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The Golden Age of Spanish Harp

by Nancy Hurrell

IN the history of the harp, there have been a few notable evolutionary moments when a new type of harp was created, increasing the capabilities and wider use of the instrument. The most obvious such moment was in the 18th century, when pedals were added to the hook harp, and the new single-action pedal harp was invented. With pedals, harpists could now play the popular music of the day, with its frequent accidentals and key changes. Paris became a Mecca for harp builders, composers, and players of the French harp.



In 1555, Juan Bermudo mentioned the need for a chromatic harp in his *Declaración*, an encyclopedia of instruments.

Another less well-known evolutionary moment for the harp occurred two hundred years earlier, in 16th century Spain, Spain's 'Golden Age,' when a new type of harp generated another golden era

of harp playing. In fact, the very first written music specified for harp comes from a Spanish source in the mid 1500s. At this time, the new, innovative chromatic harp being developed was the *arpa de dos órdenes* or 'harp of two orders.' It had two rows of strings crossing above the middle: a diatonic row (white notes on the keyboard) and a chromatic row (black notes). Thus, it was fully chromatic with a string for each note, perfectly idiomatic to Spanish music, with its rapidly shifting tonalities. The harp was considered one of the three main instruments in Spain, with the keyboard and *vihuela* (type of guitar). Harp production increased as the *violeros*, makers of string instruments in guilds, were now required to know how to craft an *arpa de dos órdenes*.¹ Treatises were written on harp playing, and books of music in a new tablature for harp were published. The Spanish harp was prominent in music of the church, court and theatre, its use declining in the mid 1750s. The surviving Spanish harp music reflects these contrasting genres: sublime polyphonic church music and exciting popular dance music, with fiery syncopated rhythms.

Harpists in Spain's Golden Age

The artistic flowering of Spain's Golden Age in the 16th and 17th century included the paintings of El Greco and Velázquez, the literature of Cervantes and the vocal compositions of Victoria and Guerrero. In instrumental music, stunning pieces were written by Mudarra, Milán, Narváez and Cabezón. The

1 The definitive source on the Spanish *arpa de dos órdenes* is Cristina Bordas, "The Double Harp in Spain from the 16th to the 18th Centuries," *Early Music* (May 1987): 148-163.

Golden Age began during the reign of Charles V (1516-56), the Holy Roman Emperor whose vast Spanish empire included the Netherlands, Naples, and the colonies in the New World. Royal chapels in the various capitals provided work for musicians, and the royal entourage traveled from court to court, taking their musicians with them. The interaction of musicians from different countries resulted in a creative exchange of ideas, which was reflected in the music. With the Netherlands as part of the Spanish crown, Flemish musicians were at court, and a formidable Flemish influence on Spain's music was felt, especially in polyphonic church music, both vocal and instrumental.²

The Golden Age continued under the reign of Charles V's son, Philip II (1556-98), who was also a patron of the arts. He built the grand palace of El Escorial with its huge chapel and library, and he commissioned many religious works of art.³ In daily life at court, members of the aristocracy played the harp for entertainment. Juana, Philip II's sister, had a 'household harpist,' and her ladies in waiting played harps.⁴ For professional harpists, there were full-time positions in the churches, documented from the early 1600s. The royal chapel in Madrid maintained full-time harpists for most of the 17th and early 18th centuries; at times, there were two harpists employed. The payments to about ten harpists employed at the chapel during the period show that the first harpist was Antonio Martínez (de Porrás), whose name appeared in 1612, while the last harpist noted was Pedro Peralta, in 1736, at his death. The entry for harpist Juan Hidalgo is, "ca. 1631 (appointment)–1685 (death)."⁵ It's quite remarkable that Hidalgo was a fully employed harpist for fifty-four years! The longevity of his position may have been influenced by the fact that he was also the leading Spanish com-



In *The Temptation of St. Jerome* (1639) by Francisco de Zurbarán, the Spanish harp is featured in a consort of instruments.

poser for the court plays, writing numerous vocal solos and choruses.⁶

Harpists were similarly employed at the monasteries in Madrid: the Real Convento de la Encarnación and Monasterio de las Descalzas Reales.⁷ Beyond Madrid, other churches employed full-time harpists, including the cathedrals at Segovia, Huesca, Oviedo, Toledo, León, Pamplona, and the Parish Church of Santa María del Mar in Barcelona.⁸ In church music, the harp was primarily used as an accompanying instrument and also for continuo. In a treatise, *Escuela música, según la práctica moderna*, (1724), author Pablo Nassarre explains how the harp is suited to accompanying because of its resonance:

Among the instruments with gut strings, the harp is the one which should hold first place, on account of its enlargement [wide range] as well as its great resonance... Thus music chapels accompany themselves with the harp, for its tones have sufficient body for this usage.⁹

2 For detailed information on the Flemish influence on Spanish music, and indeed on all aspects of the Spanish harp, see Maurice Esses, *Dance and Instrumental Diferencias in Spain During the 17th and Early 18th Centuries, Volume I* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1992).

