

SOLO LYRA VIOL MUSIC OF TOBIAS HUME (c. 1579-1645): HISTORICAL CONTEXT
AND TRANSCRIPTION FOR MODERN GUITAR

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The seventeenth century in England produced a large and historically significant body of music for the viola da gamba played “lyra-way.” Broadly defined, playing “lyra-way” on the viol meant playing from tablature notation in a polyphonic style. Most players of plucked strings such as lute and guitar are familiar with tablature and, as a result, have a decisive advantage when attempting to explore this music. Other factors that make lyra viol repertory potentially attractive to the modern guitarist are its chordal textures, similarities in physical properties of the instruments, and many points of connection regarding the principles of left hand technique.

The purpose of this study is two-fold: 1) to illuminate the historical and cultural context of the seventeenth-century English lyra viol music in general and that of Tobias Hume (c. 1579-1645) in particular; and 2) to present an idiomatic transcription for the modern guitar of four representative pieces from Hume’s 1605 collection *Musicall Humours*.

Musicall Humours, published in London in 1605, is one of the first and most significant collections of music for the lyra viol. The collection is both ambitious and groundbreaking, being the largest repertory of solo music for the lyra viol by a single composer in the early seventeenth century.

Since the modern guitar, although not as contrapuntally facile as the keyboard, is nevertheless capable of executing two- or three-voice polyphony, reconstruction of the polyphonic implications of solo lyra viol music becomes the first step in creating an idiomatic arrangement. The differences in acoustical properties and technical capabilities between the viol and the modern guitar have to be taken into consideration when deciding on the degree to which

harmony must be filled in. Generally, thinner textures of the lyra viol music, when transferred directly to the guitar, tend to sound incomplete. The arranger's musical sensitivity and intimate familiarity with both instruments must guide the final stages of the transcription process.

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INTRODUCTION

Background and Significance

The seventeenth century in England produced a large and historically significant body of music for the viola da gamba played “lyra-way.” Broadly defined, playing “lyra-way” on the viol meant playing from tablature notation in a style that could be both melodic and chordal, but most characteristically polyphonic.¹ The notion of performing polyphonic music on a bowed instrument with a curved bridge was not an originally English idea, since it can be traced to mid-sixteenth century Italy and the viol treatises of Silvestro Ganassi.² However, the English did take this idea further than any country on the Continent. The English repertory for the lyra viol represents a musical tradition of great richness and ingenuity. The lyra viol could execute polyphonic writing similar to that of the lute and play solo lines like the later fashionable violin and cello, thus functioning as both a harmonic and melodic instrument. A great amount of music of the highest quality was written for the instrument by composers such as Tobias Hume, Alfonso Ferrabosco the Younger, John Jenkins, John Coprario, William Corkine, Simon Ives, William Young, John Playford, Christopher Simpson, William Lawes, Thomas Ford, and others, spanning the entire seventeenth century and encompassing within its range the changes in musical style underway in England as well as on the Continent. There are eighteen English sources of printed music for lyra viol, issued from 1600 to 1682, and a great number still exist only in manuscript.

Tablature notation is foreign to most modern bowed string players, making the English lyra viol repertory seem daunting and less accessible than repertoire in standard notation. However, most players of plucked strings such as lute and guitar are familiar with tablature and,

¹ Frank Traficante, “Lyra Viol,” *Grove Music Online* (accessed March 31, 2007).

² Silvestro Ganassi, *Regula Rubertina* (Bologna, 1542) and *Letitione Seconda (Pur Della Pratica di Sonare il Violone D’arco da Tasti)* (Bologna, 1543).

as a result, have a decisive advantage when attempting to explore this music. Other factors that make lyra viol repertory potentially attractive to the modern guitarist are its predominantly polyphonic texture, similarities in physical properties of the instruments (both are fretted instruments with six strings and similar tunings), many points of connection regarding the principles of left hand technique, and, finally, the ease with which lyra viol pieces seem to lend themselves to transcription and adaptation for the modern guitar.

Purpose

The fascinating transitional period of late Renaissance-early Baroque music is dramatically underrepresented in the guitar repertoire. The main impetus behind the present study is a desire to enrich the guitar's range with works from this musical period and to increase guitarists' awareness of the suitability of lyra viol music for performance on the modern guitar.

The purpose of this study is two-fold: 1) to illuminate the historical and cultural context of the seventeenth-century English lyra viol music in general and that of Tobias Hume (c. 1579-1645) in particular; and 2) to present an idiomatic transcription for the modern guitar of four representative pieces ("Harke Harke," "A Question," "Touch Me Lightly," and "Tickell Tickell") from Hume's 1605 collection *Musicall Humours*. I will approach the transcription process with this overarching principle: An effective transcription must make full use of the idiomatic characteristics of the new instrument to create a musical work that succeeds in sounding like it was conceived with this instrument in mind, while preserving the integrity of the original composition.

State of Research

The tremendous surge of interest in early music in the twentieth century has brought with it research on the history of the viol and its repertoire. Performance of the viol repertory on

replicas of period instruments was initiated by the early music pioneer Arnold Dolmetsch (1858-1940) and his family. Among the earliest studies were Arnold Dolmetsch's 1904 essay "The Viols," published in the periodical *The Connoisseur*, Thurston Dart's essay on the viol in *Musical Instruments Through the Ages* (1961), Nathalie Dolmetsch's *The Viola da Gamba: Its Origin and History, Its Technique and Musical Resources* (1962), and Frank Traficante's Ph. D. dissertation on the Mansell lyra viol manuscript (1965). One of the most important lyra viol primary sources—John Playford's 1652 treatise *Musick's Recreation on the Viol, Lyra-Way*—was reprinted in 1960 in facsimile with an introduction by Nathalie Dolmetsch.

