
THE VIHUELA: PERFORMANCE PRACTICE, STYLE, AND CONTEXT

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This diversity of modes, melodies, consonances and duly proportioned rhythms, together with many other beauties are found by musicians on the vihuela, united in one, and more perfectly than on any other instrument. For from the vihuela comes the most perfect and deepest music, the gentlest and sweetest concord, that which most pleases the ear and enlivens the mind; moreover, that of greatest efficacy, which most moves and ignites the soul of those who hear it.¹

For an instrument played as extensively as the *vihuela de mano* was in sixteenth-century Spain, it has left an astonishingly small inheritance of music, instruments, and other information related to its performance. We are nevertheless fortunate that limited resources should yield such a richness of perspectives. The present study begins by examining several of the cultural issues regarding the vihuela prior to considering questions of style, taste, and instrumental technique. The reasons for this approach are simple: an understanding of context develops an image of the cultural and intellectual world of the original practitioners, while more detailed questions of musical style and instrumental technique, respectively, delineate the artistic objectives of performance practice and strategies for its implementation. It is always my hope that informed, historically based practice should not be restricted by the limitations of source materials, but should produce artistic performances in which the final product is greater than the sum of all the parts.

The core of what we know about the vihuela consists of seven well-known books of printed music, a handful of pieces in manuscript, a small number of theoretical sources and illustrations, two surviving instruments, and a patchwork of documents that offer fleeting glimpses of the instrument and its world. The discovery

¹ Enríquez de Valderrábano, *Silva de sirenas*, fol. [5r]: 'Esta diversidad de tonos, sonos, consonancias, y rhrthmos [sic] de devida proporción, con otros muchos primores músicos se hallan en una vihuela, todo iunto, y más perfectamente que en otro instrumento alguno. Ca en la vihuela es la más perfecta y profunda música, la más suave y dulce consonantía, la que más applaze al oído y alegra el entendimiento, y otrosí la de mayor eficacia, que más mueve y enciende los ánimos de los que oyen.'

of new materials continues to augment and refine our knowledge of the instrument, its music, and its players, while John Ward's 1953 account of the vihuela and its performance practice remains the most authoritative, central point of reference.² More recent studies have examined the early development of the instrument prior to the emergence of notated vihuela music, the Italian variant of the vihuela known as the *viola da mano*, and a number of newly identified manuscript sources of music.³ More significantly, it is now understood that the vihuela was not exclusively a court instrument, but that it was popular among the middle class and as important a means in its own day as the modern compact disc in increasing access to polyphonic art music.⁴

The life of the *vihuela de mano* stretches from the last quarter of the fifteenth century until the early 1600s. The emergence of the Renaissance vihuela has been traced from the mid fifteenth century, largely on the basis of iconographical evidence.⁵ Ian Woodfield places the origins of the vihuela in Aragon around the middle of the fifteenth century as a single instrument that was both plucked and bowed; independent, differently constructed plucked and bowed models began to emerge from the 1480s. The Spanish origins of the instrument are attested to by Tinctoris in *De inventione et usu musicae* (ca. 1487), who describes it as 'hispanorum invento'. Most of the iconographical representations before 1500 show the plucked vihuela being played with a plectrum. Woodfield's claim that the bowing technique of the *vihuela de arco* resulted from the adoption of the Moorish underhand bowgrip of the *rabal* might also have parallels in plucked performance. Civic records offer complementary written evidence about players from this period. While most of the early iconography shows vihuelas being played in allegorical liturgical configurations, there are several references to blind players of the bowed *vihuela de arco* and *rabal* who were *oracioneros*, presumably professional ballad singers. Apprenticeship contracts show these musicians to have spent periods of between three and six years learning their repertory from memory and to play the bowed instruments mentioned.⁶ While these documents are not specifically related to the plucked vihuela, they come from the period when no distinction is made between plucked and

² John Ward, 'The "Vihuela de mano" and its Music, 1536–1576', Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1953.

³ The early history of the vihuela is documented in Ian Woodfield, *The Early History of the Viol* (Cambridge, 1984); the *viola da mano* is discussed in Ward, 'The Vihuela de mano', pp. 59–63, and James Tyler, *The Early Guitar* (Oxford, 1980). For details of recovered manuscripts, see Juan José Rey, *Ramillete de flores: Colección inédita de piezas para vihuela (1593)* (Madrid, 1975); Antonio Corona-Alcalde, 'A Vihuela Manuscript in the Archivo de Simancas', *The Lute* 26 (1986), pp. 3–20; John Griffiths, 'Berlin Mus. MS 40032 y otros nuevos hallazgos en el repertorio para vihuela', in *España en la Música del Occidente*, ed. Emilio Casares et al., 2 vols. (Madrid, 1987), vol. I, pp. 323–4; and Antonio Corona-Alcalde, 'The Earliest Vihuela Tablature: A Recent Discovery', *EM* 20 (1992), pp. 594–600.

⁴ See John Griffiths, 'At Court and at Home with the *Vihuela de mano*', *JLSA* 22 (1989), 1–27.

⁵ Literary reference to the vihuela has been traced back to the anonymous *Libro de Apolonio* (ca. 1250).

⁶ Among the players in the documents reported by Pallarés Jiménez are Juan de Vitoria and Juan Pérez de Guernica (1462), Ramón Recalde and Iñigo García Landa (1466), and García Jiménez and Juan Sánchez de Córdoba (1469), in each case master and apprentice.

bowed models, and further research might be able to connect the practices of these *oracioneros* directly to the accompanied singing of secular *romances* like those found in the sixteenth-century vihuela books. Although referring to the *vihuela de arco*, the report by Tinctoris to having heard it used ‘ad historium recitationem’ similarly waits to be connected directly to this tradition.⁷

Numerous early references to the vihuela link it to Moorish culture, and they locate its use within an urban, rather than courtly, context – one that points to a direct link with oral tradition. The Moorish connection is confirmed by documents recently brought to light in Zaragoza that refer from 1463 to Moorish instrument makers such as Juce and Lope de Albariel, ‘maestros de hacer vihuelas y laudes’, that is, master builders of vihuelas and lutes.⁸ While most of the iconography presented by Woodfield of late fifteenth-century vihuelas is of Valencian provenance, parallel documentary evidence from Zaragoza confirms the continuing practice there of vihuela playing by Christian, Jewish, and Moorish musicians.⁹ In line with the assumption that the decline of the lute in Spain was a consequence of the expulsion or conversions of non-Christians, we find instances of musicians described in the 1480s as lutenists who are cited by 1500 as vihuelists.¹⁰ It is precisely at this time that the presence of the vihuela is noted at court.¹¹

During the period in which Spanish tablatures were printed (1536–76), vihuela performance practice is more attentively documented, after which our knowledge again becomes hazier. Although manuscript sources exist after 1580 that document a continued practice, it is nevertheless the period in which taste and musical styles began to change radically in Spain and vihuela playing declined in favour of the guitar. In the early seventeenth century its waning fortunes are aptly portrayed in Sebastián de Covarrubias’s *Tesoro de la lengua Castellana o Española* (1611), in a definition more heavy-hearted than customary in lexicography:

This instrument has been highly esteemed in our time, and there have been most excellent players, but since the invention of the guitar, there are only few who devote themselves to the

⁷ *De inventione et usu musicae* (ca. 1487). Tinctoris had visited Catalonia during his employment at the court of Naples. See Woodfield, *The Early History of the Viol*, p. 79.

