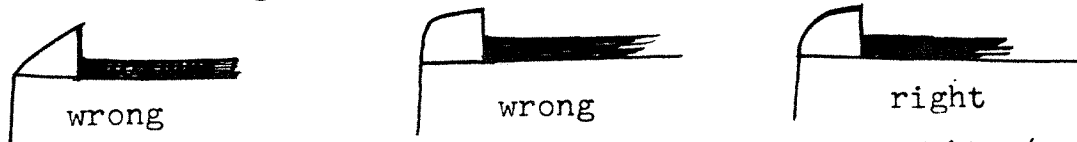


LUTE MAINTENANCE by Ray Nurse
(continued from the previous newsletter)

The most noticeable problem associated with the nut is that of sticking strings; i.e., the string does not slide smoothly over the nut while tuning. This makes tuning next to impossible and is very hard on the strings themselves. Usually the reasons for a sticking string are simple. Here are the most common causes:

- a) The notch is not filed round inside, and the string becomes wedged in.
- b) The notch is too deep, causing undue friction.
- c) The notch is not smooth inside, allowing the string to catch.
- d) The nut is too large, so that the string has too much contact with it, again causing undue friction. $\frac{1}{4}$ inch is an adequate amount of contact.
- e) The nut is not shaped to the proper curve on its upper surface. The string should be tangent to the nut at both edges, and the curve should be an arc. The following diagram should clarify this:



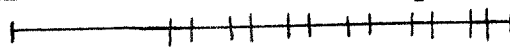
Especially sticky strings can be helped with a bit of graphite (pencil lead) rubbed on the notch for lubrication.

A note on string spacing: Many modern lutes have their strings spaced much more widely on the nut than historical instruments. As a result, many chords are much more difficult to play, especially those with internal barres, for example:

The diagram reproduced below full size is the string spacing on the mid-16th century lute by Gerle (now in the Vienna Kunsthistorisches Museum:



Lutes from the later Renaissance seem to have a slightly wider spacing. The next diagram is taken from a theorbo by Vendelio Venere, 1611 (also in Vienna), and seems typical of lutes from this period:



It is necessary for each player to determine his own personal spacing to best suit his needs (depending on the size of his hands, thickness of fingers, etc.) The following are points to keep in mind:

- a) Do not have the first string run too close to the edge of the fingerboard; an eighth of an inch is the absolute minimum, lest the string pull over the edge when fretted.
- b) The double strings of a course are easier to fret if they lie close together, but if they get too close they will buzz. How close they can be placed will depend on the touch of the player.
- c) Bass strings have a greater amplitude of vibration than trebles, and therefore the pairs of a course will have to be placed further apart if they are not to rattle.
- d) In order to facilitate clean fretting in the bass, it helps to have a bit more space between courses. Look at this spacing from the orpharion by John Rose, 1580:

