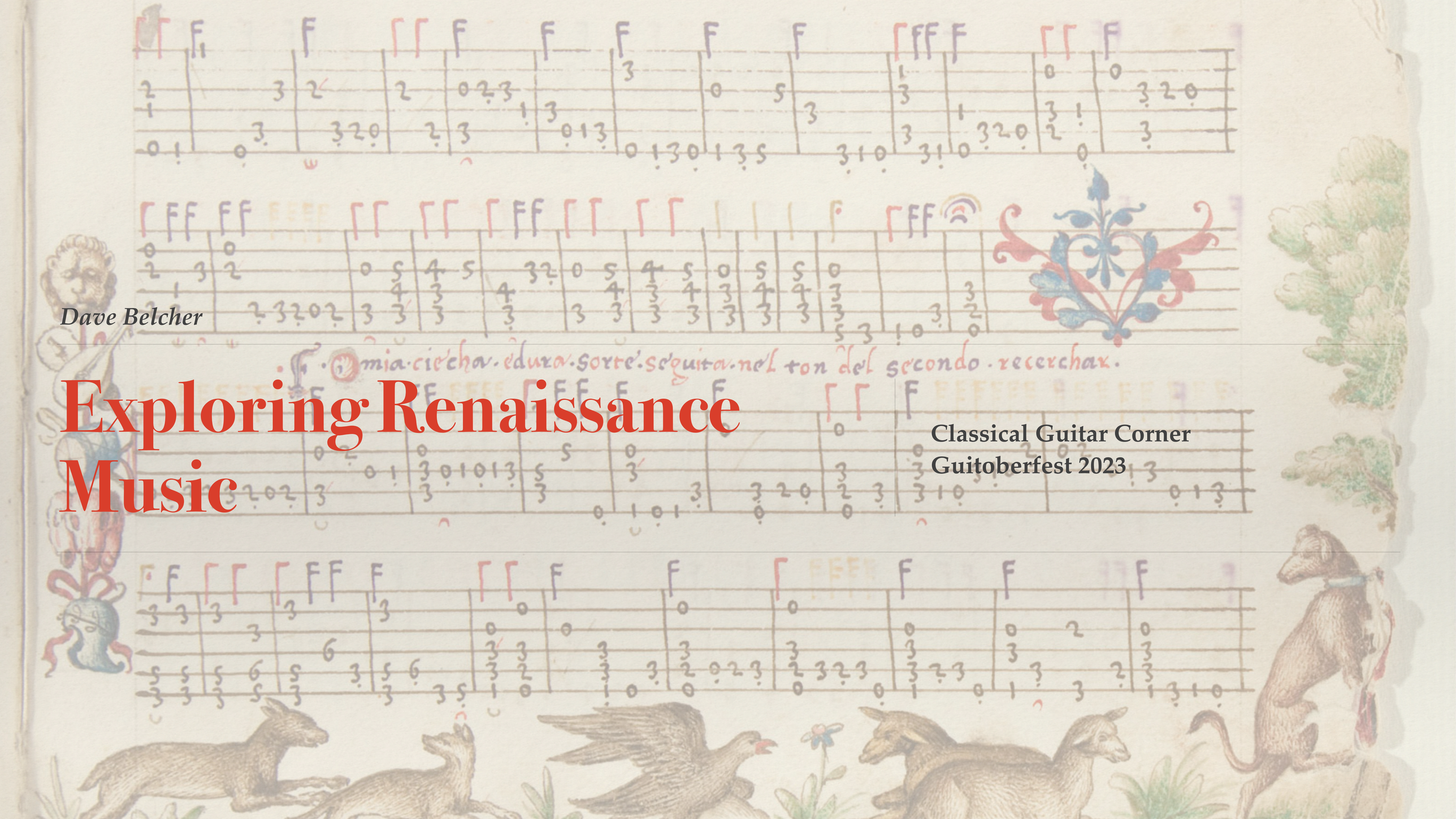


Dave Belcher

Exploring Renaissance Music

Classical Guitar Corner
Guitoberfest 2023

Rebirth

- The Renaissance period was a time of social and cultural revival. Thinkers, poets, musicians, artists, architects, and others sought to bring ancient Greco-Roman ideas into their own time.
- With this renewed attention to classicism, we also see a shift of focus toward the human as well as matters of the here and now, rather than with the afterlife.
- For our purposes, the Renaissance was also a time of huge growth in music, with new compositions, forms, instruments, and techniques emerging.

