proportion signs as well as this flexibility with tempo.

Mudarra, Alonso. *Tres libros de musica en cifras para vihuela*. Facsimile ed. Introduction by James Tyler. Monaco: Editions Chanterelle, 1980.

In Mudarra's *Tres libros de musica en cifras para vihuela*, the musical works are accompanied by an introductory explanation of the tablature and the signs used throughout the work. In this preface, one can find the composer's use of signs related to tempo markings,

which are also discussed in James Tyler's introduction. What is most relevant to the topic in question is, however, the relation that these signs bear to mensuration and proportion signs. That particular aspect, although not discussed in Tyler's text, can be examined and reflected upon by analyzing the facsimile reproduction of the original text.

Narváez, Luys de. *Los seys libros del Delphin de musica de cifras para tañer Vihuela* [...]. 6 vols. Valladolid: Diego Fernandez de Cordoua, 1538. IMSLP.

Los seys libros del Delphin are a collection of polyphonic music for the vihuela by the Spanish composer and vihuelist Luys de Narváez. His work does not only contain some of the most well-known pieces from the vihuela repertoire but is also a valuable source for research on tablature and Renaissance music. After a prologue and some *coplas* (Spanish poetic form) for the dedicatee, Narváez presents some guidelines to reading the tablature. Of great relevance to the topic of barring is his explanation of the use of *compás* and *compasillo* and the indications of proportions. The musical works in these volumes, which vary from instrumental fantasias to intabulation of vocal works and *villancicos* for voice and vihuela, are a great example of the use of these concepts, especially the use of proportion and how it relates to the use of the *compás*. The fantasia in the eighth mode (*octavo tono*) of the first volume of the collection is one of the pieces which can be fruitful for the topic of barlines.

Pisador, Diego. *Libro de Musica de Vihuela* [...]. 7 vols. Salamanca: Diego Pisador, 1552. IMSLP.

Diego Pisador's *Libro de Musica de Vihuela*, although less well-known and less frequently performed than other sources of vihuela repertoire, is a valuable source and an impressive collection of both original compositions and intabulations of vocal works. Throughout its seven volumes, printed by Pisador himself, one finds variation sets, romances, *pavanas*, *sonetos*, fantasias, *villancicos*, intabulations of eight mass cycles by Josquin

des Prez and other vocal works by composers such as Adrian Willaert, both for solo vihuela and voice and vihuela. The intabulations of Josquin's masses can be especially fruitful for researches on this topic, given that it is possible to compare the original publications of such masses, written in mensural notation, with the treatment Pisador gives to the passages with different mensuration signs and proportion.

Secondary or Tertiary Monographs

Apel, Willi. *The Notation of Polyphonic Music, 900-1600*. 4th ed. Mediaeval Academy of America 38. Cambridge, MA: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1953.

Willi Apel's *The Notation of Polyphonic Music, 900-1600* is one of the most important works in the field, and it is cited by most works on the topic. Apel's book is divided in three parts – notation for soloist music, white mensural notation for ensemble music and black notation for ensemble music. Each part is subdivided in chapters, each discussing a different form of notation. The chapter on Lute Tablatures is particularly important, given that it even presents some discussion on the topic of barring with a couple of musical examples. However, the rest of the work should not be deemed irrelevant, especially the chapter on white mensural notation, which provides interesting argumentation in the topic of mensuration signs and proportion, as well as *tempus*, *prolatio* and *modus* – concepts that can be considered when researching the use of barlines in modern editions of Renaissance music.

DeFord, Ruth I. *Tactus, Mensuration and Rhythm in Renaissance Music*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

This book by Ruth DeFord is a recent major undertaking in the topic of *tactus* and mensuration in Renaissance music. DeFord's work analyzes sources of information, the different definitions of *tactus* among theorists of the time and its relation to rhythm, the signs used and tempo. In a second part, however, she discusses practical examples and shows the

issues arising from a strict application of theoretical concepts to actual repertoire. This is a valuable source for the topic, for it sheds some light onto how one can understand the use of such concepts in performance practice and what they would represent for the performer, which can, in turn, assist in making informed decisions for modern editions.

Houle, George. *Meter in Music, 1600-1800: Performance, Perception, and Notation*. Music: Scholarship and Performance, edited by Thomas Binkley. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.

Although Houle's work focuses on another time period, its depiction of the changing concept of meter in time is important if one is to investigate how to use this very concept. Detailed attention should be paid to the first chapter of the book, which discusses the origins of the terms and signs related to meter in connection to the ones related to mensuration and *tactus*. Furthermore, the other chapters of the book can also be of interest to the topic, such as Chapter IV, which analyzes the perception of meter.