In the seventies and eighties, lyra viol was the subject of several master's theses and dissertations, including John Sawyer's "An Anthology of Lyra Viol Music in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Manuscripts Music School D245-7" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1972), Paul Furnas's "The Manchester Gamba Book": a Primary Source of Ornaments for the Lyra Viol" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1978), Ginger Lee Pullen's "Five Collections of Lyra Viol Music Published by John Playford" (M.A. thesis, The University of British Columbia, 1979), and Ila Hartzler Stoltzfus's "The Lyra Viol in Consort with Other Instruments" (Ph.D. diss., Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College, 1982). The focus on specific collections of lyra viol music, evident in three of the four works, points to the still urgent need for close examination of the available primary sources.

Despite the several detailed studies mentioned above, the lyra viol repertoire has remained relatively unexplored by the viola da gamba enthusiasts, largely due to the obscure notation and the many alternate tunings often called for in the music. However, the last decades of the twentieth century saw an increase in the amount of lyra viol publications in the original tablature notation, among these John Jenkins's lyra viol consorts, published as part of the

performance-oriented series *Recent Research in the Music of the Baroque Era*, John Moss's *Lessons for the Basse-Viol on the Common-Tuning, and Many Other New Tunings*, published by Dovehouse Editions, and others. Recordings of the lyra viol music are a recent phenomenon. Most extensive is Jordi Savall's recording of select works from Tobias Hume's *Musical Humours* for the Alia Vox label.

No transcriptions of the lyra viol repertoire exist for solo classical guitar, a surprising lacuna considering the similarities between the instruments. However, one significant precedent of transcribing viola da gamba music for the modern guitar has been set by Cem Duruoz's recent transcriptions of Marin Marais's "Pièces de viole," recorded by him on the Centaur label and published by Productions d'Oz. Although quite different from the lyra viol repertory, Marais's music fares extremely well in the guitar idiom. Duruoz's successful incorporation of the viol music into modern guitar repertoire points to further possibilities and new directions of research in this area.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Origins of the Viola da Gamba in the Spanish *Vihuela*

Viol's unlikely parent, *vihuela* was a favorite court instrument in sixteenth-century Spain. It was a guitar-like fretted plucked instrument with six courses of double strings (except the top course, which was usually single). During the height of its popularity, musicians started experimenting with fitting the instrument with a curved bridge and playing it with a bow, in the manner of the Moorish fiddle *rabāb*, common in the Kingdom of Aragon.³ Thurston Dart, in his essay on the viol, describes this hybrid process thus:

...the cross-fertilization consisted of applying to [*vihuela de mano*] a playing technique which had always been associated with an entirely different family of instruments, the fiddles, in which there had never been any frets round the neck and the strings were always sounded with a bow.⁴

This offspring of the traditional *vihuela de mano* (literally, “vihuela of the hand”) became known as *vihuela de arco* (“vihuela of the bow”). The new instrument retained the six strings (now all single) and frets of its predecessor, both characteristics facilitating the playing of chords. Several sizes of the bowed *vihuela* were developed to broaden the range in ensemble playing. The largest of them, the bass, had to be held between the legs of the player or rested on the ground in an upright position while the player either stood or sat on a stool behind it. Spanish musicians who traveled to Italy brought the new family of instruments with them; Italians first called it *viola spagnola*, then adopted the term *viola da gamba* (“leg viol”) because of the sitting position. From Italy, *viola da gamba* spread to other European countries and eventually to England.

³ Ian Woodfield, *The Early History of the Viol* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 53.

⁴ Thurston Dart, “The Viols,” in *Musical Instruments Through the Ages*, ed. Anthony Baines (New York: Walker and Company, 1961), 169.

Introduction of the Viol to England

Accounts of “vialles” being played in the royal court date back to the beginning of the reign of Henry VIII. In 1526, the King hired two Flemish viol players into permanent employment at the court. In 1540, Henry VIII enlarged his viol ensemble to eight by inviting a complete consort of six viol players from Venice, Milan, and Cremona, and appointed them as his “newe vials.”⁵ Even after this event, however, the instrument did not immediately become fashionable outside the royal court. The situation changed dramatically when in the mid-sixteenth century viol got introduced into the curriculum of London choir schools such as St. Paul’s and Westminster, where it quickly became a standard part of the children’s musical education. There is enough evidence to attribute the eventual popularity of the viol in England to its inclusion in the music schools’ curriculum: “...the training of several generations of young choristers in the art of viol playing during the second half of the sixteenth century was of vital importance in helping to prepare the ground for the sudden upsurge of interest in the instrument among amateurs in the early seventeenth century.”⁶ By the beginning of the seventeenth century, viol consort was a standard instrumental ensemble in England, consisting of two trebles, two tenors, and two basses.

Derivation of the English Term “Lyra Viol”; Connection with the Italian *Lira da Braccio* and *Lirone*

The English term “lyra,” originating from the Italian names for instruments such as *lira da braccio* and *lirone*, indicates that there was a perceived similarity in the musical function between lyra viol and the two Italian instruments. *Lira da braccio*, designed for sustained chordal playing, was used by courtly Italian poet-musicians of the fifteenth and sixteenth century

⁵ Woodfield, *Early History*, 208.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 227.

to accompany improvised recitations of lyric and narrative poetry. It was erroneously believed to have relationship to ancient culture, especially the Greeks (hence “lira”). *Lirone*, also called *lira da gamba* and *arciviolatalira*, was the bass counterpart to *lira da braccio* that outlived its smaller predecessor well into the Baroque era; it had a wide fretted neck and a body size comparable to that of a bass viol. The *lirone* had from nine to fourteen strings on the fingerboard and from two to four drone strings; its main function, just like *lira da braccio*'s, was to play sustained harmonies to accompany the voice. Three to six strings, some of them usually open, could be bowed together because of a re-entrant tuning system. The sound of one *lirone* was often compared with that of the organ or a consort of viols. The instrument played an important role in *intermedio* repertory and in basso continuo ensembles of early Florentine operas, such as Jacopo Peri's *Euridice* (1600) and Francesca Caccini's *La Liberazione di Ruggiero* (1625).