3 In an excellent BBC series, *The Art of Spain: Part 2*, art historian Andrew Graham-Dixon visits El Escorial, and he examines the paintings from this period. A video clip is online: <http://ovationtv.com/programs/495-the-art-of-spain>.

4 Esses, 185.

5 Esses, 188.

6 Esses, 397. Esses states that Hidalgo composed thirty-seven songs for six plays, and a further eighteen songs possibly intended for the theatre. Hidalgo served the court as *músico de arpa y claviarpa de real capilla y cámara*. Although his position in the royal chapel lasted the longest, several other harpists in the chart compiled by Esses were employed for at least twenty to thirty years.

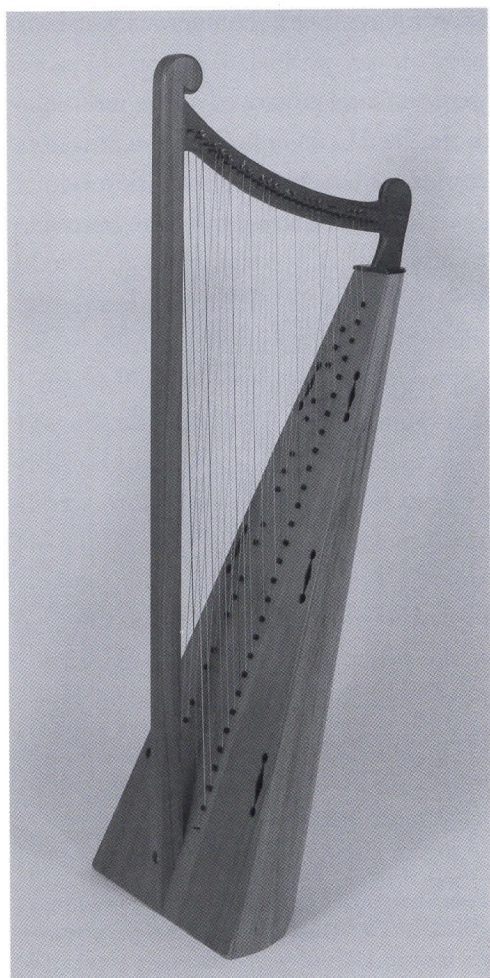
7 It's interesting that in the list of ten surviving *arpa de dos órdenes* compiled by Cristina Bordas, seven of the harps are from convents and monasteries.

8 Esses, 190.

9 As quoted in Esses, 187.

The harp was also the standard accompanying instrument in the theatre. In the first half of the 17th century, actors who played the harp, also sang and danced. By the second half of the century, harp became more of a specialized profession, and records show full-time harpists employed solely for accompanying.¹⁰

The harp, as played by professionals and the nobility, is well documented, whereas much less is known about harp playing in other social classes. There is, however, a wonderful quote from the visiting ambassador for the sultan of Morocco, in 1691, which gives insights into the widespread popularity and use of the harp:



Spanish arpa de dos órdenes by David Kortier, after Domingo Pescador, Avila, 1704.
Photo: Matthew Hurrell

It [the harp] produces harmonious sounds and one does not see the blow given by him who plays it. The Christians make much use of it and teach it to their wives, sons and daughters. Hence it is rare to find a house all of whose dwellers do not skillfully pluck the harp. When they receive guests, when they are welcoming anyone or when they wish to honor someone who has come to see them, they let the harp express what they feel. The persons who most cultivate this instrument are the daughters and sons of the great and noble.¹¹

Writing of the use of the harp in church and chapel, the ambassador remarked: "It is the instrument they employ most of all."

Harpists took part in musical gatherings and informal concerts held in houses, not connected to the aristocracy. An account of one such event appears in an autobiographical novel by Vicente Espinel, in 1618, with a harpist, Bernadina, playing in a group with keyboard and vihuela, a popular combination at the time. Espinel describes the music as, "...each one imitating the others in the performance of extremely difficult and unusual passages, and it is the finest thing which I have heard in my life."¹²

Harp Iconography in Spanish Art

In addition to written accounts and theoretical treatises, one can learn about the Iberian harp from contemporary paintings. The type of harp shown in most of the paintings from the period is the single rank harp, the *arpa de una orden*. It is not known exactly when the chromatic harp became the preferred instrument over the diatonic harp, and the single rank harp did continue to be played up to the 18th century. Between 1600 and 1650, three types of harps existed: a single row diatonic harp, a cross-strung double row harp with a partial chromatic row, and a fully chromatic cross-strung double row harp.¹³ In early Spanish art from the middle ages, the type

11 Quoted in Esses, 186.

12 Quoted in Esses, 53-54. Vicente Espinel, *Relaciones de la vida del escudero Marcos de Obregón* (Madrid, 1618).

13 Bordas, 152.

10 Esses, 191.

of harp usually depicted is a small, hand held single row Gothic harp. However, in a 14th century triptych from Piedra Monastery, a harp with two parallel rows of strings is shown, so a double harp did exist in Spain in early times.¹⁴