Timeline of Events

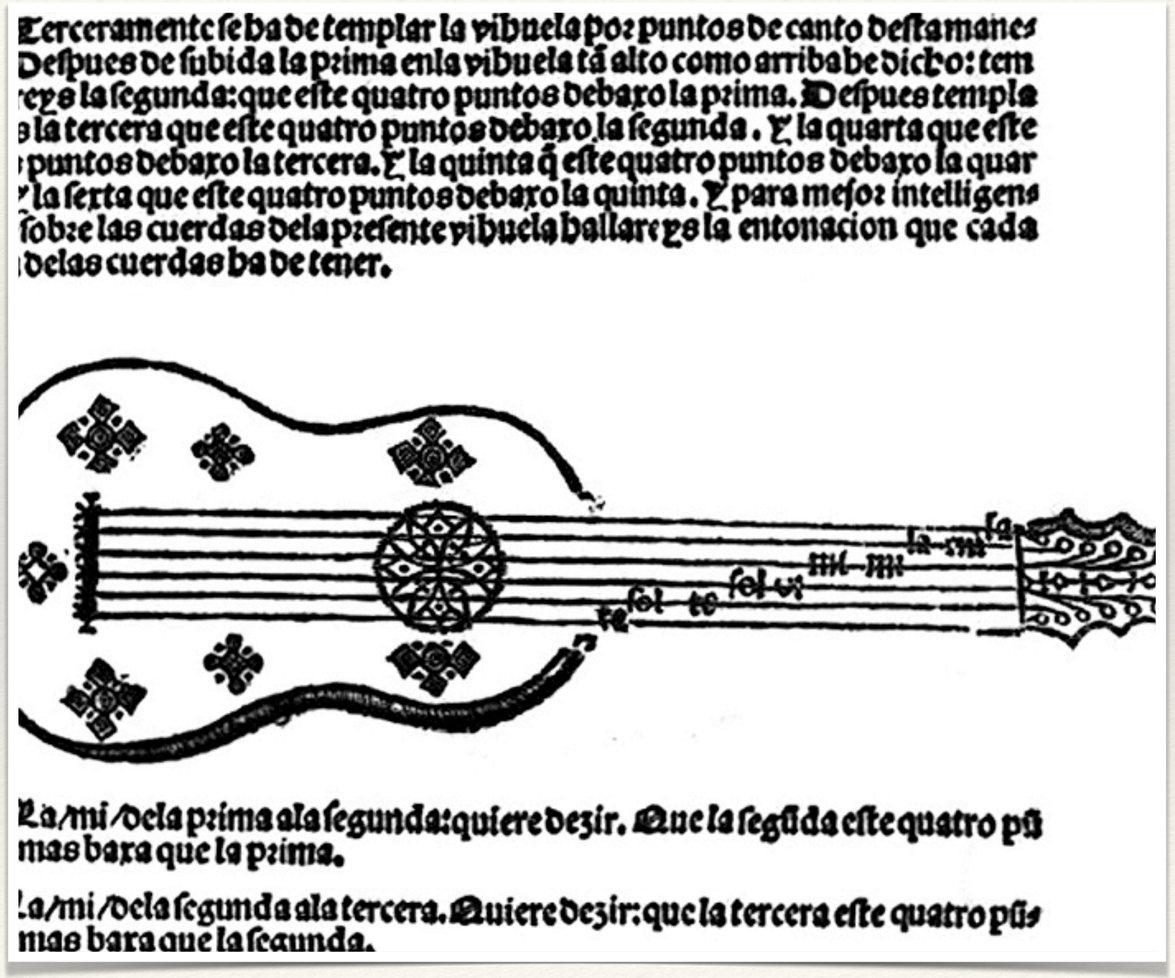
- Around 1450 Johannes Gutenberg invents the movable-type printing press
  - Around 1501 Italian printer Ottaviano Pettruci begins collecting and printing polyphonic music, including chansons, masses, and lute music
- In 1453 the Eastern See of the Holy Roman Empire in Constantinople falls
  - Anyone know the *They Might Be Giants* song?
- In 1492 Christopher Columbus discovers "the new world"
- On October 31, 1517 Martin Luther nails his 95 theses to the door of the Wittenberg church, initiating the Protestant Reformation
- January 1, 1524 the so-called Peasants' Revolt begins

What is unique about Renaissance music?

