

Performing early music on
record 6

The vihuela repertoire

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The vihuela repertoire is unusual in that it has attracted almost as much attention from classical guitarists as from artists specializing in the performance of music of the period. While this may be regarded as something of a mixed blessing, it has at least resulted in some of the music becoming very well known, and has to some extent been responsible for the revival of the vihuela itself. Not surprisingly, the repertoire has also attracted the attention of Spanish artists not otherwise associated with the performance of early music. Victoria de los Angeles, for example, made a recording of Spanish songs of the Renaissance with the Ars Musicae Ensemble of Barcelona many years ago; the original record is no longer available, but two items from it, Fuenllana's setting of 'De los álamos vengo' and Daza's of the romance 'Enfermo estaba Antioco' are included in a recently issued set 'The incomparable Victoria de los Angeles' (Decca, SLS 5012). Teresa Berganza has also made a record, discussed below, of early Spanish songs, which includes several by the vihuelistas.

But obviously the most interesting recordings are those which feature instruments which make some claim to authenticity. Here one encounters problems, for unfortunately little is known about how the vihuela was constructed or about how it was played. In appearance it resembled the guitar. Usually it had six pairs of strings doubled throughout at the unison. Like the lute it was tuned in perfect fourths with a major third between the third and fourth courses, and like the lute it almost certainly had tied-on, adjustable frets. A brief mention of the advantages of inlaid frets in Bermudo's *Declaración de instrumentos musicales* (Book 4, Chapter 77, f103^v) has been seized upon by some present-day vihuelistas (including the present writer) as an excuse for using them on their instruments. Bermudo's reasons for recommending them are purely practical—humidity causes gut frets to shift, resulting in faulty intonation—but it is very unlikely that any of his contemporaries took his advice. Bermudo also recommends a seven-course instru-

ment as being convenient for tackling complex polyphonic music in several parts, but very little music survives intabulated for such an instrument.

In spite of the fact that some of the tablatures claim to be methods by which the beginner may learn to play the vihuela, none includes a great deal in the way of systematic practical instruction, although Fuenllana and Mudarra discuss in some detail the methods of right-hand fingering used for playing *redobles* or running passages. It may be assumed that the vihuela shared much the same technique as the lute. As far as the right hand is concerned this means that it would have been considered better style to play with the tips of the fingers rather than with the fingernails. It also means that the little finger would have been allowed to rest on the soundboard of the instrument, confining the activity of the right hand to a relatively short length of string, usually quite close to the bridge and resulting in a dryer, more sharply focused sound than most guitarists produce. Nevertheless many players today, lutenists as well as vihuelistas, play with their fingernails and allow themselves more freedom in moving between the bridge and the rose to obtain greater contrast in tone quality than is possible with the hand anchored in one place.

In all the tablatures except that of Milán, many of the pieces, both instrumental and vocal, are prefaced with what appear to be instructions for tuning the vihuela to different pitches. There are two schools of thought as to how these should be interpreted. Emilio Pujol has chosen to take these literally, and in the three volumes of *Monumentos de la música española* which he has edited, the music is transcribed at the pitches specified in the tablature. On the other hand, John Ward has pointed out that during the 16th century pitch was entirely notional and suggests that these instructions are supplied to enable the player to determine the mode in which the music is written and not as a guide to the pitch to which he should tune his instrument ('Le problème des hauteurs dans la musique pour luth et vihuela au XVI^e siècle' in *Le luth et sa musique*, ed.



Jacquot). There is probably an element of truth in both sides of the argument. While the instructions are most likely intended to indicate mode rather than pitch, vihuelas varied in size and were certainly tuned to different pitches; Valderrábano includes in *Silva de Sirenas* duets for vihuelas tuned a minor third, perfect fourth and perfect fifth apart as well as at the unison and Milán offers advice on the stringing of instruments of different sizes. Most modern players confine themselves to one instrument tuned in G but one of the records to be discussed features vihuelas of seven different sizes.

There are seven surviving printed collections of music for vihuela, compiled by Milán, Narváez, Mudarra, Valderrábano, Pisador, Fuenllana and Daza. All save that of Daza date from the second quarter of the century, and *El Parnasso*, printed in 1576, does not differ greatly in either style or contents from the others. Most of the music is for the six-course instrument, but Mudarra and Fuenllana include pieces for four-course guitar, Fuenllana those for five-course vihuela, and Valderrábano duets for two vihuelas. All collections contain both instrumental music and songs with vihuela accompaniment, original compositions by the compilers and arrangements or settings of already familiar music. All except Milán include quantities of intabulations of sacred and secular pieces by both Flemish and Spanish composers, some of which are for vihuela alone, others including parts to be sung. It is likely that some of these were intended for use during religious services. Mudarra's two settings of psalm tones, 'Nisi dominus' and 'Exurge quare ob dormis' spring to mind as possible examples. The music of Cabezón and Venegas de Henestrosa was also intended to be suitable for performance on the vihuela although printed in keyboard tablature.

The music of Milán, Narváez and Mudarra is much the most frequently performed and much the best represented on gramophone record, presumably because their tablatures have been readily available in complete transcriptions for a number of years.

Valderrábano and Fuenllana have fared less well and Pisador and Daza are comparatively neglected. Not surprisingly, it is the solo pieces which are the most often heard, especially those with distinctive titles. The intabulations of vocal music have been almost entirely neglected with the exception of Narváez's gloss of Josquin's chanson 'Mille regres'. This is a pity since there is no doubt that this kind of music-making was highly thought of and was regarded as one of the ultimate aims in learning to play the vihuela. The concentration on the more extrovert and virtuoso pieces gives an unbalanced picture of the repertoire.

At least eight records devoted substantially to the vihuela repertoire have been released in recent years. One is now deleted and four are imports but they are not unduly difficult to obtain in Britain. In the following notes the numbers in brackets after the pieces without distinctive titles are those assigned to them in Howard Mayer Brown's *Instrumental music printed before 1600*.

1. DGG Archiv 198 457 Deleted *Hispaniae musica: Vihuela y guitarra*. Renata Tarragó, *vihuela* Review: *Gramophone*, June, 1969

Side 1: FUENLLANA: Fantasia for 4 course guitar (165); MILÁN: Pavañes 3 & 5; MUDARRA: Pavane (14); Galliard; NARVÁEZ: 7 Diferencias sobre Guardamé las vacas; Mille regres; VALDERRÁBANO: Fantasia remedando al motete de Queramus cum pastoribus (116).

Side 2 contains music by Guerau, Sanz, Sor & Ferrandiere played on the classical guitar.

The sleeve note, which is otherwise informative, gives no details of the instrument used. It appears to be tuned in E but the pitch varies from track to track, and the Narváez *diferencias* seem to have been either transposed or played on another instrument tuned in A. The Fuenllana is presumably played on the same six-course instrument. The performances are attractive although technical obstacles occasionally get in the way of the natural flow of the music. The editions used were prepared by Graciano Tarragó and others from tablatures in the Biblioteca Central, Barcelona. Both Renata and Graciano Tarragó may be counted amongst the



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pioneers of the vihuela revival; they played together in a series of concerts broadcast by the BBC Third Programme twenty two years ago.

2. Hispavox HHS 15 Spanish import *Vihuelistas españoles (Siglo XVI): Música vocal e instrumental* (Colección de música antigua española no. 16) Anne Perret, mezzo soprano Rodrigo de Zayas, *vihuela* Review: *Consort*, 1974

DAZA: 2 Fantasias (18 & 22); FUENLLANA: 2 Fantasias (16 & 12); Vos me matastes niña; MILÁN: Con pavor recordó el moro; Pavañes 1, 4 & 6; O gelosia d' amanti; Fantasia (1); MUDARRA: Isabel, perdiste la tu faja; 12 Diferencias sobre el Conde claros; Fantasia que contrehaze la harpa en la manera de Luduvico; NARVÁEZ: Ya se asienta el rey Ramiro; 22 Diferencias sobre el Conde claros; PISADOR: Aquellas sierras madre; En la fuente del rosel; Si la noche hace oscura; Partense partiendo; Si te vas a bañar, Juanica; VALDERRÁBANO: Los braços traygo cansados; Hierusalem, convertere ad dominum (Ortiz); Pavana (165, first 2 diferencias only); Se pur te guardo; Qui la dira.

The record is accompanied by an extended essay in Spanish by de Zayas dealing with the vihuela and its repertoire, with an English translation, as well as translations of the songs separately. De Zayas uses instruments of seven different sizes, tuned from Gamut through F *fa ut*, made for him by the brothers César and Fernando Vera. All have inlaid frets. Specific instructions

for tuning are in fact not supplied in the original tablatures for most of the pieces played on the record and de Zayas has used his own discretion in choosing which instrument to play. Where specific instructions are supplied these are not always adhered to.

The two artists have specialized in performing the vihuela repertoire together for a number of years. The programme is imaginatively chosen, includes items from all seven tablatures, many of them relatively unfamiliar, and reflects almost every facet of the vihuela repertoire. The wayward interpretation of the instrumental solos is a bit disconcerting and perhaps not altogether appropriate, but one can't help admiring de Zayas' dexterity.

