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Book Review: "Performance on Lute, Guitar and Vihuela: Historical Performance Practice and Interpretation" by Victor Anand Coelho

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**Book review: Coelho, Victor Anand, ed.
*Performance on Lute, Guitar and Vihuela:
Historical Performance Practice and
Interpretation*. Cambridge University Press,
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A volume on historical performance practice is always a welcome endeavor, if sometimes controversial. Studies specifically devoted to the lute and guitar families of instruments are infrequent at best, enough reason for this collection of essays to be appreciated. A paperback edition of a book originally published in 1997, the volume comprises nine essays that cover a varied range of performance practice issues on period instruments from roughly c.1500 to 1850. A large percentage of the essays focus on Italian music or on the lute; yet, despite this as well as its tendency towards pragmatism regarding the subjects under discussion, the topics themselves do not complement each other in a manner that effectively creates a unified whole. Of course, performance practice is a vast subject on any instrument and is (thankfully) perpetually open to discussion. As such, any collection of essays on the subject is likely to throw light on some aspects while leaving others untouched. A good number of the present collaborators are also seasoned performers as well as researchers, essential in a book of this nature. Via different roads, all contributors seem to have reached a similar conclusion: the mercurial quality of historical performance practice, at every turn emphatic on the need for flexibility.

The first essay, by Vladimir Ivanoff, is a condensed version of his 1988 study of the 'Pesaro Manuscript' which contains fifteenth-century plectrum lute music, the earliest source found to date. It complements previous studies on the same field by David Fallows and Christopher Page, and is rendered more valuable by its constant reference to the technical aspects of the instrument. Dinko Fabris focuses on lute-tablature instructions in Italy from 1507 to 1759. The quality and quantity of sources here mentioned make this an invaluable tool of reference on the subject. The discussion of the contents is illuminating, and makes one wish for more articles on the topic. Lute-song performance is discussed by Daniel Fischlin in the only essay that does not address technical issues of performance but rather performing context. His conclusions lie at a different end of the spectrum than those of Robert Toft and Anthony Rooley, pragmatically

emphasize intimacy in performance and argue for the rejection of aesthetic demands imposed by modern concert performance.

Late-sixteenth-century styles of accompaniment on the lute are discussed by Kevin Mason, who chooses to focus on written-out lute accompaniments in an effort to explain the contradictions commonly found in later continuo intabulations. The approach seems to be less centered on performance practice itself and more on the historical study of the origins of this specific performance practice. As is the case in the Fabris essay, the lists of sources here are invaluable for both researcher and performer. Victor Coelho's own contribution analyzes plurality in performance as suggested by the numerous manuscript sources of seventeenth-century Italian lute music. His main argument emphasizes the different performing traditions of professional, courtly, and amateur lutenists and how these affect the concepts of authority and autonomy with respect to specific pieces of solo lute music. Wallace Rave's approach to the performing instructions found in seventeenth-century French lute music sources is that of a concise summary of technical instructions and symbols in the notation for lute, an approach that is somewhat in opposition to Coelho's own. In discussing Jehan Basset's treatise from Marin Mersenne's *Harmonie Universelle*, Burwell's lute tutor and Perrine's staff-notation prints of lute music (the Robarts lute book is also briefly addressed), Rave thoroughly surveys discrepancies found in the different printed and manuscript sources, pointing to the large number of inconsistencies found as indicative of the performance variations of what he calls "core compositions."

In an impeccable summary of the vihuela's history and technique, John Griffiths achieves a balance between the presentation of primary musical and literary sources on the instrument (in addition to numerous secondary ones) and the examination of the instrument's technique and historical importance. Its history is full of contradictions, not the least of them the fact that the characteristics of the two surviving instruments (the one located in Quito probably not even a vihuela in the sixteenth-century sense but more likely a six-course guitar labeled anachronistically) are at such odds with the surviving music. A third instrument, known as the Chambure vihuela (found in Paris, Cité de la Musique, inv. E.0748)—the only vihuela surviving in original condition—is not mentioned in the essay, due, in all likelihood, to the date of publication of the original essay, yet its characteristics fully support Griffiths' conclusions on the instrument and its technique. Gary Boye's overview of the seventeenth-century five-course guitar's stringing possibilities is limited to Italian printed sources, the essay itself derived from one aspect of his excellent dissertation on Giovanni Battista Granata and Italian printed guitar music of the period. Given the fact that "appropriate" stringing is perhaps one of the more relevant issues on performance practice on the guitar, the clarity of the study is without doubt gratifying, even more so, because of its acknowledgement of possible regional differences in practice that render a single, all-encompassing tuning a utopian pursuit. Surprisingly, Boye omits Foriano Pico's 1608 print (the source of the most commonly copied tuning instructions found in Italian printed guitar books). This topic has since been approached in other essays by James Tyler (*The Guitar and its Music*) and Monica Hall (The Lute Society Booklet no. 9; *Baroque*

Guitar Stringing: A Survey of the Evidence), which reach similar conclusions to those of Boye, yet also survey existing manuscript sources.

Richard Savino provides closing material to the collection by discussing performance practice on the classical guitar in the period covering 1770–1850. His essay reads more like a brief tutor for the instrument, discussing the five-course, six-course, five-string, and six-string guitars, but unfortunately leaves aside important variants of the instrument by dismissing them as peripheral. This view is comprehensible from the amount of solo music that survives for the different types of guitars, but does not take into consideration the large amount of vocal pieces that feature, for example, the English guitar as an accompanimental instrument. Yet, his essay is probably the one that focuses most specifically on modern interpretation, providing numerous insights into the instrument's various techniques that come from extensive performance experience. This makes it very valuable as a reference tool for performers.

Period performance-practice awareness is becoming increasingly commonplace for a wide range of instruments. This collection of essays, the first (and hopefully not last) entirely devoted to the subject, is a fundamental volume of reference for anyone interested in issues pertaining to lutes and early guitars. It is only a first step, yet a considerably firm one.