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Sandman, Susan G. (1993) "Interpretive Left-Hand Fingerings for Lute in Nicholas Vallet's "Le Secret des Muses" (1615)," *Performance Practice Review*: Vol. 6: No. 2, Article 5. DOI: 10.5642/perfpr.199306.02.05  
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## Baroque Lute Fingering

### Interpretive Left-Hand Fingerings for Lute in Nicolas Vallet's *Le Secret des Muses* (1615)

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Susan G. Sandman

Lute fingerings constitute a valuable and often overlooked source of information about the articulation of baroque music. Although not as commonly studied by scholars today as are fingerings in keyboard, viol, and violin music, they offer equally clear evidence of fingering choices that affect linear articulation. Fingerings for the left-hand, as indicated in Nicolas Vallet's *Le Secret des Muses*, are revelatory in this regard, and contribute to our deeper understanding of phrasing and of articulative nuance in early 17th-century music.

*Le Secret des Muses*, a two-volume collection of lute pieces using French tablature, was published in Amsterdam in 1615 and 1616, and subsequently in France in 1618 and 1619.<sup>1</sup> Ninety pieces (49 of them with fingerings)

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<sup>1</sup>The title of the first edition of Volume One published in Amsterdam in 1615 reads: SECRETUM MUSARUM, /IN QUO/ Vera et genuina testudinem / dextre simul et prompte pul- / sandi ratio ad amussim / proponitur. / Nicolao Valletto auctore. (Secret of the Muses, in which is exposed the true and natural manner to play the lute exactly, cleverly, and at the same time rapidly.) The music and pedagogical information of the second edition of volume one published in France in 1618 is the same, but the title is different, and refers to fingerings: PARADISUS MUSICUS TESTUDINIS, / in quo / Multae insignes et ante hunc diem inauditae, Gallicae, Germanicae, Anglicae, Hispanicae, Polonicae, cantiones; / Nec non /

appear in Volume One, thirty pieces in Volume Two. Vallet's fingerings have a particular value because of their completeness—they are in fact written out for entire compositions. Moreover, they appear in many genres, including dances (courantes, voltes, galliades, and a branle), and songs,<sup>2</sup> and so allow for the consideration of fingerings in numerous contexts.

Vallet's fingerings are not limited to showing the basic left-hand position for chords, as was typical of fingerings in lute treatises.<sup>3</sup> Although occasionally contradictory and incomplete,<sup>4</sup> his fingerings are nonetheless quite informative, and contribute significantly to our understanding of the relationship between performing technique and musical phrasing, in much the same way

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Varia Praeludia, Fantasiae, Tripudia cōtinentur: / Praeterea punctis tum suprà [sic] tum ad latus singulis cuiusque tactus alteris / adscriptis, eorumque praemissa explicatione, docetur quibus tum dextrae / tum sinistrae manus digitis chorda tangenda puldanave sit, / AUTORE NICOLAO VALLETTO. (Musical Paradise of the Lute, containing numerous and remarkable French, German, English, Spanish, Polish, and not yet heard songs; and also various preludes, fantasies, dances; moreover, added fingerings, above, appearing next to each letter are explained first in the instructions which indicate which finger whether for the right hand or the left, the string which must be touched or struck . . .)

<sup>2</sup>The present study (which considers only the solo lute pieces, not the music for four lutes at the end of the collection) is based on the 1615 edition and on the *Oeuvres de Nicolas Vallet pour luth seul, Le Secret des Muses*, ed. André Souris (Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1970). Biographical and critical details by Monique Rollin, "Étude biographique et appareil critique," appear in this volume, from p. xi. I would like to thank The Lute Society of America for the loan of a microfilm of *Le Secret des Muses*, and the reference librarians at Wells College for their assistance in obtaining research materials; also, for partial funding, I am grateful to The Wells College Advisory Committee Grants for Faculty Research.

