Journal

of the Lute Society of America

Richard K. Falkenstein
Editor

Douglas Alton Smith
Consulting Editor

John Cassidy
Copy Editor

Patrick O'Brien
Monologue on the Left Hand
The Left Arm
How to Practice: A Lecture
Patrick O'Brien Coaches a Student on Practicing
Staccato Practicing
How to Learn Your First Pieces
Improvisation: Practical Beginnings

Tony Elitcher and Grant Herreid
Pat O'Brien and the New York Continuo Collective

VOLUME XLVIII ISSN 0076-1526 2015

Journal of the Lute Society of America

Volume XLVIII 2015

Richard K. Falkenstein
Editor

Douglas Alton Smith
Consulting Editor

John Cassidy
Copy Editor

Consulting Editors
Paul Beier, *Scuole Civiche di Milano*
Tim Crawford, *Goldsmiths College, University of London*

Editorial Board
Dinko Fabris, *Università di Basilicata and Conservatorio N. Piccinni, Bari*
John Griffiths, *University of Melbourne*
Klaus Martius, *Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg*
Stewart McCoy, *Nottingham*
Arthur Ness, *Boston*
Franco Pavan, *Conservatorio N. Piccinni, Bari*
Grant Tomlinson, *Vancouver, BC*

Monologue on the Left Hand 1
Patrick O'Brien

The Left Arm 16
Patrick O'Brien

How to Practice: A Lecture 23
Patrick O'Brien

Patrick O'Brien Coaches a Student on Practicing 44
Patrick O'Brien

Staccato Practicing 48
Patrick O'Brien

How to Learn Your First Pieces 51
Patrick O'Brien

Improvisation: Practical Beginnings 56
Patrick O'Brien

Pat O'Brien and the New York Continuo Collective 74
Tony Elitcher and Grant Herreid

ISSN 0076-1526

The Lute Society of America

http://LuteSocietyofAmerica.org

OFFICERS
Michael Grant, *President*
Christopher Wilke, *Past President*
Kate Benessa, *Clerk*
Thomas Walker Jr., *Treasurer*

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Kate Benessa, Michael Grant, Ronn McFarlane,
Douglas Alton Smith, Christopher Wilke, William Willits

SOCIETY ADMINISTRATOR
Nancy Carlin

MICROFILM LIBRARIAN & BACK ISSUES
Anne Burns

WEBMASTER
Phillip Rukavina

LUTE RENTAL PROGRAM DIRECTOR
Michael Grant

The *Journal of the Lute Society of America* is an annual, refereed publication that is free to all members of the Lute Society of America. It is not available separately by subscription, but back issues in print may be ordered from the Microfilm Librarian, Anne Burns, LSA-Back Issues, 8175 S. Eston Road, Clarkston, MI 48348, lsa@reasonablefax.com. Correspondence concerning subscriptions should be addressed to the LSA Administrator Nancy Carlin, P.O. Box 6499, Concord, CA 94524; phone (925) 686-5800, Nancy@NancyCarlinAssociates.com.

The *Journal* welcomes contributions of scholarly merit and correspondence dealing with issues raised within its pages. Authors should submit MS Word files of their articles and are urged to contact the editor for formatting guidelines. Musical examples should be submitted on separate pages with captions exactly as they are to appear in the article. Camera-ready musical examples are also encouraged, but authors should consult with the editor in order to ensure uniformity throughout the volume. Professionally produced, high quality photographs (preferrably digital) should be submitted for all plates. For matters of style, the *Journal* generally follows the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th edition (2010). Articles, correspondence, or queries should be addressed to Richard Falkenstein at falkensr@canisius.edu.

Monologue on the Left Hand

By Patrick O'Brien

Transcribed and edited from a digitized videotape
by Douglas Alton Smith

Editor's Introduction

In about the year 1991, Patrick O'Brien had been teaching guitar and lute in New York City for more than fifteen years, following his remarkable recovery from tendinitis via his autodidactic study of anatomy and physiology in the early 1970s. A significant portion of his teaching was devoted to helping students who had suffered injury to their hands due to faulty technique, as he himself had.

In the videotape dating from approximately 1991 that is here transcribed, Patrick set out to produce a series of short video recordings (about thirty minutes in length) that would explain the essence of his pedagogical method, particularly for those students who had lost part of their ability to play. This tape was given to one of these students and probably also to others. He refers below to other similar films that he intended to make to educate more than one student, but thus far I have found only one other, on the left arm.[1]

On the Left Hand

I'm sitting here alone in a room with a [camcorder] machine and I'm teaching a guitar lesson to the machine. I'd like to build up a library of concepts that I use to advise people who are having technical difficulties on guitar.

[1] The video film of this monologue will be made available on the website of the Lute Society of America. I am grateful to Brian Hays, and to his source Tom Singman, for providing the digitized videotape of this impromptu lecture and permitting its publication. If a reader has another tape by Patrick on a different aspect of guitar or lute technique and would like to contribute it for publication, please contact the current *Journal* editor.

JLSA XLVIII (2015)
© 2017, The Lute Society of America

Figure 1. Patrick O'Brien in his studio. Screen capture by Douglas Alton Smith.

I'll start with some of the easier things that are very simple to teach and might be perceivable for a format like this.

The principal difficulties people get into in the left hand have to do with two or three categories of muscles that they might be misusing or not taking advantage of and a couple of mistaken perceptions about how the left hand works.

The first thing to define is kind of ironic. You would think I should define everything about how the shoulder and arm work, and I will get to that. But the first thing to remember is for [the] most accomplished players who are getting the usual kind of carpal tunnel problem that people describe in the left hand on the guitar and are being advised to get the retinaculum extensorum split and so on and so forth.[2]

The usual thing to say about that for me is to observe that they have never been told anything about the muscles which control the lateral motion of their fingers. And by taking control of and learning to balance those muscles, they could so improve their leverage and the balance of their whole left arm eventually that they could avoid the

[2] The retinaculum extensorum is a strip of fascia on the back of the hand. Patrick refers to advice that he has heard to split it, that is, to submit to a surgical procedure which would be irreversible and may not even solve the player's problem.

necessity for that kind of operation or extensive therapies that people recommend for that sort of thing. Most of the therapies like that operation are designed to make you tolerate more of the motion that you don't need in the first place.

Abduction

The basic irony of early guitar study is that you are told you must stretch your fingers apart, and you see that it's necessary to stretch on the neck of the guitar. As you first perceive the command to stretch on the neck, you begin a grave mistake that is compounded in later technique. When I look at my hand, and intuitively when I say, "Stretch," I'm going to move my hand like that. [He spreads all his fingers and thumb far apart: Figure 2.]

Figure 2. Abduction. Screen capture by Douglas Alton Smith.

That involves a group of muscles that are basically on the dorsal (top) side of the hand, and they are called abductors [Figure 3]. Any motion away from the centerline of the middle finger is said to be abduction or moving away from center. If you try a little test, if you press against your index finger and press out, you'll see or you can feel the muscle right here [pointing to the outer edge of the base of the index] distending. That is the muscle that pulls the index finger outward. Likewise you can see and feel the ones on the outside of the little finger pulling it outward.

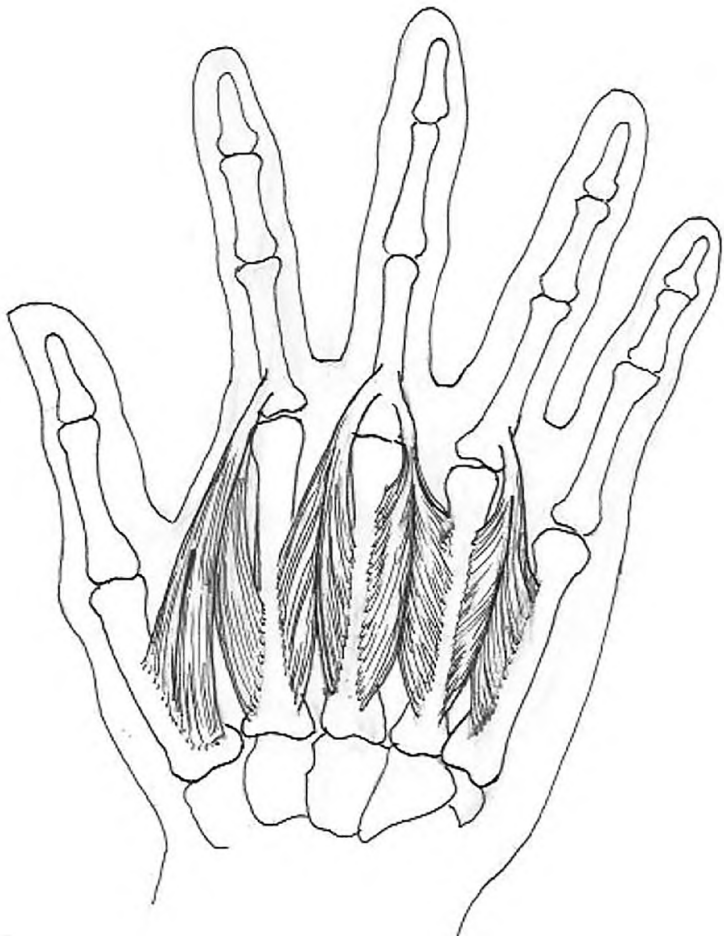


Figure 3. Abductors. Drawing by Andy Rutherford.

The muscles that pull the other fingers outward aren't perceivable from the surface. They are deep down between the bones of the hand. But there's one in here, in this compartment between these two fingers [the ring and little fingers], that pulls the ring finger outward, and there are two that pull the middle finger back and forth. The method of definition, the nomenclature they use, is that either one of those is an abductor because either one of those muscles pulls the middle finger away from that imaginary center line. We overuse those on guitar. We say, "Stretch," constantly.

Adduction

The muscles which pull the fingers back toward center are called adductive muscles. They're basically in the palm of the hand, although they are deep in the palm, and again, you can't see them easily on the surface [Figure 4].

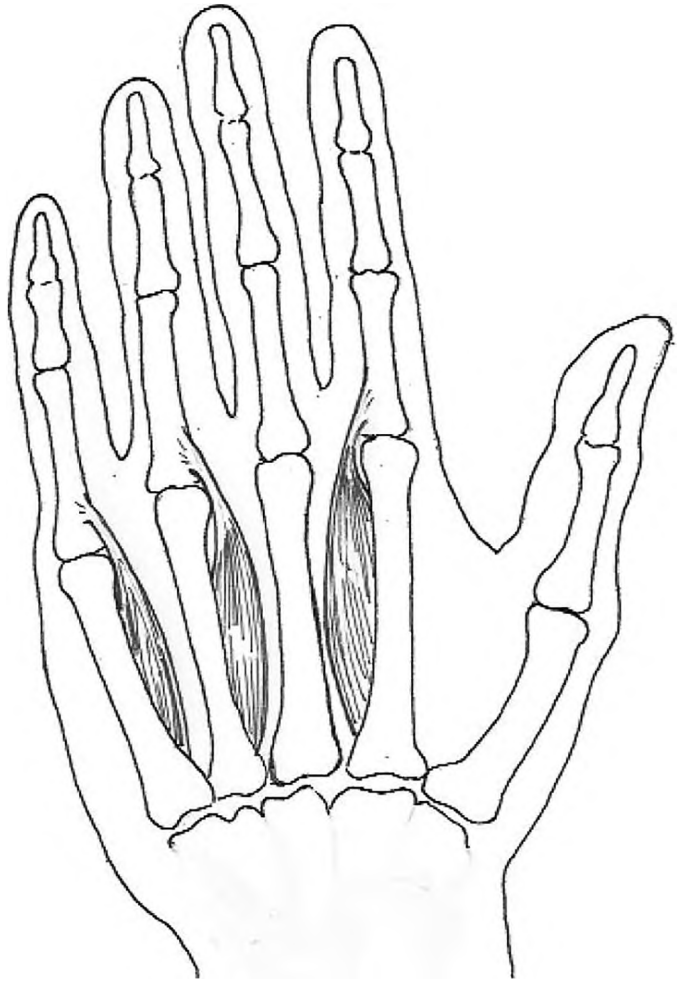


Figure 4. Adductors. Drawing by Andy Rutherford.

There's one here which pulls the index finger in toward the middle. There's another here which pulls the ring finger in toward the middle, and still another down in there which pulls the little finger in toward the middle. [He points to the locations of the adductor muscles: Figure 5.]

Figure 5. Adductor location. Screen capture by Douglas Alton Smith.

Those are the ones which are habitually underdeveloped in guitarists and many string players. Basically the reason for that is that we don't think of the command "Squeeze" as a necessary thing when we are trying to stretch on the guitar.

So here, then, is the irony. I wish I could get up close at this, but basically, if I say, "Stretch," to my fingers when they are straight out like this, that does move their tips apart. If on the other hand I bend my fingers like that as you do on the guitar, and then I say, "Stretch," that tends not to move the tips apart any more; it jams them together [Figure 6]. If I give the command, "Stretch," to the second and third fingers, it pushes the tips closer together.

Ironically, if I say to the fingers, "Squeeze," it pushes the tips a little bit apart. Many times on the neck of the instrument that is a necessary balance to learn, when to say, "Stretch," and when to say, "Squeeze." We say, "Stretch," too often and, "Squeeze," not often enough.

I'm going to demonstrate this to a couple of other people and try and send a few different tapes. Basically when I am looking down at the neck from above, I see a view that looks like this [Figure 7]. And if I am trying to place my fingers, say, my second and fourth fingers which are a typical problem for guitarists, if I try to place them a whole tone apart, and I believe that to be very difficult to do, I will say, "Stretch," to those fingers and the tips will get jammed toward one another that way.

If on the other hand—you can see where my second finger is—if I say, "Squeeze," to my second finger, the tip goes back quite a bit, and I'm

Figure 6. Stretched proximal phalanxes but fingertips not spread. Screen capture by Douglas Alton Smith.

able to shift forward toward the fret like that. When I say, "Squeeze," to my fourth finger, I can aim it out at the fret and much more easily get a whole tone. It's a little hard to do it this way, but on the neck if you can do it from above, as you experiment with it, you can see that by using the adductive muscles you can actually get a very good grip on the neck and more distance between the fingertips.

Figure 7. Adducted fingers seen from above. Screen capture by Douglas Alton Smith.

When you abduct two fingers on the neck like that, the second and third, there is a tremendous amount of stress on the back of the hand here. [He points to the dorsal side of the left hand below the base of the middle finger and to the other metacarpal bones.] And that usually is the sort of thing that leads to the diagnosis of carpal tunnel syndrome. In fact, it is simply not necessary, it is counterproductive to jam the fingers apart like that. If you are holding a simple chord like this and find yourself stretching fingers apart like that, it's actually not doing a very good job of pressing down on the strings. You're not coming straight into the tips of the fingers, but rather you're pushing along the surface of the string. And much of your energy is either going down this way or up that way along the string.

If you can squeeze your fingers toward one another, you can actually bear more weight from your arm, which is the basic way you play. I should spend more time on that in a few moments, about the weight of the arm doing most of the work.

Adduction is the principal exercise that one has to do to get away from the kinds of problems we have with the back of the left hand. I have a series of exercises that deal with that.

Quite simply, it is very unlikely that anyone could overdo the exercise of the adductive muscles. Why? Well, if you try to abduct [spread] the fingers a tremendous amount, you begin to tear tissue between the fingers, and you put a lot of twist or torque, a lot of turning force, on the fingers. You are tilting and twisting them. And there's an infinite amount you can twist them outward, [so] you can twist them outward and keep twisting them until you hurt yourself.

Whereas in adduction, there's a finite amount you can squeeze together. You squeeze until you run into the finger adjacent and then you can't squeeze any further. So it's hard to overdo adduction.

Arm Position

With that in mind, I can advise you to attempt a fairly extensive program of adduction, and you can learn how to do it in a fairly safe way, even if no one is there to watch you and monitor every little bit of work.

For instance, I can ask you to hang your hand and arm and shoulder very loosely, using the weight of your arm on the neck, leaving your arm and shoulder very loose, hanging down, right below wherever you are on the neck. And then put your second and fourth fingers, these two fingers, on the sixth string, one fret apart. That's only a half step. Usually I'll ask you to do that in the middle of the neck. I've observed that almost

everyone plays with a pretty good hand position with the left hand if they play the bass side of the neck in the middle of the neck somewhere.

Most of us start to twist wildly when we get to the first position, and we start to hook off that way when we get to the treble side of the instrument. Ironically, because of our training we have the most trouble playing the simplest part of the instrument. That again has to do sometimes with early training, being taught to play the notes E, F, and G with [left-hand fingers] 1 and 3 when we're not ready to do it, as opposed to 1 and 4, which is the way it was always taught in previous centuries. And [the latter] would line up and balance our hand comparatively well.

Static Adduction Exercise: The Squeeze

Now I asked you to put [left-hand fingers] 2 and 4 here, with a relaxed arm, and adduct them. You can see me doing that as I move these two knuckles toward each other. In fact, the fourth finger is going to get squeezed a little bit under the third finger here. I will move to a new string and then squeeze again for a few seconds and then move to a new string and then squeeze again.

It's very important that exercises always move to the new string for each attempt or for every few attempts after a few seconds. You should not attempt to do this same squeezing on the same fret on the same string many, many times in a row. Each time you move to the new string, your arm shifts down slightly, and you try and do this squeezing, or adduction.

If I were viewing my hand from the ceiling, I would see that my fingers when I adduct, my fingertips, are lined up perpendicular to the plane of the fingerboard. If I held my hand like this, you can see that I'm sort of pressing down straight into the fingerboard now rather than pressing at an angle like this.

Now, once I've completed the cycle of those squeezes, squeezing for a few seconds and relaxing for a few seconds on, say, the sixth fret where I am now, I can go down to a slightly bigger fret, slightly further away from the center of my body, and squeeze there.

One way to think about this is that we have so long used our fingers in a slightly bowlegged fashion that now it is necessary for us to compensate or develop the ability to be knock-kneed a little bit, so that we will eventually be able to stand up straight with those two fingers rather than [be] bowlegged. We have to overcompensate by building up the adductive muscles.

Now you can progress down the neck, fret by fret—squeeze, release, squeeze, release again—taking a few seconds. I'm foreshortening

the time here. A few seconds on each one. You can count, "One, two, three, four, relax, two, three, four"; next string, "One, two, three four, relax"; and so on.

When you can come down here at the first fret and play 2 and 4 there with good adduction and without excessive abduction, you will find that you can proceed, maybe after a few days or a week, coming up to the higher frets and playing at a whole tone with that adduction. Sometimes people go up very high on the instrument, depending on whether they have a cutaway or what kind of guitar they are playing, where it feels comfortable.

Here I am adducting at a whole tone. I can develop that ability gradually, move it down the neck slowly, fret by fret, day by day, trying to go maybe one more fret per day, giving myself a couple of weeks to get down here, whatever is necessary. And when I can do this whole tone with good balance and adduction, not this way but that way, I can proceed up the neck again and try to play a minor third. And still balance the same way, trying to avoid this and get a balance that squeezes toward center, and therefore centers the weight of my arm and the weight of my hand underneath the position I'm playing in.

I can proceed down the neck with that, and gradually increase my ability to balance my fingers properly, side to side, at greater and greater distances.

I also ask people to do these exercises with 1 and 3 and also with 1 and 4, although with 1 and 4 it's hard to start at a half step. Many people prefer to start with a whole tone, gradually working their way up to a minor third and then proceeding down the neck and working to a major third and proceeding down the neck. It depends on how tight your hand is, how flexible it is, how you've exercised it, how fast you can develop in this direction. Basically that process of exercises for adduction teaches you a kind of balance that safeguards you against excessive abduction and keeps you from stretching the back of your hand unreasonably.