⁸ Miguel Angel Pallarés Jiménez, ‘Aportación documental para la historia de la música en Aragón en el último tercio del siglo XV’, 5 parts, *Nassarre* 7/1 (1991), pp. 175–212; 7/2 (1991), pp. 171–212; 8/1 (1992), pp. 213–74; 8/2 (1992), pp. 171–244; 9/1 (1993), pp. 227–310.

⁹ For example, Rodrigo Castillo, lutenist and vihuelist active between 1488 and 1500; Mossé Patí ‘judío, tañedor de vihuela’ active 1485–8; and Alí Aucert, a Moor who entered the service of don Pedro de Mendoza in 1489 on the condition that he teach him to play the vihuela, are reported in Pallarés Jiménez, ‘Aportación documental’ Pt. III, Documents 69 and 139; Pt. IV, Documents 75 and 110.

¹⁰ The page Rodrigo Castillo (in the documents mentioned in n. 9) is described in 1488 as a ‘tañedor de laúd’, and in 1500 as a ‘tañedor de vihuela’.

¹¹ Between 1489 and 1500 Rodrigo Donaire was a salaried member of the House of Castile as a player of the vihuela and a singer, although the references fail to clarify if he played the vihuela *de arco* or *de mano*. See Tess Knighton, ‘The *a cappella* Heresy in Spain: An Inquisition into the Performance of the Cancionero Repertory’, *EM* 20 (1992), pp. 574–6.

study of the vihuela. It has been a great loss, because on it could be played all kinds of notated music, and now the guitar is no more than a cowbell, so easy to play, especially in the strummed way, that there isn't a stable boy who isn't a guitarist.¹²

Not surprisingly, the most informative sources for information on vihuela technique and musical style are the seven known printed vihuela tablatures, by Luis Milán (*El Maestro*, 1536), Luis de Narváez (*Los seys libros del Delphín*, 1538), Alonso Mudarra (*Tres Libros de Música*, 1546), Enríquez de Valderrábano (*Silva de sirenas*, 1547), Diego Pisador (*Libro de música de Vihuela*, 1552), Miguel de Fuenllana (*Orphénica Lyra*, 1554), and Esteban Daza (*El Parnasso*, 1576).¹³ Additional practical information is contained in a few paragraphs found in the *Libro de Cifra Nueva* (Alcalá de Henares, 1557) of Venegas de Henestrosa, the earliest of the Spanish publications whose titles advertise their appropriateness for any polyphonic instrument – keyboard, harp, or vihuela.¹⁴ The *Declaración de instrumentos musicales* by Juan Bermudo also offers considerable insight; Santa María's *Arte de tañer fantasía* is less central.¹⁵ These sources have all been examined with reference to performance practice by Ward and in Joan Myers's survey of vihuela technique.¹⁶ In addition, Charles Jacobs has investigated questions of tempo and metre,¹⁷ and both Annoni and Freis have made detailed studies of the information given by Bermudo relating to the vihuela.¹⁸

The ambitions of sixteenth-century vihuelists may have been quite different from the goals of performers today. The players were largely members of the professional classes for whom the courtly model of society was dominant, and their spiritual and intellectual lives were influenced by the currents of humanism and religious piety

¹² 'Este instrumento ha sido hasta nuestros tiempos muy estimado, y ha habido excelentísimos músicos; pero después que se inventaron las guitarras, son muy pocos los que se dan al estudio de la vihuela. Ha sido una gran pérdida, porque en ella se ponía todo género de música puntada, y ahora la guitarra no es más que un cencerro, tan fácil de tañer, especialmente en lo rasgueado, que no hay mozo de caballos que no sea músico de guitarra.'

¹³ Full titles and detailed inventories are given in Howard Mayer Brown, *Instrumental Music Printed Before 1600* (Cambridge, MA, 1965).

¹⁴ Luis Venegas de Henestrosa, *Libro de Cifra Nueva para Tecla, Harpa, y Vihuela* (Alcalá de Henares, 1557), ed. Higinio Anglés in *La música en la corte de Carlos V. Con la transcripción del 'Libro de Cifra Nueva para Tecla, Harpa y Vihuela' de Luys Venegas de Henestrosa (Alcalá de Henares, 1557)*, Monumentos de la Música Española 2–3 (Barcelona, 1944; rpt 1965). This interchangeability is repeated in the titles of two other important sources: Tomás de Santa María, *Libro llamado Arte de tañer fantasía, assi para Tecla como para Vihuela, y todo instrumento, en que se pudiere tañer a tres, y a quatro voces, y a mas* (Valladolid, 1565), and Hernando de Cabezón, *Obras de Musica para tecla, arpa y vihuela* (Madrid, 1578).

¹⁵ Juan Bermudo, *Comiença el libro llamado declaración de instrumentos musicales . . .* (Osuna, 1555); rpt ed. Macario Santiago Kastner, *Documenta Musicologica* 11 (Kassel, 1957); Tomás de Santa María, *Libro llamado arte de tañer fantasía* (Valladolid, 1565), translated as *The Art of Playing Fantasia*, ed. Almonte C. Howell and Warren E. Hultberg (Pittsburgh, 1991).

¹⁶ Joan Myers, 'Vihuela Technique', *JLSA* 1 (1968), pp. 15–18.

¹⁷ Charles Jacobs, *Tempo Notation in Renaissance Spain*, *Musicological Studies* 8 (Brooklyn, 1964).

¹⁸ Maria Therese Annoni, 'Tuning, Temperament, and Pedagogy for the Vihuela in Juan Bermudo's *Declaración de instrumentos musicales* (1555)', Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1989; Wolfgang Freis, 'Perfecting the Perfect Instrument: Fray Juan Bermudo on the Tuning and Temperament of the *vihuela de mano*', *EM* 23 (1995), pp. 421–36.

that were present in many aspects of Spanish life. Many of the players were amateurs with professions in law, public administration, and the church. Some were professional soldiers, such as the poet Garcilaso de la Vega (1503–36) and the vihuelist Luis de Guzmán (d. 1528) whose music was known to both Bermudo and Narváez.¹⁹ Of the published vihuela composers, Narváez, Fuenllana, and Valderrábano were professionals, Luis Milán was a gentleman courtier, Alonso Mudarra a cleric, and both Diego Pisador and Esteban Daza remained middle-class amateurs. Both professionals and non-professionals such as Luis Milán would have performed habitually at court, and it was probably in these surroundings that the young page Luis Zapata heard Narváez and remembered him as an extraordinarily gifted improviser.²⁰

Court performances most closely resemble the modern concert in both their acoustic conditions and the dynamics between performer and audience, but they were also isolated events within a society whose social rituals did not include public concerts. Most of the surviving references to vihuela playing do not describe court settings. In the main, they are abstract representations of the prowess of individual players that are silent about both the music they played and the settings in which they were heard. Some accounts appear to derive from small gatherings, however, or circumstances where the commentator is perhaps the only witness of the performance. One such description is of the small informal gathering celebrated in the Madrid home of the organist Bernardo Clavijo, as given by Vicente Espinel in *La vida del escudero Marcos Obregón*. He writes that ‘hearing maestro Clavijo on the keyboard, his daughter Bernardina on the harp and Lucas de Matos on the seven-course vihuela, imitating each other with serious and uncommon turns, is the best thing that I have heard in my life’.²¹

The real purpose of many sixteenth-century literary references to the vihuela, it would seem, is the enumeration of the personal qualities and talents of virtuous or exemplary individuals. Such references reveal the musical capacity of a good vihuelist to be equated with moral virtue and spiritual enlightenment along the lines advocated by Castiglione, who lived the last year of his life in Spain and whose influential *Cortegiano* was first published in Spanish translation in 1534. An important aspect of vihuela playing was the individualistic pursuit of enlightenment and edification through study and self-improvement. Social performance at intimate domestic

¹⁹ See Juan José Rey, ‘El vihuelista Luis de Guzmán’, *RM* 4 (1981), pp. 129–32, and Garcilaso de la Vega, *Obras con anotaciones de Hernando de Herrera* (Seville, 1580).

