



Creating Duets for Renaissance Guitar and Diatonic Cittern

NOTE: The fourth and last installment of "A Brief Survey of Plucked Wire-Stringed Instruments, 15th-18th Centuries" should appear in the next issue of the Quarterly.

Introduction

We know from the 16th century musician and music instructor Thomas Whythorne that the cittern and gittern (the waisted, figure-8 instrument that we would today call the "Renaissance guitar") were brought into England some years before 1550, both being at that time "strange in England, and therfor the mor dezyred and esteemed."¹ While relatively new in England at that time, both instruments had been played on the continent before and remained in vogue until the end of the century. Given their popularity and their similar note range, it is surprising then that there is little direct evidence that the two ever played together in ensemble or as a duet.² However, the surviving body of printed and manuscript works contain a similar repertoire of songs and dances that offer a tantalizing glimpse of possibilities for duet and ensemble music. The surviving music also suggests, as I will show below, that some of these solo pieces may have actually been intended to function as duet or ensemble works (or were derived from them), even though there is no direct mention of such a possibility.

The Sound of "Small Strings"

The tuning-ranges of the 16th-century cittern and guitar provide a unique opportunity for duet work. Though the guitar has a larger open-string compass (Maj. 9th) when compared to the "French tuned" diatonic cittern (Maj. 6th), one may immediately notice that they possess an almost identical range starting on the same lowest pitch *g*, with the cittern having a slightly greater overall range on the fingerboard (highest note of *b*" at the 19th fret compared to the guitar's *g*" at the 10th fret). (See Example 1.) Whereas these treble-ranged instruments can sometimes sound out of place when played in a duo with the lute, one does not seem to notice the lack of bass when the instrument ranges are evenly matched, and in fact this makes the two instruments quite well-suited to playing with each other.

Duets for guitar and cittern sound especially good when the guitar is strummed,³ matching the style of the cittern. Correspondingly, cittern parts can also be played in a "broken" plucked

Example 1: Comparison of the ranges of the Renaissance guitar and diatonic cittern

style. Much of the fun from these pieces comes from the contrast of textures, timbres, and dynamics available on these two instruments and the trading of solos and accompaniments.

Surviving Sources of Printed Music

Since the guitar and cittern were so popular in France and the Low Countries, most of the sources of music for those instruments were printed there. In addition to sharing a common geographical provenance and publishers, they (fortunately for our purposes) share a common repertoire. A brief list of sources follows:

4-course guitar:

- ◆ 1551: Gorlier, Simon. *Le troysieme livre* (Paris: R. Gran Jon & M. Fezandat)
- ◆ 1551: Le Roy, Adrian. *Premier livre de tabulature de guiterre* (Paris: A. Le Roy & R. Ballard)
- ◆ 1552: Le Roy, Adrian. *Tiers livre de tabulature de guiterre* (Paris: A. Le Roy & R. Ballard)
- ◆ 1552: Morlaye, Guillaume. *Le Premier livre de chansons* (Paris: R. GranJon & M. Fezandat)
- ◆ 1552: Morlaye, Guillaume. *Quatriesme livre contenant plusieurs fantasies* (Paris: M. Fezandat)

- ◆ 1553: Brayssing, Gregoire. *Quart livre de tabulature de guitte* (Paris: A. Le Roy & R. Ballard)
- ◆ 1553: Morlaye, Guillaume. *Le second livre de chansons* (Paris: M. Fezandat)
- ◆ 1554: Le Roy, Adrian. *Cinquesme livre de guitte* (Paris: A. Le Roy & R. Ballard)
- ◆ 1556: Le Roy, Adrian. *Second livre de guitte* (Paris: A. Le Roy & R. Ballard)
- ◆ 1570: Phalèse, Pierre, & Jean Bellère. *Selectissima elegantissimaque* (Louvain: P. Phalèse & J. Bellère)

4-course diatonic cittern:

- ◆ 1552: Morlaye, Guillaume. *Quatriesme livre contenant plusieurs fantasies* (Paris: M. Fezandat) [principally for guitar]
- ◆ 1564: Le Roy, Adrian. *Second livre de cistre* (Paris: A. Le Roy & R. Ballard)
- ◆ 1564: Viera, Frederic. *Nova et elegantissima in cythara* (Louvain: P. Phalèse)
- ◆ 1565: Le Roy, Adrian & Robert Ballard. *Breve et facile instruction pour apprendre la tablature* (Paris: A. Le Roy & R. Ballard)
- ◆ 1568: Vreedman, Sebastian. *Nova longequa elegantissima cithara ludenda carmina* (Louvain: P. Phalèse)
- ◆ 1569: Vreedman, Sebastian. *Carminum quae cythara pulsantur liber secundus* (Louvain: P. Phalèse)
- ◆ 1570: Phalèse, Pierre, & Jean Bellère. *Hortulus cytharae* (Louvain: P. Phalèse & J. Bellère)
- ◆ 1578 and 1580: Kargel, Sixt. *Renovata cythara* (Strasbourg: B. Jobin)
- ◆ 1582: Phalèse, Pierre, & Jean Bellère. *Hortulus citharae* (Antwerp: P. Phalèse & J. Bellère)
- ◆

Repertoire

A quick survey of the surviving printed sources turns up a number of piece titles common to both instruments — though it will be found that some concordant pieces have different titles, and pieces that share the same title are not concordant! (I’ve compiled some information on these pieces into a “working list” of possible duets, which can be found at the end of this article.) The pieces are the standard fare of the day: dances, songs, song accompaniments, and songs put into dance form. However, there does not appear to be any overlap in regard to “freer forms” such as fantasies or contrapuntos.

Practical Considerations

In looking for works that can easily be adapted to a duet for cittern and guitar, it is helpful to look for pieces in the same keys (though it is also possible use pieces in different keys and adjust the range of the instrument with, say, a tone-low or fourth-low cittern or guitar). A simple way to do this for any given piece is to see if the starting and ending chords are the same for each instrument. While this doesn’t work all the time (see **Common Problems and Solutions**, below), it is a shortcut that allows one to go through a good deal of music quickly without an instrument in hand.

Once one has found a suitable piece, one should consider the texture and structure of the piece in order to create a satisfying

duet. For instance, many of the guitar pieces in the Le Roy books are supplied with divisions, making the backing of cittern chords an attractive (and easy) arrangement. Pieces comprised of just block chords for both parts are not necessarily as musically interesting, though they do provide a starting point for making one’s own divisions.

Common Problems and Solutions

When arranging duets for guitar and cittern, there are some problems that commonly occur. Here are some one can expect to encounter:

Right chord, wrong type:

One problem common to these pieces is one also common to some of the extant lute ensemble repertoire, namely the clashing of major and minor chords. Sometimes it is an issue throughout an entire piece, while other times it is an issue of a chord being either major or minor in one section of the piece and then switching on the repeat. An example of this can be found in the many settings of “Cara Cosa.”

Fortunately, this is a fairly easy problem to fix but may require a bit of research on the performers’ parts to decide which form of the chord is correct or appropriate for the given piece or section of the piece. In this case, it is helpful to look not only at the other settings of the piece for guitar or cittern, but to look also at lute, keyboard, and other instrumental (or vocal) versions of the same piece.

Right note, wrong chord:

Possibly due to shortcuts taken by scribes or arrangers of cittern music, cittern pieces often have errors in which the melody or bass note is correct but the wrong chord has been used.⁴ These are often not overtly noticeable until one pairs the cittern part with the guitar part. This is also, fortunately, easy to fix. One needs to determine first whether it is the bass or the treble portion of the chord that needs to be retained. Since the cittern has very few courses and a very small open-course range, the placement of just one finger can quickly change chords, as can be seen here in Example 2.

	F	A5	D5
	a	a	a

Example 2: Cittern chords with a common melody note

An example of this in practice can be seen in the second beat of measure 30 of the cittern part of “Galliard La Lionnoyse” (found at the end of this article), in which the chord of the original was an F major but has been changed to a D in order to match the guitar part.