There are a great many other choices that you find yourself beginning to make when you try this. One of the things is that you will, of course, try centering your arm weight underneath the position you're playing in, rather than holding it out to the side. It's good to get it down and centered.

Another thing you'll do is try either raising the instrument or lowering your shoulder, or a combination of those, in order to get the ability to stretch this way without bending the wrist like this. If the guitar is too low, you have too much bend in the wrist and you should just raise the instrument.

You don't have to raise the instrument, of course, if you happen to be playing a style like a blues style in which you don't do big stretches. This is only for a situation where you don't have to control large stretches.

Adduction Exercise Playing Tones

After doing those basic warm-up squeezes each day, with those three combinations of non-adjacent fingers—I usually don't ask people to do this exercise with adjacent fingers, there's not much point to it, and it's possible with weak third and fourth fingers they can really strain themselves—once they've done the basic squeezes, I sometimes ask them to actually play the notes: that is, to play descending half steps [on the] high strings and learn to turn the finger in each time they put it down. At first they might put the fingers down this way, leaning them outward each time. But they can learn to hold them up straight or hold them slightly in toward center, which is stronger and safer.

The Vibrato

Also, there's another thing that intuitively happens when you are really well balanced. If you're a classic guitarist, this will certainly happen. You tend to use a vibrato, which is in a kind of disrepute in modern times. We play with so much stress this way that we don't get a very good sound to the vibrato. With the fingertips that fall over to the outside and then jam toward the inside, you don't get an even, comfortable-sounding vibrato. You don't really get a good-sounding vibrato unless the finger is well balanced side to side and it's centered, when viewed from the top, so that it's comfortable to lean back and forth from the elbow and play that kind of classical vibrato.

I think many people playing other instruments, for instance the cello, probably learn this balance of the finger because it is stressed that they should play with vibrato from their very earliest lessons. It's agony to play with a big vibrato from the arm if the finger is stretched off to the side, and they just get in the habit of kind of centering the finger because they're constantly being asked for vibrato in their early lessons. So they lock into this system of balance accidentally, just because of the accident of the request for the vibrato.

Conversely, a classic guitarist will free up his vibrato and get a comfortable sound out of it when he does this. And when he begins to do this exercise, he'll naturally start doing this. I usually ask him not to at first, to try and emphasize his learning the balance of his hand better.

Many of us actually use a vibrato when the finger is extremely unbalanced and jam the hand down. You can tell someone's using a vibrato on classic guitar because he's kind of leaning, he's going for a high note like this one for instance, and he's ironically leaned away from that place, stretched his hand. He doesn't feel confident. He kind of jams his arm weight to try and make more force on the note, and of course he's straining his hand terribly to do it. There's a kind of free vibrato that starts to happen spontaneously when you really feel comfortably centered on each finger.

Slurs

Another thing that happens when you're comfortably centered on each finger is that it becomes very easy to make slurs of various kinds. And once I've asked people to do this kind of exercise—adducted half steps, just playing the notes normally across the neck and back and then down to the next fret and so on, until they are down at the bottom of the neck—once they've done that of course they can proceed to wider intervals the same way I described with just the plain squeezing. They can come up the neck and try and play, adducting the fingers a little bit, on whole tones. Because the bass side of the neck is the place where they usually develop the best leverage, I usually ask them not to shift to the new position until they get to the bass string.

Some of us attempt to leave our thumb stuck in the back of the neck the way I am now, and we lean further and further away as we go to the treble until we have very poor leverage indeed here on the treble. The fingers kind of flatten out, looking from underneath the neck.

If I let my thumb slide down the back of the neck and relax the weight of my arm, I can come back up to the tips of my fingers, which is a much more secure place to play from. That's the reason why I'll ask you always to shift to the new position in this exercise when you return to the bass. It's the most secure and fail-safe way to do the exercise.

Practicing Wider Intervals

Now, once you've done this with half steps and whole tones, you might go on to a wider interval some weeks later. I don't wait for one portion of the exercise to get perfect before I go on to the other one. When you get any one of these up to 65 or 70 percent efficiency, something like that, you try doing a little bit of the next biggest size [interval] up the neck, just to stretch yourself a little bit further.

You might say there's a natural interval for each pair of fingers. For instance, [for] 2 and 4, obviously it would be a whole tone. So I start with an adducted or shrunken interval, a half step, and then I go to the natural interval. Eventually I go on to an even bigger, oversized interval. I don't usually go more than one half step over the normal limit, in other words, a minor third with 2 and 4 is as far as I would go. There is a natural limit to the hand, I feel, and I don't really want to go crazy stretching miles further than I have to.

But it depends on what you wish to do with your own style and how big your hand is and how flexible it is. Eventually, some months later, some people do proceed even further than that and develop a tremendous span of the hand. Notice I'm trying to avoid the word "stretch" for the association of abduction when I say the word "stretch." I'd like you to have a wide reach, a wide span of your fingers with good balance, rather than merely saying the word "stretch."

The possibilities for developing this exercise in other directions are very interesting. Because you are coming down very directly and straight down on the fingerboard, perpendicular to the plane of the fingerboard, you will find that it is very easy to slur from one finger to the other. You'll get a very good, solid slur, where the note you slur is nearly as loud as the note you pluck. So, many people like to practice slurs upward or downward with these adductive exercises, again, gradually proceeding, being able to control the slurs with good adduction and [with] one element I should discuss later on—the transfer of weight from finger to finger.

When you slur from 2 to 4, the weight should come off 2 as 4 makes its impact. As I look here, I can see a certain whiteness of my second finger as I press down, right on the tip. The nail is pink, but it's sort of white near the tip from the pressure. As I press down on 4, or slur down to 4, 4 takes up that whiteness, and this becomes pink over here on my second finger. I haven't picked the finger up in the air, I've merely let the pressure off it, taking up the weight of my arm by my fourth finger. This is what I call transferring weight.

The weight of my arm is now all on my second finger; I could well play this note without my thumb entirely. And now I take that weight up on my fourth finger. The slur sounds much better, cleaner, and is much easier to do if you allow the weight to shift into the fourth finger as you do the slur. Mind that I'm not saying you should pick up the finger or that you should take the weight off 2 before you get 4 down. It's as though 4 drives 2 off.

Likewise, when you make a shift in the other direction, when you make a slur in the other direction, the normal way to practice it at first

is to allow 4 to slur downward. It makes a kind of stroke where it rests against the next string. That's the best way to begin the practice. Some people do an exercise where they slur up and then down, and then up and down, making all the notes very equal. You would end on the bottom finger, and [on] the next string, you could start on the top to reverse the order. Again, I proceed from bass to treble, and then return gradually to the bass and shift, and gradually work my way down with an adductive interval to the bass, then back up the neck and work with a wider interval, then come back up again and work with a still wider interval.

And you'll notice that the wider the interval, the more I have to either raise the instrument or drop my body down. [He demonstrates lowering his shoulder and arm.] This is not a natural posture in which I'm playing, but I'm sitting on the stepstool here trying to make a graphic demonstration.

Summary

Now if you work some kind of series of exercises in adduction the way I describe, you will find that in many chords that you play, instead of placing that chord and stretching your fingers apart, it would be possible to squeeze them together and get much more leverage and also cut down the strain on the back of your hand.

So that, in short, is how I introduce the concept of adduction, or squeezing together in the hand, as a way of balancing the weight of the arm on the fingertips without a lot of stress in the back of the palm of the hand. Anyone who has studied with me could tell you that I could do probably another three hours on that one subject. There are a million interesting facets to how that affects your technique.

I am going to try and tape a short segment, which this is related to, with a jazz guitarist [Greg Chako] who came to me a couple of months ago diagnosed with carpal tunnel syndrome. I introduced this concept to him and he began to work on it. We did two lessons and he's doing fine now. He has a complex chord vocabulary [and] a large old Gibson F-hole guitar, the kind of situation that would normally cause the potential for a lot of stress. He's managed to control that stress and improve his leverage vastly in a fairly short time.

[In reference] to the tape Dr. Frank Wilson sent me a while ago, this would apply to a Mister A particularly, and the person after him on the tape, I can't remember the name, Mister X—in any case, two jazz players who have had some trouble especially on the back of their left hand. I would try to optimize all of the elements of the action they

mentioned and probably check the size of the frets, which I refer to in another tape here.

Have the frets tall enough. Then raise the instrument up, lower the arm, and work on the adduction and get whatever capacity for adduction I could. Once you make that choice for adduction, you'll find yourself staying in this position and, perhaps in scales, reaching up with your fourth finger flattened or reaching out with a barre, a hinge barre, or this kind of an angle, rather than drawing it back like that.

It involves almost a 180-degree change in the position of the palm of the hand under the neck. And it gradually does things I've mentioned elsewhere on these tapes in terms of loosening the shoulder muscles and allowing the weight of the arm to fall down under the position in which you play.

Okay, that's enough for this session. I'll try to get back to this tomorrow.

The Left Arm

By Patrick O'Brien

Transcribed and edited from a digitized videotape
by Douglas Alton Smith

Editor's Introduction

This monologue is part of a series from about 1991 in which Patrick O'Brien began to videorecord his insights into various aspects of plucked-string technique. He distributed copies to a few students. Only this lecture on the left arm and one on the left hand are in the hands of this editor (Douglas Alton Smith), though others may still exist in private collections.

The Left Arm

This is an experiment in describing some simple concepts of guitar technique. These apply to all forms of fretted instruments and to all forms of guitar playing, although certain things about them are relative. Certain instruments require more weight, more leverage, simply because they are instruments which have a higher or harder action.

The simplest way to describe how the left hand should function is to begin from the statement that what presses down the strings is not the force of the fingers against the thumb but rather the weight of the arm. One has to organize the position of the instrument such that the relaxed arm is brought up and slightly forward to the instrument, such that the arm wants to fall back into the strings to some extent back and down.

JLSA XLVIII (2015)
© 2017, The Lute Society of America

In customary classic guitar position it looks like this [Figure 1]:

Figure 1. Classic hand and arm position. Screen capture by Douglas Alton Smith.

If you were playing an acoustic guitar with very heavy action, a Martin Dreadnought, you would want the instrument up very high on your body to create the opportunity to use a lot of weight of your arm.

If you were playing an instrument with very low action, an electric guitar, you could keep it low on your body because you don't need as much weight. The concept is relative.

Also, the amount of displacement of the guitar back to front depends a bit on the leverage you need on the guitar and the tuning and the kind of action you need to press down.

The higher or harder the action, the more the instrument wants to be out in front of you. The lower the action, the easier it is for it to be very far back. But if it comes too far back, it's obvious that the relaxed arm puts your hand very far ahead of the neck, which you must strain some muscles in your back to get to the neck in the first place.

So, I view it as a window of opportunity here, where the guitar is not too low, nor too far back. There's a little space out here where the neck can go, for my body. Depending on how hard the action of the instrument is, it will go up or down, or front or back, but there's a natural location in which I can relax the weight of my arm on the neck, like this [Figure 2], where I'm hanging the weight of my arm here.

In general I'd like to keep the weight of my arm below the neck at all times. I'd like to play such that the weight of my arm is always below

Figure 2. Left arm relaxed below the neck. Screen capture by Douglas Alton Smith.

my finger position. That means I'd like to avoid lifting my upper arm from the shoulder like this [Figure 3] and playing with all my weight held up by muscles up here in the shoulder. I'd like to let that weight hang down below the instrument to some extent.

Figure 3. Improper left arm position. Screen capture by Douglas Alton Smith.

Again, it's all relative. How much weight you need hanging down depends on the difficulty of the chords you play.

Invariably, when someone is asked to play barré chords or more difficult chords of a certain kind, he will come down to a position where his arm is below the neck, and his weight is below the neck. That is in general the position in which I'd like to play any other even very simple chord or in which I'd like to play any scale position. For many players it is true that they become most efficient when they must play a difficult chord. But as soon as they go to play a simple combination of notes, they lift their arm like this, elbow outward. They therefore only use the weight of their arm when they feel they need it.

But I feel that if you use the weight of your arm to maximum advantage at all times, you can play everything with the least effort possible, even if you happen to be playing only one note at a time.

The angle of the knuckles of the left hand to the underside of the neck is a typical way for guitar teachers to describe the manner in which you should arrange your technique. Most beginners unfortunately begin rather like this, with the elbow outward [Figure 4]. The 19th-century methods for guitar often ask you to play the first few notes E, F, and G with your first and fourth fingers; and also B, C, and D. Whereas in most beginners' lessons today they begin with 1 and 3. And since [beginners] can't quite get that third finger up far enough, they twist the hand this way, elbow outward and with ring and little finger extended, using very poor leverage with the third finger and getting into the habit of lifting their arm, also often buzzing on that note [G] because they don't have very good leverage.

Figure 4. Improper arm position often used by beginners. Screen capture by Douglas Alton Smith.

In addition, one could consider that when one plays an elementary guitar piece, you usually use the fourth finger for that note in the treble string as we play a C or a G chord. That leaves the student with a choice. All too often having been trained to play in this position (elbow out)—1 and 3 in the treble—playing a chord like this and turning this way, elbow outward, [the student] uses this third finger in the treble, and then [turns] back (elbow down) to the chord, when it would be sensible to keep the weight of the arm down here and just use [the] fourth finger there.

There's a whole complex idea in terms of teaching reading in the first position that causes people to try and teach one finger per fret, which I think is a grave mistake in the open position in the very elementary lessons. It leads to all kinds of problems in the left hand later on, also clearly the left shoulder, and so on.

The possibilities for describing the position of the hand, then, with regard to the knuckles and their orientation to the neck, are these: one normally (but faultily) begins somewhat pronated with the hand, that is, turned out this way somewhat, elbow outward, the knuckles at an angle to the neck (these knuckles at the base of the fingers).

Someone will at some point ask the players to keep the knuckles parallel to the underside of the fingerboard, which is better than being turned out. In this turned-out position, the fourth finger has a very great disadvantage in playing scales, since it has to reach flat with almost no leverage on the neck. Turning this way, knuckles parallel to the fingerboard, brings more of the MCP [metacarpophalangeal] joints' force to bear on the neck.

I feel that one should not go merely down to this point where the knuckles are parallel to the underside of the neck, but one should in fact supinate the forearm and relax the shoulder, to the point that the knuckles are parallel to the floor or the horizon. Therefore, they are at this reverse angle to the neck. That enables you to take advantage of the natural structure of the hand. The knuckles of the shorter fingers are closer to any given string than are the knuckles of the longer fingers. You can say simply that we invent instruments like the guitar as a species because our bodies are structured this way.

If I relax my arm and shoulder and put my hand out this way [supinated; Figure 5], I have very good circulation in my forearm, the bones in my forearm are parallel to one another and not crossed over one another [as they would be if the forearm were rotated]. My shoulder is very relaxed. The weight of my arm can bear upon the neck. And then I can simply relax my fingers and see that I create an angle like that with

Figure 5. Supination. Screen capture by Douglas Alton Smith.

my relaxed fingertips, as I merely try to poise the guitar in such a way that I can find a way of putting that relaxed angle of these three fingers especially [2, 3, and 4] onto a string. Many people estimate the angle [at] which their hand should be oriented to the neck by looking at these two fingers [index and middle] and placing them this way [elbow extended]. Whereas for several hundred years in guitar technique it has been commonly observed that one should in fact observe this angle [Figure 6] and

Figure 6. Historical orientation of hand to fingerboard. Screen capture by Douglas Alton Smith.

orient the hand that way. This is typical for the methods of Fernando Sor and many 19th-century guitarists. In the 20th century this is not taught very well, and I think that is the most important underlying concept in left-hand technique.

Now I'll stop and try to continue to build a library in short segments, each of which deals with one basic concept.

How to Practice: A Lecture

By Patrick O'Brien

Transcribed and edited by Douglas Alton Smith

Editor's Introduction

Patrick O'Brien delivered this lecture to a group of attendees at the LSA Summer Seminar in 1982. This live lecture focuses on how to prepare to practice. It may be a unique perspective on the preparatory foundation of practicing that is rarely addressed. Patrick's approach tends toward the spiritual. It should be apparent that he raises issues which we all have to think about and decide for ourselves—not only for practicing but for organizing our lives in general.

The Purpose of Practicing

[The audiotape begins in mid-sentence. The lecture's introduction is missing.]

PATRICK O'BRIEN: What is the aim with which we practice? Most of us don't really know, we don't think about what we're trying to do. We know we're filling time. We know we're supposed to do it, but we're not sure what we're trying to do. We don't have very specific goals.

When my daughter was about four years old, she came in and watched me playing scales for a few minutes, trying to figure out what this activity was called, whether it was interruptible or not. She wanted to find out what kind of activity it was, linguistically. Into what kind of category did it fall? She watched for a few minutes and finally, perplexed, she came over and pulled on my sleeve and asked, "Dad, are you playing or working?"

Most of us don't know when we're doing either. There's a vast difference between playing a little concert for yourself and practicing. Most

JLSA XLVIII (2015)
© 2017, The Lute Society of America

of us don't know the difference, don't define it, don't care to actually deal with it. Which is fine if you don't want to get any better. The foremost thing you have to remember is that what you're trying to do is make something better tomorrow than it is today. You're not going to do whatever you did yesterday over again and hope by magic that it's going to get there. With that kind of procedure you will probably just make the same mistakes today that you made yesterday. You should pick one mistake and say, "I'm going to get that one."

How to Master Fast Runs

For instance, there is a category of cheap tricks that one can use in practicing that in a very small amount of time will take care of a large problem. There must be dozens of them.

When you have a difficult run, a cadential figure of some kind that plows up the neck at high speed and must be done with a great deal of panache, you may keep finding yourself marching into it and then breaking down in the middle of it. You never quite get through it the way you want.

I was taught by a jazz drummer that what you're supposed to do is practice it backwards. You set yourself up and play the very last note rhythmically. You count the length of the bar, or whatever the unit is, and play the very last note. Then you try and find the next unit before that in whatever the meter is, be it two, three, or four notes before that. You try and play the two notes before that. Pa pa pom, two three four, pa pa pom, two three four. You do that, say, eight times in a row, till you know it very well.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: You're not talking about playing in reverse?

O'BRIEN: No, I'm talking about working back from the end. Then you go back two notes more, you play the four last notes leading up, and then two notes more, and so on.

What will happen is that you've practiced the end of the run many more times than the beginning. It will gain strength, confidence, and security as you play it. If you need a run that goes [he sings] pom, dadadadadum [very quickly], that's how you practice it. That's a cheap trick. It can take care of any run really fast. If you practice it that way carefully for a day or two, you'll always have it. There are lots of ways you can do that. That's one of the simplest. You pull out something that's giving you trouble, and you work at it from an odd perspective.

Often for a very strong section of the piece—the very end where you always seem to break down and not make the last couple of chords—what you must do is practice the coda or the last section backwards. You start by playing the last chord and playing the last two chords and then the last three chords. Most really fast cadential figures have a habit of starting a little slow and ending faster, a sort of accelerando effect. And, in fact, you can get that kind of effect by practicing that way.

There are many techniques. How often do you talk to another musician about the techniques of practicing? Do you pay any attention to it? Do you actually set any store about how you go about your practicing methodically? You spend a lot of your life at it.

Practice a Piece Correctly Every Time

There is another process about practicing. Your first object is to make something work better.

Therefore it is self-defeating for you to march into the room, pick up your instrument, sit down, and just roll into the thing. What you're hoping for is like being a compulsive gambler. You're hoping you can put heavy money down on a long shot, and God will come down and touch your brow and say, "You got it!" You're hoping for something for nothing. And you're setting yourself up, like a compulsive gambler, to be a victim. You're waiting for the first mistake to happen.