- New development of modes or "tones" (see Early Music Sources YouTube video on "Modes in the 16th and 17th Centuries" for more)
  - “Many have written about the formation and recognition of the modes, but one is confusingly different from another; and for this reason many cannot perceive in what mode a composition might be, when seeing it, and much less when only hearing it" (Camillo Angleria, *Regola di Contrapunto*, 1622)
- New use of major and minor thirds and thus triads
  - Moves us closer toward modern harmonic concepts of "major" and "minor" keys
- Influence of vocal music with new emphasis on making the text clear and understandable to the listener
  - Vernacular language texts become much more central
- Social Dances and Dance Music
  - Courtly dances but also countryside dances
- New instrumental idioms
  - Toccata for the keyboard; fantasia and ricercare for the lute

Instruments

- Lute
  - 6 strings in courses (unisons) but with a single string for the first or highest string (the "chanterelle")
  - Large pear-shape back
  - Tuning: GCFADG
- Vihuela de mano (or vihuela for short)
  - Smaller body than the lute, with a shape more similar to the modern guitar
  - Same number of strings and tuning as the lute, but pitch varied
- Four-string Renaissance guitar
  - Very little repertoire survives for this instrument but it is tuned the same as the top four strings of the modern guitar. (Thus, if you have a baritone ukulele, you can play all of the music written for this instrument directly!)



Social Dance and the Lute

Dance

Dances:

- Saltarello
- Spagnoletto
- Pavana
- Alman
- Branle
- Passamezzo
- Gagliarda
- Volta
- Jig / Gigue
- Tourdion
- Piva
- etc.

Dances

- Strong repeatable rhythmic patterns, including syncopations and hemiolas
- Heavy use of chords and chord progressions — some dances feature this more than others, like the Pavana and the Alman
- Dances were often grouped in pairs or in threes
  - For instance, the pavana (a duple meter dance) was often followed by the gagliarda (triple meter dance) in social dances. Thus, composers also frequently grouped them together.

Pavana

- Pavana was a slow processional dance from Padua in Italy.
- It features two large beats per measure
- This was a dance for two partners, each of whom would take slow, dignified steps together, interrupted by moments of pause.
- We can see this same kind of motion in Luis de Milan's "Pavana No.1" from his 1536 instructional treatise for the vihuela de mano, *El Maestro*:

Pavana No.1

From *El Maestro*

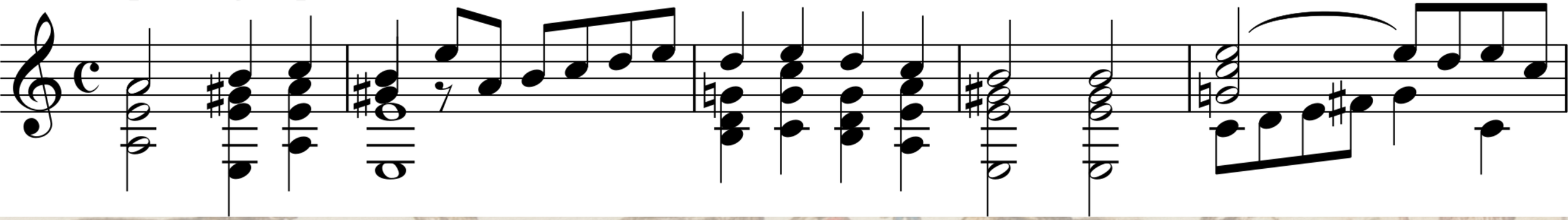
Classical Guitar Corner Academy

Ed. David Belcher

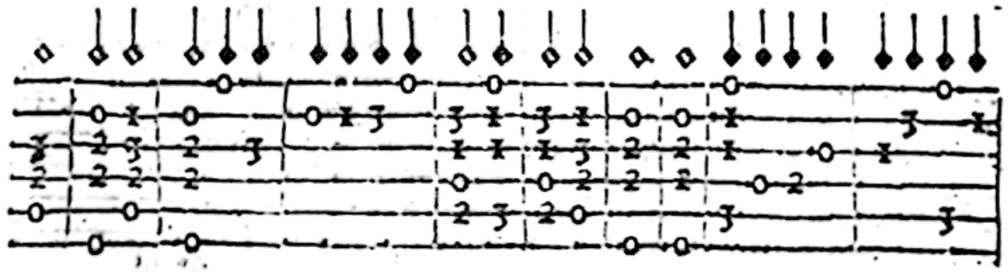
Luys de Milan (1500 - 1561)

