

William Sherman Casey
Printed English lute instruction
books, 1568-1610

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Julia Sutton

Toward the latter part of the 16th century, England's artistic riches crowded one upon another in such profusion as to produce one of the most remarkable creative explosions in our history. Not least among the exalted arts of the time was that of the lutenist whose "sweet song," attested to by innumerable poets, still provides us with some of the loveliest sounds in the lute repertoire. More mundane, perhaps, but of importance as contributions to and manifestations of the great popularity of the lute, were the lute instruction books printed in England during this period. William Casey, in his two-volume study, surveys the five extant self-instructors published between 1568 and 1610 and includes a transcription of the music in the fourth book.

The five books published between 1568 and 1610 are:

1. Le Roy, Adrian. *A Briefe and Easie Instruction to Learne the Tableture to Conducte and Dispose Thy Hande unto the Lute*. Translated by J. Alford Londoner. London: John Kyngston for James Roubothum, 1568.¹
2. Le Roy, Adrian. *A Briefe and Plaine Instruction to Set All Musicke of Eight Divers Tunes in Tableture for the Lute, and A Briefe Instruction How to Play on the Lute by Tablatorie, to Conduct and Dispose Thy Hand unto the Lute, with Certaine Easie Lessons for That Purpose. . . . And Also a Third Booke Containing Divers New Excellent Tunes*. Translated by F. Ke., Gentleman. London: James Rowbothome, 1574.
3. Barley, William. *A New Booke of Tabliture, Containing Sundrie Easie and Familiar Instructions, Shewing Howe to Attaine to the Instruments, As the Lute, Orpharion, and Bandora: Together with Divers New Lessons to Each of These Instruments*. London: William Barley, 1596.

¹The music from this work appears in Adrian Le Roy, *Fantasies et Danses* from *A briefe and Easie Instruction* (1568), ed. Pierre Jansen (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris, 1962). The original volume in French is lost.

4. Robinson, Thomas. *The Schoole of Musicke: Wherein is Taught, the Perfect Method, of True Fingering of the Lute, Pandora, Orpharion, and Viol de Gamba; with most infallible generall rules, both easie and delightfull*. London: printed by Thomas Este for Simon Waterson, 1603.
5. Dowland, Robert. *Varietie of Lute Lessons*, London: Thomas Adams, 1610. This contains two instructional sections: Jean-Baptiste Besard's "Necessarie Observations Belonging to the Lute and Lute Playing," trans. R. Dowland; and John Dowland's "Other Necessarie Observations Belonging to the Lute."²

It should be stated at the outset that Casey's interest is more pedagogic than scholarly. As an amateur guitarist and teacher, he explains, he has chosen to make a compendium of the instructions in the five publications in order to provide a lute tutor for the contemporary player (i.e., guitarist with an interest in old music). His decision to transcribe Robinson's music was also dictated by considerations of its practicability for beginners. Furthermore, the transcription is for guitar rather than lute.

There is no question that the inclusion of Robinson's music in the second volume marks Dr. Casey's most important contribution. Robinson's life is hardly known to us, but we do know that he was in the service of the Earl of Exeter and the court of Elsinore. His music reflects this high professional standing.³ *The Schoole of Musicke* contains 38 delightful and characteristic pieces (6 for lute duet), always skillfully and idiomatically written, always charming; some indeed are outstanding. The complex yet lovely *Fantasie for Two Lutes*, the exercise in simple chords (*Griffe His Delight*), the setting of *Row Well Ye Mariners*, and others among the dances or variations on grounds are worthy of inclusion among the finest of the lute repertoire. We may note here that ties with the virginal repertoire of the same period are very close.

Dr. Casey's transcription methods are on the whole highly commendable. His was undoubtedly a labor of love, for his copying of the tablature along with the transcription (a procedure recommended but not always followed by modern scholars) represents countless hours of work. Highly accurate, certainly musical, he carries out a most praiseworthy goal of providing an edition which at once preserves the polyphonic nature of the music (about which all instructors of the period are in complete agreement) and is entirely playable. Praises for bringing this music out in a good modern edition are certainly in order. It is really too bad that the title of the thesis gives no hint of the emphasis on Robinson and the inclusion of his music. This, I am sure, is why

²Facsimile edition by Schott (London, 1958).

³Other works by Robinson are *Medulla Musicke . . . transposed to the lute* (London, 1603), now lost; *New Citharen Lessons* (London, 1609).

Richard Alexander Harmon does not list Casey's work in his article on Robinson (*MGG* 11:584-85).