You should instead attempt to sit down with the full intention of playing the thing through from beginning to end correctly the very first time. Now, that takes a lot of preparation. We can talk about different steps of preparation till you're ready to do that. But your basic procedure when you walk into your practice session should be to sit down and play through something perfectly the first time, however slowly, however carefully, to get yourself very loose. You may have to go through several stages of warm-up and limbering yourself and so on before you get there. But once you approach a piece, you should attempt to play it correctly the first time, just for this result: that the next time you walk in and sit down in front of the stand, you can remember that last time when you played it correctly.

You can actually set that up. You can increase the statistical likelihood that you will do it correctly. You can certainly increase your sense of security emotionally. You can feel that every time you go through and look at this page, you will go through it correctly and make all the moves right rather than looking at it and saying, "Oh boy, look at that, I always miss that," and starting to get tight just as you approach it.

There is a system of behavior modification, what you're trying to do, to do it absolutely correctly. Very few people practice pieces correctly. They would rather just noodle around and hope it's going to go right, and they'll get something for nothing. So they'll play it five or six times wrong and hope it's going to go right by magic once.

The other way of looking at it looks a little more like work, I guess. What you're trying to do is increase the likelihood that you do it correctly. You have to do certain things very specifically when you begin to practice. One of the things you have to consider is your reaction time. What are you trying to do? You're trying to make things work better. You have to allow for the fact that some of your practice is going to be very slow and intermittent, that you might make one stroke on one beat and then wait several more very slow beats before you make one more stroke.

For instance, looking at one finger and how it works and how it sounds, you have to leave yourself enough time between events to notice what happened, to decide whether it sounded good, whether it felt good, whether you could do it again. To try to remember what it felt like, and prepare to do it again. To give yourself time to imprint that memory, to evaluate and find out what you did and see [whether it] is worth doing again and come up with a solution.

Most of us go at our practicing far too fast. We go through a mistake, and then once it's happened, we look back at it. We don't do anything in the way of planning ahead or going back and doing it so slowly that we can see what went wrong and react to it.

Time and time again the most obvious mistakes happen. Someone has a failure to get from one chord to another, and I'll see this sort of thing. They'll play one chord, and then they'll go like this [demonstrates]. Their whole body will veer, their shoulder will go up, they'll lose everything, and they'll get a horrible sound on the next chord.

Did they ever stop to look at that? I wonder how they could not see it. Did they ever give themselves a chance to look into what they're doing? Did they ever put a mirror in their practice room and just watch what they look like? You have to give yourself time to see things. You have to agree with yourself that you will move slowly enough that you can watch the process. You shouldn't be defining your practice by the bottom line, with a goal of, "I'm going to get there no matter how I have to crawl to get there." You're trying to find a way that is rather pleasant and comfortable, that is emotionally such a thing that you could look forward to. You're trying to find a way of getting there that you can live with. You measure it against yourself and your own needs, not necessarily the needs

of the music, not trying to get to the bottom line at all costs, thinking, "I must play this at this speed."

We're not bold enough sometimes to take these things and measure the attempt by ourselves, to measure them against what we need. It's just a question of whether you got the sound out on the beat somehow, no matter how. We live in a society that gears us that way. It doesn't ask us what the quality of the experience of playing that note was. It just wants to know whether you got it out.

What happens in terms of the quality of experience of playing a note is that if you don't pay attention to how your body feels—[whether it] feels secure and relaxed, both physically and emotionally—you burn out. There are a lot of young players who play very hard for a few years in college and then stop playing because they don't build a life-giving process, a way of dealing with it each day that feels comfortable and nice, that ensures a certain amount of success. They'd rather go out and play craps with the universe and see if they just give it a whirl, maybe the earth will move.

When and How to Practice

One of the first things you have to consider regarding your own needs in practicing is when you actually do it, where you do it, how you go about it physically. A classic situation, for instance, is that we don't measure practice against our own needs. Here's a phrase I use with students constantly: "If you have a very busy day and you only have forty-five minutes in which to practice, you'll get it done. If you have the whole day off, you won't get anything done."

We don't normally choose to practice when we want to. We don't stop to consider, "When would I *like* to play? What's my best time of day?" Some people practice in the morning, some practice at night. Some people practice alone—most do, I guess. I practice very late at night, after the phone has finally shut up for the day and everyone else has gone to bed. Some people practice early in the morning for the same reason. Some people feel fresh in the morning, and they figure, "I'll get up half an hour earlier before I go to work." And the very fact that they've gotten up a half hour earlier and they're working against a deadline and they've got to get something in makes them work in the wrong way. Sometimes people need to feel an open-ended space of time.

You have to have quiet. You have to be able to hear yourself. But you also have to be quiet inside yourself. You have to be prepared to listen to what you're doing. You can't really do it with seventeen other things

on your mind. Forced practicing that a musician does in a hotel room before a concert when he doesn't know a piece is not what we're talking about. We're talking about what you do every day of your life voluntarily because you enjoy it, some process that makes your life contain more good stuff tomorrow than it did today. It's not something you do because you have to. You have to avoid the feeling of anxiety. You have to sit down with the intention of doing things correctly, trying to find the easiest way, the most secure way, the loosest way. Not because the world wants to hear the notes you play but because it's going to feel good for you to play them. You have to define it inside yourself in terms of what it means for you to do it.

Ergonomic Requirements for Practicing

There are a lot of physical details about how you practice. How many of you don't have a proper stand for your music? How many of you don't have a proper chair, and so you put your music on a desk while you sit on a bed? How many of you have your music in some sort of phenomenal disarray and horrible Xerox copies falling all over the place and you can never find the last page of that piece? Or you always have to turn that page over because when you Xeroxed it and put it in the binder, you had the two pages 1 and 2 and you didn't put them on opposite sides [of two sheets] so you always have to turn between those two measures. And you go on for months without making three more holes and turning the thing around so you can play straight through it. You've all done these things, simple, dumb things where you didn't take the situation in hand and do something about it. The simplest thing: rewriting a piece if you can't read it. The light might not be good. You can find yourself very uncomfortable because your seat isn't correct.

For instance, you can work on a chair with a footstool like a classical guitarist, and your chair or footstool might slip on the floor where you practice. You will have your knee out there and the thing will want to slip away. So you will hold your leg in with a little bit of tension and hold yourself up a little bit, a little tight, [and] you'll hold yourself there for hours rather than doing something about it. Put some rubber under the feet. But we'll practice like that, sometimes for years, without taking care of the physical situation, just the simplest details.

What you're trying to do is to make this activity pleasant for yourself, it's a part of your life. It has to fit into your life, it's not something you shoehorn in there between other things. It has to be something you leave time for because you prefer to leave time for it. Not something

you've got to do after everything else. It should be a ritual, whatever it has to be to make it be the right thing. Do it in the morning, in private, whatever you have to do, whatever physical or mental state you have to be in to do it.

And take responsibility for it. It's easy not to [or] to say, "I couldn't find the last page for a couple weeks," or not to correct the faint page. Sometimes if you write out the fingering for a whole piece, you realize how vague your thinking is about it. If you write out every finger[ing] for the first half-dozen pieces you learn, it's a tremendous education. Pretend that you're teaching it to someone and you wrote compulsively a right-hand and left-hand fingering for every single note. Then read it very carefully as though you were trying to explain it to someone. Talk your way through it. You'll be amazed, when you look at it, that you'll write down three 2s in a row, on three different notes, and not realize you did that. Time and time again I will say to someone, "Do you realize that you just repeated that finger eight times in a row?" And they don't, they just never looked.

Physical Considerations

You can do physical procedures like that, recopying a piece and fingering it as though you were going to make a professional edition of it. Find out how to stabilize your fingering. Primarily, you're supposed to be looking at your personal goals. In the first segment of your practice each day, you start inward and work outward. You think about your body, you relax your neck, your shoulders, you loosen up with some simple exercises. You think outward from there to the lute. How do you hold it? How does it feel comfortable? Your posture, your chair, your music, and so on gradually come to your notice as you move outward, one circle at a time. You should stop at the point of just You and the Lute. Just observe your body and the lute itself. And spend a lot of time on your personal goals—before your musical goals.

Your musical goals should have a form such as improving your tone or playing legato or something like that. Your musical goal should not be by any means, "I've got to play this piece." Your personal goals, which come first, are watching what your body does and feeling if it feels good, relaxation, perhaps the disarticulation of motion such that one thing moves independently of another, [making] yourself more secure and more centered and relaxed, trying to move from place to place without moving your whole body to do it. You can gradually move outward from there, but you really start by centering on your own work.

Beginning to Practice: The Right Hand

For those of you that don't have teachers, I usually recommend that you start with the right hand each day. Once you settle your body down, I'd like for you to start just on your tone and your articulation. The first thing for me in the long run is how the body works. There are certain principles that I feel have to be adhered to.

One of them is disarticulation, whereby you move one finger independently of another, or at least you are capable of doing it if you need to. For instance, if you have to play an index finger and your middle finger follows it every single time, then it's not going to be ready to play on the next beat. You should be at least theoretically capable of moving each finger independently. There are some situations wherein they do move in tandem, obviously, but there are particular goals.

Feeling How it Feels to Play

I don't start from the standpoint of thinking of what the audience hears. I start from the standpoint of how it feels to play. If you observe the playing of very fine players, you find that their playing is very different, very individual, sometimes highly idiosyncratic, and that the most successful players by and large are serving their own emotional needs, very honestly. They are playing the way they feel. They're playing very intuitively. When all is said and done about all the intellectual processes that go into determining how they're going to play, they're basically following their own needs, they're living their own lives through an instrument. They are being themselves.

The result is that I don't think you should make a great attempt at first to emulate the way someone you admire looks like or sounds like and whom you're watching on the stage. I think you should interpret things far more personally than that when you start.

An example: You can focus on one finger, once you've built a system, just one finger and the lute. Try and play one tone and listen to it. A classic Hopkinson Smith quotation from a master class has to do with someone who didn't play very well asking fervently for some kind of hint for how to make these two notes legato in this phrase. "I want to play them very legato." Hoppy sort of sat back and said, "Well, that presupposes that you are capable of making two tones in a row beautiful enough that they deserve to be joined."

You have to start somewhere. Probably you start from the sound, from what it sounds like and what it feels [like] to make it.

You can start with one finger, move very slowly, observe how you play, and perhaps set a beat, very slowly, and play one note periodically, and listen to it, and feel it: [he demonstrates] two, three, four [plays another tone], just listening to it and seeing what it sounds like. Try all kinds of ways of plucking it. [Plays one tone badly, the audience laughs.] You will find if you watch, say, Nigel [North], and Paul [O'Dette], and Jakob [Lindberg], they all have a very highly individual style. None of their styles would necessarily work for any of you. If you got to be as good as they are, you would have your own style.

So you're going to have to focus on what happens to you. You have to give yourself time to practice individual strokes very slowly, several on each string. Once you allow for the reaction time, the essence of practice time is repetition. You're going to try it again. You're going to try to improve it, you're going to try and observe it, try and make it more regular and dependable, until you have tremendous confidence in it under any circumstances.

You start just with one finger. It's very interesting to observe what you do in terms of training any physical system. You try and relax the largest joints you have, loosen up. And you will find that most people neglect—in the direction they're supposed to practice—they neglect to use anything but the most immediately connected joints to the job. In other words, they try to start from the tip of the finger, sort of like that [he demonstrates curling the tip], rather than attempting to distribute the job among several different joints. It takes you a while, in terms of reacting and watching what happens, to see what's actually happening and to figure out what kinds of procedures you might use. There are an awful lot of ways to pluck a string.

The processes you go about evolving may be very different, but the means you use to create that evolution are probably going to be very similar. You start very slowly, very relaxed. You give yourself a lot of reaction time. And you watch to see if you played that stroke loosely. You watch to see if your shoulder went up when you played it, you watch to see if all your fingers move together in a chunk, and so on. And you listen to the sound. You give yourself a good long four beats to listen to how the note [was] attacked, how it sustained, and how it decayed.

Using Each Finger Independently

There are certain technical things that you're trying to go for when you do that. There are anatomical things. For instance, if you tighten the tip joint of any finger, the adjacent finger will tend to follow it. If you

can do any particular job with the other joints instead, you can move more independently.

There are other things as well, like the excursion of the string and its mechanics. My most likely analogy for the excursion of a string and how you're trying to set it in motion is that you can picture it as a child's swing. You can walk up and hit the swing with a baseball bat and go "whack" and make a lot of noise, jump up in the air with a very rapid motion, and the whole chain will hardly move at all, just flip up in the air and slow down very quickly. You'll set it in motion very quickly, but it will slow down to a very tiny point rather quickly. You can also, for instance, grasp a swing, raise it as high as you can, and let it go very gently. The chain will swing in a very long arc and continue swinging for quite a while.

If you move a string very slowly, press it down and get out of its way and let it pop up at its own speed, it tends to react like this. You press it down, then as soon as you get out of its way, it recovers in one piece, or pretty nearly one piece. It is also possible for you to strike with so much acceleration at one point of the string that you get one part of it moving before the rest. Parts of it will move opposite from one another a great deal more. So you can affect the kind of excursion you get on the string by the speed at which you hit it. You have to consider what it is that you want. Do you play for a lot of attack, [or] do you play for a lot of sustain? What is it that you want? What is it that expresses how you feel? Players really play themselves.

The thing that you'll find if you study with different instructors at a seminar like this, the same people for three years in a row, is that very often they'll say the same things to each student. They'll repeat certain themes that are the most important things in the world to them. Some people want a tone that sustains and don't want much attack on the tone. That's how they feel, that's who they are. Some people like a lot of attack and don't worry about the sustain.

Practicing Slowly for Speed

In terms of specific goals, what are you practicing for at this moment? Are you practicing for one kind of sound or another, or for relaxation, or disarticulation? Or for speed?

When you practice for speed, do you back up and practice slowly and attempt slowly to create a microcosm of what happens fast? You can be quite self-defeating in terms of practicing slowly. For instance, I can set the metronome very slowly and then play repeated strokes, [with] the

nicest sound I can, with thumb and index finger on the second string [he demonstrates awkward long strokes], wildly [moving with] a jerk as fast as I can. That's not a microcosm of what you do fast. If I took a high-speed photograph of what happens when someone plays fast, it would look like this. It would be a continuous slow motion. You can therefore practice slowly in a self-defeating way.

One of the things about practicing slowly is that you don't just play the notes infrequently—you move slowly in all ways. You release and move very slowly and form the chord in the air as you move the tone. You do everything in slow motion. If you can create a certain beat, a certain number of repercussions on the note with the slowest possible motion of your arm, that will still get you past the string in time to make those notes, [and] that is in fact the microcosm of what you do at high speed. Playing at 90 miles an hour straight down and waiting at the bottom and then playing 90 miles an hour straight back up and waiting at the top is not what you do at high speed. That means you're tying very infrequent notes to the maximum speed of your body, rather than tying very infrequent notes to the minimum speed of your body.

Even practicing slowly is not enough. You have to do it in a certain way. You have to do it with the intention of finding out exactly what you really do. That's a cheap trick for practicing for speed. That's one of the simplest observations you can make. You can use that very easily to get a certain kind of speed. What everybody always wants [are] magic tricks. How do I make my practice efficient, how do I learn something very quickly?

Staccato Practicing—The Quick Release

A classic example is another cheap trick. You can poise your hand over a certain phrase that always gives you trouble, staying very still because at high speed you would be very still over this phrase, not moving very wildly. You can play one note at a time and release each one as suddenly as you can. The weak link in playing that fast is not how fast you can ram your fingers down—they are very well designed to do this. We don't do this [demonstrates lifting a finger], human beings that we are, we don't do this very well. We grab a lot better.

The release is usually too slow. You can at any speed play very quick, loose notes [he demonstrates playing quickly and releasing quickly]. Those notes are of a very short duration, very individual motions in the fingers. Now, if I packed all of those notes as close together as I could get them, they would be a very fast phrase. Often what you do for

a division is that you practice very infrequently, doing exactly what you must do at high speed. If you play that phrase eight times through, for instance, very slowly like that, trying to make the notes as short as you possibly can, loosening up and relaxing, placing your hand down early and relaxing as soon as you can, by the end of the eighth time you can usually with absolute security play it at double the speed you just played. Now, if you can play it at double *that* speed, probably you can find that you can play it very staccato even there, which means you could play it even faster.

Any time you're working on a division like that, a little phrase like that, there's a cheap trick: you can play it very staccato a few times like that such that you know you are able to engage the note and release it quickly enough to combine that group of notes at a still higher speed. Any time you can cut down the length of the notes to half the time in question, you can play twice as fast. It's really the release, the letting go that you have to find.

This is a way to boost speed very quickly. Playing scales very, very disjointedly in that way, and then learning that you can play them much faster immediately afterwards. It's a way of giving your playing a shot in the arm, of putting any phrase together when you absolutely must.

Paul O'Dette Practicing

There are a million tricks like that. Did any of you ever think to ask Paul O'Dette how he practices? He works harder than almost anybody. He's a tremendously efficient practicer, maybe the most efficient user of time that I know. He does not spend a lot of time going over his previous errors and making them again. He fixes things right away.

Focusing on Details

The kinds of procedures you need to institutionalize in your practice probably involve taking things apart, getting away from the bottom line, and zeroing in on certain individual aspects of your playing. You work with an individual finger for a while. You work with another individual finger for a while. You get each one working individually quite well before you attempt to integrate the two. However, you must at some point integrate the two. You must find a compatible way of working. You can't have one way that this one works and another way that one works. Somehow you must have a way that they fit together. The literature has to teach you that. You have to see what things work together.

Playing Opposition (Simultaneous Notes with Thumb and a Finger)

Here's an example of a glaring oversight in practice. We learn to play scales, single notes. We learn to play chords, which we will very often roll because we can't play them simultaneously. Because we don't have a synthesis of directions for our fingers where they will all work in the same place, we have to tilt in various different ways as we go through them.

The most common single type of playing in any solo piece is called opposition, where we play with thumb and a finger simultaneously. I've been to about half of each of two master classes, and in each a very important point was the fact that people with guitar training could not come in and play notes simultaneously.[1] They had a case of what we in the guitar world call "Segovia disease," which is playing every pair of notes separately, not being able to play them simultaneously.

Now, has anyone ever asked you to practice opposition? For instance, once you've worked on these individual fingers and you've worked on your thumb individually, and you've even worked on thumb-index alternation. Have you worked on playing both these notes simultaneously? Now you have to think about how to engage each one in exactly the way you want so that the notes come out simultaneously. Very few of us can actually play two notes simultaneously. It's very rare. You can try playing thumb and middle together, and thumb and index together. Here the music has to teach you how to play. You have to observe the music and see that this is a texture that comes up and you must be able to do this thing.

Still, these are mostly right-handed things. Once you develop a synthesis whereby several of your right-hand fingers can work effectively together, you usually go on to your left hand. The plucking hand is more important and it's usually where you begin. It's the soul of the activity, really. The sound you make is who you are. You are what your tone is. That's what the world perceives. If you're an aggressive person, you'll probably play a real nasty, angry tone. Your personality comes right out. It's not necessarily what your personality is or has to be but what you force it to be because of the constraints you think you're under, what purpose your playing serves in your life.

Whenever people come to me with a physical problem—they've hurt themselves playing—I will ask, "How did you hurt yourself?" They'll answer, "Playing this piece," and put it on a music stand. And I'll ask,

[1] The master classes to which Patrick alludes may have taken place during the same 1982 Summer Seminar.