Same title, different piece:

As mentioned above, several of the pieces in these printed sources share the same title but, in fact, are entirely different works. This seems most common with dances named for places, likely because there might be multiple pieces associated with a place. (Think here of the numerous “Branles de Bourgogne.”) On the other hand, concordant dances can also vary in length and form, occasionally requiring heavy “adaptation” or reworking in order for parts to fit together. Unfortunately, even works like Howard Mayer Brown’s *Instrumental Music Printed Before 1600* don’t always get the concordances between the cittern and guitar books right (or omit trying altogether), so the best way to find these out is simply to sit down and try playing through them.

Same title, same piece: different mode?

In some instances, some very interesting situations arise in which the titles and the melodies of two works show them to be concordant, but the arrangements are so radically different that they might as well be separate pieces. This is the case for the separate settings of “Branle du beaux Robert” found in Phalèse’s guitar book of 1570 and Le Roy’s cittern book of 1565. While the title and the melodies are obviously related, the former is in a minor mode while the latter is in a major mode. Though it might be tempting to try and modify one of the pieces to be a workable duet part for the other, one quickly finds that the melodies are too entrenched in the major/minor modalities, making any rearrangement of this piece difficult (and possibly counter-productive).

Implications and Conclusions

Further analysis of some pieces yields some surprising results, suggesting that some pieces may have originally been conceived of as duet or ensemble pieces, despite having been included in a collection of solo works. One particular instance of this can be seen in the “Galliard La Lionnoyse,” found in the books of both Phalèse and Le Roy. A brief analysis of the cittern and guitar parts shows that in the first statement (measures 1-6) the cittern plays a harmony rather than a melody, while the guitarist plays melody from the first statement onwards. Beginning with the harmony suggests that the cittern part may originally have been conceived of as an ensemble part. It is also serendipitous for our purposes, as it allows the cittern and guitar parts to function well as a duet.

While they have not been discussed here, the arrangement of other duets is certainly possible given the extant manuscript sources. Guitar parts survive in the *Raphe Bowle Manuscript* (British Library, Ms. Stowe 389), the *Thomas Mulliner Manuscript* (British Library, Add. Ms. 30513), and the *Osborn Commonplace-book* (Yale University, Beinecke Library, Music Ms. 13). There are a number of extant cittern manuscripts, but one of the most promising Franco-Flemish manuscripts with a significant amount of possible source material for arranging duets is the manuscript formerly owned by James de Rothschild (Bibliothèque nationale de France MS Rothschild I, 411).

Given the possibilities present in these sources and the wonderful sound of these instruments together, it would be truly surprising if our 16th century predecessors had not spent time playing guitar and cittern duets. Hopefully, this article and the “working

list” that follows provide a beginning for the exploration and creation of new (and possibly forgotten) duets.

Notes

¹ Whythorne, Thomas. *Autobiography*. ed. J.M. Osborn. Oxford, 1961.

² In general, it does not seem that the guitar was used much in ensembles in the same way that the lute and cittern were. There is one image from 1604 of a waisted instrument (guitar?) being played alongside a lute and a viol in Stephen Harrison’s depiction of the triumphal arches for King James. (See Plate III of John Ward’s “Sprightly and Cheerful Musick: notes on the cittern, gittern and guitar in 16th- and 17th-century England.” *Lute Society Journal* XXI [1979-81]). The anonymous, printed Italian source of 1645, *Conserto Vago*, contains ensemble pieces for lute, theorbo, and chitarrino (a small 4-course guitar). However, later 17th century references to the gittern in ensemble almost assuredly refer to the metal-strung instrument. (For more information on this type, see my column in the previous *Quarterly*.)

³ That strumming was commonly used on the 16th century guitar can be inferred from a rendering of its sound as “thrumpledum, thrumpledum, thrum” in Udall’s play *Ralph Roister Doister* (1566). (Ward, op. cit., p. 26, note 101.)

⁴ An analysis of some of the cittern works for consort suggest that writers of cittern music may not always have had an instrument in hand while writing. For instance, there are numerous instances in Allison’s *Psalmes of David in Meter* (1599) in which the chord for the cittern part uses as a root a note from the bass viol part — but the bass viol note is a first or second inversion! Many other sources, such as Valerius’s *Neder-Landsche Gedenck-Clanck* (1626), show multiple instances of a correct treble/melody note but the incorrect harmony, suggesting that the treble lines may have been written out with an instrument in hand and the rest of the accompanying chords were written in afterward.



A Working List of Possible Duets for Renaissance Guitar and Diatonic Cittern

The following “working list” is just that — a draft list of possible duets. It is drawn from my own personal notes and is incomplete. One will note, for instance, that not all of the sources from the article are included below nor are all concordances for a piece given. In addition, there are other possible duets lurking out there that might be included (the variations on “Les Bouffons” come to mind). This list is intended solely as a starting point for those who are interested in arranging guitar and cittern duets. —AMH

Title	Sources	Notes
Almande Lorayne	Guitar: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Le Roy 1552, f. 16, “Almande tournée” ◆ Phalèse 1570, f. 60, “Almande. Loreyne” Cittern: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Rothschild I, 411, “Allemande De lorayne” 	Cittern version also contains a "Reprinse."
Branle de la torch	Guitar: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Phalèse 1570, f. 78, “Branle de la torche” Cittern: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Rothschild I, 411, “Allemande de la Torche” 	Despite the difference in form between branles and allemandes, these two pieces seem to go together...
Branle de la Nonnette	Guitar: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Phalèse 1570, f. 75v, “Branle de la nonneste” Cittern: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Le Roy 1565, f. 23, “Branlle de la nonnette” 	
Branle le beau Robert	Guitar: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Phalèse 1570, f. 78v, “Branle du beau Robert” Cittern: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Le Roy 1565, f. 20v, “Branle le beau Robert” 	Though the pieces seem the same and draw from a related melody, the two settings are quite different in character, the guitar in a minor mode and the cittern in a major mode.
Galliard la Lionnoyse	Guitar: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Le Roy 1552, f. 12v, “La lionnoyse gaillarde” ◆ Phalèse 1570, f.63, “Gaillarde la Lionnoyse” Cittern: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Le Roy 1564, f. 9v, “Gaillarde la Lionnoise” 	Phalèse guitar version is a plain statement only. The Le Roy version has both variations and a 'plus diminuée.' Cittern chord requires correction near end.
Galliard O Combien est	Guitar: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Le Roy 1556, f. 5v, “O Combien est heureuse” Cittern: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Le Roy 1564, f. 12, “Gaillarde O Combien est heureuse” 	The guitar part is a song accompaniment, which is essentially a plain statement of each section followed by a variation.
Galliard la Roque el fuso	Guitar: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Le Roy 1551, f. 15v, “Gaillarde la rocquo el fuzo” and f. 16 “La Gaillarde precedente plus diminuee” ◆ Phalèse 1570, f. 65, “Gaillarde la Roque el fuze” Cittern: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Phalèse 1582, f. 63, “La Gaillarde roche el fuso” 	The Le Roy guitar version is in a different key from the cittern, requiring either a tone-low cittern or a tone-high guitar. The Phalèse pieces each have a different number of measures; the last phrase is longer in the guitar part.
Cara cosa	Guitar: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Phalèse 1570, f. 63v, “Caracossa gaillarda” and “Plus diminuée” Cittern: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Numerous sources (See Brown, <i>Instrumental Music Before 1600</i>) 	Major/minor chord clashes on some strains — easily correctable.
J'ay du mal tant tant	Guitar: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Le Roy 1552, f. 7-8, “Pavane J'ay du mal tant tant” and “Plus diminuée” ◆ Ibid., f. 8v-9 “Gaillarde de la precedente pavane” and “Plus diminuée” Cittern: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Le Roy 1564, f. 6v, “Pavane J'ay du mal tant tant” ◆ Ibid., f. 7, “Gaillarde de la precedente pavane” 	In performance, the galliards to these pavans seem superfluous.
La Muniere de Vernon	Guitar: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Le Roy 1551, f. 24v, “La Muniere de Vernon” Cittern: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Le Roy 1565, f. 22, “La muniere de Vernon” 	Short – needs variations.
Une m'avoit promis	Guitar: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Le Roy 1556, f. 18v-19, “Une m'avoit promis” and “Autrement” Cittern: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Le Roy 1565, f. 24, “Une m'avoit promis” and “Autrement” 	The guitar version is a song accompaniment followed by a variation. The cittern version is a harmony followed by an "Autrement" of melody. The simple settings of this tune are ripe for improvisation and variation.