Alessandro Striggio (1540-1592), instrumentalist and principal composer at the Medici court, was considered one of the greatest virtuosos of the sixteenth century on the *lira da braccio* and *lirone*. In 1567, Cosimo I de' Medici, Duke of Florence, sent Striggio as an emissary to the English court for 15 days. It is possible that Striggio introduced the English to the idea of sustained chord-playing on a bowed instrument by demonstrating on his *lira da gamba*. In fact, around 1560, Alfonso Ferrabosco I brought a *lirone* with him to England when he left Bologna to enter the service of Queen Elizabeth I⁷. As early as 1542, Silvestro Ganassi was one of the first to draw the comparison between *lira da gamba* and viola da gamba played in a chordal style.⁸ *Lira da braccio* and *lirone* became the inspiration for chordal accompaniments on the viola da gamba and the source of the English name “lyra viol.”

⁷ Nathalie Dolmetsch, “The Lyra Viol and Playing on the Viol “LyraWay” [1965], preface to John Playford, *Musick's Recreation on the Viol, Lyra-Way* [1682] (London: Hinrichsen Edition Ltd, 1965), viii.

⁸ Ganassi, *Regula*.

Although attempts have been made to draw a sharp organological distinction between standard bass viol and lyra viol, structurally there seems to have been little or no difference between them. There were experiments throughout the seventeenth century with adding sympathetic strings to the lyra viol to add resonance to chords, but that did not become standard practice.⁹ The viols intended specifically for playing the lyra viol repertory were usually smaller, their bridges made flatter and the strings lighter for easier chord playing. However, writers of the day seem to agree that, if only one bass viol was available, it could be used both for playing in consort (in standard tuning) and solo lyra viol repertoire (usually in an alternate tuning). It is better, then, to think of lyra viol as a way of playing rather than a separate instrument.

The Seventeenth-Century English Lyra Viol Tradition

In sixteenth-century England, the viol was associated most firmly with the performance of contrapuntal ensemble music, thus perfectly fitting the Renaissance ideal of polyphony. Both Thurston Dart and Ian Woodfield confirm this:

By the latter part of the [sixteenth] century, the viol had risen to a position of unquestioned eminence for the playing of “serious” contrapuntal music.

There are few records of the violins ever having been admitted at this time to such fields of musical activity in any country in Europe...¹⁰

What kind of music was played by the choirboy viol consorts of the mid 16th century? A good case can be made in support of the view that textless polyphonic music of the period, by far the largest of which consists of “In Nomine” settings, was associated in some way with their activities, either as public performers or as private students of music.¹¹

⁹ As in the case of Daniel Farrant, an early lyra viol composer, mentioned in Nathalie Dolmetsch, *The Viola da Gamba: Its Origin and History, Its Technique and Musical Resources* (London: Hinrichsen Edition Ltd, 1962), 75.

¹⁰ Dart, “The Viols,” in *Musical Instruments*, 170.

¹¹ Woodfield, *Early History*, 217.

By the second decade of the seventeenth century, the musical role of the viol had changed. In many ways, the viol played “lyra-way” had challenged the lute because it had learned “to play like a lute” with the advantage of a stronger and sustained sound. Through its development of the solo capabilities of the instrument, the English lyra viol tradition of the seventeenth century led the way for the change in musical tastes towards such characteristically Baroque qualities as a “vertical” rather than “horizontal” concept of sonority, loosening of the strict contrapuntal rules for expressive purposes, and emphasis on melody and bass in dialogue with each other. In contrast to standard viol, a large part of whose repertoire was consort music, the solo aspect of playing became central to lyra viol repertory. Lyra viol was self-sufficient because it could execute scalar passages alternating with double stops and full harmonies. Far from the rather instrument-neutral composition style of the Renaissance, in which ensemble parts could often be played on a variety of instruments (or even sung by voices), lyra viol repertory represents a highly idiomatic style of instrumental writing. Its composers made use of *style brisé*, as in the music for the lute and the harpsichord, with its free appearance and disappearance of polyphonic parts and implied counterpoint. The technical and musical demands of the lyra repertory has been described by Gerald Hayes thus:

...nothing short of a perfect technique and a sound musical sense will serve to permit the complexities of lyra music to emerge in their true relations.

The most careful tonal treatment and phrasing are necessary for the imitative contrapuntal parts to be made clear, and there are several points of technique to be observed, those directed to emphasizing the correct note when several are played together, and to the fingering that shall ensure the sustaining of notes for their correct duration.¹²

¹² Gerald R. Hayes, *Musical Instruments and Their Music, 1500-1750, vol. II*, (London: University Press, 1928), 134.