"Why are you playing this piece?" And the next phrase will always be the same: "Well, see, I've got to have this ready for an audition next week." It's always, "I gotta, I have to do this." But do you actually want to? Do you even like the piece? Why do you have to play it? Their whole attitude in terms of their feelings about the piece is portrayed in what they do with their body as they play it. Before they start practicing, they don't decide whether they should. Should you do this thing at all?

Left-Hand Basics

When you get to your left hand, the most important thing to know is that gravity should press down the strings. The weight of your arm presses down the string, not the pinching in your hand. You don't squeeze the neck, you relax your arm and bear the weight, which means that we can do some very unusual things to begin. Place your finger on a string, the second finger, perhaps, which is the center of gravity. The thumb is more or less behind it. Take your thumb off the neck, just relax it and let it sit back there. Just feel the weight of your arm on the neck. Once you have the feeling of that weight, try putting down another finger, pressing down very gently until the weight feels secure on that finger, and then release the pressure. Don't pick it up, just release it. Try trading the weight back and forth from finger to finger. That's the way great players play. They don't perform a series of discrete events. One event flows into the other and they telescope together.

What you're trying to do in this way is institutionalize a certain kind of thinking. The relaxation of your arm therefore has a purpose. You know what you are trying to achieve with that relaxation. It's not just one more thing someone tells you to do. You have to have a specific goal in terms of why you are relaxing. You want to use the weight of your arm as much as possible and to use as little stress as possible. Therefore, it pays big dividends to relax your shoulder.

It's really fairly simple. You can look up the anatomy of the hand in an anatomy book and find out what the muscles are. What do your fingers do? How many people can name the motions of their fingers and tell me what they are called and what accomplishes them? And if you have just been told what that is, think about this: why didn't you ever ask that question before? With regard to having an anatomy book, I tell people to look in one to find out what muscles and tendons and ligaments and whatnot they have. If you bought an appliance, you would demand an operating manual and guarantee. Here you have this machine, you're all stuck inside it, and you don't demand an operating manual, you don't

demand any basic knowledge of how it functions.

Everyone put your hand out. [He extends his arm and holds his hand palm down.] Your hand is prone. Turn it over. It's supine. They don't mean the same thing. Lying on your stomach you are prone, lying on your back you are supine. When you turn the palm down, it's called pronation; the opposite is supination.

Your hand, your fingers, can do four things. They flex, controlled by muscles over here [the palmar side (inside) of the forearm through tendons]. The fingers extend [by the use of muscles over the dorsal side (outside) of the forearm through tendons]. They move the fingers apart like this [he spreads his fingers]. It's called abduction, which is controlled by muscles up here [called the dorsal interossei, located on the back of the hand and extending up to the base of the fingers]. And they move the fingers together, which is called adduction, and is controlled by muscles in here [the palmar interosseous muscles located in the palm of the hand and extending up to the base of the fingers].[2]

If you don't know what the machine is, you can't make rational judgments about what it can and cannot do.

Finger Placement

When I practice for my left hand, one of the first things I do is to see if I am pressing down as efficiently as possible. I don't want to be lifting up a finger in an extension way out there [he probably demonstrates straightening the finger]. I'd rather lift it straight up [a short distance off the string], which means I'd rather come down straight on a string rather than at an angle.

In terms of the force, if you have some kind of impact on something with your finger, and part of your finger bends that way [diagonally], then some of the impact goes out that way. So if you put eight ounces of force into the motion, four ounces go one way and four ounces go the other. A great deal of the force that you put on your fourth finger is usually wasted by pressing along the string sideways, like that [demonstrates at an angle]. Now, you can control that finger and put it down straight, it's not hard to do. It can usually be learned in a matter of a couple months.

When practicing, one of the things I am thinking about is whether I am doing each action in the easiest possible way. I also pay attention

[2] Cordial thanks to longtime LSA member Michael Peterson, MD, a surgeon who has helped to elucidate Patrick's anatomical references and terminology in this paragraph and numerous other passages in this issue.

to whether I customarily seek the easiest possible way to do things. I frequently get students who make everything as hard as possible for themselves. They find ways to make excuses, a series of things that take away responsibility from themselves for doing it well. You probably can think of someone you know who makes things difficult for themselves by constantly picking the wrong instrument.

Instrument Selection

Once you decide that you do not want to put any barriers between yourself and the instrument, such as choosing an inappropriate instrument for a certain literature in the wrong tuning, you may put up other barriers. You may make yourself practice at the worst time of day or in a frenzy, not zeroing in on any one thing while practicing but rather spreading out wide. The unconscious mentality behind this is sometimes to absolve oneself of responsibility for not doing well.

Usually if you examine your motives, you find out what you really like to do, which may not be what your teacher says you should do.

A particular problem people have in terms of practicing is that they don't form a general knowledge of the instrument. They are trying to struggle through the few notes that are written on this page. They don't teach themselves harmony on the instrument, figure out how to resolve each chord in each position and go to wherever they're supposed to go musically. They are only concerned with getting this one piece done. And for lack of that general knowledge, they don't get a very good sense of balance, of where the music is going. They don't see the musical direction of a phrase, and they shove something over there at the last minute, finding fully half their body going curiously away from where they are going to go.

How much of the time when you're trying to get somewhere do you spend a lot of energy going in the opposite direction? This is a classic example. [He gestures.] Ever seen that one? [He gestures again.] Obviously that's where you want to be. You might possibly even stretch away and hold on for those notes if you want to go in that direction, not away from where you're going.

Planning the Practice Session

The process of practicing is terribly complex. I find I have to make a plan very carefully in my mind for what I want to do, and I have to revise it minute by minute. For many people it helps to write down what they are attempting to do. You can sit down with a blank

piece of paper on your stand and write down the first thing you do. Try it. Then write down what you do next. Keep a list of what you do on a given day. Then look at the list at the end of the week and see how much time you spent doing what. You'll be terribly shocked within the first fifteen minutes. And immediately you'll start to do everything very differently.

One of the worst things about that kind of artificial procedure is that you'll start worrying about what it looks like on the page: "Oh, it looks like I'm an idiot, I'd better try doing something else"—not because you feel it, but because you think it looks better—"I may not get to my goal, but it looks like I'm trying harder."

If you begin to monitor how much time you practice, you will ask how important is this thing in your life and do you treat it so, or is it in fact the last thing you get around to after everything else? How many things like this do you have in your life and of what value is it, proportional to the other things you have to do? Is it important enough where you can make the time and say, "No, I can't do that now, this is when I practice because it's my time, when I have to do the thing that I want to do"? You can stake out a piece of territory physically and temporally and make a boundary for yourself of some kind.

Starting from the Center of Oneself

There are myriad other ways of looking at it, and I tend to make up different ways with each student. But perhaps the most important element is that you attempt to start in the center, in yourself, consider how you feel, what you want to do, consider the condition of your body, its physical environment, and work outward very slowly.

The last thing you really get to is the audience itself. If you don't feel very good about what you're doing, the audience isn't going to care for what you're doing. You have to take care of the center first. That's where it comes from.

Now, Besard says, "Choose one lesson by self."[3] This is very important: One lesson. By self. Don't choose it because Paul O'Dette plays it incredibly. You need to choose the piece because you like it and it sustains you well enough that you will want to work on it carefully.

"Further," Besard says, and Dowland translates, "according to thy

[3] Jean-Baptiste Besard, lute-playing instructions in Latin from his *Thesaurus Harmonicus* (1603), translated into English and republished by John Dowland in his *Varietie of Lute-Lessons* (1610).

capacity."

You don't play a piece to compete with somebody else but to enjoy the experience of playing it. You have to frankly admit what your level of playing is. It's not what you can barely scratch through, it's what you can have a nice experience playing. What can you do that's unique that no one else can do, that's specifically yourself, that is satisfying?

What is your capacity, what should you be playing, what's your reason for playing this piece? Does it fit in your plan to teach yourself about the literature, to try and find out what techniques you need to develop? Does it happen to use a certain kind of fingering combination that you wanted an excuse to learn and balance on and learn how to play securely?

Does it use a certain aesthetic effect of nuance of time or dynamics that you want to learn to control better? Does it say a sort of thing in a literary or spiritual sense that is terribly important to you? Why are you playing the piece? Should you be playing it? Frankly, can you control it well enough that you should be playing it? Do you really enjoy playing it that way? Does anyone else enjoy it?

You have to discipline yourself enough that once you admit you like this piece, you are going to take the responsibility to learn it well, in a well-organized fashion, with enough respect that you're going to treat it decently. It's not a vehicle for your ego.

Sight Reading

I differ from Besard in this respect: When he says that you should not read through a piece at first sight, I wonder about that. I think that you can permit yourself to know how a piece goes all the way through. But that's a very difficult thing. Some people ought to pass an absolute rule that [if] they can't do it, they should give the book to a really good player, and ask him to read through a few pieces so they can hear them and decide if they like them and can play them. Because once you open this Pandora's box of plowing through a whole piece, you tend to plow through it again.

You have to start with individual sections. You have to look at how it should be fingered. Try combinations of rhythms, attempt different things, write them down. Use whatever organizational system you need graphically to remember what you intend to do.

And you have to work through each part very slowly, playing each part in slow motion, not in a series of infrequent jerks, at first slowly and carefully and smoothly, trying to feel the condition of your entire body as

you do it. When you can do the whole piece that way, you've actually got the whole thing. It's a very succinct piece of advice about practicing that Besard gives here, I don't know of anything better in the whole literature, nor in fewer words.

Defining Practice Goals

Primarily what I've tried to say here is what you need *before* you actually get down to the bottom line of what you're going to play and how you're going to play it. What you first need to know is why you're practicing and what you're trying to accomplish in a general sense. I say of course "about specific goals," and I don't tell you necessarily what they are. That's something you need to determine on a one-on-one basis. But the kinds of specific goals you are looking for are aesthetic and not bottom line, such as "I just want to play this piece faster." You have to take apart in a piece what's working individually and find out what parts you have the most trouble with. You can even consider two ways of playing a piece. If there is a little *gruppo* in the piece that you cannot possibly play fast enough, you have to slow down the whole piece to play it.

It's perfectly reasonable to say, "Now I must go and woodshed this thing, I must go and practice that technique. But right now, if I have to perform that piece, I'm just going to leave that out. I'm going to alter it to a simpler ornament and play something stylish and well and not destroy the whole piece by playing the whole thing at half speed."

You have to look at an awful lot of solutions like that, in terms of what happens with the bottom line once you pull the thing apart and look at it realistically.

You are applying yourself to a very specific goal. You have to consider if that should be a part of your plan at all. Should you be performing [publicly] now? Or by performing, are you in fact perpetuating the level of your own playing? Whenever someone gives you a really good observation—you look at Paul and the lessons when he is teaching somebody something, and you say, "I want to try that, I really need that." And then you say, "I've got to play Thursday night. When I get home I'll try it afterward." And then you forget it. And another year passes and you haven't done it. Perhaps you have to look at the idea that practicing, your learning process, your growth, can be more important than performing when the performing is counterproductive to your further growth. It really is only something you should do if it fits in with your plan, such as playing a particular piece. You should not give up the responsibility for your own growth and put it into the hands of someone else.

We're professionals because we take money. But it does not necessarily mean that you have the right goal in mind. You're playing from one little performance to another, and you'll take any gig that somebody calls up with on the phone rather than saying, "Here's my practice procedure, I've outlined certain goals, and this gig does not fit within my goals. It is going to be counterproductive. It doesn't compensate me for what I need to do at all." This dude is calling me up and saying, "It's good exposure," but it's very little money. But how many times do you aim yourself at a rather tawdry gig and find yourself going from one little tiny gig to another?

That's very short-sighted, perhaps even aiming yourself to one monster gig that I call the *hors d'oeuvre* of the century: senior recital syndrome—putting off everything in your life until you get done with that senior recital, until you've gotten so used to putting off everything in your life that you can't figure out, [and] once the recital is over, how to pick up the threads of the rest of your life.

If you look at it in a certain way, it is easier to organize yourself because you feel part of something, a movement, perhaps. You have to keep some sort of contact with others that gets you outside yourself so it's not just your ego on the line. You are part of something larger than yourself, which sometimes makes it much easier for you to see what your goals are or should be. Ironically, you can treat yourself somewhat better in that way because you are not focusing on your own ego but on what a whole number of us are trying to achieve.

I have gotten that kind of experience from quite a number of different people, notably from our obviously absent friend David Phillips, who passed away this winter.[4] I spend a lot of time trying to be better at this than I am, and I have for years because I knew David expected it of me, other people expected it of me. It helps.

David would look at me being rather petty and getting annoyed with someone who was slighting me in some fashion, and David would say, "Well, of course you know it is insecurity that makes them do that sort of thing." I knew nothing of the sort. But he did that with such a light touch that I didn't feel like I had to apologize for being such an idiot.

Improvisation

[4] David S. Phillips (1938?–Nov. 25, 1981) was an avid amateur lutenist who attended multiple LSA seminars beginning in 1976. He was also an Eastman-trained professional contrabassist with the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra and electric bassist in progressive or art rock groups such as Sigmund Snopek III.

That's the view from the inside out, or as jazz players would say, from the inside to the outside, of how and why you go about it. From the inside to the outside is a sort of attitude I learned from certain jazz players, a way of looking at what they do in the world. David was of the generation of John Coltrane and Ornette Coleman and people like that, so they thought in that way. Mostly improvisers think that way, which we should all be. It's very interesting, when you put the immediate body on the line, how it changes the way you think.

The last thing about how you should practice is how you go about cultivating spontaneity. It's probably the most left-out thing in terms of practicing. You ought to teach yourself or somehow learn to improvise, to make things up immediately. You must organize things in certain ways and see patterns and so on when you improvise. You have to prevail upon a whole set of feelings that are very different from what it is to prepare something from a fixed page. Ability to improvise is one of the most healthy measures of whether or not you can actually do a thing.[5]

[5] See the article on learning to improvise by Patrick O'Brien, which he wrote for the LSA *Newsletter* in February and November of 1980. It is reproduced in this issue of the *JLSA*.

Patrick O'Brien Coaches a Student on Practicing

By Patrick O'Brien

Edited by Douglas Alton Smith

Editor's Introduction

This is an email exchange between Patrick O'Brien and luthier Travis Carey, of Vancouver, B.C., who had taken a few lute lessons from the maestro beginning in 2003. The exchange took place in 2009. This brief tutorial presents some ideas not present in Patrick's 1982 lecture on practicing (see above in this *Journal*).

TRAVIS CAREY: How to structure my practice time?

PATRICK O'BRIEN: Boy, that's a hard one. Everyone learns differently. Some people work best at certain times of day and happily hit upon what time or in what order to do things to use their energy best. Likewise, people remember musical things in different ways: some by pure sound, some by theory, some by visualization of their hands' motions . . .

Several things which seem common: Write out large or a get the best possible copy of what you're working on and use it as a journal entry, writing in your fingering, phrase marks etc. so they are very clear and you waste no time trying to remember what you figured out yesterday. I have noticed over the years how much more trouble people have when working from bad copies of things. Pick a few pieces you really like, stick with them and identify the things which need work so you get to them regularly. Make a list.

One friend makes a bunch of virtual flash cards of knotty bits and practices a few very, very slowly when he has short segments of time. I have known people to do this when they are away from the instrument, just doing the mental practice of hearing the slow phrase and picturing their hands making the motions. (I learn things by a combination of kinesthetics and sound, and this doesn't seem to work for me.)

JLSA XLVIII (2015)
© 2017, The Lute Society of America

CAREY: Here's what I've got—most mornings before catching the bus to head over to Grant's [Tomlinson], I've got about 15-20 minutes. Barely enough to get warmed up really; I usually spend the time working (very slowly) on some knotty passage I'm trying to untangle.

O'BRIEN: Most people in your situation would like to play a couple of enjoyable pieces with this sort of morning time. A professional doesn't often have the luxury to do that. He has pieces to play through and learn by very slow practice. Often a professional can't even take the time to play whole pieces. He only has time for the hard bits. The only time he gets to play the whole thing is in concert. (This happens to Paul O'Dette all the time.) I would hate that.

I would probably use this sort of fresh, calm, morning time to work on a long term aesthetic project, something which seemed to me lacking in my current playing, working toward some particular current goal: for instance, improving my tone in my right hand by playing long, sustained slow tones in scales, working on some specific goal in my left hand, (adduction of the fingers, relaxation of the left shoulder . . .) or putting things together with both hands to improve the smoothness of my scales during position shifts or the clear articulation of the counterpoint in my cadences etc. When I focus clearly on these things it makes my whole approach to the instrument a more positive thing. I come to anticipate the pleasure of improvement, even if only in one aspect at a time.

CAREY: Most evenings—at least an hour, maybe as much as two. Julia [later Carey's wife] and I are hanging out after supper, she's marking, or maybe away at a meeting, and I play away to my heart's content. During this time I'll play through pieces, maybe pulling out passages and working with them in the larger context.

O'BRIEN: There are some conventions that might work:

1. We often begin with a ritual of brief warm up, working slowly on some point in either or both hands which is a current technical and/or musical goal. Set a limit of time for this so that it doesn't take up too much time and you are encouraged to concentrate really well for a short burst of very organized abstraction.

2. With that new idea somewhat in place in our memory, we then work on our newest piece, hoping that thus we will learn new things with our best new technical and musical ideas and control.

3. Thereafter we play recently learned repertoire, for which we need to have good concentration and discipline, playing slowly to imprint everything correctly.

4. Then we amuse ourselves somewhat more by playing older repertoire for musical and expressive work and as something of a diversion. In this already learned repertoire, one should be least conscious of one's technique and be simply thinking of the rhetorical expression of phrases.

One of the benefits of this sort of plan is that you get to the essential pedagogic things first and only get to the others once the hard, new, heavy lifting is done. If you don't have much time in a given session, your most essential, progressive work still gets done.

CAREY: Saturday and Sunday—usually I have 3, maybe 4 hours both days. I seem to use this time for playing passages in context (as described above) and also for exploring repertoire, finding suitable pieces.

So what do you think? Pretty vague question I know, but if you have any advice, or if there's some vital part of the process I'm leaving out, please let me know. My new circumstances here have really given me a gift of time to work on my playing, and I'm feeling like I could make strides over the next few months, if I use the time wisely.

FYI, the kind of stuff I'm playing these days—Holborn, Pavan and Galliard #2; Dowland, Earl of Essex and Queen E's Galliard (I'm also on the lookout for anything else in the "Varietie" that I can play on 6 courses); Arthur's Dump from the Marsh lute book (a nice, easy pace on that one); and various Francesco (10, 11, 12, 28, etc.)

O'BRIEN: Some people set a goal of reading a new piece every day [if] they have enough time after doing their essential work. The internet being what it is, one can pick something from a website like Sarge Gerbode's and read it right off the screen. One gets more familiar with the scope of the literature in this way and it improves the speed with which you pick up new things.

In general, one starts with a plan, even writing it out as a list on the right side of a piece of graph paper and checking things off daily if that works for you, but what happens is that you find yourself remaking the plan quite often. In the process you learn how you learn. It's good to have real goals, like playing in front of people every so often. My favorite university plan was made for one school by a very active secretary to the chairman of the music department. She got the names of local librar-

ies, elementary schools, old-age homes, hospitals etc. For years, when a student was preparing a recital he could go to her with his date and she would set up practice performances for him. It was a great community outreach project. People in the area came to support the department and the school and many would come to the student's final recitals. Often he would play only a few pieces in each venue and sometimes give a little talk about what he was doing but he learned to get ready, perform, and deal with the audience and different performing situations.