An *arpa de dos órdenes* is clearly represented in the early 17th century painting, *The Presentation of Christ in the Temple*, by Diego Valentin Diaz.¹⁵ The organology of the harp in El Greco's masterpiece, *Annunciation* (1596-1600), is less clear, due to the artist's painterly style. It could be a single or a double rank instrument. We do see the characteristics of Spanish harp design: a slender shape, straight pillar ending in a carved backwards turned scroll, and a shallow neck with a forwards turned scroll at the treble end. The harpist is part of a consort of angels playing instruments of the period, with organ, viola da gamba, lute, and recorder.¹⁶

El Greco's patron at the turn of the 17th century was Philip III (1598-1621). Spain's next monarch, Philip IV (1621-1665) sponsored another master painter, Francisco de Zurbarán, who lived from 1598 to 1664. Two paintings by Zurbarán incorporate splendid images of the harp as an integral part of the composition. In *Adoration of the Shepherds* (1638), featured on the cover of this issue, a large harp with an angel harpist is prominently placed, on a cloud above the holy family. The harpist is the sole accompanist for a choir of cherubs, a visual affirmation of the harpist's real-life role in the church. The single rank harp is quite realistically depicted; one can even see the stave back construction.

In *The Temptation of St. Jerome* (1639), again Zurbarán gives the harp an important position, as part of an instrumental group with lutes and guitar. Here the instruments are played by attractive, aristocratic women, instead of angels. Whereas only parts of the



The Italian dancing master, Cesare Negri, dedicated his dance treatise, *Le Gratie d'Amore* (1602) to Philip III of Spain.

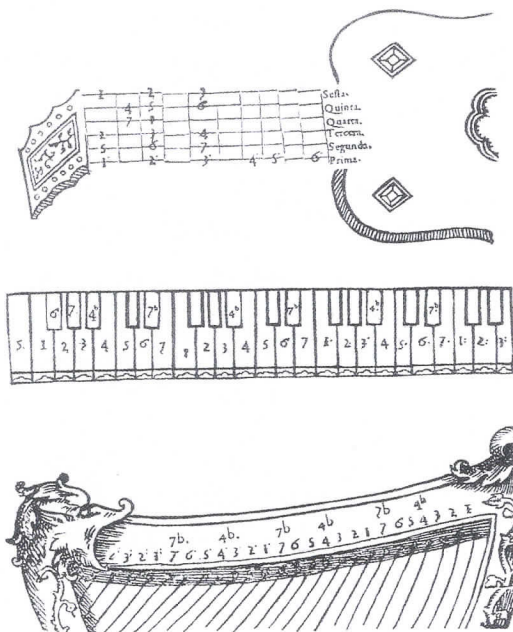
other instruments are shown, the harp is almost in full view. A single rank harp, it has two large sound holes, on the lower left and upper right (facing). There is foliate carving on the top of the pillar, and on the treble end of the neck is a carved lion's head. The harpist is dressed in a rich gown of red silk tafeta with a green sash tied in an elegant bow. The painting, commissioned by the Jeronymite monks of Guadalupe, shows a hermit, or holy man, being tempted by the women and their music. The purpose of the painting is the 'lesson' of the hermit rejecting their beauty as he remains faithful to his holy order. The message for us is a visual confirmation of the power of music, especially coming from the luxurious sounds of combined plucked strings.

In all the paintings, the harpists are standing as they play, with the harp slightly pulled back, leaning into the right shoulder. A final observation about the gender of the harpists: in most of the paintings, the harpists are female, both angels and humans. In a treatise by Diego Fernández de Huete, *Compendio numeroso* (1702), there are two illustrations of Spanish harps played by males. One is a bearded

14 Arpa doble (?), Triptych from Piedra Monastery, 1390, Real Academia de la Historia, Madrid, Spain. Note: the painting illustrates the cover of *Historical Harps*. Heidrun Rosenzweig, ed.

15 Bordas, 150. The painting is listed as being in the collection of the Museo Provincial de Pintura, Valladolid.

16 An image of El Greco's *Annunciation*, in the Museo del Prado, Madrid, can easily be found online. It's a truly magnificent painting, 124 x 681/2 inches. It was included in the recent exhibition, *El Greco to Velázquez*, at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.



A woodcut in *Libro de cifra nueva* (1557) by Venegas de Henestrosa, compares the tuning of the keyboard, harp and vihuela.

man in a crown, and the other might be a boy angel. As previously mentioned, we know that both ‘sons and daughters’ learned to play the harp. It does appear from the records that most of the professional harpists employed by the church and theatre were men, even though lady harpists appear in the paintings. True to traditional gender roles in most societies, harp playing for women was seen as an attractive skill or hobby. It would be several more generations before women were employed as professional harpists.

Arpa de dos órdenes—A ‘Perfect’ Harp with Interwoven Strings

On the single rank harp, there were various techniques used to play occasional chromatic notes, as mentioned by the authors Mudarra and Bermudo¹⁷:

- Pinching the string at the top with the left hand, pressing it against the neck while the right hand plucks the string. This raises the pitch a semi-tone for sharps, and flats are produced enhar-

monically, pinching the lower string (e.g. the A string is pinched to produce a B-flat).

- *Scordatura* tuning: re-tuning for a different pitch in an octave, for example, tuning F-natural in one octave and F# in another octave.
- Inserting an extra string, for instance, having both a B-natural string and a B-flat string in an octave.
- Or simply omitting the chromatic notes.