²⁰ Luis Zapata, *Misclánea* (ca. 1592), ed Pascual de Gayangos, *Memorial Histórico Español* 9 (Madrid, 1859), p. 95; translated in Ward, ‘The Vihuela de mano’, p. 381. Descriptions of Milán’s own performance practices are recorded in his *El Cortesano* (1560) and discussed in Luis Gasser, *Luis Milán on Sixteenth-Century Performance Practice* (Bloomington, 1996), Ch. 2.

²¹ ‘Pero llegado a oír al mismo maestro Clavijo en la tecla, a su hija doña Bernardina en el arpa y a Lucas de Matos en la vihuela de siete órdenes, imitándolos los unos a los otros con gravísimos y no usados movimientos, es lo mejor que he oído en mi vida.’ *La vida del escudero Marcos Obregón* (ca. 1616), Colección Austral Nº 1486 (Madrid, 1972), *relación* III, *descanso* 5.

gatherings of family and friends extends from this base. As tablature notation enabled any person to play sophisticated and complex music by numbers, without any knowledge of music theory or compositional style, study had multiple rewards. In their domestic role, the printed vihuela manuals may be transmitting a code that relates only partially to public performance, but includes advice on practices relevant to private activity. Thus, suggestions such as those of Daza and Pisador that commend the vihuelist to sing one voice of the fantasias in their books as they play may relate less to public performance convention than as guidance to the domestic performer on how to gain maximum understanding and benefit from private music making.

IMPROVISATION AND EMBELLISHMENT

Vihuela practice shared with the lute a heritage in improvisation, although the development of the sixteenth-century instrumental style is also much indebted to the dominant tradition of vocal polyphony. Just over two-thirds of the extant vihuela repertory is made up of intabulated vocal music. Applied to music emanating from both the vocal and the inherently instrumental traditions, improvisation and embellishment were important ingredients of instrumental practice. Although *cantus firmus* compositions do not abound in the repertory – Narváez's book includes some variations on hymn melodies and a *basse danse* – both Venegas de Henestrosa and Fuenllana make specific reference to such playing in their discussion of right-hand technique, and a small number of pieces in the manuscript sources suggest that *cantus firmus* improvisation may have been more widespread than the printed sources would have us believe. A closely related practice was to improvise or invent variations on repeated harmonic grounds, a technique apparently derived from improvising accompaniments in the performance of strophic *romances*. The numerous variations on *Conde Claros*, *Guárdame las vacas* (or *Romanesca*), and the *Pavana* show how vihuelists created independent instrumental pieces by developing each variation from idiomatic devices such as chords, arpeggios, scale movement, motivic imitation, or other sophisticated forms of counterpoint. *Cantus firmus* melodies appear to have been treated similarly.

Though melodic embellishment of vocal pieces was a distinct practice, intabulations contain little embellishment other than at cadences. In agreement with Bermudo and Pisador, Fuenllana expressed his opinion that unembellished intabulations allow the player to preserve both the polyphonic integrity and tempo of the original model; accordingly, in most of his arrangements, he restricted himself to cadential ornamentation.²² He does, however, provide embellished versions of a few pieces, such as Claudin de Sermisy's *Tant que vivray*. Valderrábano was of a similar

²² *Orphénica lyra*, introductory fol. v r.

mind, stating that unadorned works were less difficult to play, particularly given the current vogue for complex counterpoint. His stated preference was to leave embellishment to the taste and technical ability of the player, although he advertises that he adds embellishments in a few works as a model for those who wish to play in this way. Bermudo goes so far as to admonish those players who 'destroy good music with importune glosses', and considers it an audacity for any instrumentalist to attempt to 'improve' compositions by eminent masters.²³ It must be remembered that in all these cases writers are expressing their taste and personal preference, and in so doing all are also tacitly acknowledging a practice of embellishing intabulated vocal pieces.

PLACING MUSIC ON THE VIHUELA

Composing or arranging for the vihuela meant fitting music to an instrument for which the intervallic relationship between strings was more important than a concept of fixed pitch. Pisador, for example, indicates that the vihuela has no fixed mode because it is arranged with semitone frets, and explains that players should be aware of melodic motion, cadences, and finals.²⁴ His views are shared by the majority of other vihuelists. Most vihuela pieces – intabulations and original compositions – locate the root note of the final chord on the open sixth, fifth, or fourth course, or at the second fret of those courses, depending mainly on the range of the piece, with mode being a secondary consideration. This formula ensures the advantageous use of open strings and a vocabulary of idiomatic chord configurations that reappear in piece after piece. Much of Bermudo's discussion of intabulation is directed towards this outcome, and the seven vihuelas for which he provides templates offer the intabulator a practical tool for making intabulations accordingly. As has been clarified frequently in modern literature, these are not references to vihuelas of different size and pitch; they are conceptualizations of the fingerboard to facilitate intabulation and performance.²⁵ To this end Bermudo describes vihuelas in *Gamaut*, *Are*, *Bmi*, *Cfaut*, *Dsolre*, *Elami*, and *Ffaut*. According to this practice, the intabulation of a piece of music in mode 1 with a final D on V/2 gives a vihuela in *Gamaut* or G; the same piece arranged so that the D final is on V/0 supposes a vihuela in *Are* or A; and, should it fall on VI/0, a tuning in *Dsolre* or D is imagined.²⁶ An intabulator who has difficulty conceiving the relationship of notes to the fingerboard can construct a template of the fingerboard or make use of those illustrated in Bermudo's treatise.

²³ *Declaración*, fol. 84v. An almost identical admonition is made on fol. 29v.

²⁴ *Libro de música*, introductory fol. Aiii v.

²⁵ Ward, 'The Vihuela de mano', pp. 37ff.; Antonio Corona-Alcalde, 'Fray Juan Bermudo and his Seven Vihuelas', *The Lute* 24 (1984), 77–86; Annoni, 'Tuning, Temperament, and Pedagogy', pp. 89ff.

²⁶ Roman numerals indicate the course, arabic numerals specify the fret.

IMPROVISING AND COMPOSING FANTASIAS

The composition of original fantasias was the pinnacle of the vihuelist's art. Most of the fantasias in Milán's *El Maestro* are fundamentally distinguished from those by all subsequent composers in that they are less dependent upon techniques derived from vocal composition and more closely connected to instrumental improvisation.²⁷ Milán's recourse to a reservoir of melodic cells, motives, textural complexes, cadential formulas, and even entire passages is evident from the recurrence of these devices in many pieces. He was a musician who composed directly onto the instrument by means of improvisation using partially pre-composed materials. The extent to which this represents a more widespread practice is a question to which no other evidence can be brought to bear.