Staccato Practicing

By Patrick O'Brien[1]

In changing to the thumb-under style of playing this year I found it necessary to return to many elementary modes of practice. One of these, at least, has proven itself many times in the past on many plucked instruments and is, I find, less known on the lute than it should be.

A large area of right-hand technique, particularly tone and fluency, depends on the ability to place the fingers of the right hand on the courses precisely. In order to clearly establish the position of the fingers and to be able to control their placement, it is extremely valuable to practice playing somewhat "staccato."

Begin with one finger—the middle finger, for instance—and play the second course, and then deliberately stop the sound by placing the middle finger on the string again. Then pluck again from that position, again stopping the note deliberately by replacing the finger on the course. As you repeat this action, you will find yourself able to observe the placement of the finger as it prepares to pluck, and feel exactly how the tip of the finger is contacting the two strings of the course.

In developing tone and articulation, there are two principles to remember in using staccato practicing:

1. The exact position in which you mute the string should be the same position that you pluck from. There must be no re-adjustment. Muting with the side of the finger and then sliding up closer to the tip to pluck is a common fault which sacrifices speed, tone, and accuracy.

2. The position in which you mute the string must be one in which you contact both strings. The damping of the course must come abruptly, as if only a single string were stopped. You cannot get a full, lute-like

[1] This article first appeared in the January, 1979 LSA *Newsletter*.

JLSA XLVIII (2015)
© 2017, The Lute Society of America

tone unless you pluck both of the strings as evenly as possible, and the plucking position which will sound the two strings most evenly will also be the position in which they are dampened most evenly.

A problem common among guitarists like myself who change to the lute is that they prepare to play a note by placing the finger on the side of the course rather than on the top. Typically, this only sounds one string of the course, and quite often also produces buzzing in the course as the two strings are snapped against each other. You can check your accuracy in hitting both strings of a course by watching the fingerboard of the lute in a mirror. As you pluck and stop the course, you should see the two strings vibrate equally against the dark background of the fretboard. If they do not, you probably must bring the finger to a more vertical attack in order to catch both strings.

Once you have found the spot on the middle finger that feels and sounds right, try the same procedure with the index, repeating it over and over very slowly until you can mute both strings, pluck from that position without moving the finger, and see in the mirror that both courses are vibrating equally. From the time you mute until the time you pluck the course, there should be a feeling that you are pressing the strings of the course straight down toward the top of the instrument.

An added benefit of this form of practice is that by repeating one finger slowly, you must learn to let it relax after each pluck, thus avoiding one of the most common problems of novice players—the tendency to hold each finger pulled in toward the palm after it is used, not letting it relax until it is needed again. All fingers should be released immediately after plucking.

Once you can play this staccato stroke with two fingers, each taken one at a time and repeated, try alternating those two fingers:

Place the index finger on the second course,
pluck,
release the index, allowing it to return to the rest position,
place the middle finger on the second course so that it mutes both strings at once,
pluck with the middle finger,
release it to return to the rest position,
place the index finger on the second course, and so on.

When this motion is firmly established, it can be practiced on the third and fourth courses and in patterns of repeated notes alternating

between two courses to gain fluency in string crossings. Remember, however, to proceed slowly and deliberately.

All of this may seem like a lot of trouble, I know. But your tone and articulation will improve dramatically. Be sure to feel both strings on the fingertip before plucking; watch in a mirror to see if you've succeeded. Eventually your ear will tell you. And be aware of the feeling of coming down on top of the course and pressing it into the top slightly as you prepare to pluck.

Although the thumb-index stroke depends largely on the motion of the arm rather than the fingers, some of the same rules apply. You should, again, feel both strings against the finger before you pluck, whether the impetus for the plucking is from the finger joints or from the arm. It is simply a question of which muscles do the job of placing the finger on the course and pulling it off. For the middle-index alternation, the fingers do the work. For the thumb-index technique, the arm provides most of the energy. In both cases, however, the placement of the fingers on top of the course does not vary if the tone is to be solid and clear. Try to pluck with a hard and clean tone, as Thomas Robinson says. None of this will do you much good if you mince around with it. Stick your fingers in the lute and play out!

The final objective, of course, is not that one should merely be able to play staccato, but rather that the exact contact point of the finger against the strings be exactly defined and felt with unfailing accuracy so that the greatest variation and control of articulation becomes possible.

Guitarists who have never tried this exercise will find it beneficial to their playing as well.

How to Learn Your First Pieces

By Patrick O'Brien[1]

Perhaps the most frequent question I am asked by lute teachers is "What do you do with beginners?" Modern method books progress a bit too fast for beginners, they tell me.

Looking at the history of the lute's early repertoire, I am struck by how dominant melodic playing and its technique were to the training of early players. When a novice player is ready, we all assign some treble and ground duets to learn, realizing that the right hand's articulation of a melody is fundamental to 16th-century lute. I discussed this with my friend Paul O'Dette years ago, and he had brilliant insights into how a method for beginners for Renaissance lute might be organized around the function of the right hand. It occurs to me that some of our ideas might help the average teacher or beginner.

Most modern methods seem to use a few of the same short English pieces to begin. Many English manuscripts have little pieces roughly suitable for beginners. These do not occur as often as continental sources. While basically simple, a melody over a simple bass, these pieces contain textures which vary from one to four voices, requiring a wide variety of right hand skills. Perhaps we might take a few of these pieces and "deconstruct" them, building them up from one to two to three voices, providing the beginner with a path not only to learning the techniques required to play the pieces but to understanding their structure. We could create many more "easy" pieces in this way. Of course complex pieces of polyphony cannot be treated this way, but a true beginner isn't ready for these for some time.

One could do this with any simple beginner's piece that is constructed with a melody over a simple harmony or ground. The student learns to articulate the melody as the first generations of Renaissance lutenists did, alternating strong and weak fingers and allowing the right forearm to move slightly up and down as it does in many early bowed instruments. Later the bass is added, and finally the larger chords are filled out. (Ray Nurse used this idea to create a group of wonderful easy "reporting" duets based on small English tunes.)

Here is a piece common in many method books, treated in this way:

[1] Thanks go to Douglas Hensley for providing the content of this article.

© 2017, The Lute Society of America

How to learn your first pieces,

by deconstructing them.

First, examine the whole piece:

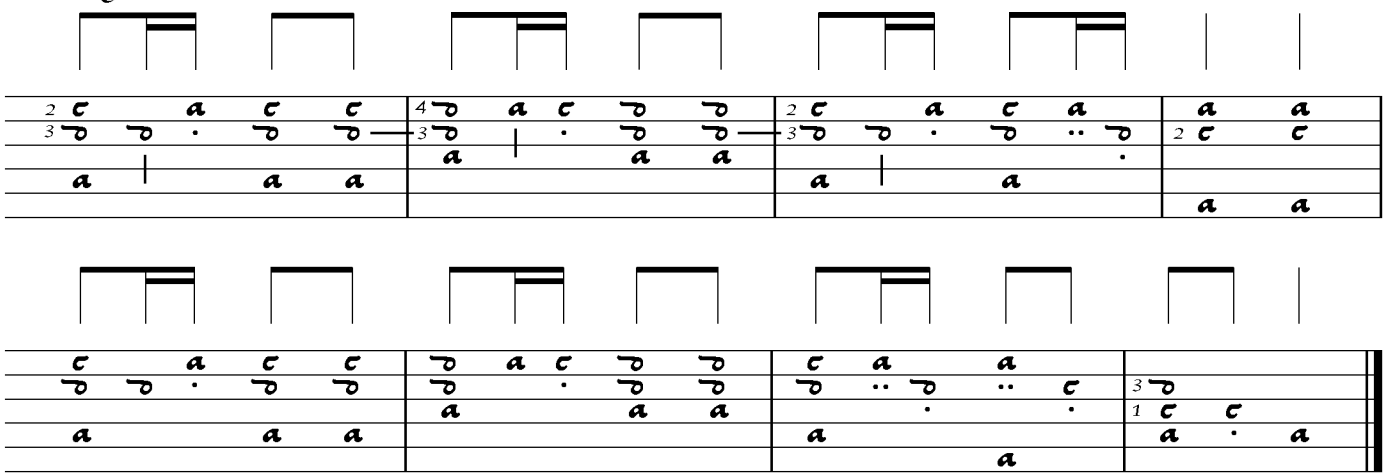
Buffons

(Passamezzo Moderno)

William Ballet Lute Book

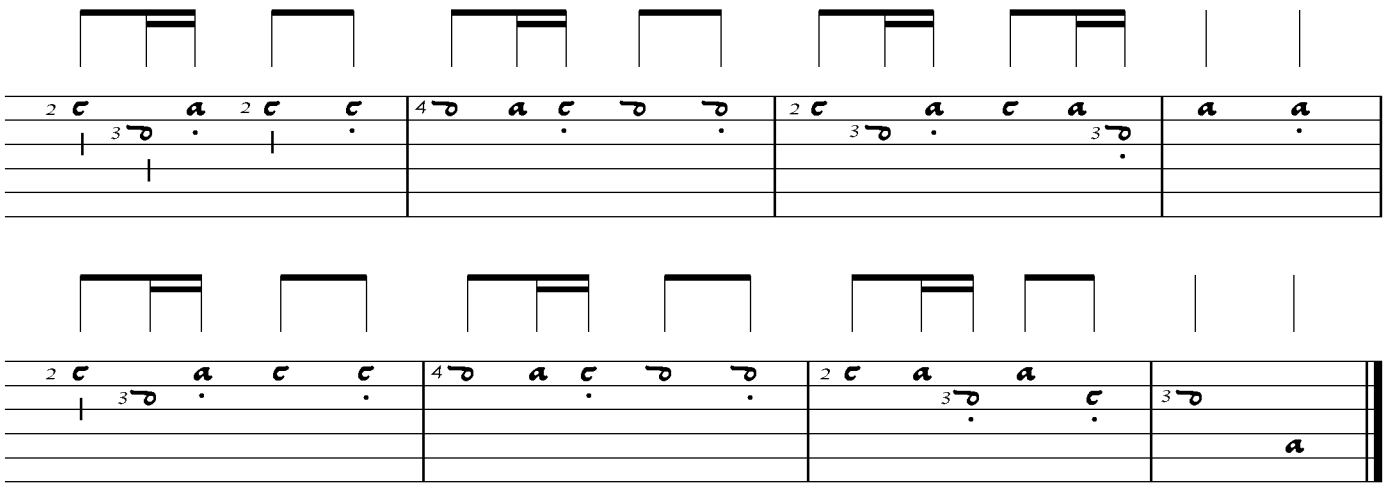
p. 104

original



Begin by extracting the melody only, making a one voice version
and playing it with by thumb and index fingers.
Use left hand fingering which will fit into the larger chords.

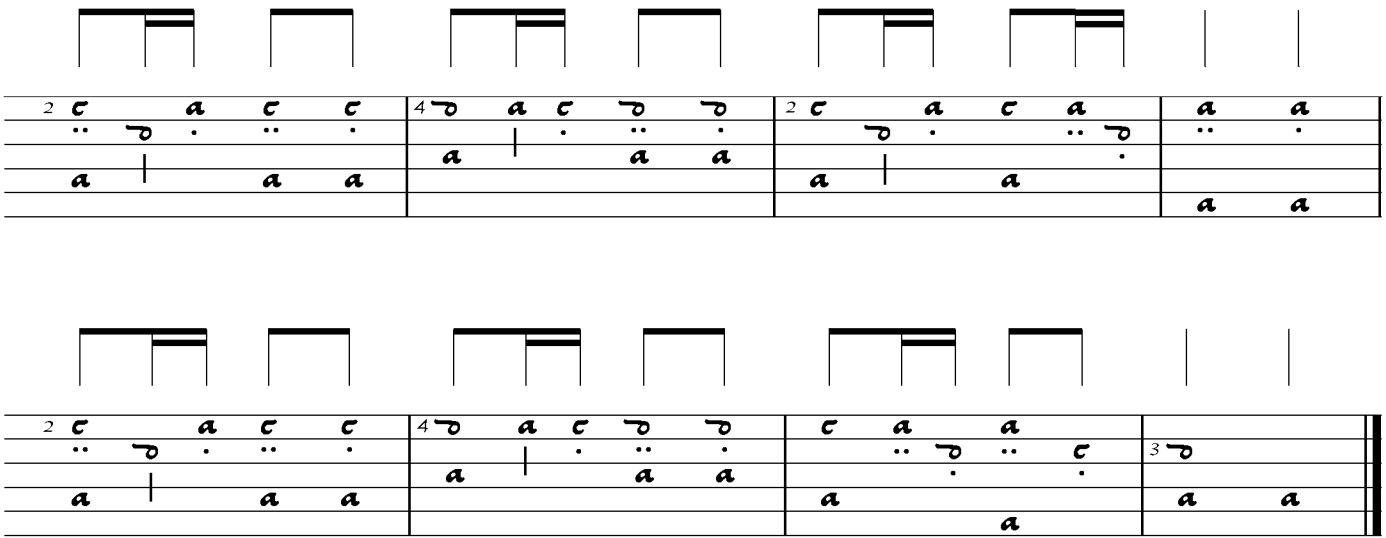
| = thumb plucks · = index plucks



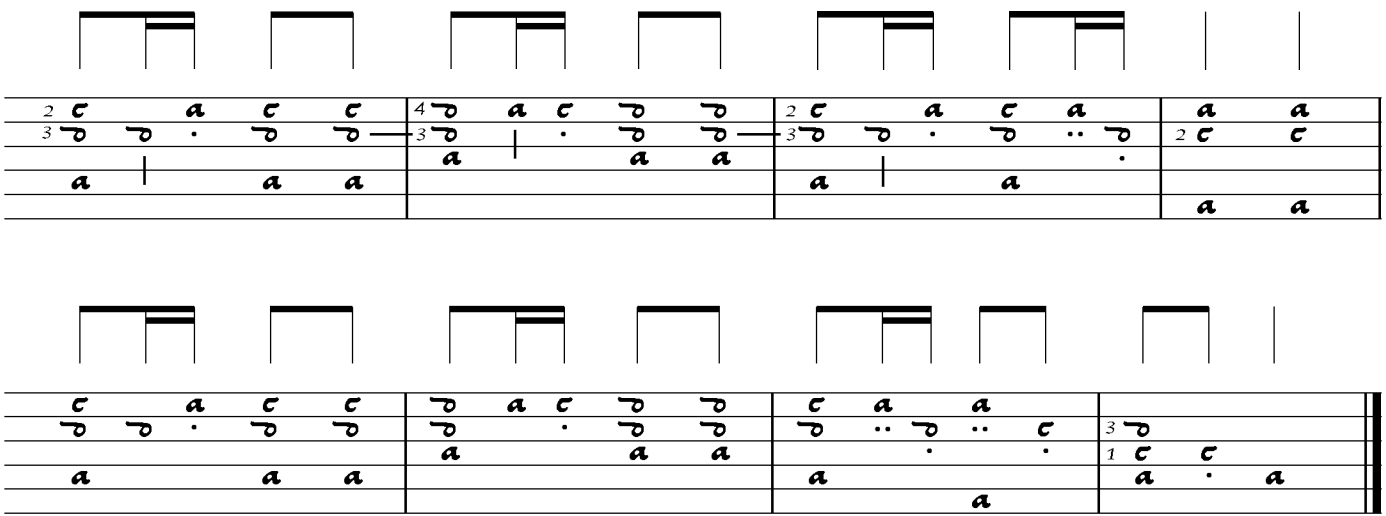
© 2008 pat o'brien

Next add the bass under the melody and play a two voice version
with the middle finger playing the top voice on strong beats while the thumb plays bass.
Remember to allow the notes to be strong and weak.

·· = middle finger plucks



Add the third voice and you are back to the original piece in 3 voices,
Remember to retain the lilting character of the strong and weak beats.
One of the most common mistakes we make at first is
to make all the notes sound equal, as we are taught in modern music lessons.



© 2008 pat o'brien

Improvisation: Practical Beginnings

By Patrick O'Brien[1]

Part I

It is a point well taken that one should study many points of style and composition before attempting to improvise in a historically remote idiom. In practice, however, I have found that teaching students to improvise is often the fastest way to promote their ability to observe and understand the historical traditions. A spontaneous familiarity with the musical materials certainly precedes analytical facility.

Improvisation is as much a training of the body and emotions as the mind. The kinesthetic memory, which is perhaps the most important faculty an improvisor needs, when linked to a sense of contrapuntal tension and melodic figuration gives the student the emotional security to react instantaneously with a spontaneous interpretive commitment. A much more confident, flexible musicianship emerges if music study includes improvisation along with sight reading, scholarship, and the cultivation of musical taste.

Another benefit of the study of improvisation is as an aid to ear training. Singing the numbered names of the tones as they are played reinforces the student's recognition of intervals.

The system of naming the intervals used in the following examples is like that used in continuo figuration. The interval between a given bass note and the treble is named, not merely the name of the note reckoned from the overall tonal center of the piece. Thus, the note c in the first example is named "1" in the first measure where the bass note is also c, while in the second measure, where the bass note is B-flat, it would be

[1] The present text was first published in separate articles in the LSA *Newsletter*: Part I in February 1980 and Part II in November 1980; corrections and explanatory notes for the first article appeared in the May 1980 issue of the *Newsletter*. Some minor edits of the original text have been made here, and the tablatures have been corrected (based on the May 1980 notes) and reset by Douglas Towne.

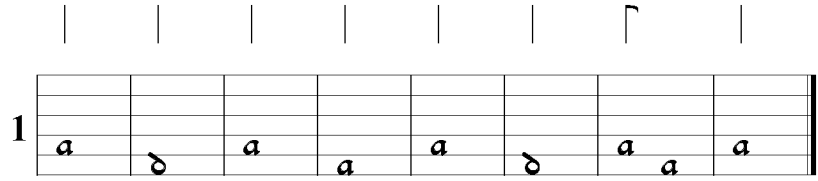
JLSA XLVIII (2015)
© 2017, The Lute Society of America

named "2." These examples are an important first step in preparing the student for playing from figured bass; still more important is that they clearly show the relationship of tonality to rhythm.

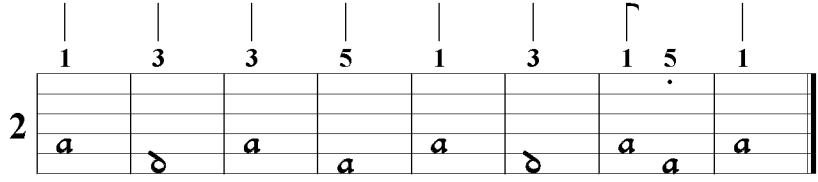
This particular method of studying improvisation, starting with common *basso ostinato* themes, represents only one of many forms used by Renaissance musicians. It was, however, one of the earliest and most long-lived forms, dating from well before the sixteenth century, as noted by Peter Danner,[2] to beyond its probable zenith in the trebles of John Johnson.[3]

In the following examples, I have chosen the *passamezzo antico* theme in its simplest form for ease of fingering and conceptualization. The student can apply the same method to other themes, such as the *folia*, *passamezzo moderno*, *romanesca*, etc., in different keys and positions. The examples are explained in the following notes:

1. This is the theme (tenor) of the *passamezzo antico* in C.



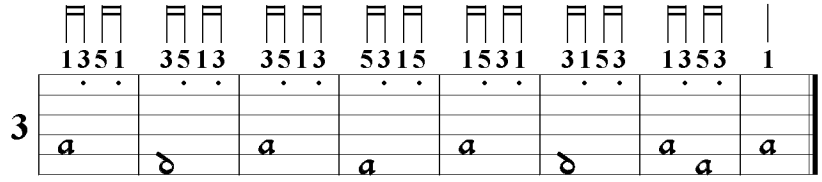
2. Play the bass note and the suggested interval, singing the top note by number. Here, I have provided a simple counterpoint to the theme, which forms the basis to the following examples; this serves to create opportunities to demonstrate and reinforce the principles of improvisation. The student might invent other solutions according to the basic rules of counterpoint.