However, as the music in the Renaissance became increasingly chromatic, there was a growing desire to be able to play *all* the notes on the harp. The first mention of the need for a chromatic harp was in 1555, by Juan Bermudo in his *Declaración*, an encyclopedia of instruments. He states: “As it has been shown, the harp in its original tuning (the white keys of the monochord) is imperfect for the genre, and the music played nowadays belongs to the semichromatic genre.”¹⁸ Bermudo advocated adding eight new chromatic strings to the diatonic row and coloring them red. This obviously caused problems for the harpist, who was used to a certain spacing of intervals. The next logical step was to simply add a separate chromatic row.

In the treatise, *Libro de cifra nueva* (1557) by Luis Venegas de Henestrosa, a woodcut shows a harp, keyboard and vihuela, comparing the notes on each. The harp in the diagram is interesting because it has added chromatic strings. In addition to a diatonic row, there are extra strings for the fourth (B) and seventh (E) notes in each octave (for B-flats and E-flats). It is not known whether this meant chromatic strings were inserted in the row, a second row of strings was added, or if it’s a cross-strung harp. Although it is possible that a cross-strung harp did exist before 1600, the first documentation of a double rank harp appears in 1616. The *violero*, Antonio Hidalgo (father of the harpist Juan Hidalgo), described two harps he made for the royal chapel:

A harp [made] of white poplar and walnut, with ebony purfling on the back, five roses on the body, and marked with ebony castles, li-

¹⁷ Bordas, 148.

¹⁸ Quoted in Bordas, 148. Bermudo, Juan. *Declaración de instrumentos musicales*, Osuna, 1555.

ons and eagles on the other side. It has two full and universal ranks, stands at seven handspands, with ebony mouldings on the edges...¹⁹

This passage also informs us about the type of inlay decoration used on harps, with 'ebony castles, lions and eagles.' These three royal heraldic symbols generally represented safety, nobility and courage. The 'roses' were the decorative inserts for the hexagonal sound holes on the soundboard. These would have been exquisitely carved in intricate geometric patterns. The rose design was typically the type of sound hole found on *vihuelas*, guitars and lutes.

From Nassarre's treatise, we learn that the *arpa de dos órdenes* had twenty-nine diatonic strings and eighteen chromatic strings, and it was made of walnut with a spruce soundboard.²⁰ The large soundbox had seven staves, and Nassarre stated that the relative proportions of the parts were more important than the actual dimensions. The upper width of the soundboard was to be no more than a fifth of the lower piece.²¹ Therefore, the Spanish harp has quite an extended soundboard at the bottom and a large soundbox, resulting in its resonant bass.

The proportions of the soundbox and the way the harp is strung, give the *arpa de dos órdenes* its very unique timbre. The strings cross one third of the distance down from the neck, so the right hand plays at the top of the strings, near the neck. The resulting sound is clear and bright, with an almost metallic quality, similar to a guitar or theorbo.²² The left hand position is generally below the 'X' of the strings, and the bass timbre is quite full and mellow. The combination of the bright, percussive treble and 'swelling' bass seems to add depth and range to the envelope of sound.

19 Quoted in Bordas, 152. Madrid, Palacio Real [Mp], Leg.902, 1616.

20 Bordas, 154.

21 Quoted in Esses, 208.

22 The bright timbre from plucking the string at the top, rather than the middle of the string, excites a different series of overtones on the harp. A similar sound is achieved with *p.d.l.t.*, when strings are played at the bottom near the soundboard. The so-called perfect alignment of the overtones is produced by plucking the string in the middle, resulting in a pure tone.

Eventually, the *arpa de dos órdenes* fell out of fashion. Philip V (1700-1724) brought Italian and French musicians to his court and chapel, and, by 1750, the *arpa de dos órdenes* was replaced in Spain by the Italian triple harp. The Italian *arpa doppia* had three rows of strings, the two outer rows were diaton-



A noble couple is illustrated in Negri's dance treatise, *Le Gratie d'Amore* (1602).

ic and a chromatic row was in the middle. The Iberian harp, however, with its large stave back soundbox, lived on in the New World, becoming known as the Paraguayan harp.²³ Introduced to these countries by Spanish missionaries, the *arpa de una orden* took preference over the double harp and is still popular today.