A central concept of lyra viol left hand technique, alluded to by Hayes, became “the hold”—the necessity of holding down fretting fingers until they are needed somewhere else. By continuing to stop the string after it’s been played, the player increased the resonance of the instrument and gave the played note longer sustain. This technique partially compensated for the bowing limitation of being unable to play non-adjacent strings simultaneously, accomplished easily on the lute. Polyphonic effect could be thus achieved on one instrument. The plucked-instrument origins of the viol resurfaced in the favorite device of English lyra viol composers—“the thump”—the plucking of strings with fingers of the left hand while the right hand remained on the bow, allowing rapid alternation between plucked and bowed notes and the resulting illusion of two distinct instruments playing at once.

As an instrument with both melodic and harmonic capabilities, lyra viol was an instrument perfectly suited to solitary practice and music-making. Roger North, in his essay “Musick to Various Intents,” agrees that

...with respect to amusement, and releif of an active mind distressed with either too much, or too little employment, nothing under the sun hath that vertue, as a solitary application to Musick...It is most conducing to use such instruments that touch the accords [chords], for the harmony yeilds more pleasure than any single-toned instrument can doe...I knew one who was the greatest Justiciar, and one of the best men of his time, who in his youth became a very good musitian, and in his chamber used (in a voluntary way) to divert himself with touching his lyra viol, lute fashion upon his knee, and essaying his voice thereupon. And I have heard him say that if he had not had that refreshment, he had never bin a lawyer; that is, he could not have kept his chamber.¹³

North’s account leads us to suggest that in the second half of the seventeenth century (when he most likely came into contact with the mentioned lawyer), lyra viol was known to be

¹³ Roger North, *Roger North on Music, Being a Selection from his Essays Written During the Years c.1695-1728*, transcribed and edited by John Wilson (London: Novello and Company, 1959), 258.

played by upper-class amateur musicians who often lacked the time and the company to devote to ensemble rehearsals. John Playford recognized the attractiveness of the lyra viol to isolated music-lovers in the preface to his “Musick’s Recreation,” when he addressed it, among others, to those “who live in remote Parts.”¹⁴ Another observation to be gathered from North’s story is that, even in the heyday of its development, the viol’s plucked-instrument roots were also present in the manner in which the lyra viol was sometimes held and played.

Although of great importance, the solo role did not exhaust the potential of the lyra viol. Ensembles for two or three lyra viols were a major part of the repertory since its beginnings in the early seventeenth century. In 1609, Alfonso Ferrabosco II published a collection of music for one, two, and three lyra viols which was overall in a more elevated style and used a greater variety of tunings than its immediate predecessor, Hume’s *Musicall Humours* (1605)¹⁵. By 1671, John Moss included a thorough bass part for the bass viol along with the soloistic lyra viol part in his collection of *Lessons for the Basse-Viole on the Common-Tuning, and Many Other Tunings*, following the trend to strengthen the implied bass line of the stand-alone lyra viol part by an independent sustaining instrument.

The second half of the seventeenth century saw the publication of several instruction books for the lyra viol: John Playford’s *Musick’s Recreation on the Viol, Lyra-Way* (1652) and *A Breefe Introduction to the Skill of Musick for Song and Violl* (1654), Christopher Simpson’s *The Division-Violist* (1659), and Benjamin Hely’s *The Compleat Violist* (1699). Playford’s *Recreation* was reprinted four times between 1652 and 1682, and his *Breefe Introduction* saw twenty-two reprintings between 1654 and 1730, indicating a great interest of the general public in all things viol.

¹⁴ John Playford, *Musick’s Recreation on the Viol, Lyra-Way* [London, 1682], (London: Hinrichsen Edition Ltd, 1965), A2.

¹⁵ Alfonso Ferrabosco II, *Lessons for 1, 2 and 3 Viols* (London, 1607).

Later in the century, musical taste began to prefer a polarized texture of sustaining outer voices (treble and bass) and an open middle filled during performance with harmonic material by continuo. An intriguing intermediate stage in this musical development is represented in the lyra viol consorts of John Jenkins (1592-1678). The treble parts are assigned to treble viol or violin, the lowest voice to bass viol or simply “bass.” Lyra viol inhabits the space between these outer limits.

[Lyra viol’s] tessitura falls between those of the treble and bass instruments, and [it] often doubles the bass parts. Unlike those instruments, however, the lyra viol does not ordinarily play a single contrapuntal line. Its musical style ranges from the highly linear and imitative textures...which require it on occasion to produce two or more contrapuntal lines (insofar as this is possible on a bowed string instrument), to the simpler harmonic intervals and chords... Yet even when the textures of its parts are relatively thin (compared to a typical keyboard realization), the lyra viol produces a sound as resonant and sustained as those of the other string instruments, a sound, indeed, that is often more so, due to the nature of its special tuning, which encourage the excitation of sympathetic vibration.¹⁶

The broken consort combination such as violin/treble viol, lyra viol, and organ or harpsichord became popular with Matthew Locke and other Restoration composers, moving towards trio sonata texture in its treble-bass polarity. Eventually, lyra viol must have been dropped as the “odd man out,” perhaps because of its hybrid nature as a melodic/harmonic instrument. Continuo parts could be realized more easily on a keyboard, bass line was best carried by the powerful new instrument violoncello, and the louder violin projected the melody further than treble viol could. Lyra’s universality may have been the cause of its demise, as the very musical changes that the lyra viol helped usher in resulted in a backlash against it.

¹⁶ Frank Traficante, preface to John Jenkins, *The Lyra Viol Consorts*, vol. 67-68 of *Recent Researches in the Music of the Baroque Era* (Madison: A-R Editions), xiv.