Later vihuela fantasias rely more extensively on vocally derived practices. Bermudo offers vihuelists a graded pathway to acquire mastery on the instrument through the intabulation of duos from Mass movements, and simple three-part polyphony, before tackling works in four or more voices by Morales, Gombert, and others. All of this he regards as prerequisite to inventing one's own fantasias, specifically so that they should be 'in good taste'.²⁸ One could not find a more explicit expression of aesthetic goals. Whether there were many vihuelists able to improvise fantasias of the kind that is included in the printed repertory is not revealed by surviving documents. It seems clear, however, that in a number of cases fantasias were composed on paper and transferred to the vihuela by exactly the same process used in intabulating vocal works. The fantasias of Daza and Pisador are the most likely to have been conceived in this fashion.²⁹

SINGING AND PLAYING

The vihuela repertory includes works that were intended primarily to be sung to accompaniment, as well as pieces in which singing was an option. Obligatory or optional, the evidence points to the vihuelist being also the singer. The books of Mudarra, Valderrábano, Pisador, and Fuenllana include accompanied songs as well as intabulated vocal works with the vocal part notated on a separate mensural staff, which are incomplete unless both voice and vihuela participate together. In the

²⁷ John Griffiths, 'The Vihuela Fantasia: A Comparative Study of Forms and Styles', Ph.D. diss., Monash University, 1983, Ch. 2.

²⁸ Bermudo, *Declaración*, fol. 99v.

²⁹ Although there is no direct documentation of this practice, the music of both composers suggests the likelihood of score composition and subsequent intabulation. In Daza's case, the dogged adherence to detailed aspects of vocal compositional practice leads to this conclusion, while in Pisador's music it is the density of his thematic imitation – often totally obscured and inaudible on the vihuela – that suggests a similar working method. Regarding Pisador, see John Griffiths, 'The Vihuela Fantasia', pp. 315–64 and Esteban Daza, *The Fantasias for Vihuela*, ed. John Griffiths, *Recent Researches in Music of the Renaissance* 54 (Madison, 1982), pp. xi–xiv.

tablatures of Milán, Valderrábano, Pisador, and Fuenllana, the figures corresponding to the vocal parts are printed in red, while the books of Mudarra and Daza signify sung parts with apostrophes (*puntillos*) at the upper right-hand corner of the tablature figures, with the text printed beneath. In numerous instances, the vihuelists indicate that these parts are shown so that the works can be sung if desired. Pisador and Daza extend this practice to their fantasias as well.

Vihuelists evidently performed intabulations in flexible configurations: as solo pieces; with one or more of the voices sung; or possibly together with other instruments. On this last point information is indeed scarce. One of the few references is given by Bermudo, who recommends placing a handkerchief under the strings to form a new nut in order to conform to the pitch of others when playing *en concierto*.³⁰ Considerable discussion has also centred on the issue of whether or not sung vocal lines should be doubled by the vihuela.³¹ Apart from specific cases where separate mensural notation and tablature precisely declare the composer's intentions, the absence of reference to the problem in sixteenth-century sources suggests that it was not a crucial issue for players and there is no suggestion that a particular practice existed. Pisador's choice of notational format has more to do with legibility and notational clarity than performance practice. In the second and seventh books of his *Libro de música*, the three-part villancicos and villanescas are notated with red ciphers 'so that the voice they indicate may be sung by the player', while four-part pieces are notated with the vocal part on a separate staff.³² Several of his transcriptions of cantus firmus Masses indicate the cantus firmus in red figures, perhaps more for didactic reasons than as a performance direction, and the majority of the motets show one voice in red, although Pisador designates other motets 'to play without singing'. With regard to his thirteen fantasias based on pre-existing themes 'sobre pasos remedados', statements of the theme are also printed in red and indicated to be sung as 'this will be a most pleasurable thing for him who plays and sings them, for the theme is found in all the voices'.

No preference is shown in the repertory for any particular voice range, and intabulations can be found showing any one of the voices – soprano, alto, tenor, or bass – in red ciphers or by *puntillos*. In the *libro segundo* of *Silva de sirenas*, Valderrábano presents a collection of motets and Mass sections in which either tenor or bass parts are shown in red 'para cantar y tañer' while the *libro tercero* comprises songs, intabulations of motets, villancicos, and other songs printed with an upper voice on a separate mensural staff and a specific indication for the vihuelist to sing them in falsetto ('para cantar en falsete').

³⁰ Bermudo, *Declaración*, fol. 30r.

³¹ For example, Jesús Bal y Gay, 'Fuenllana and the Transcription of Spanish Lute Music', *AcM* 2 (1939), pp. 16–27.

³² 'para que la voz que por ellas va señalada, la cante el que tañe', quoted here and following from the prologue of Pisador's *Libro de música*.

TEMPO AND METRE

The earliest four printed vihuela books include explicit indications of the desired tempo, which constitute the earliest known tempo markings in European music. Milán provides verbal instructions to guide the performer, using phrases such as ‘algo apriessa’ (‘somewhat fast’), ‘con el compás batido’ (‘with a beating pulse’), ‘compás a espacio’ (‘a slow beat’), or ‘ni muy apriessa ni muy a espacio sino con un compás bien mesurado’ (‘neither very fast nor very slow but with a well-measured beat’). While most of his music is to be played with a regular pulse, he also includes fantasias in a style that require internal tempo changes. Grouped together in each of the two *libros of El Maestro* are pieces that show ‘más respecto a tañer de gala que de mucha música ni compás’ (‘more respect for “gallant playing” than much other music, nor for the beat’). His so-called *de gala* or ‘gallant’ style consists of chords mixed with passage work that is commonly called playing *dedillo* (‘consonancias mezcladas con redobles que vulgarmente dizen para hazer dedillo’) in which the intention of the author is that ‘all that is in chords should be played slowly and all that is in running notes fast, and pause on each fermata’ (‘todo lo que será consonancias tañerlas con el compás a espacio y todo lo que será redobles tañerlos con el compás apriessa, y parar de tañer en cada coronado un poco’).³³

In subsequent publications, Narváez, Mudarra and Valderrábano adapted traditional mensural signs to indicate two or three performance speeds. Narváez uses the symbols Φ for pieces to be played quickly or ‘apriessa’, and \mathbb{C} for those to be played slowly or ‘muy de espacio’. Mudarra uses three mensural signs Φ , \mathbb{C} , and \mathbb{C} to show tempos of fast, moderate and slow – ‘apriessa’, ‘ni muy apriessa ni muy a espacio’, and ‘despacio’, respectively. The signs employed by Valderrábano show a similar range of tempos with the signs \mathbb{C} : for ‘a espacio’ (slow), \mathbb{C} : ‘más apriessa’ (‘faster’) and \mathbb{C} : ‘muy más apriessa’ (‘very much faster’). While in the vast majority of instances the tempo indicated by signs provides relatively useful guidance to the performer, it does appear that the vihuelists were not entirely consistent in their application. In comparing, for example, two consecutive fantasias in Mudarra’s first book, we find works identical in most respects – mode, length, textural density, difficulty, compositional style – yet one is marked to be played at a faster speed than the other.³⁴ In some instances where markings appear to be anomalous, such as the *Romanesca* and *Pavana de Alexandre* in Mudarra’s first book, slow tempo markings do not result in slow tempos when the given sign is taken to indicate the duration of the written tablature bar instead of the musical pulse. In both cases, slow tempos are given because the pieces are respectively notated in 3/2 and 4/2, so that the bars are of longer real-time duration than the more common 2/2 ones.