Unfortunately, the transcription of the tablature into modern guitar notation (E tuning) rather than lute (C tuning) is questionable today not only from a scholarly but from a musical point of view.⁴ It caters to the outdated notion that the lute is an esoteric, dead instrument and fails to recognize or encourage the renaissance it is so deservedly enjoying. While it is always difficult for the editor to make decisions with regard to transcription procedures and while the results are always easy to criticize, Dr. Casey would have done well to have read the lengthy discussions on the subject in *Le Luth et sa musique*⁵ and to have given more weight to the fact that recent editions of lute music are all in the original tuning. As it is, guitarists may thank him for adding fine music to their literature; lutenists, while awaiting David Lumsden's forthcoming publication of a lute transcription,⁶ will have to be satisfied with the tablature placed above the guitar music (they may also read the music in the bass clef, transposed up one octave, with a change of key signature).

Among minor points of criticism, one may wonder why Dr. Casey chooses to change some of Robinson's spellings (e.g., "gigue" in the original has become "jig," and "almaine" is converted to "allemande"), but not others (Robinson's "fantasie" is kept), or why he chooses to omit some of the music of Robinson's "Rules to instruct you to sing" (the music omitted is for viol and voice). This author would have liked to see unusual positions and courses indicated in the modern notation, a technique employed by some modern transcribers,⁷ but this is a matter of personal preference. Nevertheless, Casey's omission in the transcription of fingerings given by Robinson is puzzling.

In the first volume of his thesis, the five self-instructors are introduced first, together with a careful and rather lengthy explanation of the tablature and the reasons for transcribing it for guitar. Then we launch into the meat of the prose text: an extensive compendium of the instructions, with numerous examples culled from the originals transcribed together with the tablature. The various books' recommendations on choice of instruments, their stringing, fretting, and

⁴Casey justifies his use of the E tuning by citing Edmund Fellowes' transposition of the lute songs "down in many instances" in *The English School of Lutenist Song Writers* (London, 1920-1932), suggesting that the actual pitch of most lutes was lower than concert G. Arthur Mendel, "Pitch in the 16th and Early 17th Centuries," *Musical Quarterly* 24:28ff., 199ff., 336ff., 575ff., presents contradictory evidence in these masterly essays which should certainly have been taken into account.

⁵Jean Jacquot, ed. (Paris, 1958). With library cataloguing systems as slow as they are, however, it may be that Dr. Casey's access to this valuable book was blocked even as late as 1960.

⁶Announced in *Le Luth et sa musique*, p. 341.

⁷E.g., David Lumsden, ed., *English Lute Music (16th Century)* (London, 1963).

tuning are covered, as are Le Roy's very specific instructions on the intabulation of vocal music. The chief matter in all the books is fingering technique for both hands (it is worth noting that the tutors are all in substantial agreement here), and each point is clearly explained. A search for hints in the tutors as to performance practices (dynamics, ornaments) predictably turns up very little, though Robinson is more explicit than the others. There follows a frankly superficial survey of the music in the lute books of Le Roy, Barley, and R. Dowland; and finally, there is a fairly extensive analysis of Robinson's music.

Certainly anyone wishing specific instructions on lute playing will do well to read Casey. His survey is arranged in a logical, straightforward manner, and many of the best examples and exercises to be found in all the books are included. It is with Volume I, however, that one may have the greatest quarrel, for the scholar will look in vain here for an exact comparison of the tutors (as in a chart, for instance), for an explanation of historical developments or influences, for any biographical information on authors or composers (even Robinson gets no biographical notice), or for any discussion of musical trends, types, or sources for the music.

The title of the thesis is ambiguous, for it suggests that the five lute instructors published in England were of English origin. Actually, only one of the five, Thomas Robinson's, is of English provenance (I am referring to the instructions, not to the music). Dr. Casey, while duly taking note of the foreign origins of the other four, draws no conclusions therefrom about historical priority or musical influences upon England. Although he states quite properly that Nos. 1, 2, and 3 of the instructors are all translations of Le Roy's first instruction book (thus reducing the real number of books to three), he does not ask why Le Roy should have been popular for so long.⁸ No effort whatsoever is made to locate the source of the major instructional portion of No. 5 (J.B. Besard's "Necessarie Observations Belonging to the Lute and Lute Playing"), about which there is no mystery and which could have been obtained quite easily.⁹ One would also have thought that since extensive quotes are taken from Besard's copious instructions, an attempt might have been made to judge Dowland's accuracy in translating and in copying the examples, yet there is nothing on this point.¹⁰

⁸For complete information on Le Roy's instruction books, see Adrian Le Roy, *Premier livre de tabulature de luth (1551)*, eds. André Souris and Richard de Morcourt (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris, 1960) with a historical introduction by Jean Jacquot and a list of concordances by Daniel Heartz.

⁹Dowland's translation is from Besard's *De Modo in testudine libellus*, the instructional portion of his gigantic *Thesaurus harmonicus* (Cologne, 1603).

¹⁰The translation is indeed very close to the original and only a few minor changes of fingering were made in the examples. Cf. Julia Sutton, "The Lute instructions in Jean-Baptiste Besard's *Novus partus* (1617)," *Musical Quarterly* 51:345-62.