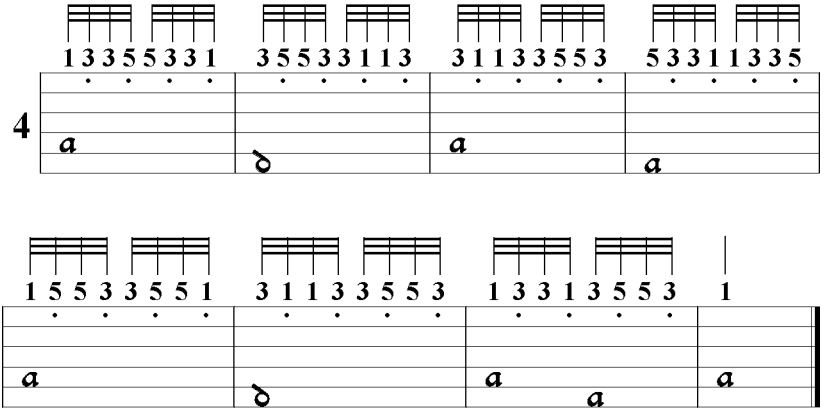
[2] "The Lute Before Petrucci," *JLSA* 5 (1972): 4-17.

[3] Lyle Nordstrom, "The Lute Duets of John Johnson," *JLSA* 9 (1976): 30-42.

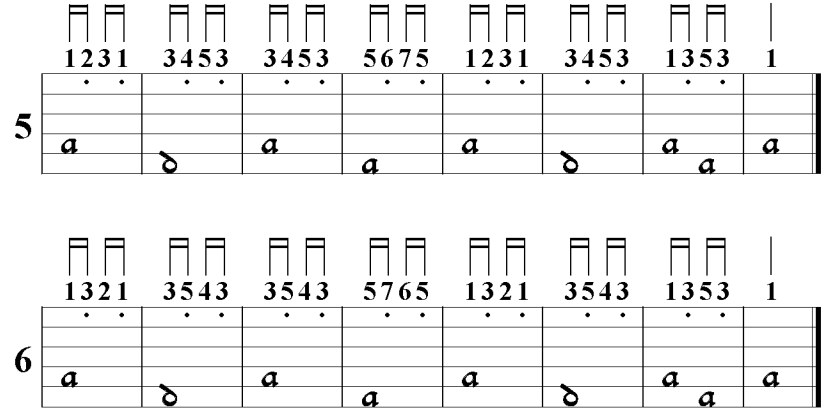
3. Play and sing by name the various consonances over each bass note, being careful to avoid consecutive fifths and octaves (which means never saying "five" or "one" twice in a row while crossing a bar line or changing to a new bass note).

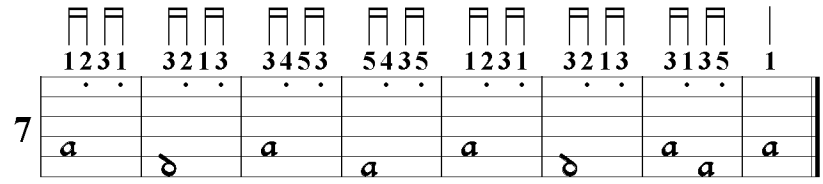


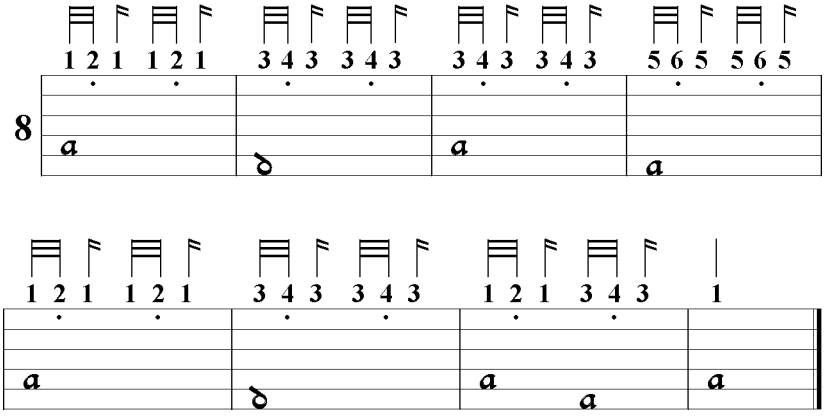
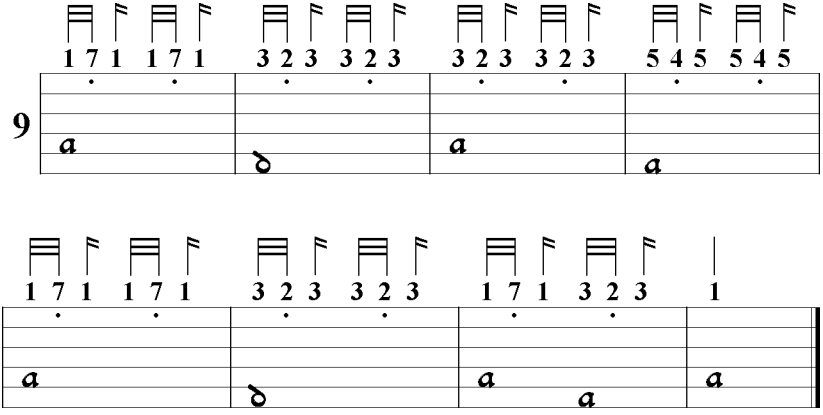
4. When playing only consonances, a particularly popular technique in early trebles was to mix them up, changing on offbeats.

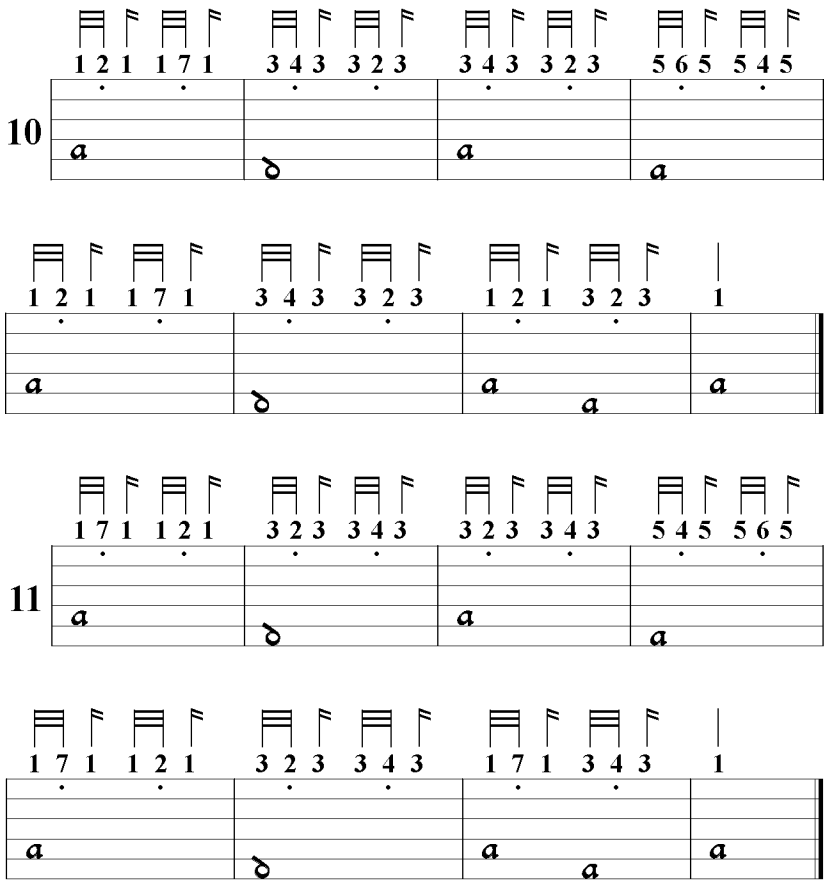


5. Add passing tones on weak beats to connect consonances.

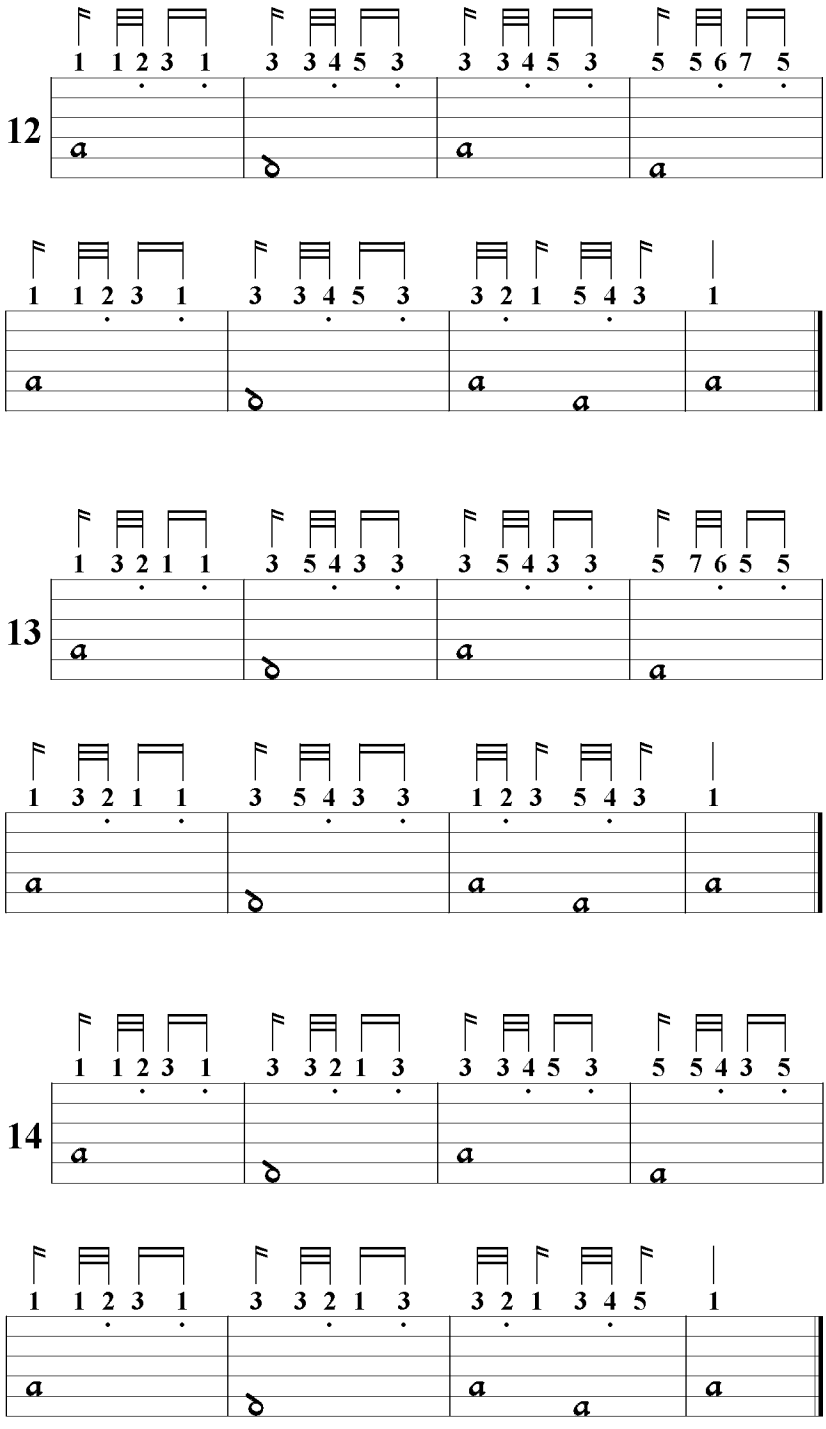


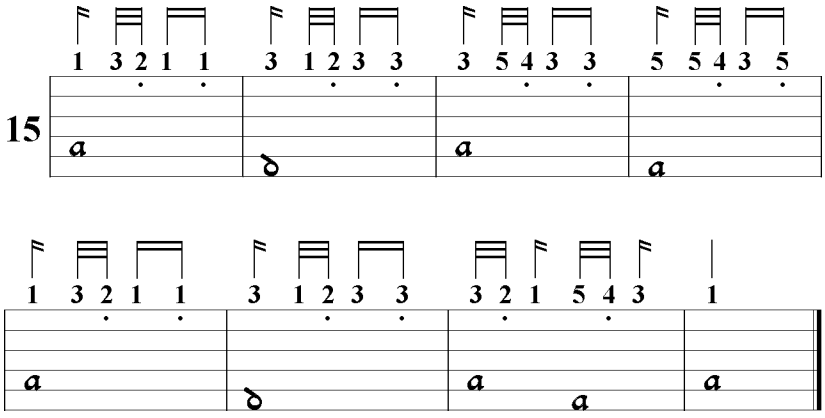


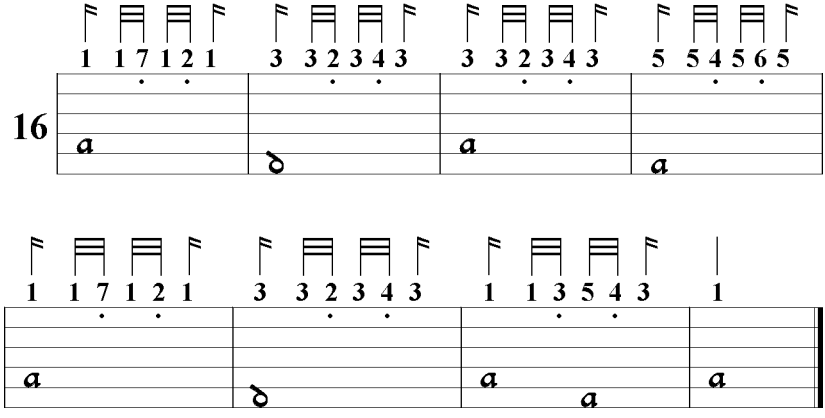
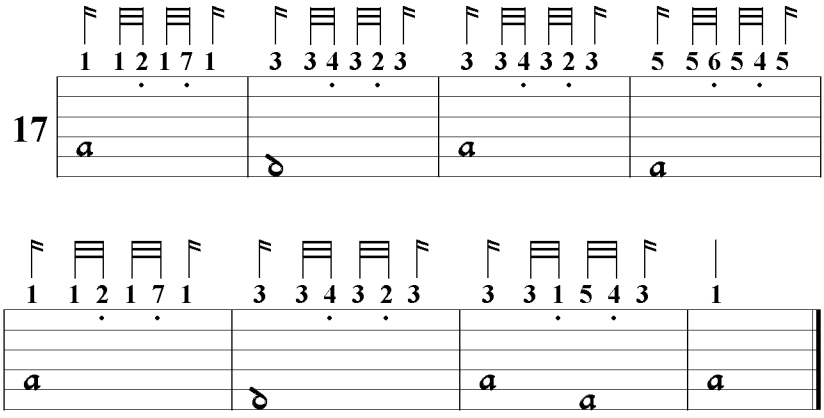
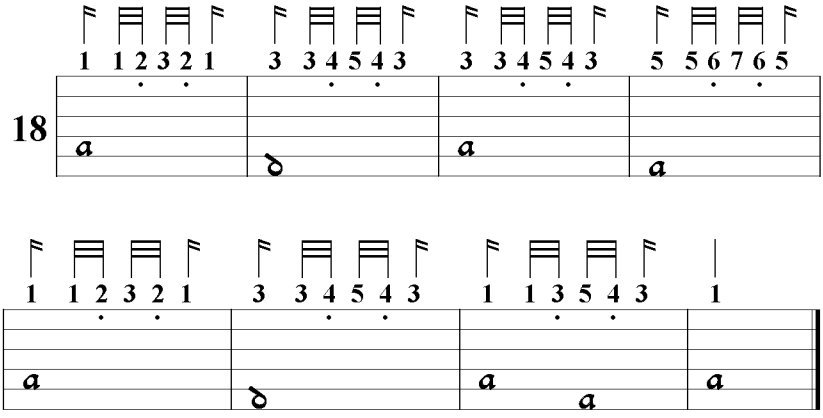
8. Explore neighboring tones adjacent to consonances on weak beats. Here, each upper neighbor is played.

9. Here, each lower neighbor.

10-11. Try mixing upper and lower neighbors.

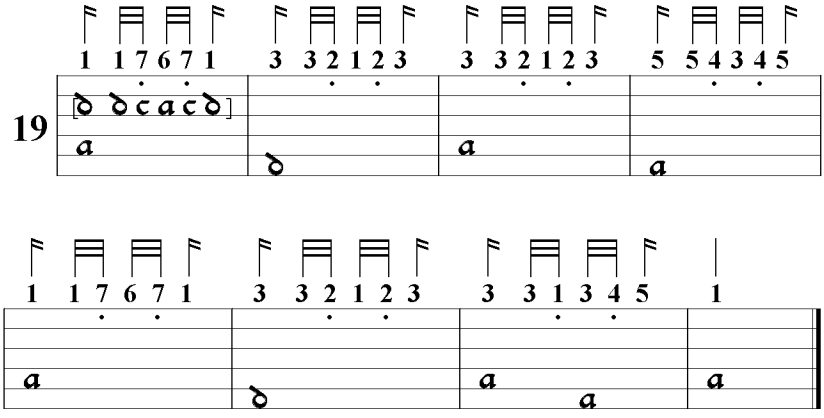


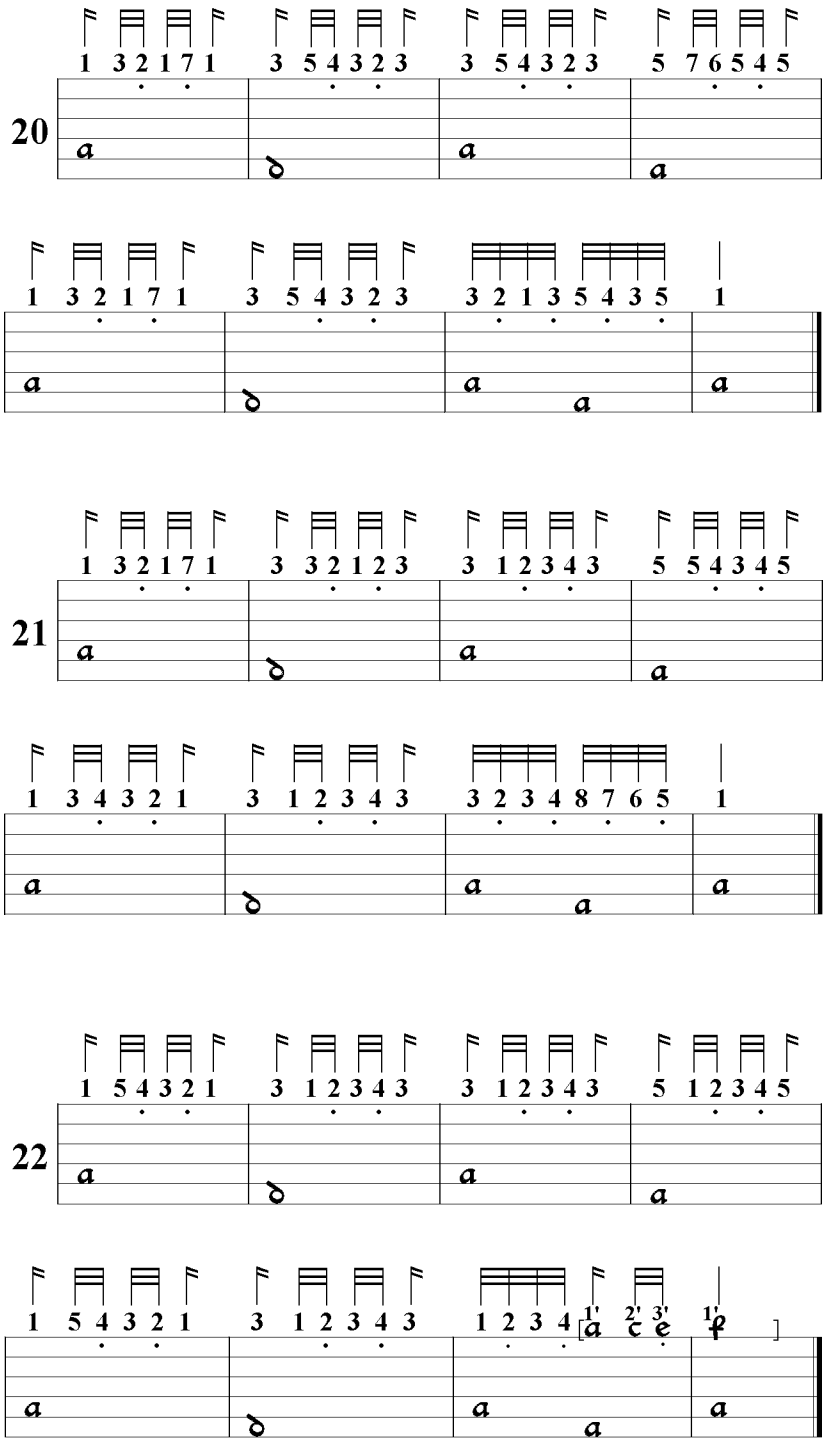
12-15. Experiment with various passing tones. Note the careful return to the principal note of the invented melody at the close of each measure to avoid consecutive, or parallel, fifths or octaves. This is characteristic of divisions based on descants with only one note per measure. If we made a descant with two notes per measure, its divisions would be far less monotonous but also harder to conceptualize, carrying us into a more advanced lesson.