³³ *El Maestro*, fol. Diii r.

³⁴ *Tres libros*, fols. v r and vi r; Fantasias 5 and 6 in the Pujol edition, *Monumentos de la Música Española* 7 (Barcelona, 1949; rpt 1984).

The vihuelists who published after 1550 chose to break with the new tradition established in the 1530s and 1540s. It was certainly not due to their lack of familiarity with the earlier books. Pisador instructs his readers that *tactus* (*compás*) 'can be of greater or lesser interval as the player may desire' ('puede ser de mayor espacio o menor como quisiere el que tañe'). Towards the end of his preface (fols. viii v–ix), Fuenllana stresses the need to play evenly as one of the necessities of good performance, but concerning tempo his pronouncement is so intertwined with references to the ability of the player and the difficulty of the works, that it appears more to do with establishing a tempo relevant to the player's competence than to any ideal performance tempo. Fuenllana was more concerned to define an aesthetic objective for the performer, advocating a goal of unhurried forward movement rather than giving prescriptive tempo indications. Good taste, it seems, was more the manner of the performance than its speed:

Concerning the tempo with which these works should be played, I only wish to say that each should conform to the technical ability of his hands and the difficulty of the work, for he who has ability has licence to play any work with more liberty and dexterity, even if it be a difficult one. And he who does not have such ability should play with a slower beat, especially at the beginning, until knowing how to play the work accurately, and to maintain the integrity of the composition. And finally, both those who have skill and those who lack it, it seems to me that in any work they might play whether easy or difficult, they should choose the average, so that the beat is neither fast nor very slow.³⁵

INSTRUMENTS AND PLAYING TECHNIQUE

From the variety of sizes shown in pictorial representations of the vihuela and by customary reference in the sources to its intervals rather than its pitch, it is unlikely that vihuelas were built to a standard size. Bermudo used the term *vihuela común* (common vihuela) to describe the instrument that he thought of as usually tuned in G, or sometimes A, irrespective of how those pitches translated into modern equivalents. In practice, pitch, according to Milán, was established empirically by the size of the instrument and the thickness of its strings. The variety of sizes is confirmed by Valderrábano's music for two vihuelas which calls for instruments tuned up to a fifth apart. Empirically, it is evident that much music in the surviving

³⁵ *Ophénica lyra*, introductory fol. v r: 'En lo que toca al compás con que estas obras se han de tañer, solo quiero dezir, que cada vno se deue conformar con la dispusición de sus manos, y dificultad de la obra, pues él que las tuuiere con ellas se tiene la licencia para tañer con más libertad y destreza, qualquiera obra, aunque tenga dificultad. Y él que no tuuiere tanta soltura de manos deue tañer con el compás reposado, en especial a los principios, hasta tener conocimiento de la obra que tañe por vsar de limpieza en lo que tañere, y guardar la verdad de la compostura. Y al fin assí los que tienen manos, como los que carecen dellas, me parece que en toda obra que tañeren, ora sea fácil o dificultosa, deuen de elegir el medio: quiero dezir, que ni el compás vaya apressurado, ni muy de espacio.'

tablatures is difficult if not impossible to play on instruments with a string length of over 72 cm, as found on the only surviving vihuelas in Paris and Quito.³⁶ The music is much easier to negotiate on instruments with a string length of 60 cm or less. It could even be the case that string lengths became shorter during the course of the century: the music of the later tablature books is much more manageable on an instrument with a vibrating length of 55 cm or less. Small instruments like this might have been known from quite early on if the proportions of the vihuela depicted in the frontispiece of Narváez's book are reliable.

The common vihuela was an instrument of six courses tuned to the same intervals as the lute – fourth, fourth, major third, fourth, fourth – although variants with four, five, and seven courses were also played. All these variant forms of vihuela are discussed by Bermudo in his *Declaración*. Fuenllana includes a group of pieces for the five-course vihuela, and pieces for four-course instruments are included in both *Orphénica lyra* and Mudarra's *Tres libros*. These instruments are all vihuelas in the generic sense of the term, but the instrument with four courses is generally referred to in the sources as a *guitarra*. Bermudo also refers to the five-course instrument as a guitar. References to seven-course vihuelas are found throughout the century, the earliest being to its use by Luis de Guzmán, and later sources mention the ability of the composer Francisco Guerrero as a vihuelist.³⁷

Vihuela *scordatura* occurs only in the books of Pisador and Fuenllana, which both call for the sixth course to be lowered a tone in a number of instances. It is evident from Bermudo, however, that tuning might not have been so immutably standardized. He discusses variant tunings and gives in addition to standard tuning two others: one in which the third course is raised by a semitone as on the modern guitar, which Bermudo describes as having seen in Italian sources, and another that is based on a major triad that ascends G–B–d–g–b–d¹, if G is assumed as the lowest course. Bermudo enumerates four different tunings for the seven-course vihuela, four for the five-course guitar or vihuela, and three for the four-course guitar. He claims that the adventurous vihuelist 'does not content himself with the tuning of the vihuela común, but tunes according to his wishes and ciphers according to the tuning, and . . . [that] only he will know how to play on such a vihuela'.³⁸ In the absence of other evidence, it is difficult to assess whether these tunings are simply theoretical speculation, or were part of a real practice.

³⁶ Comparative measurements for both instruments are given in Egberto Bermúdez, 'The Vihuela: The Paris and Quito Instruments', in *La guitarra española* (Madrid, 1991), pp. 25–47.

³⁷ Francisco Pacheco, *Libro de descripción de verdaderos Retratos de Illustres y Memorables varones, c.1599*; facsimile edn (Seville, 1983), p. 204.

³⁸ *Declaración*, fol. 93v: 'no se contente con el temple de la vihuela común: sino temple a su voluntad, y cifre conforme al temple, y tañendo aquello cifrado, solo el sabrá tañer por semejante vihuela'.

STRINGING

The courses of the vihuela appear to have been tuned in unisons, although we cannot be sure. The literature discusses strings by course, always expressed in the singular – the *prima*, *segunda*, etc. – rather than by individual string. The unique exception is found in the introduction of Pisador's book where he specifies that the player 'take one of the open fourth strings and tune it in unison with its pair' as the starting point for tuning the vihuela.³⁹ The only other Spanish evidence favouring unison pairs rather than octaves is the testimony of Covarrubias, who claims unison courses to be one of the features that distinguish the vihuela from the guitar.⁴⁰ As has recently been argued, these references are scant evidence upon which to base a general conclusion.⁴¹ Similarly, the question of whether one or two strings were used on the first course also suffers from a similar lack of information. The testimony of Covarrubias and the painting in Barcelona Cathedral of a five-course vihuela that clearly shows a single first course are the only explicit pieces of information. Strings were not always perfect in roundness and diameter. Milán explains a simple manner of testing strings to ensure their true intonation by plucking an outstretched string before putting it on the vihuela, and observing whether its vibration produces an even arc 'as if two strings and not more'.⁴² Little is known about string-making in Spain or the importation of foreign strings, and no evidence has been produced to show whether the bass strings of the vihuela were plain gut, or whether the techniques of roping or chemical modification of gut (so-called 'loaded' gut) that have been revived in recent decades are relevant to Spanish practice.

PITCH AND TUNING

Milán's advice on stringing suggests that the true pitch of the vihuela, its *verdadera entonación*, was determined empirically according to the size of the instrument. His advice to novices is to choose a first string according to the size of the instrument; quite simply, this means the larger the vihuela, the thicker the string. This string is raised to just below its breaking point, 'as high as it can bear', and the other courses are tuned from it.⁴³ Venegas also recommends that the first string be used as the

³⁹ *Libro de música*, introduction, fol. iii r.

⁴⁰ Covarrubias, *Tesoro*, p. 670 states that the guitar has 'cuerdas requintadas, que no son unisonas, como las de la vihuela, sino templadas en quintas [sic]; fuera de la prima que está en ambos instrumentos, es una cuerda sola' ['higher strings which are not unisons like those of the vihuela, but tuned in fifths except for the first of both instruments which is a single string'].

⁴¹ See Bill Hearn, 'Playing Devil's Advocate: The Shaky Case for Unison-Course Vihuela Stringing', *LSAQ* 29 (1994), pp. 3–10.

⁴² *El Maestro*, fols. Aiii v–Ai v.

⁴³ *El Maestro*, fol. A iii v: 'subireys la prima tan alto quanto lo pueda suffrir; y después templeys las otras cuerdas al punto de la prima'.

reference point for tuning since it is easily broken. Milán comments that if the vihuela is tuned too high it goes down, and if it is too low it goes up.

The tuning instructions of Milán and Pisador proceed by unisons and octaves. Milán gives two tuning methods for the instrument: unisons descending from the first string on the fifth and fourth frets of each lower string as required. Pisador varies from this only in that he starts from the fourth course. Milán's second method is based on the octaves II/3–IV/0, III/3–V/0, and IV/2–VI/0. Pisador specifies these same octaves for confirming the tuning done by unisons. Venegas adds to a similar description his observation that some players teach tuning by marking a line across the strings at the nut of a tuned vihuela for students to use as a visual reference point, retuning the strings by aligning the marks with the nut.

FRETS AND TEMPERAMENT

Knowledge of vihuela fretting, temperament, and intonation is principally derived from the precise accounts given by Bermudo. He observes that most vihuelists placed the frets by ear, and moreover that few did it well,⁴⁴ so it is possible that he had never seen his scientific method of fretting used in Spain. It can only be hoped that his mathematical formulas accord with the sound world he knew. He gives advice at three levels: a simple fretting system for beginners, more complex systems for advanced players, and a sophisticated system to satisfy the needs of the most inquiring player. While his ultimate system results in an approximately equal temperament, Bermudo's simpler systems are all based on Pythagorean principles of pure fifths, and unequal major and minor semitones.⁴⁵

Bermudo's simplest system specifies only the placement of frets corresponding to the diatonic notes, and he leaves the player to place by ear the frets that correspond to accidentals. For the standard vihuela in G he gives rules for placing frets 2, 4, 5, 7, and 10: fret 2 is placed at $\frac{1}{5}$ of the distance from the nut to the bridge, fret 4 at $\frac{1}{5}$ the distance between the second fret and the bridge, frets 5 and 7 respectively at $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{3}$ of the full string length, and fret 10 at $\frac{1}{4}$ of the distance between fret 5 and the bridge.⁴⁶ The chromatic frets are initially placed at half the distance between the whole tone frets, and moved towards the nut if a smaller *fa* semitone is desired, or towards the bridge if it is to be a larger *mi*. Bermudo's more advanced systems give the mathematical calculations for all the frets on the seven vihuelas for which he provides intabulation templates. The essentially diatonic frets 2, 5, 7, 9, and 10

⁴⁴ *Declaración*, fols. 102r ff.

⁴⁵ Annoni, 'Tuning, Temperament, and Pedagogy', pp. 132, 135, and 163ff. tabulates equivalents in cents for these systems.

⁴⁶ These frets, expressed as decimal fractions (rounded to 4 places) of the distance from nut to bridge, are the following: 0.1111, 0.2099, 0.2500, 0.3333, and 0.4375.

remain constant for all these vihuelas, while the other frets are manipulated slightly to give both diatonic and chromatic notes their correct intervallic distance within Pythagorean temperament. The templates depicted in Bermudo's treatise provide an approximation that allows the reader to see which frets represent both major and minor semitones.

But owing to the intervals between courses, these tunings do not always give the correct semitone at each fret of each string. In G tuning, for example, the first fret should give a small *fa* semitone for $E\flat$ and $B\flat$ on courses II and III, and a *mi* semitone for $F\sharp$ on course IV. Theoretical and practical differences are irreconcilable. Bermudo acknowledges the problem and describes practices that can remedy these deficiencies by (1) finding an alternate fingering on another string for the incorrect note, (2) altering the pitch of the string with the left hand, (3) slanting the fret, (4) moving the fret, (5) using double frets of different thicknesses to give both the correct *mi* and *fa* in the manner of the split keys of keyboard instruments, or (6) retuning and playing only one of the strings of a unison course. He is not sympathetic towards some of these practices, but they obviously represent some of the solutions that players used.

References to altering fret positions are found in the books of both Milán and Valderrábano, specifically with regard to the fourth fret. The apparent contradiction between them – Milán recommends moving the fourth fret towards the pegs while Valderrábano requests that it be shifted towards the rose – is reconciled in terms of the modes in question. Within a Pythagorean framework, both instructions result in altering the semitone division to create an effect closer to equal temperament, similar to Bermudo's most elaborate system of fret placement. In Milán's case, the change to the fourth fret specified for his fantasia in modes 3 and 4 serves, in A tuning, to correct the octave $b-b^1$ ($IV/4-I/2$) and to decrease the sharpness of the semitones $g\sharp^1$ and $d\sharp^1$ ($II/4$ and $III/4$) to something close to equally tempered notes.⁴⁷ In Valderrábano's case, his *Fantasia sobre un pleni* in mode 1 assumes E tuning with the final on $IV/0$.⁴⁸ Modification of the placement of the fourth fret sharpens the normally minor semitone between a and $b\flat$ on course III, again approximating equal temperament. Thus, Mark Lindley's argument that Milán played in meantone temperament is without credibility; it completely ignores Bermudo and develops on the assumption that Pythagorean tuning was far too 'Medieval' for the refined 'Renaissance ear'.⁴⁹

While the primary beauty of Pythagorean temperament lies in the purity of fifths, in strategic terms it favours the structure of vihuela music. The cadences that form its essential grammar and punctuation are strengthened – to the modern ear, at least –

⁴⁷ *Fantasia* 14, fol. D vi r, and *Con pavor recordó el moro*, fol. Qiv v.

⁴⁸ *Silva de sirenas*, fol. 74r.

⁴⁹ Mark Lindley, 'Luis Milán and Meantone Temperament', *JLSA* 11 (1978), p. 46.

by the sharpness and upward insistence of cadential leading notes, and the more strongly plaintive Phrygian cadences that emphasize the flatter *fa* semitone. It seems no surprise that Spanish taste for Pythagorean temperament may have endured longer than in other parts of Europe due to its inherent strong contrasts and affective intensity.

