



Beyond the Basics

The Art and Science of Playing the Lute

A Lighter Touch in Rapid Passages

In general, play fast passages with less weight than a slower moving line. This works well on both technical and musical levels.

Technical: Playing with a lighter touch makes rapid passages easier to play. It is easier to relax the hands, and increases your sensitivity of touch.

Musical: The musical function of most rapid passages is ornamental. As ornaments, these rapid notes (a.k.a. diminutions) deserve a lighter touch than more important melody notes.

Ideally, the touch should be constantly varied to reflect the rise and fall of the line. Subtle shadings of touch can bring a long line of 16th notes vividly to life! And some important notes within a fast passage should receive extra weight for emphasis. These are often key melody notes, which are imbedded in rapid passages. They can be brought out more clearly and easily if the majority of the rapid notes are played lightly.

In "Queen Elizabeth's Galliard" by John Dowland, there are several opportunities to use a lighter right hand touch to good effect:

1. In the second half of measure 2 of the piece, the bass must move very quickly with three successive thumb strokes. They should be played lightly by the thumb.
2. In measure 8, a phrase is ended with a rising ornamental scale passage. A light touch with a bit of diminuendo will help to taper the phrase ending gracefully.
3. Beginning with line 9, we have an ornamented repeat of the first strain of music. Notice that the original melody of measures 1, 2 and 3 is embedded in the rapid passages of measure 9, 10 and 11. The rapid ornamentation should be played lightly. But one could also place a very subtle stress on those notes that were a part of the original melody. This will sound clunky if overdone, but with a subtle touch, you can help listeners hear the original melody embedded in the diminutions.

4. In measure 12, the ascending scale passage acts as a pickup to the next measure. It would be ideal to begin this scale with a very light touch, and gain more firmness and weight as the scale progresses.
5. In measures 14 and 15, we have more diminutions which are a decorated repeat of measures 6 and 7. Once again, a light touch with slightly more weight on the key melody notes would be appropriate.
6. Even though the fingering is different, the scale passage in measure 16 is identical to measure 8. Again, a light touch with a diminuendo will help to create a graceful phrase ending.
7. In the second half of this piece, many dotted rhythms occur. As a general rule, the short note which follows a longer dotted note should receive a lighter touch. The dotted rhythms in measures 19, 23, 27, 29 and 31 may all be treated in this way.
8. The ascending scale passage in measure 31 should be played lightly. This will help bring out its playful character, and also make it easier to execute cleanly. However, the last note of the scale, which is also the last note in the measure, could receive a little more weight.

The most sacred Queene Elizabeth, her Galliard.

John Dowland, Batcheler of Musick / Varietie...1610 p.46

The musical score is presented in a single system with 33 measures. The notation includes a treble clef, a 3/2 time signature, and various rhythmic values such as quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes, as well as rests. The melody is decorated with many accidentals and dynamic markings like 'f' and 'p'. The bass line consists of a few notes, primarily 'a' and 'c'. Measure numbers 2 through 33 are indicated above the staff.