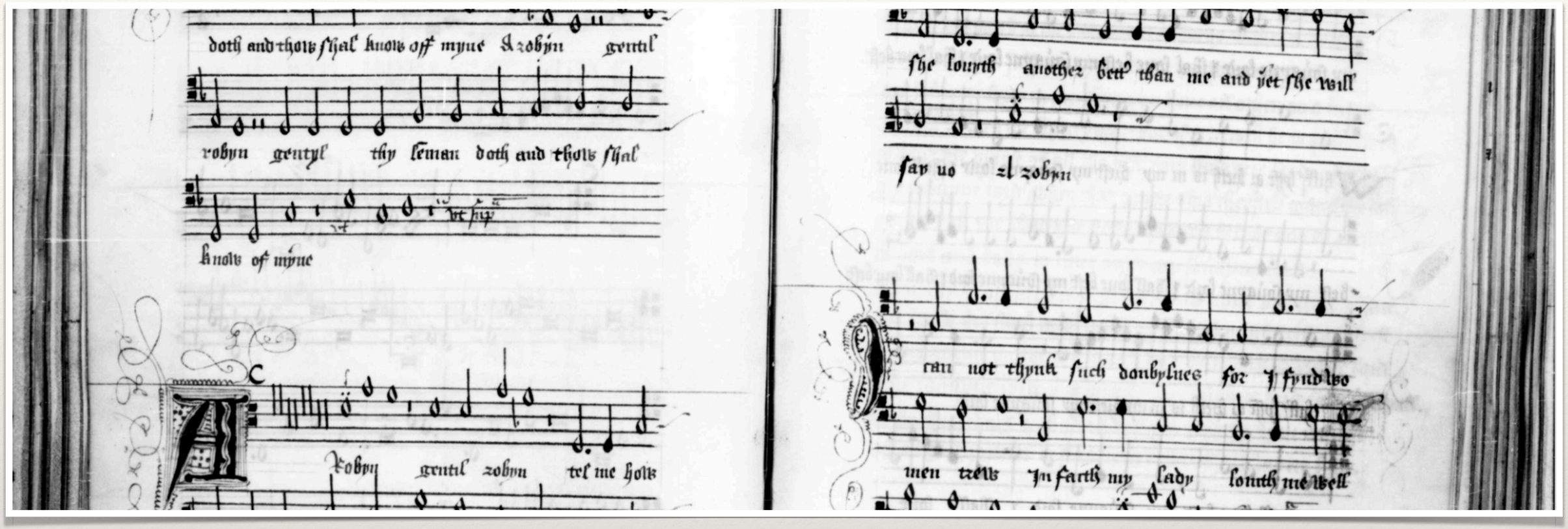
classicalguitarcorner.com

Compas algo apressurado



Estas seys fantasias que se siguẽ como arriba vos dixe parescẽ en su aspre y cõpostura a las mesmas pauanas q̃ en Ytalia se tañen: y pues en todo remedan a ellas digamos les pauanas. las quatro primeras son inuentadas por mi. las dos que despues se siguen la sonada dellas se hizo en ytalia: y la cõpostura sobre la sonada dellas es mia. Deuen se tañer con el cõpas algo apreissurado: y requieren tañerse dos o tres vezes. y esta pauana q̃ primeramente se sigue anda por los terminos del primero y segundo tono.