12
1 1 2 3 1 3 3 4 5 3 3 3 4 5 3 5 5 6 7 5
1 1 2 3 1 3 3 4 5 3 3 2 1 5 4 3 1
13
1 3 2 1 1 3 5 4 3 3 3 5 4 3 3 5 7 6 5 5
1 3 2 1 1 3 5 4 3 3 1 2 3 5 4 3 1
14
1 1 2 3 1 3 3 2 1 3 3 3 4 5 3 5 5 4 3 5
1 1 2 3 1 3 3 2 1 3 3 2 1 3 4 5 1

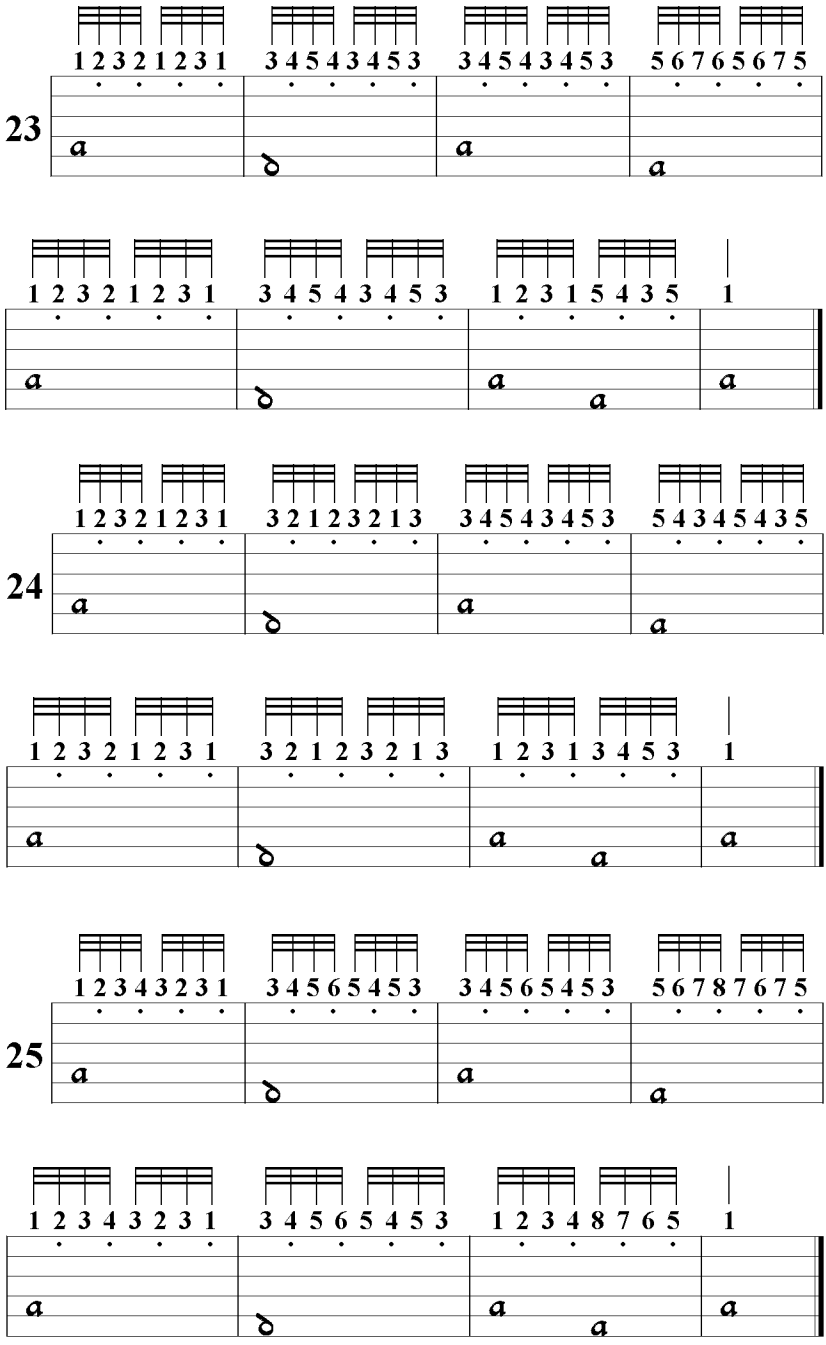


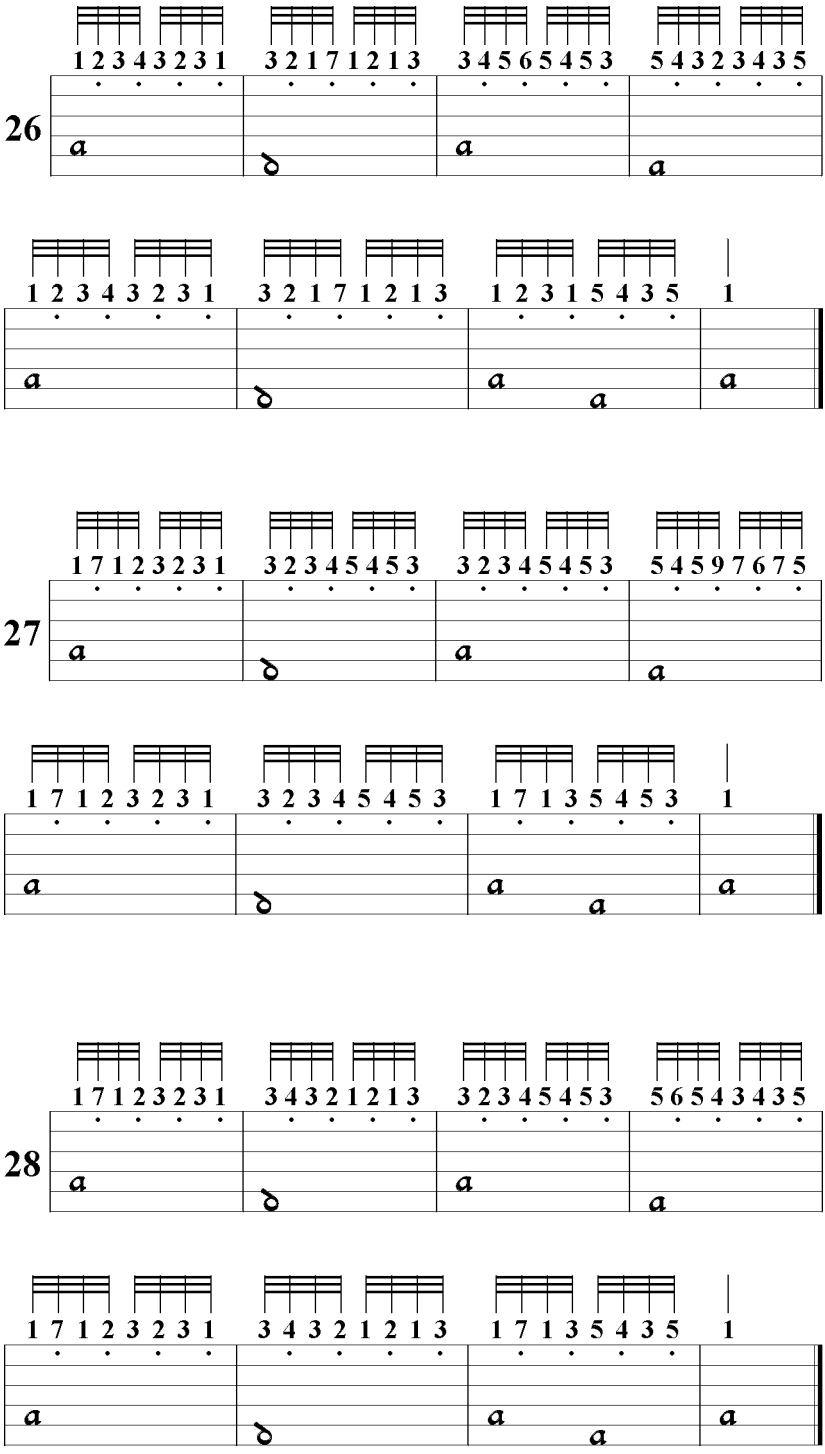
16-22. Offbeat dissonances adjacent to consonances. Remember, the monotonous rhythms and frequent stopping on certain notes are devices to drill certain kinesthetic memory and ear training formulas. Be sure you go slowly, finger consistently, and keep singing!

17
1 1 2 1 7 1 3 3 4 3 2 3 3 3 4 3 2 3 5 5 6 5 4 5
1 1 2 1 7 1 3 3 4 3 2 3 3 3 1 5 4 3 1

18
1 1 2 3 2 1 3 3 4 5 4 3 3 3 4 5 4 3 5 5 6 7 6 5
1 1 2 3 2 1 3 3 4 5 4 3 1 1 3 5 4 3 1


19
1 1 7 6 7 1 3 3 2 1 2 3 3 3 2 1 2 3 5 5 4 3 4 5
1 1 7 6 7 1 3 3 2 1 2 3 3 3 1 3 4 5 1

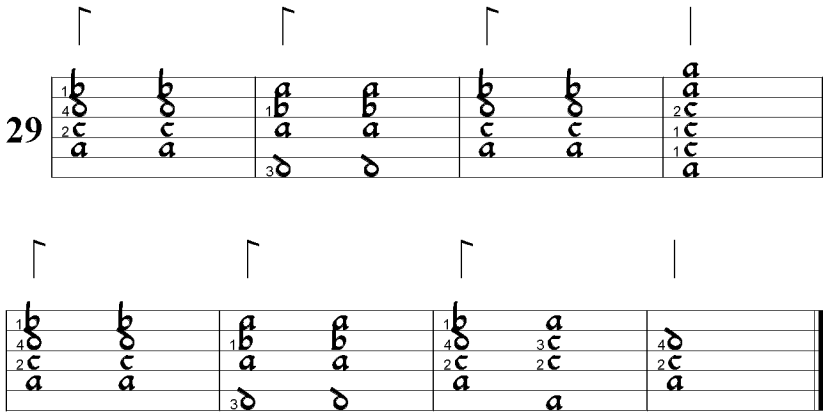

20
1 3 2 1 7 1
3 5 4 3 2 3
3 5 4 3 2 3
5 7 6 5 4 5
1 3 2 1 7 1
3 5 4 3 2 3
3 2 1 3 5 4 3 5
1
21
1 3 2 1 7 1
3 3 2 1 2 3
3 1 2 3 4 3
5 5 4 3 4 5
1 3 4 3 2 1
3 1 2 3 4 3
3 2 3 4 8 7 6 5
1
22
1 5 4 3 2 1
3 1 2 3 4 3
3 1 2 3 4 3
5 1 2 3 4 5
1 5 4 3 2 1
3 1 2 3 4 3
1 2 3 4
1' 2' 3'
1'

23-28. Divisions in continuous patterns are perhaps the most obvious device of treble invention.




26
1 2 3 4 3 2 3 1 3 2 1 7 1 2 1 3 3 4 5 6 5 4 5 3 5 4 3 2 3 4 3 5
1 2 3 4 3 2 3 1 3 2 1 7 1 2 1 3 1 2 3 1 5 4 3 5 1
27
1 7 1 2 3 2 3 1 3 2 3 4 5 4 5 3 3 2 3 4 5 4 5 3 5 4 5 9 7 6 7 5
1 7 1 2 3 2 3 1 3 2 3 4 5 4 5 3 1 7 1 3 5 4 5 3 1
28
1 7 1 2 3 2 3 1 3 4 3 2 1 2 1 3 3 2 3 4 5 4 5 3 5 6 5 4 3 4 3 5
1 7 1 2 3 2 3 1 3 4 3 2 1 2 1 3 1 7 1 3 5 4 3 5 1

29. If desired, the student can omit the playing of the theme in the bass and concentrate solely on improvising the treble. He can either imagine or sing the theme, or better yet, have an accompanist play the chords.



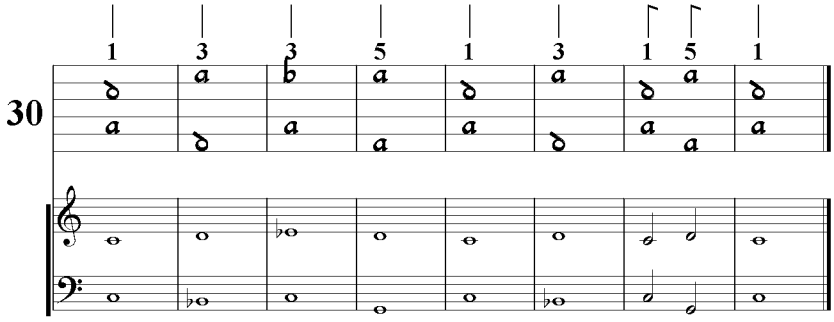
It is, of course, the goal of every improvisor to mix even the most mundane materials in novel and interesting ways. If halfway through these examples, you do not find yourself lapsing into chance combinations which you find preferable to those given, I would be very surprised.

For those interested in historical theory, singing the appropriate syllables as an early singer would have done suggests itself as a logical extension of this project. The compositional insights to be gained would be very significant. Spontaneous understanding of the theory contemporary with the lute's music, the mutation of the hexachord, et al. should be the goal of every dedicated player. (I cannot imagine a good method on lute improvisation without such a chapter.)

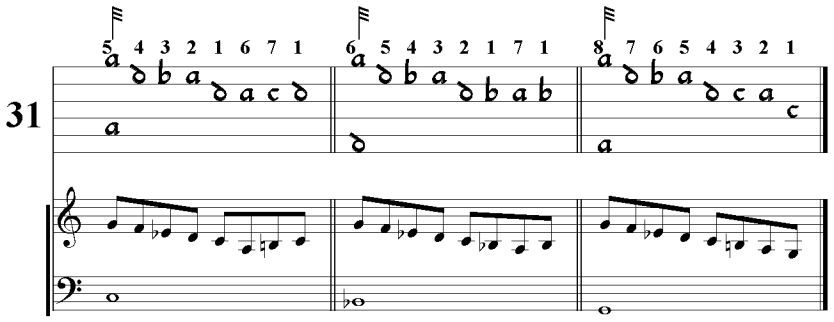
Practicing various figures for improvisation was probably the early musician's equivalent of the modern student's scale and exercise routine, insofar as chord progressions and playing two-octave diatonic scales for fluency seem never to have entered their minds pedagogically. Certain patterns of intervallic usage were doubtless more important to the early teacher, which suggests an approach to improvisation much as in the species counterpoint system. Perhaps at another occasion, we might look into adapting the principles of various counterpoint methods to lute improvisation, so as to have a better understanding of which of the various techniques shown here were and were not used at various times and places.

In conclusion, let me stress the final reason for the particular format I have chosen: it is essential that the beginner in improvisation pick very specific, achievable goals in things he can do spontaneously, so that he gradually develops a repertoire of usage. I did not write all the examples out in tablature for a very good reason: because reading through them is not the point! Playing, thinking, planning, feeling, and reacting, all at the same time, are what I am trying to make you do.

The following is a key showing exactly how to interpret the figures used [above].[4]



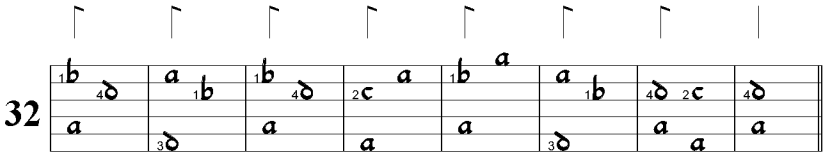
According to this scheme, which is designed to keep the entire set of exercises within one small register on the neck, facilitating fingering, Example 2 would be played as follows:



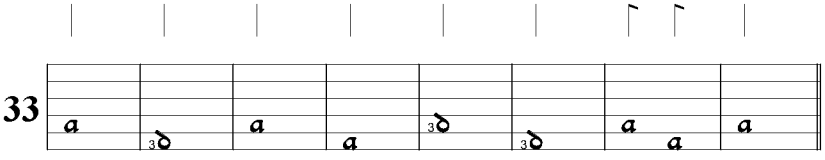
[4] The material beginning with this sentence to the beginning of Part II appeared in the May 1980 issue of the LSA *Newsletter* along with corrections for the examples above; the corrections have been incorporated into the appropriate tablatures.

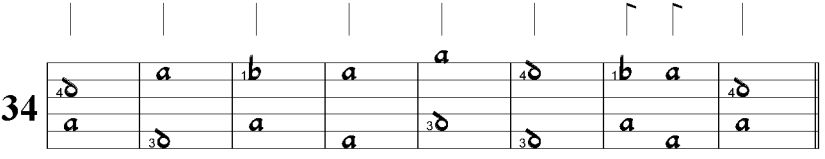
Part II

In the first part of this article (LSA *Newsletter*, February 1980), the *passamezzo antico* was given a particular melodic formula which was then varied and embellished in the accompanying [examples]. Obviously, the student should attempt to frame other basic melodic solutions to the ground, like the following one, and then proceed to embellish them. Again, this should be done by playing and singing, and not by writing on paper!