Lyra Viol Notation and the Use of *Scordatura*

Almost all lyra viol music is not in standard music notation, but in tablature. The English used French lute tablature style, in which letters in alphabetical order indicate the fret at which a given string is to be stopped, *a* indicating an open string, *b* first fret, *c* second fret, and so on. These letters are placed on a six-line “staff,” the lowest line of which corresponds to the lowest string of the viol and the top one to the viol’s highest string. Rhythmic values are indicated with stems and flags placed above the staff. Once one durational value is established, it remains in effect until another one is indicated.

Closely connected to tablature notation, one of the most fascinating aspects of lyra viol repertoire is the use of *scordatura*, or alternate tunings. Tablature is the most practical notation system for alternate tunings since it is pitch-neutral, only indicating the positioning of the fingers and the duration of the notes. Nearly sixty different lyra viol tunings in use in the seventeenth century have been discovered so far; each tuning was suited for playing in a specific key or group of closely related keys. The different tunings were meant “to maximize unisons on adjacent strings, facilitate the fingering of different sonorities, and, in some cases, increase the instrument’s range by lowering the sixth string below D2.”¹⁷ Usually, three of the six strings would be tuned to the notes of the tonic triad, and the other strings to other important notes in the key. A shorthand system for tuning the viol was developed, in which unisons between the higher open string and the stopped lower string were indicated by the fret number on which the lower string had to be stopped. For example, a tuning indication *fhfhf* (Example 1) would mean that the second string, when stopped on the fifth fret (*f*), would sound in unison with the first open string; the third string, when stopped on the seventh fret (*h*), would sound in unison with the

¹⁷ Ted Conner, preface to John Moss, *Lessons for the Basse-Viol on the Common –Tuning, and Many Other New Tunings* [1671], (Ottawa: Dovehouse Editions, 2004), ii.

second open string; the fourth string, when stopped on the fifth fret (*f*), would sound in unison with the third open string; the fifth string, when stopped on the seventh fret (*h*), would sound in unison with the fourth open string; and the sixth string, when stopped on the fifth fret (*f*), would sound in unison with the fifth open string.

Ex. 1. Lyra viol tuning shorthand

a

f a

h a

f a

h a

f

In the plethora of tunings, however, only three or four were widely used at first; in the second half of the seventeenth century, uncontrolled proliferation of various *scordature* caused negative reactions from some musicians who advocated scaling back down to the few preferred tunings. Thomas Mace, in his *Musick's Monument* (1676) wrote: "The Wit of Man shall never Invent Better Tunings...for questionless, All ways have been Tryed to do It."

Tobias Hume's *Musicall Humours* (London, 1605)

One of the first and most significant collections of music for the lyra viol was Tobias Hume's *Musicall Humours*, published in London in 1605. It was the second English publication of music for the viol notated in tablature, after Robert Jones's *The Second Booke of Songs* (London, 1601)¹⁸. The full title of the collection indicated, in the tradition of the time, all possible combinations of instruments which could be used to play the music contained therein, no doubt because the author hoped to appeal to the widest possible audience:

Musical Humours, or The First Part of Ayres, French, Pollish and others together, some in Tabliture, and some in Pricke-Song; with Pavines, Galliardes, and Almains for the Viole de Gambo alone, and other Musicall Conceits for two Base Viols, expressing

¹⁸ Robert Jones, *The Second Booke of Songs and Ayres; set out to the Lute, the Base Violl the Playne Way, or the Base by Tableture After the Leero Fashion...*(London, 1601).

five parts, with pleasant reportes one from the other, and for two Leero Viols, and also for the Leero Viole with two Treble Viols, or two with one Treble. Lastly for the Leero Viole to play alone, and some Songes to be sung to the Viole, with the Lute, or better with the Viole alone. Also an Invention for two to play upon one Viole.

Composed by Tobias Hume, Gentleman.
London, 1605.

The latter invention requires one player to sit in the lap of another—just one of the many glimpses of Hume’s eccentric humor, also manifested in many programmatic (and sometimes bawdy) titles such as “Hit It in the Middle,” “My Mistress Has a Pretty Thing,” “Tobacco,” “I Am Falling,” “Tickle Me Quickly,” etc.

In his first-page dedication to the Earle of Pembroke, Hume reveals a little about himself: “My Life hath beene a Souldier, and my Idleness addicted to Musicke .” We know that Captain Hume, as he calls himself, was a professional soldier in the service of the Swedish and Russian armies. He retired from his career as a mercenary officer at around the age of 50 and entered the Charterhouse almshouse (a retirement facility for former soldiers), where he died in 1645. The preface directed to the readers offers many more glimpses of the author’s vivid, even contentious personality. There is unequivocally expressed pride in the originality of his compositions, even to the point of defiance; a manifesto-like proclamation of the superior qualities of his chosen instrument, the viol; and even a suggestion on how to properly string the viol in order to get the maximum resonance from the instrument:

To the understanding Reader

I doe not studie Eloquence, or professe Musicke, although I doe love Sence, and affect Harmony: my Profession being, as my Education hath beene, Armes, the only effeminate part of me, hath beene Musicke; which in mee hath beene always Generous, because never Mercenarie. To prayse Musicke, were to say, the Sunne is bright. To extol my selfe, would name my labors vaine glorious. Onely this, my studies are far from servile imitations, I robbe no others inventions, I take no Italian Note to an English dittie, or filch fragments of Songes to stuffe out my volumes. These are mine own Phansies expressed by my proper Genius, which if thou dost dislike, let me see thine, Carpere Vel Noli Nostra, Vel Ede Tua. Now to use a modest shortness, and a briefe expression of my selfe to all noble spirites, thus my Title expresseth my Bookes Contents, which (if my Hopes faile me not) shall not deceive their expectation, in whose approvement the crowne of my labors resteth. And from henceforth, the statefull instrument Gambo Violl, shall with ease yeelde full various and as devicefull Musicke as the Lute. For

here I protest the Trinitie of Musicke, parts, Passion and Division, to be as gracefully united in the Gambo Violl, as in the most received Instrument that is, which here with a Souldiers Resolution, I give up to the acceptance of all noble dispositions.