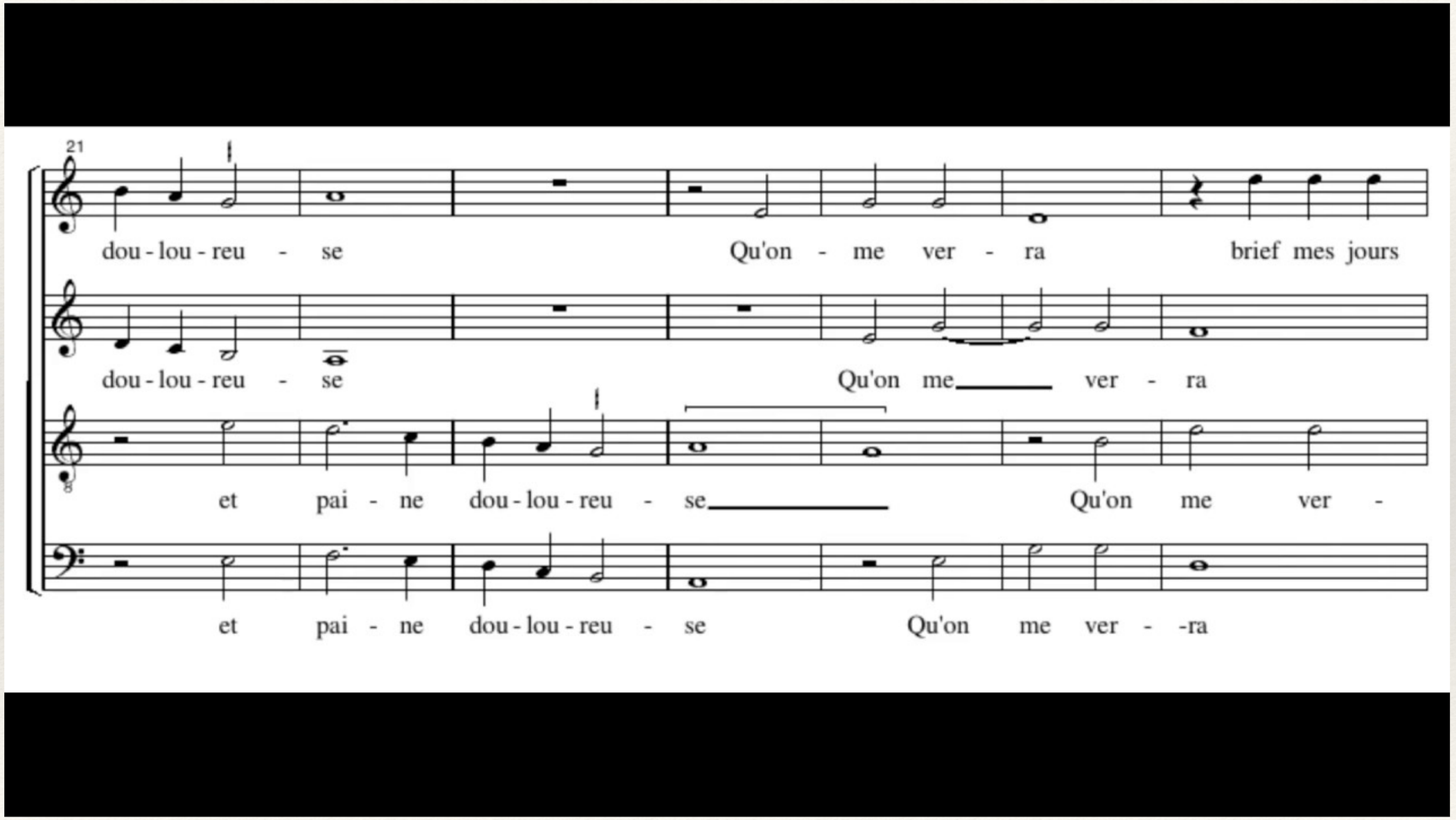
Song

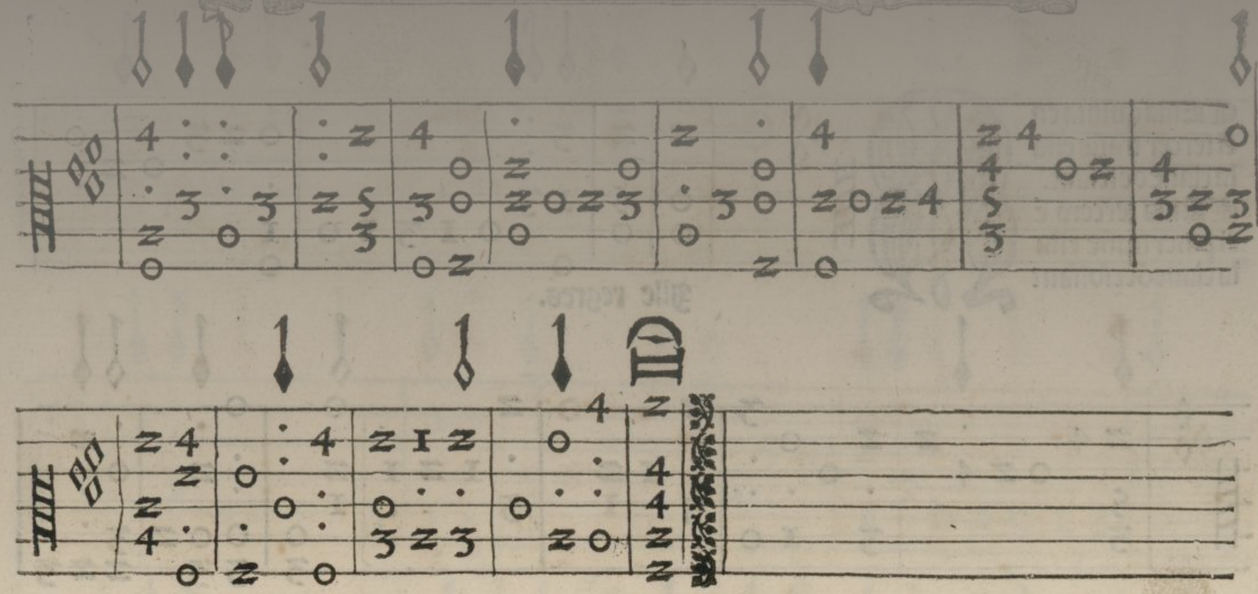
New genres: Madrigal, French chanson, fantasia, ricercare, and toccata

Canción del Emperador

- Luis de Narváez
- Intabulation of the French chanson, *Mille regretz* by Josquin des Prez (~1450-1521).
  - Said to be one of Charles V's favorite songs (thus the "song of the emperor")
  - Really an intabulation with divisions/diminutions

Josquin des Prez, *Mille regretz*
Hilliard Ensemble





¶ Comiençan las canciones Francesas y esta primera es vna que llaman la cancion del Emperador del quarto tono de Jusquin.

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¶ En la quinta en
el tercer traste esta
la clave de fefaut.
¶ En la tercera é
el primer traste esta
la clave de cefolfaut

Alle regres.

