



Beyond the Basics

The Art and Science of Playing the Lute

Trebles

On the Renaissance lute, playing trebles can be an important part of your daily practice routine. (By “trebles,” I am referring to those single-line pieces that make up much of the lute duet and consort lesson literature.) On the lute, treble playing can fill the role that scale exercises play on many other instruments. Only trebles are more fun, and besides - they’re music! Trebles make a great warm-up, a great technique builder, a time for technical self analysis and an opportunity for experimentation.

Many aspects of technique can be addressed in the context of treble playing: posture, holding the lute, left hand position, left hand shifts, left hand relaxation, right hand position, string crossing, right hand relaxation, quick release, control of dynamics, scale bursts and velocity. In particular, it is a good way to develop and refine thumb-under technique.

Treble playing can be your laboratory for experimenting with your technique, refining your technique, increasing your fluidity/relaxation and building overall speed. One can experiment with different angles of attack, various depths of follow-through, and the degrees of tip-joint flexibility (or resistance) in the right hand fingers.

Trebles will give you a particularly good opportunity to concentrate on relaxation and fluidity. It is best not to push your trebles to top speed. Constant pushing tends to create habits of tension, which are counterproductive. It is best to practice trebles at a comfortable speed while concentrating on fluidity, relaxation and the most efficient technique possible. As your efficiency and relaxation deepen, greater freedom and speed will come of their own accord.

Treble time is a great time to build the habit of always playing cleanly. It’s simple, but it takes discipline: Always play slowly enough to play each passage cleanly. Isolate passages to increase your fluidity during tricky fingering passages, left hand shifts, unusual right hand string crossings, etc. As you gradually increase the speed, be sure to stay within a tempo at which you can play with great fluidity and accuracy. If you begin to hear mistakes in your playing, drop the tempo to the point where you can always play the passage cleanly and relaxed.

Whether you are a beginner or an advanced player, trebles will help you to become a better lutenist. I heartily recommend that you set aside a portion of your daily practice routine to focus on trebles.

A Prelude

M.L. Lute Book, f. 2

First system of musical notation for 'A Prelude'. It consists of a single-line treble staff with rhythmic flags above the notes. The notes are: a, c, d, a, c, d, f, d, a, c, d, a, c, d, b, d, a, c, d, a, c, c, a, b, d, a, c, d, a, c, d.

Second system of musical notation for 'A Prelude'. It consists of a single-line treble staff with rhythmic flags above the notes. The notes are: a, c, d, c, a, d, c, a, d, b, a, c, a, f, c, d, f, d, a, c, d, c, d, a, c, a, c, d, a.

Third system of musical notation for 'A Prelude'. It consists of a single-line treble staff with rhythmic flags above the notes. The notes are: d, a, c, d, c, d, a, c, a, b, d, a, d, a, b, d, b, c, a, b, a, a. The system ends with a double bar line and a fermata.

John Johnson (Dd. 3. 18 f. 1)
Ground arr. Lyle Nordstrom
from Trumbull lute book

Rogero - treble

ac ecafec efelh feceac ecca ecaac ecafec

ecaca h fecac ace a dca dca ca ac dace ac

ehf hfe hface ace fcfeaecec eca ca ea ce aca ea c

ea ce ace fecaca ec ea ce acec ace ace fecaca dca dca

ca cd ac d f h f e f h e f h f c e f c e f eca e ac e a dca dca

ca cd ace acacefecaca efeca ecaac ececafefec

efeca eca hfe hfe ffeaca ececa eca dca dca ca cd

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