The friend of his friend,
Tobias Hume

If you will heare the Viole de Gambo in his true Majestie, to play parts, and singing thereto, then string him with nine stringes, your three Basses double as the Lute, which is to be plaide on with as much ease as your Violl of sixe stringes.

As the music from the collection indicates, Hume was indeed a composer of notable talent and imagination. His collection of 1605 is both ambitious and groundbreaking, being the largest repertory of solo music for the lyra viol by a single composer in the early seventeenth century (it contains one hundred and sixteen pieces). In the preface to the publication, Hume made a bold claim that the viol ‘shall with ease yeelde full various and as devicefull Musicke as the Lute,’ challenging the preeminence of the lute as a solo, ensemble, and accompaniment instrument. To prove his point, Hume included lyra viol solos, ensembles, and songs with lyra viol accompaniment. This collection is also now thought of as the first known appearances of *col legno* (Hume instructs the player to “Drum this with the back of your Bow”) and *pizzicato* techniques (“play one straine with your fingers, the other with your Bow”). This collection was followed in 1607 by his *Captain Hume’s Poeticall Musicke*, dedicated to Queen Anne.

TRANSCRIPTION

General Considerations

In the commentary to his guitar transcriptions of J.S. Bach's unaccompanied cello music, Stanley Yates points out the dual function of the melodic leap in the music of the Baroque period. As a synthesis of the Renaissance polyphonic *Prima Pratica* and Monteverdi's *Seconda Pratica*, rooted in the solo singing voice, the new style of writing reserves for the melodic leap two distinct meanings: "[the leap] now not only acts as a rhetorical expressive gesture, but also allows for a single vocal part to be constructed so as to give the impression of the entrance of a "second" voice in dialog with the "first."¹⁹ A polyphonic texture may thus be implied in a single melodic line. When transcribing for the modern guitar a work conceived on a bowed instrument (such as Bach's suites for solo cello or Hume's solo lyra viol pieces), it becomes "the task of the arranger to decide which leaps are rhetorical (i.e. "melodically expressive), which leaps *imply* polyphony, and which leaps literally represent the lower voice."²⁰ Since the guitar, although not as contrapuntally facile as the keyboard, is nevertheless capable of executing two- or three-voice polyphony, reconstruction of the polyphonic implications of solo music becomes the first step in creating an idiomatic arrangement.

The differences in acoustical properties and technical capabilities between the viol and the modern guitar have to be taken into consideration when deciding on the degree to which harmony must be filled in. Generally, thinner textures of the lyra viol music, when transferred directly to the guitar, tend to sound incomplete and un-idiomatic. We can gain some insight into the contemporary views on the differences between harmonic capabilities of the viol and the lute by comparing parallel arrangements of the same piece by Robert Johnson, discussed in Frank

¹⁹ Stanley Yates, "Arranging, Interpreting, and Performing the Music of J.S. Bach." [1998] Guide accompanying *J.S. Bach: Six Unaccompanied Cello Suites Arranged for Guitar* (Pacific, MO: Mel Bay Publications), 153.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 154.

Traficante's dissertation on the Mansell lyra viol tablature. Traficante notes: "One is struck by the sparse texture of the lyra viol setting as compared to that for the lute. In keeping with this difference of texture is the contrast between the open positioning of the harmonies for lute and the close positioning for the lyra viol."²¹ Such differences stem, of course, from the relative strengths of both instruments: the lute is capable of a richer contrapuntal texture and the playing of non-adjacent strings (hence the wider harmonic voicing); the viol has a superior sustaining ability and a greater dynamic range, but is more limited in harmonic playing because the bow cannot skip strings when playing a chord. As a plucked instrument, the modern guitar shares much in common with the lute, a fact one must keep in mind when looking for the most idiomatic solutions for transcription problems. However, after all theoretical factors have been considered, the arranger's musical sensitivity and intimate familiarity with both instruments must guide the final stages of the transcription process.

Converting the Music into Modern Notation

As has been mentioned before, the music for lyra viol exists in tablature notation.. The tuning for the four pieces to be transcribed is indicated by Hume as the standard consort viol tuning, also known in lyra viol books as the "Viol Way," or "Plain Way:" top string at d' and the rest tuned in fourths with a third between the fourth and third string, resulting in d'-a-e-c-G-D. The following illustration is an example of the original tablature notation from Hume's 1605 collection.

²¹ Frank Traficante "The Mansell Lyra Viol Tablature (Parts I and II)" (Ph.D.diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1965), 107.

Ex. 1. "Touch Me Lightly" (original notation)

The image shows the original notation for the piece "Touch Me Lightly". It features a large, ornate initial letter 'T' on the left. The notation consists of a single staff with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The melody is written in a style that uses letters (a, b, c, h, f) and symbols (accents, slurs) to represent notes and rests. Above the staff, there are several downward-pointing arrows indicating fingerings or accents. The text "Touch me lightly" is written below the staff.

Ex. 2. "Touch Me Lightly" (same passage in modern notation)

The image shows the same passage from "Touch Me Lightly" in modern notation. It is written on a single staff with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The notation uses standard musical symbols, including notes, rests, and chords, to represent the melody and accompaniment.