The Surviving Harps

For such a widely played instrument, it is surprising that so few historical harps survive in Spain from

23 See Samuel Milligan's excellent article, "The Spanish Harp in Colonial San Antonio," *American Harp Journal*, Vol. 22, No. 1, Summer 2009.

the period.²⁴ Only ten *arpas de dos órdenes* from the 17th and early 18th centuries are believed to still exist, in private collections, unknown locations, and in convents and monasteries in Avila and Burgos. Cristina Bordas, the expert on the subject, has published photographs of some of the harps and has compiled tables of detailed information on each harp.²⁵ According to Bordas, the surviving harps conform to the ‘correct proportions’ and stringing suggested by Nassarre. There are two harps, by unknown makers, of a slightly smaller size: twenty-seven diatonic strings and fifteen strings in the chromatic row. Most of the harps have five to seven roses for soundholes, with a triangular rose at the top of the soundboard and pairs of hexagonal roses evenly spaced further down. There are two harps with soundholes of a strikingly different shape: fusils,

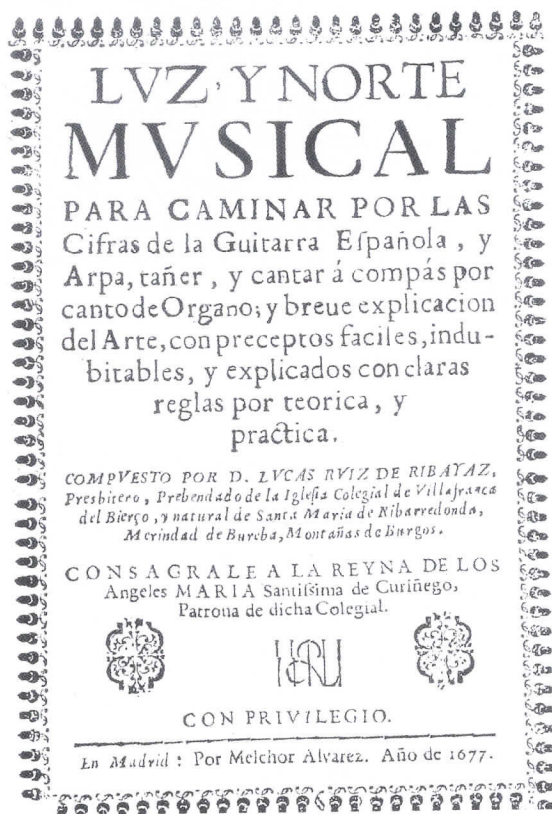
or elongated diamonds, with two small circles at the points, top and bottom. Both harps with this design are dated 1704, with one of the harps made by Domingo Pescador, and the other by Pere Elias.

Another area of decorative interest on these rare harps is the pillar. Iberian harps have pillars with turned areas of beading in the middle sections, as seen on the harps of Ivan Lopez of Toledo and Josef Fernandez of Valladolid. On another harp, by Ivan de la Torre, c.1700, the entire pillar is turned, with raised rounded bands, creating a stunning effect. The soundboard is decorated with inlaid shapes of a lion and a crowned two headed eagle.²⁶ Also interesting, is the harp maker’s stamp, displayed on the top front of the pillar.

Spanish Harp Music: Tientos and Fantasias

There are relatively few surviving collections of music specifically for the *arpa de dos órdenes*. Much was lost over time, but another reason is that harpists used keyboard music and also vocal scores. For continuo, harpists played from figured bass parts for vocal and instrumental consort music. Another important aspect to consider is improvisation. In the 16th century, improvisation was the norm, and music served to assist memory. Some of the surviving collections of pieces were actually meant for amateurs and learners. However, the few sources of music we do have are amazingly rich with treasures to be discovered and explored.

Although the polyphonic music often sounds ‘Spanish’ in its dramatic shifting from minor to major, a strong Franco-Flemish influence is also heard, in the austerity of the settings. In several of the books, the Flemish master, Josquin Desprez (c.1440-1521) is represented, followed by variations or *glosas* by Spanish composers, such as Cabezón and Palero.²⁷ The



Frontispiece of Ruiz de Ribayaz’s *Luz y norte musical* (1677).

24 A probable reason for the low survival rate is the great amount of tension on the soundboard and neck from the two rows of strings, which eventually caused the harps to collapse.

25 Bordas, 160. (See note 1.) A revised table of the surviving harps (in German) is published in Cristina Bordas, “The Spanish *Arpa de dos órdenes*,” *Historical Harps*, Heidrun Rosenzweig, ed. (Basel, Switzerland: Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, 1991): 24-42.

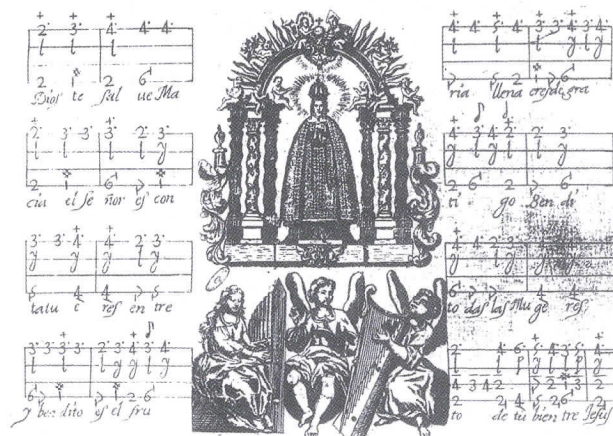
26 The harp maker Pedro Llopis Areny has a photo of the Ivan de la Torre harp on his ‘Ancient Harps of Spain’ page www.arpandes.com/IvandelaTorre.html.