<sup>3</sup>The fingering in teaching pieces can offer valuable information concerning phrasing. See my discussion of left-hand fingerings in English teaching pieces in "Thomas Robinson's Interpretive Left-hand Fingerings for the Lute and Cittern," *Journal of the Lute Society of America* 11 (1978): 26-35.

<sup>4</sup>In a few cases the ornaments (e.g. 64/52: 52; 65/53: 37; 86/78: 20) and the holds, or *tenués* (e.g. 65/53: 34-5; 67/55: 40; 77/67: 72; 78/68: 42) are impossible to execute if the fingerings are followed. E.g., 64/52: 52 refers to the Vallet (1615) manuscript page 64 and the Souris edition number 52, tablature measure 52.

as do studies of breathing marks in wind music,<sup>5</sup> fingerings in early keyboard music,<sup>6</sup> and bowing directions in string music.<sup>7</sup>

The fingerings (explained in a *Petit Discours*) are written in French tablature for complete pieces from pages 60 to 94 (the end of the first book) of the first edition.<sup>8</sup> Right-hand fingerings are indicated throughout both books.<sup>9</sup> Vallet uses from one to four dots next to the tablature letters to show the index, second, third, and fourth fingers of the left hand; one and two dots underneath the letters to indicate fingerings for the right hand. In addition, Vallet indicates held notes (*tenués*), bars, and ornaments with signs common to his époque.<sup>10</sup>

**Left-hand fingerings**

.b = 1st finger  
 ..c = 2nd finger  
 .d = 3rd finger  
 ∴ = 4th finger

\* = barré

∩ or / = tenue

**Right-hand fingerings**

ç = 1st finger  
 ç̣ = 2nd finger  
 c = thumb

<sup>5</sup>See Lewis E. Peterman, Jr., "Michel Blavet's Breathing Marks: a Rare Source for Musical Phrasing in Eighteenth-Century France," *Performance Practice Review* 4 (1991): 186-98.

<sup>6</sup>See the detailed discussion by Peter Le Huray, "English Keyboard Fingerings in the 16th and early 17th Centuries," *Source Materials and the Interpretation of Music: a Memorial Volume to Thurston Dart* (London: Stainer & Bell, c.1981), 227-57.

<sup>7</sup>See for example the discussion of Ganassi's bowing directions in Ian Woodfield, *The Early History of the Viol* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984), 163.

<sup>8</sup>Vallet omits left-hand fingerings for one piece, a *Gaillarde*, in *Le Secret des Muses*, 89; *Oeuvres de Vallet*, 188.

<sup>9</sup>Vallet's right-hand fingerings are consistent with those of contemporary lutenists. Generally thumb is used on strong beats and in alternation with the first finger. The second finger substitutes for the thumb in certain, often faster, passages. Right-hand fingerings for the second (*majeur*) finger are not indicated until p. 60 of *Le Secret des Muses*, p. 132 of *Oeuvres de Vallet*.

<sup>10</sup>Signs for *agrément*s appear in *le Secret des Muses* from p. 50 and thereafter.



In a number of instances passages using the left-hand fingerings written by Vallet require a slight break between notes; in these cases the fingerings are interpretive, for they suggest and even dictate a light articulation. Although an individual performer today may choose to work toward eliminating such breaks in continuity brought about by a particular fingering for the left hand, *the study of lute fingerings, with particular attention to their implications for phrasing*, enables us to recapture many important details of Vallet's musical style.

Vallet employs two technical means for achieving articulative breaks: by calling for the same finger successively on two different frets; and by making use of a shift of hand position. Since other of Vallet's fingerings allow for legato, this implies that the detached fingerings are purposeful. Moreover, the breaks occur in particular musical situations, most notably the following:

- prior to a strong beat
- prior to an anacrusis
- prior to an ornament

And in a broader sense these kinds of articulation were often introduced in order to emphasize or help clarify:

- the dance rhythms (as in the *volte*, *courante*, or *galliarde*)
- sequential patterns

### **The Break before a Strong Beat**

Two excerpts from "Espagnolle" (Example One) will illustrate the articulation brought about by the repetition of the same finger on two different frets. Here in both instances the use of the fourth finger for the "d" and then the "f" fret creates a lift in the melody before the first beat of the measure.