Choice of Key

To enhance the sonorous qualities of the guitar, one must select those keys that permit the maximum use of open strings for important scale degrees such as I, IV, and V. Standard guitar tuning of e²-b-g-d-A-E will be preserved in these transcriptions in order to avoid unnecessary re-tunings in concert performance. I have chosen the key of A minor for "Touch Me Lightly" (originally in D minor), "Harke, Harke," and "A Question" (originally in G minor), and the key of E major for "Tickell, Tickell" (originally in D major).

Reconstructing Implied Counterpoint

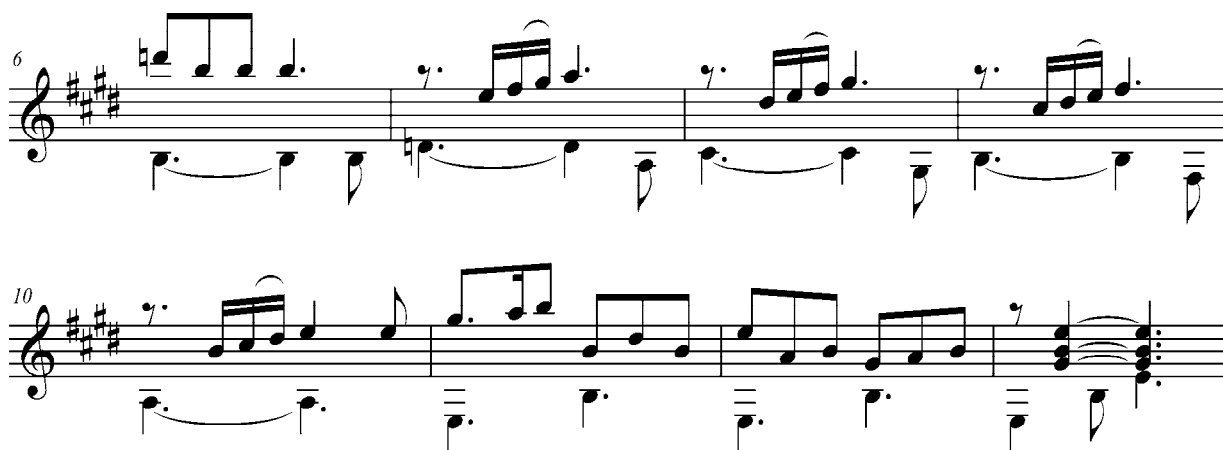
This stage of the transcription process is the most involved and critical to the success of the final arrangement. The arranger has to make decisions about the degree to which polyphonic strands need to be given independence. In the following examples from "Tickell, Tickell,"

“Harke, Harke,” and “Touch Me Lightly,” the transcription clarifies the polyphonic texture by reconstructing the implied counterpoint of the original.²²

Ex. 3. “Tickell, Tickell,” mm. 6—13 (original)



Ex. 4. “Tickell, Tickell,” mm. 6—13 (guitar arrangement)

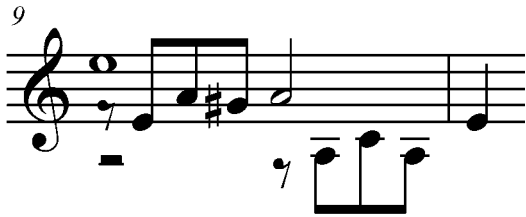


Ex. 5. “Harke, Harke,” mm.9—10 (original)



²² From here on, all examples from Hume’s original scores have been converted into modern notation to facilitate comparison with the transcriptions.

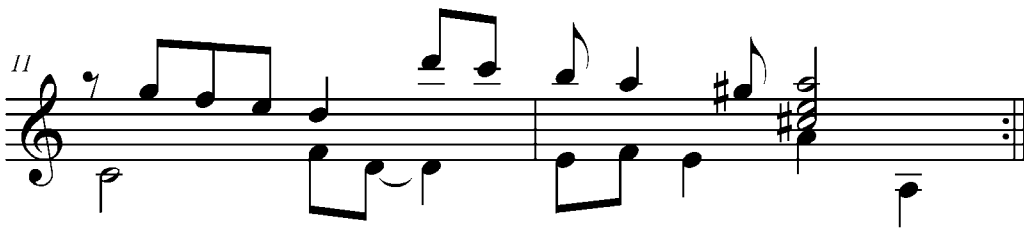
Ex.6. “Harke, Harke,” mm.9—10 (guitar arrangement)



Ex. 7. “Touch Me Lightly,” mm.11—12 (original)



Ex. 8. “Touch Me Lightly,” mm.11—12 (guitar arrangement)



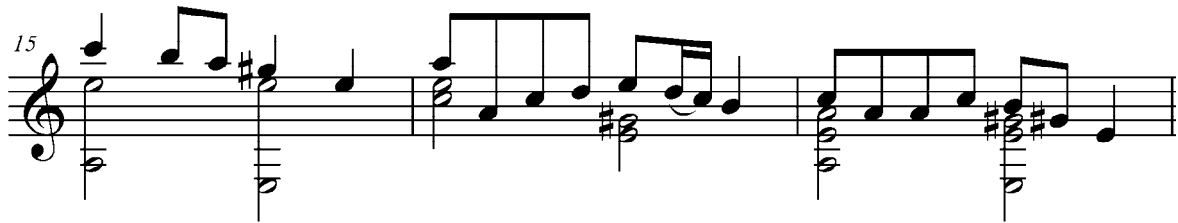
Filling Out the Harmony

As was mentioned before, idiomatic writing for the guitar often presupposes a thicker harmonic texture than that of the lyra viol pieces. The guitar, like the lute, easily performs non-adjacent strings and is therefore better suited for a wider harmonic voicing of chords than the viol. In my transcriptions, I sought to realize the harmonic implications of the originals and fill out the harmonies to make the guitar writing idiomatic and resonant.