PLAYING POSTURE

All of the writers on the vihuela are silent about how the instrument is to be held. Our observations can be based solely on iconographical evidence and personal experimentation. Illustrations show the instrument most frequently held with the lower bout resting on the right upper thigh. The neck of the vihuela is shown at angles of between 35° and 60° above horizontal. Additional support of the instrument appears to come from the right forearm pressing the instrument against the player's chest. The illustrations from the frontispieces of the Narváez and Milán books (Plates 8 and 9) are representative examples of the positions shown in iconographical sources. They also show the two extremes of right-hand position: Milán's Orpheus apparently plays with thumb-under technique while Narváez's Arion is unquestionably playing thumb-out.⁵⁰ Other related illustrations of players of the vihuela, the viola da mano, and of early guitars show only little variation. Some illustrations from both the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries show players of vihuelas *de peñola* and *de mano* performing in a standing position with the instruments held between the forearm and player's belly without the use of a cord or strap. This position allows the instrument to be played with the forearm virtually parallel to the strings, although it is difficult to play with the same ease as when seated. A similar right-arm position is depicted in Giovanni Raimondi's engraved portrait (ca. 1510) of Giovanni Philotheo Achillini playing the viola da mano, which shows him with the waist of the instrument on his right leg, and with the neck of the instrument almost horizontal to the ground.⁵¹ This illustration offers a variant that appears to be the exception to the norms of both Spanish and Italian practice, and the positions shown by Milán and Narváez's vihuelists indicate a manner of sitting and holding the instrument that appears to have remained constant until at least the end of the seventeenth century.

LEFT-HAND TECHNIQUE

Two issues concerning the left hand receive comment from writers on the vihuela. Venegas de Henestrosa is the only writer to provide advice on fingering patterns. He

⁵⁰ For a basic definition of thumb-under and thumb-out techniques, see Paul O'Dette, 'Plucked Instruments', in *A Performer's Guide to Renaissance Music*, ed. Jeffrey T. Kite-Powell (New York, 1994), p. 142.

⁵¹ Depicted in Alexander Bellow, *The Illustrated History of the Guitar* (New York, 1970), p. 72.



Plate 8 Orpheus playing the vihuela, from Milán, *El maestro* (Valencia, 1536)



Plate 9 Arion playing the vihuela, from Narváez, *Los seys libros del Delphin* (Valladolid, 1538)

indicates first that it is preferable to use open strings where possible instead of notes stopped at the fifth fret, and he also comments that ascending and descending passages are to be fingered with the 'second and fifth, or the fourth fingers', that is, 1, 4, and 3 in modern terms. No further clarification is offered. The simplest interpretation of this reference is that comfortable fingering patterns are recommended which allow the hand to remain in a natural position without having to be extended more than necessary.

The second matter concerns sustaining polyphonic voices by leaving the left-hand fingers on the fingerboard. Fuenllana exemplifies typical situations by precise description. He refers to chords as in Ex. 7.1, where it is necessary to keep the finger holding V/2 and VI/2 (the bass voice) in place for the duration of each tablature bar. In selecting fingerings, he gives the instance shown as Ex. 7.2, specified by him in E tuning, where it is necessary to sustain the lower voices while the upper part descends from g^1 to f^1 . He advocates the fingering shown in Ex. 7.3a in preference to Ex. 7.3b, which unnecessarily curtails the sound of the lower voices. Mudarra uses the sign of the circumflex above tablature ciphers to indicate that 'the finger should not be lifted for the duration of the bar, if it is found at the beginning of it', a statement intended to mean holding the finger in place for the duration of a semibreve.⁵² Numerous instances of this occur in Mudarra's tablature at places that alert the player to suspensions, and concur with Bermudo's caution to be attentive to maintaining left-hand fingers in place to allow suspensions to sound properly.⁵³ As an advanced technique, Fuenllana and Bermudo both allude to stopping only one string of a course, and letting the other sound at its open pitch as a way of fingering difficult chords. Fuenllana indicates that he resorts to this technique only in intabulations of works in five or six voices in order that the integrity of the counterpoint be preserved.⁵⁴ Numerous examples are found among his intabulations of five-voice motets.

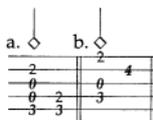
RIGHT-HAND TECHNIQUE

Iconographical sources, though often unreliable, show vihuelists playing with the right hand held in both thumb-out and thumb-under positions, as they are commonly termed. In six proficiently executed Spanish paintings and four woodcuts that show hand positions clearly, at least five if not seven of the players are using the thumb-out position, and three of them appear to be depicted playing thumb-under. The variety of practice is confirmed by Venegas de Henestrosa, who includes both positions among his 'four manners of redoubling'. His use of the terms *figueta*

⁵² *El Maestro*, fol. Aiii v: 'no an de alçar el dedo de la cuerda durante aquel compás, si estuviere al principio de el'.

⁵³ *Declaración*, fol. 28r.

⁵⁴ *Orphénica Lyra*, introductory fols. iv v–v r.



Ex. 7.1



Ex. 7.2



Ex. 7.3

castellana for the thumb-out alternation of thumb and index finger and *figueta extranjera* for thumb-under alternation is indicative of what he believed to be the origins of each style, but no preference is shown towards either the ‘Castilian’ or ‘foreign’ way, and each is presented as a legitimate manner of playing.⁵⁵ It is also clear from Fuenllana’s comments which follow below that some players used their nails to play the vihuela while others did not.

Most of the specific discussion of plucking technique is devoted to the execution of rapid passages. The noteworthy exception occurs in Fuenllana’s instructions for playing cleanly, where he makes special comment about the use of the thumb where a string is to remain silent between the strings to be plucked with the thumb and fingers. In such instances, Fuenllana advocates using an *apoyando* thumb stroke to guard against it accidentally striking the intermediate string. He makes it clear that this can only be done when the music is moving in minims and semibreves, and not in diminutions.⁵⁶

Milán, Mudarra, Fuenllana, and Venegas provide commentary regarding the kind of strokes that were used for the performance of *redobles* – rapidly ‘redoubled’ or paired notes used both in cadential ornamentation and scale passages. All authors distinguish between the single-fingered *dedillo* stroke, and various ways of playing

⁵⁵ Anglés, *La música en la corte de Carlos V*, vol. I, p. 159.

⁵⁶ *Orphénica lyra*, introductory fols. vi r–viv r.

figueta or with two fingers, *dos dedos*. *Dedillo* was the term used by vihuelists that described the use of the index finger in the manner of a plectrum. As a technique, it appears to be a vestige of the early period of vihuela practice; by the 1550s it was regarded by Fuenllana as no longer the ideal way of playing. From Fuenllana's description of the stroke it may be deduced that the flesh of the finger was used for the accented note of each pair:

One of the excellences that this instrument has is [the quality of] the attack with which the finger strikes the string. And given that in this manner of *redoble* [= *dedillo*], the finger when it enters strikes with [this] attack, when it leaves it is impossible to avoid striking with the nail, and this is an imperfection, for neither is it a [properly] formed note, nor does it strike wholly or truly. And it is here that those who *redoble* with the nail will find ease in what they do, but not perfection.⁵⁷

Milán designed the fourth *cuaderno* of the first book of *El Maestro* to show the difference between playing *dedillo* and *dos dedos*. By indicating at the outset of the *cuaderno* that the playing of *redobles* is 'commonly called playing *dedillo*', he implies this to have been in common currency in the 1530s. He specifies it as the principal technique for the first three fantasias (nos. 10–12), which he explains at the beginning of Fantasia 12 'will better be played with *dedillo* as they are composed for acquiring dexterity'.⁵⁸ The remaining two fantasias (nos. 13 and 14) are for playing with *dos dedos*. In comparing these pieces, it is evident that *redoble* passages to be played *dedillo* are concentrated on the upper three courses of the instrument while two-finger alternation is concentrated on the lower three.