27 In today’s music, copyrights and royalties often prevent one from publishing a new arrangement of a piece. In the Renaissance, writing a variation of a piece showed great skill and was valued just as much as a new composition. Improvisation was the highest form of musicianship, and written *glosas* and *diferencias* by composers were greatly admired.

free-flowing Iberian style of wandering *glosas* and improvisatory *fantasías*, was combined with the strict Northern counterpoint. Andrew Lawrence-King described it as “a fascinating blend of improvisatory freedom and polyphonic rigour.”²⁸ Many harp pieces appear in the form of a *fabordon*, choral music in four-part homophonic settings. It was a usual practice to transcribe choral works into instrumental solos and ensembles. The pieces are often a framework for the musician to fill in with ornaments and *diminutions*: running passages of shorter notes as a variation.

The two main sources for harp from the 16th century are *Libro de cifra nueva* by Henestrosa and *Obras de música* by Cabezón. The music appears in a new tablature, playable on harps, keyboards, or *vihuelas*, so that the three main instruments could all play the same pieces. The books include hymns, pavaues, *cancions* (songs), and *tientos*, which were free studies with elements of imitative counterpoint.

Luis Venegas de Henestrosa, ed. *Libro de cifra nueva para tecla, arpa y vihuela*, Alcalá de Henares, 1557: The title is translated as ‘Book of new tablature for keyboard, harp and *vihuela*.’ Although the book was intended for the amateur player, it includes an impressive collection of sacred and secular music by Josquin, Crequillon, Palero and Cabezón, who was referred to simply as ‘Antonio.’ Almost every composer represented in the book worked for either church or crown, and much of this music would have been played in the royal chapel.²⁹ [The modern edition in regular staff notation was published by H. Anglès in 1944.³⁰]



Tablature and Spanish harp illustration in Fernández de Hueté's *Compendio numeroso* (1702).

Antonio de Cabezón. *Obras de música para tecla, arpa y vihuela*, Madrid, 1578: This book, published posthumously by Antonio's son, is similar to *Libro de cifra nueva*. In his advertisement for the book, Hernando states that the collection is primarily studies for the master's pupils.³¹ The sophistication of the music suggests a high level of playing by the amateur. The famous blind composer, Antonio de Cabezón (1510-1566) was organist to Philip II, and often traveled in the royal entourage. [A modern edition of the same title was published by H. Anglès in 1966.]

Alonso Mudarra, *Tres libros de música en cifras para vihuela*, Seville, 1546: A third important collection of the time, Mudarra's book is important to harpists as it contains the first published harp piece. Also in tablature (*cifras*), the book is mainly a collection of original works for *vihuela*. However, at the end of the book is a *Tiento IX para harpa y órgano* (Tiento IX for harp or organ). This is the first known piece labeled ‘for harp,’ and it is also the first Spanish piece for organ. The *Tiento IX* was an advertisement for a forthcoming book of compositions written for harp or organ, but the book seems never to have been published.³² Another piece of interest to harpists is *Fantasia*

28 CD notes for Andrew Lawrence-King, *El arte de fantasía-Luis Venegas de Henestrosa*, Harmonia mundi, 2004. (Highly recommended.)

29 Barry Ife and Roy Truby, editors, *Early Spanish Keyboard Music, Volume I: The Sixteenth Century* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986):4. This slim book has an extensive introduction on the sources and tablatures used, followed by 34 pages of music in modern notation, all very playable on the harp.

30 Higinio Anglès, *La música en la corte de Carlos V, con la transcripción del “Libro de cifra nueva para tecla, harpa y vihuela” de Luis Venegas de Henestrosa* (Barcelona, 1944).

31 Ife and Truby, 5.

32 Ife and Truby, 4.

X que contrahaze la harpa en la manera de Ludovico. This very chromatic vihuela piece, as the title suggests, was written in the manner of the playing of the famous harpist, Ludovico. This is a rare reference to solo harp playing. Ludovico, harpist to Ferdinand V of Aragon, was renowned for his skill of playing chromatic notes on a single rank harp, by pinching the strings and using scordatura tuning. [The edition in modern notation was published by Emilio Pujil in 1949.]

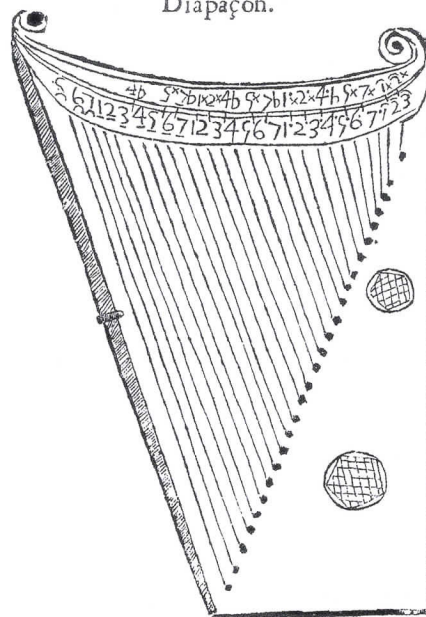
Dance Music for Harp: Fiery Canarias to Exotic Xacaras