3. Hispavox HHS 5 Spanish import. *Vihuelistas españoles* (Siglo XVI): El maestro de Luys de Milán & Silva de sirenas de Enrique de Valderrábano. (Colección de música antigua española no. 11.) Jorge Fresno, *vihuela*

MILÁN: 8 Fantasías (1-4, 8, 10, 12 & 13); VALDERRÁBANO: 4 Diferencias sobre la pavana (165); Sonetos 7-9, 11, 13 & 15 (143-5, 147, 149 & 151); Fantasías nos. 13 & 14 (101 & 102).

4. Hispavox HHS 10 Spanish import *Vihuelistas españoles* (Siglo XVI): 3 Libros de música en cifras de vihuela de Mudarra & Orphénica lyra de Fuenllana. (Colección de música antigua española no. 12.) Jorge Fresno, *vihuela*

FUENLLANA: Duo (9); Duo contrapunto (5); Duo de Morales: Suscepit Israel (3); Tan que vivray (113B); Tiento de segundo tono (175); Tiento de sexto tono (179); Tiento de octavo tono (181); Fantasía de octavo tono (85); Fantasía (173); Fantasía for 5-course vihuela (156); MUDARRA: 12 Diferencias sobre el Conde claros; Pavane de Alexandre; Pavane for 4-course guitar (21); Galliard; Fantasía de pasos largos (1); Fantasía para desenvolver las manos (2); Fantasía (5); Fantasía que contrahaze la harpa en la manera de Luduvico; Fantasía de octavo tono (46); Fantasía de octavo tono (47); Fantasía (48).

5. Hispavox HHS 23 Spanish import *Vihuelistas españoles* (Siglo XVI): Luys de Narváez, Diego Pisador, Esteban Daza. (Colección de música antigua española no. 13.) Jorge Fresno, *vihuela*

DAZA: Dame acogida; 3 Fantasías (15, 19 & 22); NARVÁEZ: 2 Fantasías (11 & 14); Canción (Gombert, 20); Diferencias 1-4 sobre Sacris solemnii; 7 Diferencias sobre Guardamé las

vacas; 22 Diferencias sobre Conde claros; Baxa de contrapunto; PISADOR: Pavana muy llana para tañer; Dezilde al cavallero que; 6 Villanescas—O dulce vita mea, Toti voria contar, Quanto duele, Madona mala vostra, La cortesía & Tuta tuta sarasi.

Fresno is a young Argentinian guitarist now resident in Spain and devoting his time to the study of early music played on authentic instruments. He plays a seven course vihuela made to his own specification by César Vera. It is tuned in G with the seventh course tuned a fourth below the standard six courses. Judging by the sleeve photograph it has inlaid frets. Fresno plays from editions he has prepared himself from originals in the Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid. Presumably the music has been rearranged to some extent to take advantage of the seventh course; the pieces for four-course guitar and five-course vihuela are played on the same instrument.

These three records represent a really worthwhile attempt at presenting substantial portions of the solo music for vihuela with the emphasis on the less familiar and less frequently performed. It is particularly gratifying to find a whole side accorded to Fuenllana whose music deserves to be better known. His gloss on Sermisy's 'Tant que vivray' is as enchanting as Narváez's 'Mille regres' and ought to be as popular. It is a pity that (as far as I know) the series does not include a third disc covering the music of Narváez, Pisador and Daza.

For some of the pieces Fresno adopts tempi which on first hearing sound rather cautious, even tentative at times. But although never hurried, the music is never allowed to drag, and the performances with their loving attention to detail capture the pervasive wistfulness which characterizes much of the repertoire.

6. DGG Archiv 2533 183 *Lute music of the Renaissance 3: Spain*. Konrad Ragossnig, lute Review: *Gramophone*, July 1975

MILÁN: 6 Pavanes; 4 Fantasías (10-12 & 16); MUDARRA: Pavane de Alexandre; Galliard; O guardamé las vacas: romaneca (13); 12 Diferencias sobre el Conde claros; Fantasía que contrahaze la harpa en la manera de Luduvico; NARVÁEZ: 7 Diferencias sobre Guardamé las vacas; Mille regres; Fantasía (14); Baxa de contrapunto (33).



Title-page of Garcia Ordóñez de Montalvo's *Amadis de Gaula* (Seville edition, 1531)

Ragossnig plays an eight-course lute made by David Rubio after an instrument of David Hoffman dating from the second half of the 17th century. The record is one of a series presenting 16th-century lute music from all parts of Europe. There is of course no reason why the vihuela repertoire should not be appropriated by the lute—some of the music was in fact included in collections of lute music published outside Spain during the second half of the century.

The performances are flawless, both technically and musically, although Ragossnig does tend to sound more like a guitarist playing the guitar than the other artists so far mentioned.

7. Everest EV 3197 U.S. Import *Guitar music and songs of the Spanish Renaissance*. Rosa Barbany, soprano Renata Tarragó, guitar.

