

## POSTURE AND PLAYING THE LUTE

In the April 1974 Newsletter an article by Rick Wheeler brought up the subject of good posture and lute playing. Now, some quotes from historical sources follow. They were concerned with good posture then, too. They were very concerned that you not offend those watching and that you not distract from the music with unsightly appearance. The player should remember that today it is just as important. Your possible bodily aches and pains, after all, are your own problem, but offending aesthetically concerns many more than just yourself if you play before audiences.

## MARY BURWELL TUTOR

1) Cites the argument for lutes "of the figure of the pear, the comeliness of it--because, being more flat in the back, they lie better upon the stomach and do not endanger people to grow crooked."

2) THE COMELY POSTURE IN PLAYING: "Those that have said that the lute maketh people crooked have said it to avoid the charges in learning, or the pains or the trouble which they have fancied to be in getting that art, or (being crooked before) they have learned to play of the lute, to cover their infirmity with that rare quality. The crooked spirits are afraid that their infirmity should be seen upon their back, and under pretence to maintain the straightness of their shoulders do shamefully discover the crooked figure of their brains. There is almost no human action that will not make a body crooked if we do (not) take heed, even in doing nothing . . . 'Tis sometimes the fault comes from the master, that does not take care to make his scholar sit upright. Those that are short-sighted, or have a short memory, are bound to have always their nose on their books, and so they may fall into that inconvenience . . . . One must then sit upright in playing to show no constraint or pains, to have a smiling countenance, that the company may not think you play unwillingly, and (to) show that you animate the lute as well as the lute does animate you. Yet you must not stir your body nor your head, nor show any extreme satisfaction in your playing. You must make no mouths, nor bite your lips, nor cast your hands in a flourishing manner that relishes of a fiddler. In one word, you must not less please the eyes than the ears."

## THOMAS ROBINSON

"I give you in charge, to use all instruments with a good grace, comelie play, without anticke faces, or shouldrings . . ."

## THOMAS MACE

(p.46) "The Third Aspersion upon the Lute is, That it causeth Young Folks to grow awry. To this I can only say, That in my whole Time I yet never knew one Person, Young or Old, that grew Awry by That Undertaking. Yet do believe it is possible, if (through their own Negligence, and their Teachers Disregard, and Unskilfulness) they be suffer'd to Practise in an Ill and wrong Posture. So may they do by several other Exercises and Employments, (which is often seen.) But let Them be first set Right to the Lute, according to such Directions as hereafter I shall set down, it shall be impossible for any Person to grow Awry by Lute-play."

(p.71) "The First Thing I would have you regard, is your Posture, viz. How to sit, and hold your Lute: For the Good Posture has two Commodities depending upon it.

The first is, it is Comely, Credible, and Praise-worthy.

The second is, it is Advantageous, as to Good Performance, which upon your Tryal, you will soon perceive, although very many do not mind it."

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