It must indeed be of some significance that the tablature imported into England at this time was French and that the technique was international, but nothing is said of it.¹¹ To put it briefly, no questions are asked which move beyond the realm of the factual material in the texts or which would serve to place them in historical context.

Small errors of scholarship may also be noted in this section. The reference to p. 2 on p. 27 is to p. 22. *Pavane* is consistently misspelled as "pavanne," although a number of acceptable variant spellings could have been used. The case for the terms "crotchet," "minim," etc., in an American thesis is also dubious; if authenticity were in order at this point, the original instructions would be all we would need.

Setting aside the cursory summaries of the musical contents of Le Roy, Barley, and Dowland, we turn to the discussion of Thomas Robinson's music. Here Casey's pedagogical point of view provides us with a good analysis of the pieces in order of difficulty. He goes into their technical requirements (works calling primarily for single notes, those employing chords or high positions), and then gives us some insight into the various forms in the collection (psalms, variations upon grounds, dance structures such as binary or varied binary [*double*] types), and a look at modality versus tonality, and key schemes. Beyond this, as was said above, we are not taken.

The author's scholarship here is casually hit-or-miss, for though he claims to have done no work on sources, this is not quite true. For example, he recognizes that the variations on the hexachord are typical, citing the six examples in the *Fitzwilliam Virginal Book* as proof; he is aware that Robinson's *Spanish Pavin* employs the same melody as Bull's (*Fitz.*, Vol. 2),¹² and that Robinson's *Goe From My Window* is to the same tune found in several settings in the same source. A few hours' more work with the same collection would have told him that Robinson's *Twenty Waies Upon the Bels* [sic] is based on exactly the same two-note motive as Byrd's *The Bells* (*Fitz.*, Vol. 1); that the *Passamezzo Galliard* is constructed over the same bass as the paired *Passamezzo Pavana* and *Gagliarda Passamezzo* of Byrd and also of Peter Philips (both in *Fitz.*, Vol. 1); and that this bass is in

¹¹Besard, for example, grew up in Burgundy, studied for a number of years in Rome, and subsequently published in Cologne and Augsburg. His written language was Latin, his tablature French. Diana Poulton, "La Technique du jeu du luth en France et en Angleterre," *Le Luth et sa musique*, pp. 107-119, says, ". . . le succès de la "Brève et facile instruction" . . . de Le Roy [in England] et le fait qu'elle demeura l'ouvrage classique sur le luth, en différents traductions, jusqu'au debut du XVII^e siècle, montre qu'elle devait décrire la technique communément en usage." Karl Scheit, "Ce que nous enseignent les traités de luth des environs de 1600," *Le Luth et sa musique*, pp. 93-105, discusses Robinson, Besard, and Waissel, pointing out more similarities than differences.

¹²All references are to the edition by J.A. Fuller Maitland and W. Barclay Squire (Breitkopf and Härtel, 1899; reprinted by Dover Publications, N.Y. 1963).

fact the popular *Pasamezzo antico*.¹³ He would also have learned that Robinson's *Robin is to the Greenwood Gone* is to the same tune used by Munday (*Robin, Fitz.*, Vol. 1) and Farnaby (*Bonny Sweet Robin, Fitz.*, Vol. 2). Had he checked a little further on the *Spanish Pavin*, he would have found that not only the melody but the bass, a variant of the *folia*, is identical with Bull's and that melody and bass together were commonly known as the *Pavaniglia*.¹⁴ Other concordances are immediately suggested by a quick survey of the indexes of the virginal books of the time.¹⁵

The bibliography reflects the lacunae in the study. Even in English there are major omissions (e.g., Bukofzer's *Music in the Baroque Era* or any of the literature on virginal music), but the lack of foreign references is almost complete (e.g., all the pertinent articles in *La Musique Instrumentale de la Renaissance*,¹⁶ the entries in MGG which had appeared prior to 1960). In short, this is an uneven piece of work, lacking not all but many of the normal appurtenances of scholarship.

The chief problem is that Casey has really attempted to handle two theses: a study of lute instruction books published in Elizabethan England and a study and transcription of Thomas Robinson's *Schoole of Musick*. As it is, both are incomplete. The practical performer can benefit (if he is a guitarist) from the work Casey has done; the scholar will have to await further studies.

¹³Reese, *Music in the Renaissance* (New York, 1954), 864ff., discusses the "passamezzo pavans" of the English school at this time.

¹⁴Reese, *ibid.*, p. 865. See also Diana Poulton, "Notes on the Spanish Pavan," *The Lute Society Journal* 3:5-16, in which she gives a long list of concordances.

¹⁵Hans F. Redlich, "Virginal Music," *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Eric Blom, 9:4-19.

¹⁶Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (Paris, 1955).

JULIA SUTTON received her Ph.D. in musicology from the Eastman School of Music. She is presently an instructor at Queens College.