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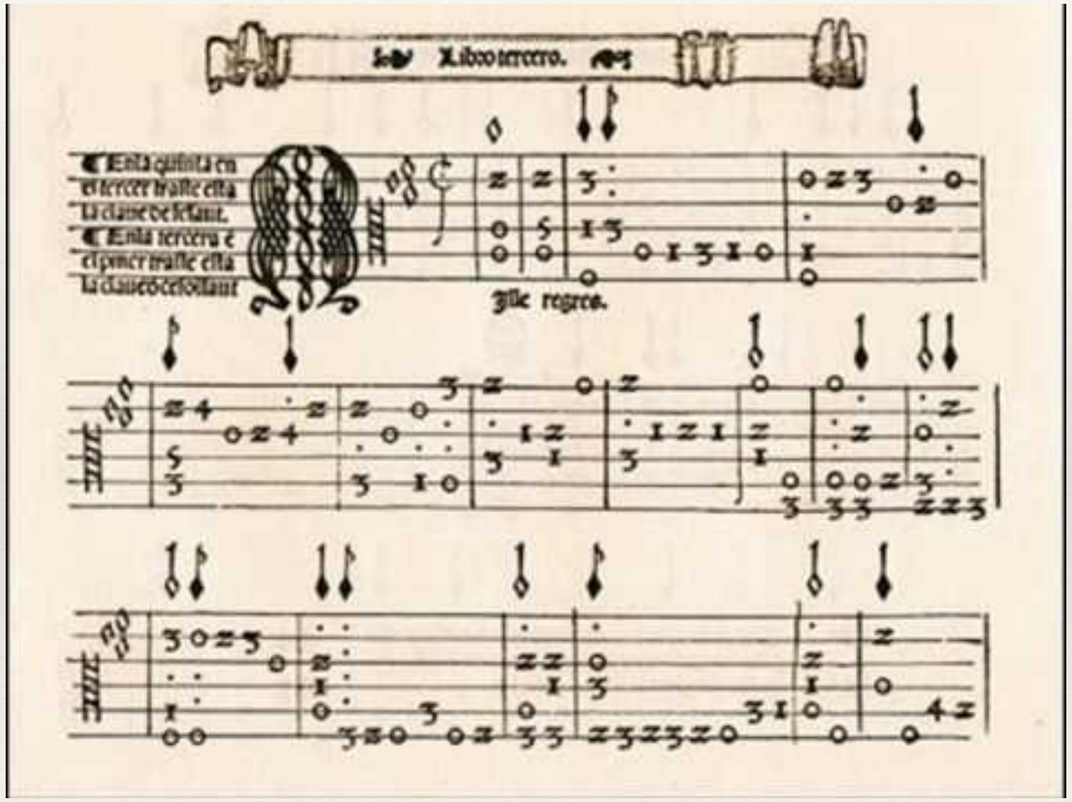
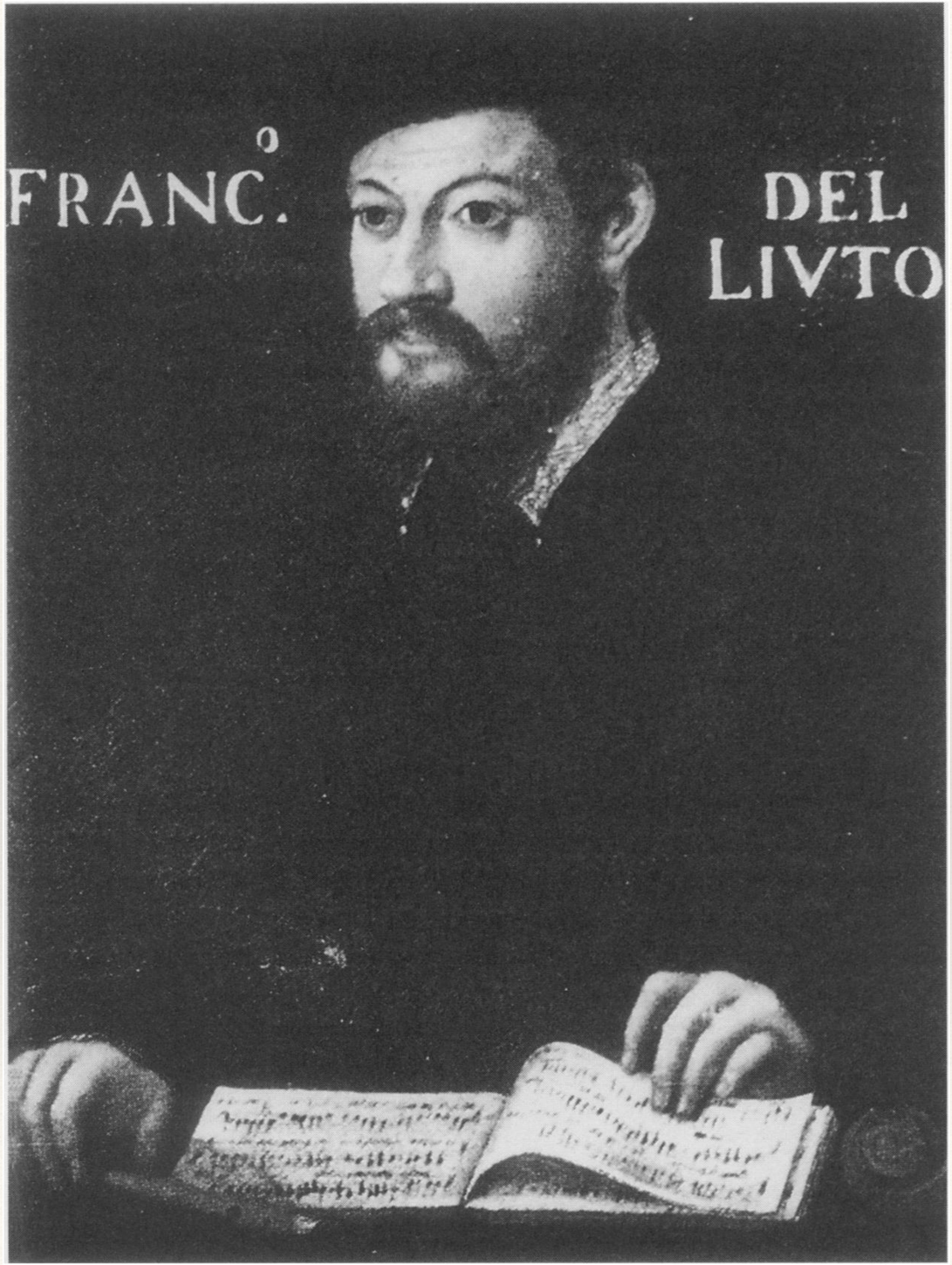
Luis de Narváez, *Canción del Emperador*