The second type of harp music from 17th and 18th century Spain is the dance music. With its pulsating rhythms and sultry *hemíolas*, this music has quite a different character. The dance music is perhaps closer to the heart of Spanish culture with its roots in the Moorish tradition. From the eighth to the fifteenth centuries, the Moors had inhabited the southern part of Spain, and a Mediterranean influence was felt in the costumes, language, music and especially dance.³³ Dance was even a part of the church liturgy in Spain. Corpus Christi and other religious feasts were celebrated with choirboys performing elegant pavaues in the church services, accompanied by harp. Among some of the extant pieces for the choirboy dances is a set by Juan Bautista in Valencia, with vocal parts and an unfigured bass for harp.³⁴

Popular dances were part of the theatrical productions, where harps and guitars provided the accompaniment. And at court, dancing was a major occupation; the king, queen and all the courtiers danced. An international style of dancing was adopted by all the courts in Europe, taught by dancing masters. The famous Italian dancing master, Cesare Negri, dedicated his dance treatise, *Le Gratie d'Amore* (1602) to Philip III. Negri was working in Milan, a Spanish territory, as dancing master to the Milanese aristocracy,

33 Lynn Matluck Brooks, "Spain", *International Encyclopedia of Dance*, Selma Jean Cohen, ed. (Oxford: OUP, 1998), 667.
34 Esses, 418.

Demostracion del Arpa de dos ordenes,
y forma para practicar el
Diapaçon.



A diagram of the arpa de dos órdenes in Ruiz de Ribayaz's *Luz y norte musical* (1677) shows stringing, scroll decoration and roses on the soundboard.

and an Italian influence is seen in some of the dances in Spain. For the lower classes, dancing was always a part of revelry, with stamping, tumbling, acrobatic contortions, and clapping.³⁵

The two main sources of dance music for harp are *Luz y norte musical* by Lucas Ruiz de Ribayaz and *Compendio numeroso* by Diego Fernández de Huete. Each book is written in its own tablature. Ribayaz's collection was written for Spanish guitar or harp, and Huete's book was for the *harpa de una orden* (single rank harp), *harpa de dos órdenes* or the organ. Both have extensive theoretical chapters in addition to the dance music. *Luz y norte musical* also has an interesting diagram of the *arpa de dos órdenes*, complete with scroll decoration on the neck and roses on the soundboard.

Lucas Ruiz de Ribayaz. *Luz y norte musical para caminar por las cifras de la guitarra Española, y arpa*, Madrid, 1677: The title is translated as 'Musical light and guiding star, to walk through the tablatures of the Spanish guitar and harp.' The book is a wonderful compilation of traditional Spanish dances includ-

35 Brooks, 668.

ing: *Xacarás, Chaconas, Marionas, Españolaletas, Achas, Paradetas and Canarios*. Ruiz de Ribayaz travelled to Peru in 1667, in the service of the new viceroy, Pedro Fernández de Castro.³⁶ The exciting rhythms in dances such as *Zarambeques* and *Zarabandas* have the flavor of South America and Africa, while the *Pabanas, Gallardas, and Galeria de Amor* show an Italian influence. Many of the pieces are grounds for improvisation. [Two modern editions are available by: María-Rosa Calvo-Manzano, and Astrid Nielsch.³⁷]

Diego Fernández de Huete. *Compendio numeroso de zifras armonicas, con theorica, y practica, para harpa de una orden, de dos órdenes, y de órgano, Madrid, 1702 (first part) and 1704 (second part)*: Huete, who was harpist at the cathedral in Toledo, published two volumes with theoretical information followed by music in tablature. The first volume, intended for the amateur, includes beginning music theory and secular dances (many of the same ones in *Luz y norte*). In the second volume, Huete presents more advanced theory, for the professional, on tuning, modes, cadences, etc., and the forms of music are sacred pieces and *pasacalles*. [Modern version of the *Pasacalles* is available from Astrid Nielsch. Also, an invaluable collection of musical transcriptions from Huete and other Iberian manuscripts is by Maurice Esses, in the *Dance and Music Series*.³⁸]

Practical Guide to Performing Spanish Music

For today's harpist, Spanish harp music from the 16th to the 18th centuries offers an interesting and

different style for the repertoire. As we've seen, the *arpa de dos órdenes* was developed for the music, and is perfectly idiomatic to the pieces. However, much of it can be played on pedal and lever harps. The chromaticism in the music will determine which pieces can be played on the modern harp. On the *arpa de dos órdenes*, the harpist has only one motion—to pluck the chromatic string. The pedals or levers, require two extra motions: to engage the mechanism and to release it, plus any dampening needed. Another advantage of the cross-strung harp, is having several choices as to where to voice chords and play chromatic notes (in which hand). Since the two rows cross, there are actually four planes of strings to play. The right hand can play both the upper diatonic row and also the lower chromatic row. Similarly, the left hand can play both the lower diatonic row and the upper chromatic row. Hence there are many other possible combinations for dividing chords and passages between the hands.

Fingering: The technique for playing a chromatic line on the double harp is to slide the finger from the chromatic string and land on the adjacent diatonic string. The back and forth of dipping up and down to the chromatic row is helped by holding the hands in a horizontal position. The fourth finger is rarely used, except for large chords. In the tablature, “p” (*pulgar*) is for thumb, “y” (*indice*) is the index finger and “l” (*largo*) is the middle finger. The fingering for ascending scales is 3-2-1-2-1 and for descending, 1-2-3-2-3.³⁹ It's as if the fingers are walking up and down the strings, and this can easily be done on a modern harp.