Mudarra advocates playing with *dos dedos* but admits that there are occasions when the *dedillo* stroke is useful, and specifies how to use it:

Regarding the *redoble* I wish to state my view. And it is that I regard the [stroke with] two fingers as good: and he who wishes to play well should take my advice and use it because it is the most secure, and [the one] which gives the best style to the passages. Of *dedillo* I shall not speak ill. He who practices both manner of *redoble* will not encounter difficulties for both are necessary at times. *Dedillo* [is] for passages that are played from the first towards the sixth [course] which is from top to bottom, and *dos dedos* for ascending [passages] and for cadencing. *Dedillo* is for passages that go from the first string towards the sixth which is from high to low, and the two-fingered technique for moving from low to high, and for cadencing'.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ *Orphénica lyra*, introductory fols. v v–vi r: 'vna de las excelencias que este instrumento tiene, es el golpe con que el dedo hiere la cuerda. Y puesto que en esta manera de redoble, el dedo quando entra hiere la cuerda con golpe, quando sale no se puede negar el herir con la vña, y esta es imperfección, assi por no ser el punto formado, como por no auer golpe entero ni verdadero. Y de aquí es que los que redoblan con la vña hallarán facilidad en lo que hizieren, pero no perfección.'

⁵⁸ *El Maestro*, fol. Diii v: 'mejor se tañeran con dedillo pues son hechas para hazer soltura de dedo'.

⁵⁹ *Tres libros de música*, introductory fol. iii r: 'Acerca del redoble quiero dezir mi parecer. Y es que tengo por bueno el de dos dedos: y que quien quisiere tañer bien de mi consejo dévelos usar porque es redoble más cierto: y que da mejor ayre a los passos. Del dedillo no digo mal quien pudiere tener entrambas maneras de redoblar no se hallará

In line with Fuenllana's implication that the accentuation in *dedillo* playing was done with the flesh stroke, Mudarra's preference is for using the *dedillo* stroke for descending passages where the movement of the finger towards the lower strings on accented notes allows for easy and natural crossing from one string to the next. In the first three of his fantasias, Mudarra uses the abbreviations *dos de* and *dedi* to indicate the passages that are to be played with the respective strokes in accordance with his stated principle. *Dedillo* technique has been maintained to the present day as an integral part of playing the Portuguese guitar.

Regarding two-finger alternation, Venegas and Fuenllana are the most specific. Venegas considers index–middle alternation to be appropriate in pieces where the thumb needs to play a cantus firmus, or its presumed secular equivalent 'making a discant with index and middle *de contado*'.⁶⁰ The same texture can also be played with *dedillo* above the cantus firmus, but not with thumb–index alternation.⁶¹ Fuenllana, the master of them all it would seem, deserves the last word. In distinguishing between two-finger *redoble* types, he expresses his preference for middle–index alternation. He praises thumb–index playing, and comments that it is particularly appropriate for the thicker lower three courses, as one can achieve a fullness of tone, and adds that it can be used on all the courses 'as we know is done by strangers to our nation'. Of middle–index alternation he tells us that it should be played in regular alternation using the middle finger on strong beats, and that it can be used in both descending and ascending passages. He adds:

I dare to venture, that in this manner alone resides all the perfection that any manner of *redoble* might contain, both in velocity and cleanliness, and in permitting that which is played with it be most perfect for, as has been said, there is great virtue in plucking the string with a good attack, without needing to use the nail or any other kind of invention, for in the finger alone, as in [any] living material, lies the true spirit, which is brought out by striking the string.⁶²

mal conellas porque entrambas son menester a tiempos. El dedillo para passos que se hazen de la prima hazia la sexta que son de arriba para abaxo y el de dos dedos para los que se hazen pa arriba y para el clausular. El dedillo para pasos que se hacen de la prima hacia la sexta que son de arriba para abaxo y el de dos dedos para los que se hacen de abaxo para arriba y para clausular.'

⁶⁰ Anglés, *La música en la corte de Carlos V*, vol. I, p. 160.

⁶¹ Venegas, from Anglés, *La música en la corte de Carlos V*, vol. I, p. 160: 'discantar con dos dedos de contado, o redoblar de dedillo sobre el canto llano: las cuales dos voces, no se podrán llenar con redobles de figueta'. The only reference in musical sources to this term is the title of Mudarra's *Fantasia de pasos de contado* in *Tres libros de música*, fol. 4r, built as running notes above an unidentified or original bass.

⁶² *Orphènia Lyra*, introductory fol. vi r: 'oso dezir, que en ella sola consiste toda la perfection que en qualquiera modo de redoble puede auer, assi en velocidad, como en limpieza, como en ser muy perfecto lo que con el se tañe, pues como dicho es, tiene gran excellencia el herir la cuerda con golpe, sin que se entremeta vña ni otra manera de inuención, pues en solo el dedo, como en cosa biua consiste el verdadero spiritu, que hiriendo la cuerda se le suele dar'. The 'other manner of invention' may be a reference to thimbles or finger picks of the type that have been documented with reference to Francesco da Milano's playing. See Paul O'Dette, 'Some Observations about the Tone of Early Lutenists', *Proceedings of the International Lute Symposium Utrecht 1986*, ed. Louis P. Grijp and Willem Mook (Utrecht, 1988), p. 87.

For the performer, the development of a historically derived performance practice requires the assimilation of information that I instinctively separate into the categories of mechanics and aesthetics. Regarding the latter, vihuela music itself reveals much of its own story. Our stylistic understanding of the repertory is the first thing that guides us in the application of instrumental technique. A deeper understanding of vihuela music in its larger musical and social contexts sharpens this knowledge: it is easier to make good music on the vihuela if one has a grasp of the sixteenth-century Spanish vocal styles and of music theory of the period. The individuals who played the instrument, their social experience, their musical preferences and traditions, and the working of their minds also form an indispensable part of the backdrop. From other, more fragmentary accounts, we can form a clearer image of the social context in which the vihuela was performed that can help us understand such issues as the role of improvisation, the value that players placed on the authority of the musical texts they used, and the level of stylistic uniformity that social conventions demanded of performers.

For the vihuela, there is no single 'correct' way to play. The central sources reveal a variety of standards and taste in matters such as embellishment (particularly in intabulations), tuning, tempo, and virtually every other dimension of performance. There is no reason to doubt the reliability of these sources, and the very fact that they do not agree simply assists us to define the boundaries of performance practice and instrumental technique. We can only conclude that there was no uniformly consistent manner in which the vihuela was played. Some players used thumb-under while others preferred thumb-out; some evidently played with nails, while others used flesh; there were progressives who expanded existing practice, and conservatives who maintained older traditions. Taken as a whole, the strength of these traditions led to an instrumental technique which was inherited by subsequent generations of guitarists, and which served the new instrument with little alteration for some 300 years.

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