Sometimes a break in articulation is caused by a shift of hand position required by the fingerings. In "La Princess" (Example Two) the substitution of the first finger for the fourth on the "d" fret creates a break before the dotted half-note on beat one, and the change to the second finger on the "c" fret after using the first finger on the "d" fret results in a brief silence before the half-note (in the bass part) on beat four.

Similarly, the fingerings called for in "La durette" (Example Three) cause a break, first in the melody notes b-flat' to c", then between e-flat' and b-flat in

the lower voice, and subsequently between *f* in the upper and *b* in the lower voice.<sup>11</sup>

**Example One, "Espagnolle" (71: 1-4 and 11-12)**

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system covers measures 1-4, and the second system covers measures 11-12. Each system includes a grand staff with a treble and bass clef, and a tablature staff below. The tablature staff uses letters 'a', 'b', 'c' for fret positions and numbers 1-4 for fingerings. Circles and arrows highlight specific fingering patterns in the tablature.

<sup>11</sup>Examples are from *Oeuvres de Vallet* (ed. Souris) and use the same format: 71: 1-4 means number 71, measures 1 through 4. Fingerings for the left hand are indicated by the numbers 1 to 4 written next to the tablature letters; fingerings for the right hand are shown by one or two dots placed underneath the tablature letters. Similar fingering directions occur in 60/49: 41-42; 63/50: 44-50; 64/52: 39-40; 65/53: 6, 37-38; 79/69: 4-5; 80/70: 1-2, 3-4, 18-19, 31-32; 80/71: 2, 11; 81/72: 11; 82/73: 14, 16, 20, 21, 25-26; 85/77: 39; 86/78: 18; 87/80: 26, 38; 88/81: 4; 92/87: 2, 10-12, 26; 93/88: 23-24. In the courantes a slight beak in articulation before strong beats occurs in 63/50: 59-60, 62-64, 84; 64/52: 39-40, 48-49; 65/52: 11-12; 65/53: 24-25, 29-30, 34-35; 68/56: 43-45; 69/57: 7-8; 71/60: 3-4; 72/62: 25-26; 73/63: 7-8, 24-25, 36-37; 74/64: 12-13; 77/67: 13-14, 51-52; 78/68: 1, 2-3, 23, 46, 47-48, 61-62.; 83/74: 7-8.

Example Two, "La Princess" (72: 9-12)

Handwritten annotations: shift (upward arrow), shift (downward arrow), [4 3 2]

Fingering numbers:  
 Row 1: aj 2c 4o aj 1b 4o 1o ax 4o 1b  
 Row 2: 3o / 1c 3o / 2x 1o 2c / a

Example Three, "La durette" (73: 8-13)

Handwritten annotations: circled '4o 4f', circled 'a 1b 1o X'

Fingering numbers:  
 Row 1: 4o 4f a 1b a 4o 1b 1o X 4o 3f  
 Row 2: 2c a 2c 3o 2f // \*

Handwritten annotations: circled 'a 1b 4o a', circled '3o 1c'

Fingering numbers:  
 Row 1: 4o 3o 3o a 1b 4o a  
 Row 2: 1o // \* 1o / a 3o 1c

### The Break before an Anacrusis

Vallet's fingering directions sometimes require a break in articulation prior to an upbeat. The same types of fingering instructions as were described above, i.e. the same finger on two consecutive frets or a shift in hand position, appear in the following *courante* (Example Four) and give a special emphasis to the upbeats. In m. 50 we see finger 4 on the "d" fret followed directly by the same finger on the "f" fret, creating a break between the half-note *f* and the anacrusis quarter-note *c*". Then, in the following measure the 1st finger on fret "d" succeeded by the 2nd finger on "c" represents a shift, requiring a break before the upbeat note *a*'.<sup>12</sup>