DAZA: Dame acogida en tu hato; Tiento; FUENLLANA: Ojos claros serenos; Morenica dame un beso; MILÁN: Con pavor recordó el mofo; Fantasía (16); MUDARRA: Tientos 7 & 8 (42 & 45); Isabel, perdiste la tu faza; Claros y frescos ríos; NARVÁEZ: 22 Diferencias sobre el Conde claros; PISADOR: Pavana muy llana para tañer; En la fuente del rosel; Porque es dama tanto quereros; Si te vas a bañar Juanica; VALDERRÁBANO: Fantasía no. 14 (89).

The sleeve refers to the instrument used as a guitar, but there is also a note stating that all the music on the record has

been transcribed for vihuela by Graciano Tarragó. In places the instrument sounds very much as though it were double-strung. If it is a guitar it has a very soft action. It appears to be tuned in E. The artist plays with the tips of the fingers rather than with the nails which may account for the ambiguity of the sound produced.

All seven collections are represented, and for that reason, and because the record is fairly readily available it is recommended listening although the performances are not outstanding. Incidentally the 'Tiento' attributed to Daza does not appear to be included in *El Parnasso*.

8. DGG 139365 *Spanish guitar music of five centuries*, vol. 1. Narciso Yepes, guitar. Review: *Gramophone*, March 1969.

Side 1: MILÁN: 6 Pavañes; MUDARRA: Fantasia que contrahaze la harpa en manera de Luduvico; NARVÁEZ: Mille regres; 7 Diferencias sobre Guardamé las vacas; PISADOR: Pavana muy llana para tañer; La Cortesía: villanesca.

Side 2 contains music by Sanz & Soler.

This record is less interesting now perhaps than when it was first issued as most of the music on it has since been recorded on 'authentic' instruments. Nevertheless the performances, which are discreet and subdued, capture the spirit if not the letter of the music faithfully.

9. DGG 2530 504 *Canciones españolas: songs from the Middle Ages & Renaissance*. Teresa Berganza, mezzo soprano Narciso Yepes, guitar. Review: *Gramophone*, March, 1975.

FUENLLANA: De Antequera salió el moro; Vos me matastes; MILÁN: Toda mi vida hos amé; Aquel caballero, madre; MUDARRA: Triste estava el rey David; Si me llaman a mi; Claros y frescos ríos; Isabel, perdiste la tu faxa; NARVÁEZ: Con qué la lavaré; PISADOR: En la fuente del rosel; VALDERRÁBANO: De dónde venis amore.

With other Spanish songs of the period and earlier.

Whereas the singing on the two records discussed previously is pleasant but unremarkable, here it is distinguished as one would expect from an artist of this calibre. Particularly moving are the two Milán villancicos, each of which is

performed three times, the first unadorned, the second with the singer following Milán's instructions 'hazer garganta', and the third with the alternative and more elaborate vihuela accompaniment. All the other items on the record help to set this aspect of the vihuela repertoire in its wider context.

The two records most readily available are the Ragosnig and the Teresa Berganza, both released in 1975. Between them they include a useful selection of the better-known items of the repertoire in satisfying if not entirely authentic performances. Addicts should try to get hold of the three Spanish discs. The three artists concerned have immersed themselves in the music over a period of years.

There are a number of other records which include odd items from the repertoire not otherwise available. Martín Best sings two of Pisador's villancico's 'Quien tu viese tal poder' and 'Si la noche' on Grosvenor GRS 1013; Mudarra's setting of Dido's lament from Virgil's *Aeneid* 'Dulces exuviae' is included in *Musique of Sundrie Kindes*, (Oiseau Lyre 12 BB 203-6), together with a fantasia (10) by Narváez; and Guy and Elizabeth Robert play Valderrábano's *diferencias* on 'Conde claros' for two vihuelas on Arion ARN 38241. The Arion disc also includes music by Cabezón and Venegas de Henestrosa played on two vihuelas and a piece by Ortiz played on the vihuela and cittern. Mudarra's settings of the romances 'Triste estava el rey David' and 'Israel, mira tus montes' and of the psalm tone 'Exurge quare ob dormis' are performed with lute accompaniment on Nonesuch H 71016 and four of Fuenllana's *tientos* (174, 177, 179 & 181) by a consort of viols on Turnabout TV 34264. The two-record set *Musica Iberica* (Telefunken, SAWT 9620/1, Studio der Frühen Musik) includes Milán's setting of the romance 'Sospirastes Baldovinos', a tiento by Mudarra (printed in keyboard tablature in the original but played here on the vihuela) and the same composer's arrangements of 'Triste estava el rey David', 'Claros y frescos ríos' and 'Si me llaman', all with vihuela accompaniment.

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