Ex. 9. “Harke, Harke,” mm. 15—17 (original)

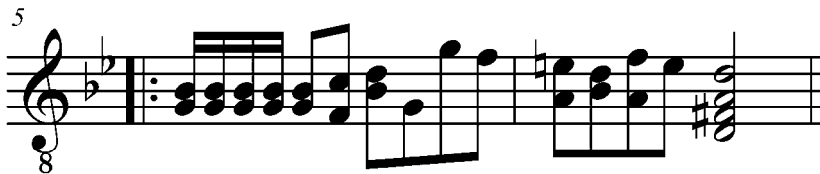


Ex. 10. “Harke, Harke,” mm. 15—17 (guitar arrangement)

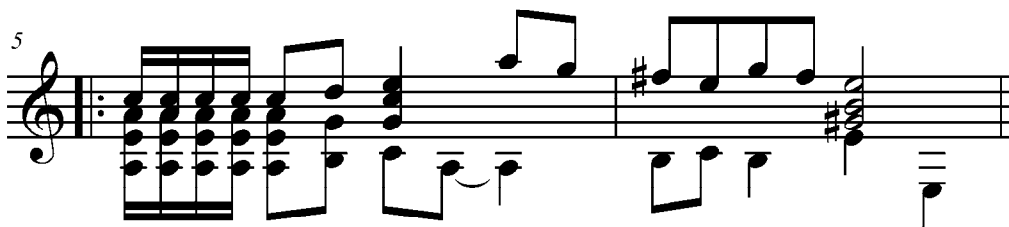


In the following examples from “A Question,” not only the harmony has been filled out, but also the contrapuntal structure clarified.

Ex. 11. “A Question,” mm. 5—6 (original)



Ex.12. “A Question,” mm. 5—6 (guitar arrangement)



Idiomatic Effects

One of the most novel qualities of Hume’s 1605 collection was his use of *col legno* and *pizzicato* techniques, the first known usage of these techniques in printed music. They expand the expressive and coloristic range of the lyra viol by imitating the plucked strings (*pizzicato*) and percussion instruments (*col legno*). “Harke, Harke” incorporates both of these techniques to create a variety of sounds in the same piece. For the final chords of the piece, Hume asks the player to “drum this with the back of your Bow.” A very similar effect can be achieved on the guitar with the technique of *tambora* (literally meaning “a drum”), in which the player strikes the strings by the bridge with the back of the right hand thumb.

Ex. 13. “Harke, Harke,” mm. 24—26 (original)

col legno till end

Ex. 14. “Harke, Harke,” mm. 24—26 (guitar arrangement)

tambora

Hume’s use of *pizzicato* (he tells the player to “play nine letters [notes] with your finger”) is more problematic because it imitates the plucked strings, which are by their nature *pizzicato* instruments. After some experimentation with various muting techniques, it became clear that an alternative solution must be found. It is necessary to realize that what Hume may have been

looking for in these *pizzicato* passages is a different kind of sound, in contrast to the bowed passages. On the guitar, such contrast and timbral variety can be provided by the technique of artificial and natural harmonics. A soft, echo-like, “ghostly” quality of Hume’s *pizzicato* passages translates perfectly onto the guitar with the use of harmonics.

Ex. 15. “Harke, Harke,” mm. 4—5 (original)

Musical notation for Ex. 15, showing the original score for measures 4 and 5. The notation is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody is written on a five-line staff. The first measure (m. 4) begins with a '4' above the staff and an '8' below the staff, indicating a fourth and an octave. The melody consists of quarter and eighth notes. The second measure (m. 5) features a series of eighth notes. The word 'pizzicato' is written below the staff between the two measures.

Ex. 16. “Harke, Harke,” mm. 4—5 (guitar arrangement)

Musical notation for Ex. 16, showing the guitar arrangement for measures 4 and 5. The notation is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody is written on a five-line staff. The first measure (m. 4) begins with a '4' above the staff. The melody consists of quarter and eighth notes. The second measure (m. 5) features a series of eighth notes. The word 'harmonics' is written below the staff between the two measures.

CONCLUSION

Lyra viol's historical role as a transitional instrument with one foot in the Renaissance and another in the Baroque makes it a fascinating witness to large musical processes at work and a legacy to be treasured all the more because of its transience. A vast amount of music for lyra viol, both solo and in ensemble, still awaits publication. I hope that many more of these musical riches of great quality and originality become available to guitarists, who can discover for themselves the beauty and excitement of lyra viol repertoire.

APPENDIX
FOUR REPRESENTATIVE PIECES

Harke, Harke

Tobias Hume (c.1579-1645)
arr. Olga Amelkina-Vera

Guitar

harmonics

5

normal

10

harmonics normal

16

0 4 1 0

3 1 4 2 3

21

tambora till end

A Question

Tobias Hume (c.1579-1645)
arr. Olga Amelkina-Vera

Guitar

4

7

9

13

C II 0 4

C III

V

4

-4

2

1

2

3

0

1

4

0

3

2

3

2

4

0

1

3

0

2

4

2

4

1

Touch Me Lightly

Tobias Hume (c.1579-1645)
arr. Olga Amelkina-Vera

Guitar

5 2.

9 a i m i a m i

11 C VII

15 VII

17

19 C VIII

Tickell Tickell

Tobias Hume (c. 1579-1645)
arr. Olga Amelkina-Vera

Guitar

5 C VII

9

13

18

24

28

hinge C VII hinge C VII

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