#### Example Four, "Courante" (54: 50-52)

<sup>12</sup>Other breaks before an anacrusis occur in courantes 64/52: 8; 65/53: 10; 65/54: 34, 36; 67/55: 1; 71/60: 7-8; 72/61: 1, 14-15; 74/64: 20, 24, 32; 75/65: 32-33; 78/68: 5, 25, 52; and in songs 79/69: 7-8; 81/72: 20; and 85/77: 25.



### The Break prior to an Ornament

Occasionally left-hand fingerings create a space before ornaments. A typical example may be seen in the repeated use of the first finger (on fret "d", then on fret "b"), which results in a slight pause before an appoggiatura in "La durette" (Example Five).<sup>13</sup> And similarly the use of the same finger on two consecutive frets (2c-2d) in "L'avignonne" (Example Six) causes a lift before the trill (marked x) on the strong beat.<sup>14</sup>

**Example Five, "La durette" (73: 29-30)**    **Example Six, "L'avignonne" (70: 19-20)**

<sup>13</sup>Similar fingerings precede appoggiaturas in 78/68: 15-16; 85/77: 25; 86/78: 17-18; 87/80: 48.

<sup>14</sup>For another example of this type see 77/67: 5

### The Articulation of Dance Rhythms

Vallet sometimes enlisted the articulation of beats (strong beats or upbeats), as illustrated above, to bring out the characteristic rhythms of dances; this is seen especially in *courantes* and *voltes*. In *courantes* the fingerings may bring out the opposing accents of either 6/4 or 3/2. For instance, in m. 21 of the following (Example Seven), we notice breaks before beat four and before beat one (of the next measure), brought about by the recurrent use of the 2nd and then the 1st finger and by a shift following beat one. This groups the notes into the accentual patterns typical of 6/4.

Example Seven, "Courante" (62: 21-26)

Handwritten annotations in the score include a bracketed annotation  $[J. >]$  above the first measure of the treble staff, and the word "shift" written above the second measure of the bass staff. Circled fingerings include  $2h$ ,  $2c$ ,  $1f$ , and  $1c$  in the first two measures of the first system.

Handwritten annotations in the second system include circled fingerings  $3e$  and  $2c$  in the first measure of the second system.

In another *courante* (Example Eight), however, the rhythmic patterning of 3/2 is brought out by the consecutive use of the same finger (as well as by the placement of a trill on e-flat').

**Example Eight, "Courante" (64: 25-30)**

### Sequential Melodic Patterns

Vallet at times showed care in the articulating of sequential patterns, aiming at consistency of treatment. In the following *courante* (Example Nine), the deliberate choice of detached fingerings results in distinctly contrasting patterns, broken in the treble, sustained in the bass.<sup>15</sup>

Example Nine, "Courante Sur La gaillarde de bocquet" (68: 8-14)

Handwritten annotations for the first system (measures 8-14):