Tuning: For the Franco-Flemish pieces, *mean-tone* tuning was used. In Bermudo's *Declaración*, he talks of the thirds being harmonious and the fifths narrow.⁴⁰

Timbre: To attain a bright sound, similar to the *arpa de dos órdenes*, try playing low, near the soundboard, in both the bass and treble.

36 Esses, 125.

37 Astrid Nielsch, *Luz y Norte Musical* (Wellington: Harp & Hobbit Press, 2004). It includes 22 pieces and is available to order online. The María-Rosa Calvo-Manzano edition is in the Opera omnia series, available in most music libraries.

38 Maurice Esses, *Dance and Instrumental Diferencias in Spain During the 17th and Early 18th Centuries, Volume II* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1994).

39 Hannelore DeVaere, *The Spanish Double Harp: Arpa de dos órdenes*, Harp Spectrum website: www.harpspectrum.org.

40 Nelly van Ree Bernard, *Interpretation of 16th Century Iberian Music on the Clavichord* (Buren, The Netherlands: Frits Knuf Publishers, 1989), 57.

Ornaments: The two names of ornaments are *quiebros* and *redobles*, basically meaning trills with prefixes. The player can insert them at any appropriate time, but they are most often used on long notes and at cadences. Trills start on or after the beat.

Tempo: For *tientos* and *fantasias*, play the lines very freely and expressively, with *rubato*. In contrast, the tempo for dance music must be steady and on the beat. Try and express the character of the dance steps; for instance, make the beat heavy where the dancer would stomp or slide a foot.

Accents: According to Ruiz de Ribayaz, the accents in duple time are on beats one and three. However, in triple time, the Spanish accents are on one and two: 1-2-3, 1-2-3.⁴¹ For rhythmic accents within the music, use quick muffling to dampen the strings. Another technique is to use flashy rolled chords for emphasis, and continued rolled chords (up and down) for several beats at a downbeat or cadence.

Rhythmic ornamentation: Sancta Maria, in *Arte de tañer* (1565), suggests ways to create rhythmic variation.⁴² For a series of quarter notes, play them in a dotted rhythm: long-short-long-short. Groups of eighth notes can be played this way and also reversed: short-long-short-long. Or a series of eighth notes can be turned into a triplet pattern: short-short-short-long.⁴³

Improvisation: The pieces are generally short, so the harpist improvises subsequent verses. For ideas on the style, listen to instrumental and vocal recordings. Also look at treatises on ornamentation from the period, such as Diego Ortiz, *Tratado de glosas* (Rome, 1553). For dance music, invent several creative variations on the basic harmonic ground, for many verses.

41 Astrid Nielsch, 31.

42 Quoted in Bernard, 33.

43 For a comprehensive discussion on this topic, see Nelly van Ree Bernard, "Ornamentation in Sixteenth-Century Iberian Music for 'Tecla, Harpa y Vihuela': Quiebros, Redobles and Glosas," *Aspects of the Historical Harp. Proceedings of the International Historical Harp Symposium*, Utrecht, 1992, Martin van Schaik, ed. (Utrecht: STIMU, 1994), 53-71.

Arrangements: There are a few published arrangements of early Iberian music for pedal harp. Always compare the arrangement to the original, if possible. There was a time when harpist-arrangers tended to 'improve' on the original pieces, filling in notes in a later 'romantic' style.

Spanish Harp Continuo: The same suggestions apply for continuo. The harp can add depth and rhythmic emphasis to the vocal and instrumental ensemble, in the Spanish *villancicos*. For each piece, find the best register for the harp within the ensemble, generally in the middle to low range. The harpist plays from a bass line with figured bass symbols and can choose how to voice the chords on the harp, or choose to play single notes. Fill in, but don't get in the way or cover up voices or ornamentation in another part. Start chords on the beat, not *before* the beat.

Learning from period sources and playing the music on a historically accurate instrument, makes it possible to get a little closer to understanding the musical language of another age. In spite of the hundreds of years between us, the human emotions expressed in these pieces are as vivid today as they were back in Spain's Golden Age.

About the author:

Nancy Hurrell presents historical harp concerts, lectures and workshops to groups across the US, Canada, and the British Isles. In Boston, Nancy is harpist in the early music group, *Renaissomics*, and performs on the arpa de dos órdenes with *Ensemble Trinitas and Musicians of the Old Post Road*. Nancy is on the harp faculty at the Boston Conservatory, and is a harp consultant for the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, presenting lecture demonstrations on harps in the collection. She completed her MM in harp performance at TCU, a BFA at University of Texas, post-graduate harp studies in Wales and master classes in early harp with Andrew Lawrence-King. In 2008, Nancy performed on the arpa de dos órdenes for Princess Cristina of Spain at the exhibit, *El Greco to Velázquez*, at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Her recordings and books of arrangements are available online: www.HurrellHarp.com 