



Beyond the Basics

The Art and Science of Playing the Lute

Quick Release (With thanks to Pat O'Brien)

This is the most important principle of all. It can transform your playing.

Quick Release is the action of releasing all tension in a right hand finger immediately upon stroking through a course. With a good Quick Release, one can play vigorously or rapidly and still remain relaxed, since the finger rests for a fraction of a second between each stroke. (It is the *holding of tension* in the fingers, hands or arms that binds a player's movement, blunts his/her sensitivity and can even cause physical damage.) In short, Quick Release is the art of getting out of your own way.

Hold your right hand in front of you, with your palm facing downward. Be sure your fingers are completely relaxed. From this position, "flip" your right hand fingers downward, one at a time, with a left hand finger. Observe how the right hand fingers effortlessly snap back into their original position. It is this reflex that the Quick Release draws upon for its effectiveness.

When you stroke a course, feel the pressure build up as you push the course toward the soundboard. At the moment of release (bow-and-arrow like) you must completely release all tension in the finger. When done correctly, the finger snaps quickly back to its starting position, ready for the next stroke.

This can be a little tricky at first. The temptation is to "throw" your finger back to its starting point through muscular effort; but that defeats the purpose of the Quick Release. And muscular effort is not nearly so fast as the automatic reflex that comes through suddenly releasing all muscular tension.

After practicing the Quick Release with the individual fingers, try the thumb. Then try two, three and four voice chords.

I can't emphasize enough, just how worthwhile the development of the Quick Release can be. It really has the power to transform your playing. But that power is in the *practice* and *development* of the technique. And it takes concentration and persistence to keep from falling back into old habits of holding tension.

The ease and relaxation that naturally comes from a good Quick Release technique dramatically improves speed, accuracy and sensitivity of the right hand fingers. The sensation of playing, of touching the strings, becomes much more pleasurable. And I have found that when the right hand is very relaxed, the left hand also tends to relax, improving its performance as well. Most importantly, Quick Release can impart more physical freedom than most lutenists think is possible to achieve while playing. And that can lead to musical freedom as well.