- Measure 8: Treble staff has notes G4, A4, B4. Bass staff has notes G2, A2, B2. Treble fingering:  $\overset{b}{3}$ ,  $\overset{a}{1}$ ,  $\overset{b}{b}$ . Bass fingering:  $a_j$ .
- Measure 9: Treble staff has notes G4, A4, B4. Bass staff has notes G2, A2, B2. Treble fingering:  $\overset{b}{1}$ ,  $\overset{a}{b}$ . Bass fingering:  $3^f 1^b$ .
- Measure 10: Treble staff has notes G4, A4, B4. Bass staff has notes G2, A2, B2. Treble fingering:  $\overset{4}{b}$ ,  $\overset{1}{b}$ ,  $\overset{a}{b}$ . Bass fingering:  $2c_j$ .
- Measure 11: Treble staff has notes G4, A4, B4. Bass staff has notes G2, A2, B2. Treble fingering:  $\overset{a}{1}$ ,  $\overset{b}{b}$ . Bass fingering:  $2c_j$ .
- Measure 12: Treble staff has notes G4, A4, B4. Bass staff has notes G2, A2, B2. Treble fingering:  $\overset{a}{1}$ ,  $\overset{b}{b}$ . Bass fingering:  $2c_j$ .
- Measure 13: Treble staff has notes G4, A4, B4. Bass staff has notes G2, A2, B2. Treble fingering:  $\overset{a}{1}$ ,  $\overset{b}{b}$ . Bass fingering:  $2c_j$ .
- Measure 14: Treble staff has notes G4, A4, B4. Bass staff has notes G2, A2, B2. Treble fingering:  $\overset{a}{1}$ ,  $\overset{b}{b}$ . Bass fingering:  $2c_j$ .

Handwritten annotations for the second system (measures 15-21):

- Measure 15: Treble staff has notes G4, A4, B4. Bass staff has notes G2, A2, B2. Treble fingering:  $\overset{a}{1}$ ,  $\overset{b}{b}$ . Bass fingering:  $3^b$ .
- Measure 16: Treble staff has notes G4, A4, B4. Bass staff has notes G2, A2, B2. Treble fingering:  $\overset{a}{1}$ ,  $\overset{b}{b}$ . Bass fingering:  $2^b 1^c$ .
- Measure 17: Treble staff has notes G4, A4, B4. Bass staff has notes G2, A2, B2. Treble fingering:  $\overset{1}{b}$ ,  $\overset{a}{b}$ . Bass fingering:  $a_j$ .
- Measure 18: Treble staff has notes G4, A4, B4. Bass staff has notes G2, A2, B2. Treble fingering:  $\overset{1}{b}$ ,  $\overset{a}{b}$ . Bass fingering:  $a_j$ .
- Measure 19: Treble staff has notes G4, A4, B4. Bass staff has notes G2, A2, B2. Treble fingering:  $\overset{1}{b}$ ,  $\overset{a}{b}$ . Bass fingering:  $a_j$ .
- Measure 20: Treble staff has notes G4, A4, B4. Bass staff has notes G2, A2, B2. Treble fingering:  $\overset{1}{b}$ ,  $\overset{a}{b}$ . Bass fingering:  $a_j$ .
- Measure 21: Treble staff has notes G4, A4, B4. Bass staff has notes G2, A2, B2. Treble fingering:  $\overset{1}{b}$ ,  $\overset{a}{b}$ . Bass fingering:  $a_j$ .

<sup>15</sup>For passages showing similar fingerings, see 81/72: 21 and 92/87: 17.



A sequential bass pattern in the following *courante* (Example Ten) displays fingerings that require a break preceding the successive leaps. This lends emphasis to the syncopation, while at the same time maintaining consistency between the patterns.

**Example Ten, "Courante" (53: 53-57)**

The musical score for Example Ten, "Courante" (53: 53-57), is presented in two systems. Each system consists of a treble clef staff with a melody and a bass clef staff with a bass line. Below the bass staff, there are two rows of fingerings. The first system's bass line has a bracketed section with a dot, and its fingerings are "4 h 1 e 2 f 4 h 1 e 4 k" and "2 c 4 o". The second system's bass line has a bracketed section with a dot, and its fingerings are "2 c", "a", "4 o 2 c", "a", "2 c", "2 o", "a", "1 c 2 o". Some fingerings in the second system are circled and crossed out with a diagonal line.

Vallet's system of interpretive fingerings is remarkably simple, while being clear and precise. His fingerings contribute to our understanding of some of the many details in performance which added up to "good taste" in early 17th-century French music, and may be mined for artistic guidance today.