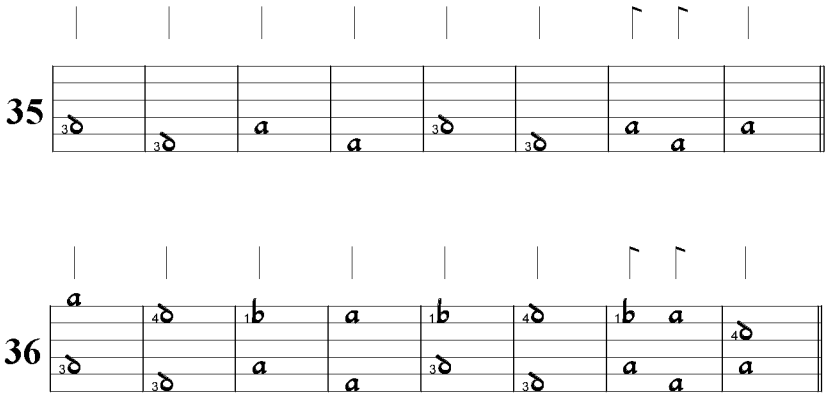


It is actually more common for the *passamezzo antico* to have a slightly different form, in which the third in the fifth measure of the ground gives what we now call a relative major tonality. This is shown below, followed by a common treble solution to this form of the ground. I omitted mention of this variation before for simplicity's sake.

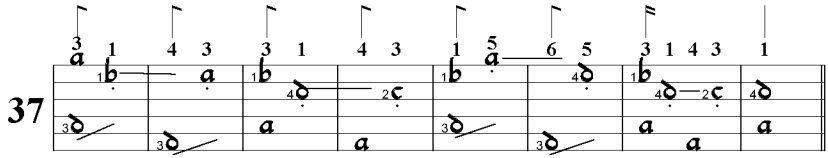




A common ground closely related to the former is the *romanesca*, in which the relative major, or III tonality, opens both four-bar segments. Here it is, again followed by a simple solution for division practice.

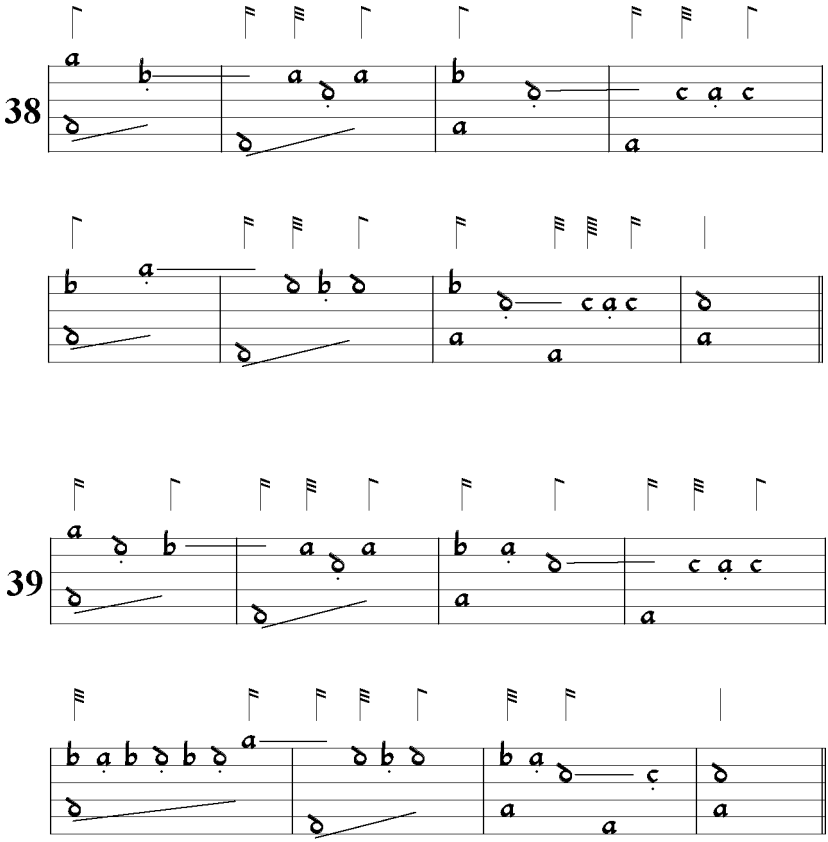


Idiomatic fingering considerations on the lute make approaches to perfect consonances by similar motion of voices very common in some lute music. This was often, Praetorius tells us, used by composers as an evocation of Arcadian moods; the villanella style is full of intentional parallelism in counterpoint as an imitation of the "primitive" style of country and village musicians. Various contrapuntal devices such as this are common in even the simplest forms of improvisation. Here, the treble voice is held over the bar line to create a suspension, or dissonance, on the beginning of the measure, which resolves to a consonance immediately afterwards.

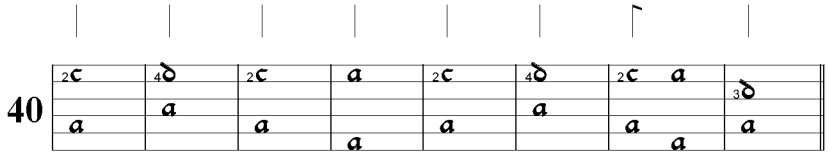


Here, the very same suspensions are "delayed" or "interrupted" by the very simple device of an off-beat lo[wer] neighbor intervening between the suspension and its resolution. If we add a few other touches to

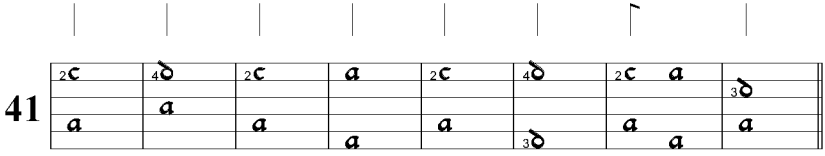
this, the next example appears, mixing the techniques of both sections in this series of articles on improvisation.



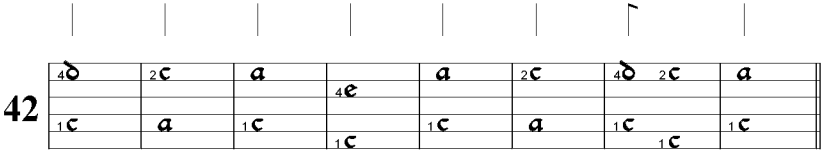
Another simple ground on which to improvise trebles is the *passamezzo moderno*. Again, the first form I would advise the student to attempt is slightly simplified. Here, again, a sample treble is given with the ground.



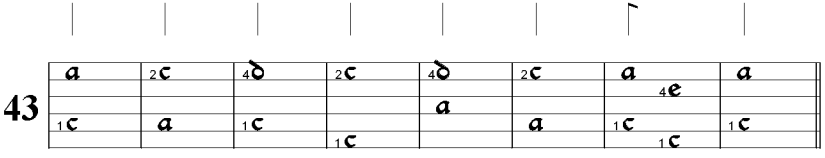
The *moderno* often includes a minor seventh in the ground, in the sixth measure. This is very similar to the *antico* form but is a bit harder to finger in this tonality, the jump from B-flat to C chords being a big hurdle for novice players.



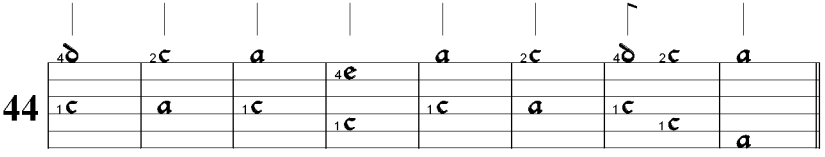
Certain similarities in the fingering and tonality make the next logical step to try the *passamezzo antico* in D. Here, it is given without the relative major in the fifth bar,

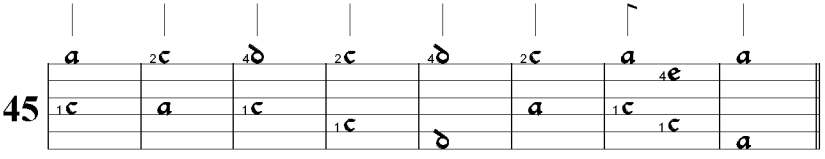


and here, with the relative major.

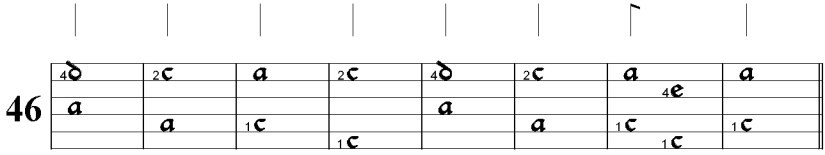


Two versions of the *passamezzo antico*, this time in G, show a great similarity in fingering to those above in D.

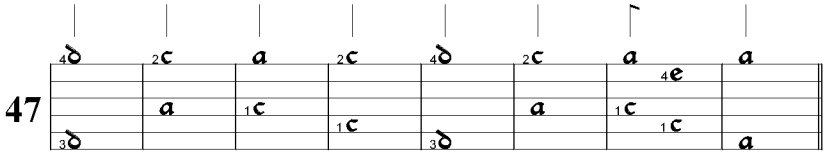




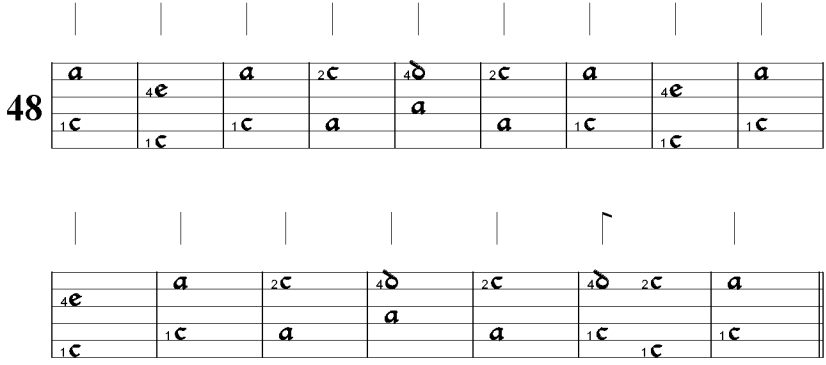
These, of course, suggest the corresponding *romanescas* that end in D



and in G.



Finally, one of the most long-lived grounds, and one which has so many versions that it is almost inseparable from those associations, the *folia*. Here, the student can compare his ideas for melodic invention with *folias* from Ortiz to Corelli to Handel and further.



I suppose it should be obvious by now, if you've been watching, that we are, among other things, moving on our way to continuo style here, bit by bit. It is but a small step from improvising from a treble and ground to an accompaniment.

Pat O'Brien and the New York Continuo Collective

By Tony Elitcher and Grant Herreid

In 1996 three students—two neophyte harpists and a beginning lutenist—approached Pat O'Brien for a suggestion about ensemble playing opportunities. Pat suggested that they join Tom Zajac's Collegium Musicum at the Mannes School of Music. One of the two harpists was already a well-versed early music performer, Christa Patton, a talented early wind professional. The other was Andie Taras, a talented singer. The lute student was Tony Elitcher, a jazz saxophone player with no early music training. All three were seeking entrée into the early Baroque and were willing to take Pat's advice; he was never known to steer anyone wrong.

Tom's Collegium featured mostly 16th-century repertoire, which meant much plucking single-line polyphony. But every so often Tom would turn to the three and say, "In this spot I need some continuo." They would then go back to Pat, who would show them what to do for that portion of the music, which was sufficient for the purposes of the Collegium. This went on for several semesters: the recurring requests for continuo, the concomitant guidance from Pat.

Occasionally, most often when a Collegium concert was looming, Grant Herreid would come to a rehearsal to help Tom prepare the group. Grant would rehearse the little continuo section, polishing their efforts. This pattern continued for several semesters, the pluckers learning for the concerts, but not gaining significant knowledge or understanding about the process of realizing continuo accompaniments.

Then in 1998 came the watershed moment for the three pluckers and the genesis of the Continuo Collective. That summer they and others of Pat's students attended the Amherst Early Music Festival workshop, at which Grant Herreid directed his pastiche production of *Il Pastor Fido*, which featured the ravishing monody of Monteverdi, d'India, and others. Thrown into the continuo ocean, the pluckers struggled to stay afloat and came back to New York flush with enthusiasm and with the firm intention of having Pat teach them everything there was to know about basso continuo.

JLSA XLVIII (2015)
© 2017, The Lute Society of America

Pat's response was to suggest that they get together on their own, with some fairly simple tunes and a singer, and try to work things out for themselves, based on what they had learned so far. He said he had some other students he was sure would be interested. One of them, Baroque guitarist Reg Moncrieff, graciously invited them to meet in his living room.

At the first meeting nine players participated, including the harpist/singer Marcia Young, playing through some grounds and chord patterns supplied by Pat. Then the plucky group attempted to accompany Marcia singing "Folle ben," their edition of which had been transcribed without the incipit "F" as "Olle ben," which forever after was the Collective's theme song!

The second meeting collected three more to make the group an even dozen players. And when the third attracted eighteen people, it was clear that with this much growing interest, a larger space was needed to continue. At the time Pat's studio on Broadway and 31st Street in New York City had enough space to accommodate a large group of players. Pat invited the group to use the studio on Tuesday nights, an evening on which he did not teach. Even so, he declined to take on the central teaching role for the group. He suggested asking Grant to take on that job. Meanwhile, and in conjunction with the formative philosophy of what would become the New York Continuo Collective (NYCC), Pat began a separate grounds and dance form class, in order that the players establish proper playing technique and learn the principles of the fluid artistry that is basso continuo realization. This insistence on adherence to shapely playing became a bedrock principle of the Continuo Collective approach to Baroque accompaniment.

Figure 1. Pat (center) with the New York Continuo Collective.

In the ensuing life of the Collective, Pat remained an indispensable part of its teaching and coaching mission. The group grew in size, incorporating three or four theorbos, five or six lutes, a few Baroque guitars, one or two viols, a harpsichord, and usually a triple harp or two. Anywhere from half a dozen to around fifteen singers would take part. Pat was instrumental in shaping the continuo sound and assignments to accommodate such a large number of instruments. He developed ways to organize the collective "whoosh" of plucked and strummed notes. For example, on certain long notes, he had the harps or maybe the guitars begin their welling up of sound later than the lutes and theorbos, so that while the one sonority tailed off, the other would gently come to the fore, to let the listener experience a variety of sonorities, rather than one large expanse of sound. In other cases, the instruments acted as one great lute.

Pat was enthusiastic and knowledgeable about ensemble writing and arranging for plucked strings, having of course arranged many pieces for up to twenty lutes and other plucked strings for the "Three, Four, and Twenty Lutes" concert at the 1989 Boston Early Music Festival. Following his guidance, we usually included such ensemble music in our projects.

In each fall semester the Collective might focus on a particular print or composer, each singer taking charge of a solo, duet, or trio to rehearse with the group. Pat would typically sit or stand among the players as a song was being rehearsed, frequently interrupting, index finger raised in classical gesture, to remind us all to breathe with the singer, to complain that our cadences needed more taper, or to offer specific technical expertise on how to execute a strum, a rolling crescendo, or a particular style of arpeggio.

Figure 2. Pat playing theorbo with the New York Continuo Collective. Photo by Leah Nelson.

Many of the players studied privately with Pat, so he worked with them individually outside of NYCC sessions on their continuo playing. With his encyclopedic knowledge of original sources, he could demonstrate the sort of chord shape and arpeggio Girolamo Kapsberger might employ in a piece of Italian monody or the light finger strum at the end of a phrase in a French *air de cour*.

He carefully explained how to exploit the dissonances by exploring expressive chord shapes on each instrument. He could talk about finding the caesura in an Italian hendecasyllabic poetic line to understand the rhetorical impulse and accents of the text. He was known to demonstrate techniques of lute ensemble playing by referencing old guitar flat pickers or the twelve-bar blues.

For a time, Pat was performing regularly with Andrew Lawrence-King's Harp Consort, and his continuo coaching was influenced by the techniques and terminology that Andrew, Stephen Stubbs, and Paul O'Dette were promulgating in their teaching and in their professional ensembles: impulse chords, *messa di voce* arpeggios, etc. Pat would explain that early 17th-century continuo treatises are clear enough when describing *what* to play over a given bass note, but quite short on actual details of *how* to play, how to shape the harmonies, when to spread the chord, when and how to apply arpeggios, tremolos, etc., to support the affect of the voice. For example, he demonstrated how to accompany a vocal *messa di voce* (an expressive crescendo-decrescendo) with a kind of double arpeggio: use each of the fingers in turn, followed seamlessly by a gentle down-stroke of the thumb through the courses. One student remembers, "Pat reinforced for me how to consider historical sources as evidence and not rules, in particular how you could see things in the music that suggest practices that are not written down until later. And it's that idea of not having a complete record of historical practice that both gives one some license and requires one to be creative in performance."

Pat was a noted expert in reconstructing early guitar-strumming and -playing styles, and so when the Collective spent a semester exploring 17th-century Spanish music, Pat was all over it. He discussed his theories of reconstructing ensembles of guitars mentioned in literary sources: for example, how a simple *folia* notated in alfabetto "E" on one size (and pitch) of guitar related to the same ground notated in "O" played on another size of instrument, and how, by referencing sources for other Spanish instruments like the harp, one could build an entire improvisatory piece from a mere four or eight measures of guitar notation. With Pat's guidance we created musical renditions of some of the *folias* in Luis de Briçeño's *Metodo mui facilissimo* (Paris, 1626), songs for which Briçeño supplies text and chords but no melody or rhythm. Pat

supplied strumming patterns and delicate dynamic phrasing with which to accompany the traditional *folia* melodies.

Figure 3. Pat with Baroque guitar.

Having left the main directing role of the NYCC to Grant and others, Pat was nevertheless rarely known to miss a Tuesday night session, offering insight through his encyclopedic knowledge, experience, and ability to make far-ranging connections and comparisons to enhance understanding at the intersection of music, language, technique, culture, history, gastronomy, literature, and visual art. If this sounds overblown, one need only come to a Tuesday meeting of the Collective to experience the vestiges of Pat's influence. Pat embraced the Collective's philosophy of equal partnership between accompanists and soloists, and singers as well as players flocked to the Collective semester after semester. Pat, a center of gravity in the early music world, attracted to the Collective visiting dignitaries for master classes and workshops as well as permanent faculty to match and enhance Grant's leadership.

Figure 4. New York Continuo Collective rehearsal. Photo by Pat O'Brien.

While Pat's death left an enormous void, it led those of us who had been within his orbit to understand the responsibility he engendered within us. When the common response in confronting a seemingly unanswerable question had been, "Ask Pat," it became clear that we had all become repositories for some facet or nugget of Pat's wisdom, and that it is through Collective action that his legacy lives on. He shared his incredibly focused teaching skills and his breadth of knowledge to help individual players and singers recognize and navigate musical and rhetorical continuo situations as they came up in our sessions and to inspire us all with his deep understanding of music and life, often punctuated by his characteristic philosophical expression: "So there it is."

Figure 5. New York Continuo Collective rehearsal. Photo by Pat O'Brien.

New Membership Rates	Digital	Digital with Paper Add-On
Individual membership 1 year	55	100
Individual membership 2 year	100	190
Individual membership 3 year	150	280
Student membership 1 year	40	85
New member 1 year	40	85
Institutional membership 1 year	75	150

Members are entitled to receive the LSA *Quarterly*, the *Journal*, and to have borrowing privileges at the LSA Microfilm Library. To join the LSA, mail a check to: Lute Society of America, Nancy Carlin, Administrator, PO Box 6499, Concord CA 94524 USA. Checks must be in US dollars drawn on a US bank. Join online on the LSA's website—www.LuteSocietyofAmerica.org.

Name_____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

Postal code _____ Country_____

Phone_____

Email _____