Rolf Viseslund, vihuela



New Instrumental idioms the Lute

The Fantasia

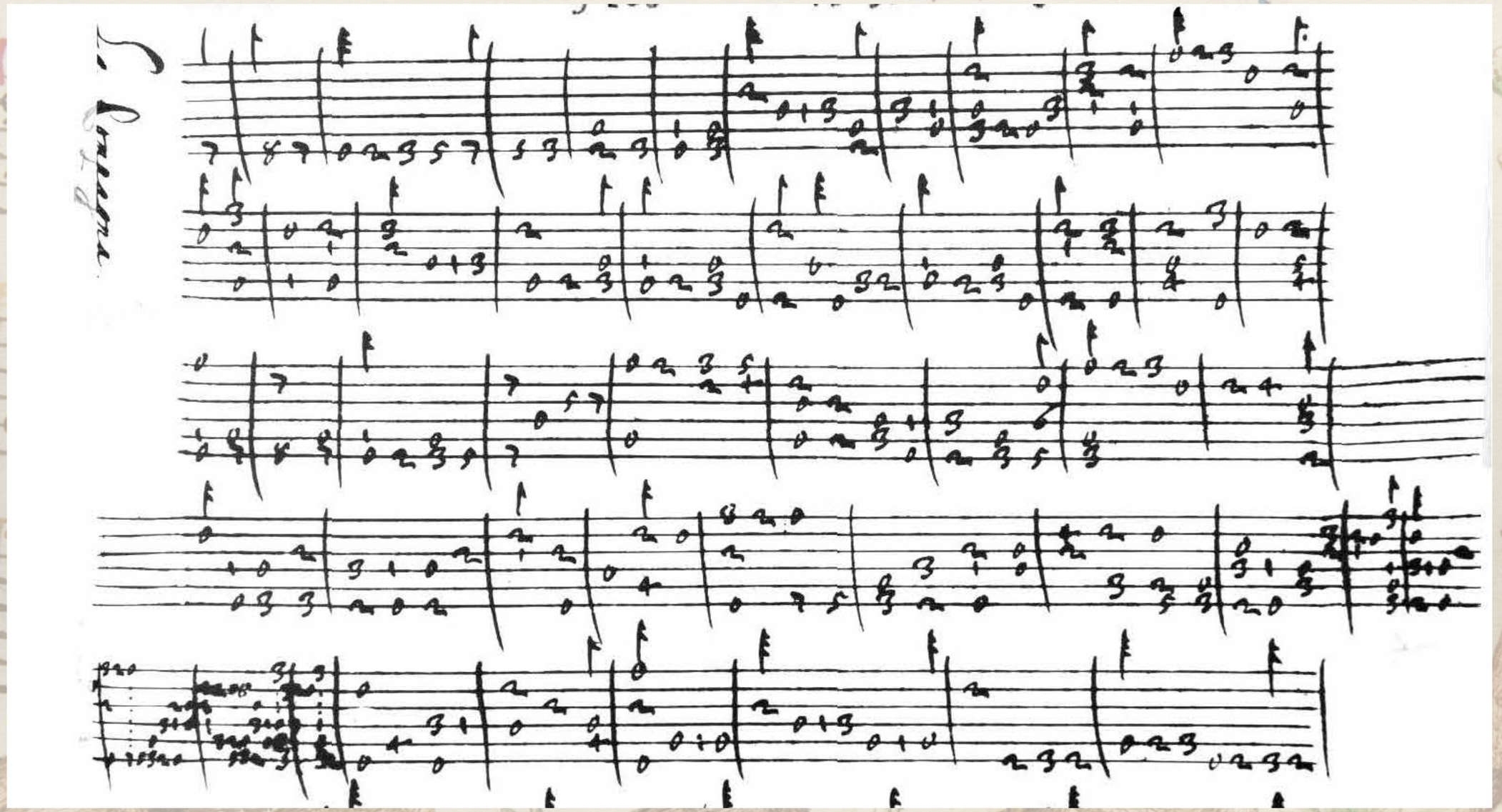


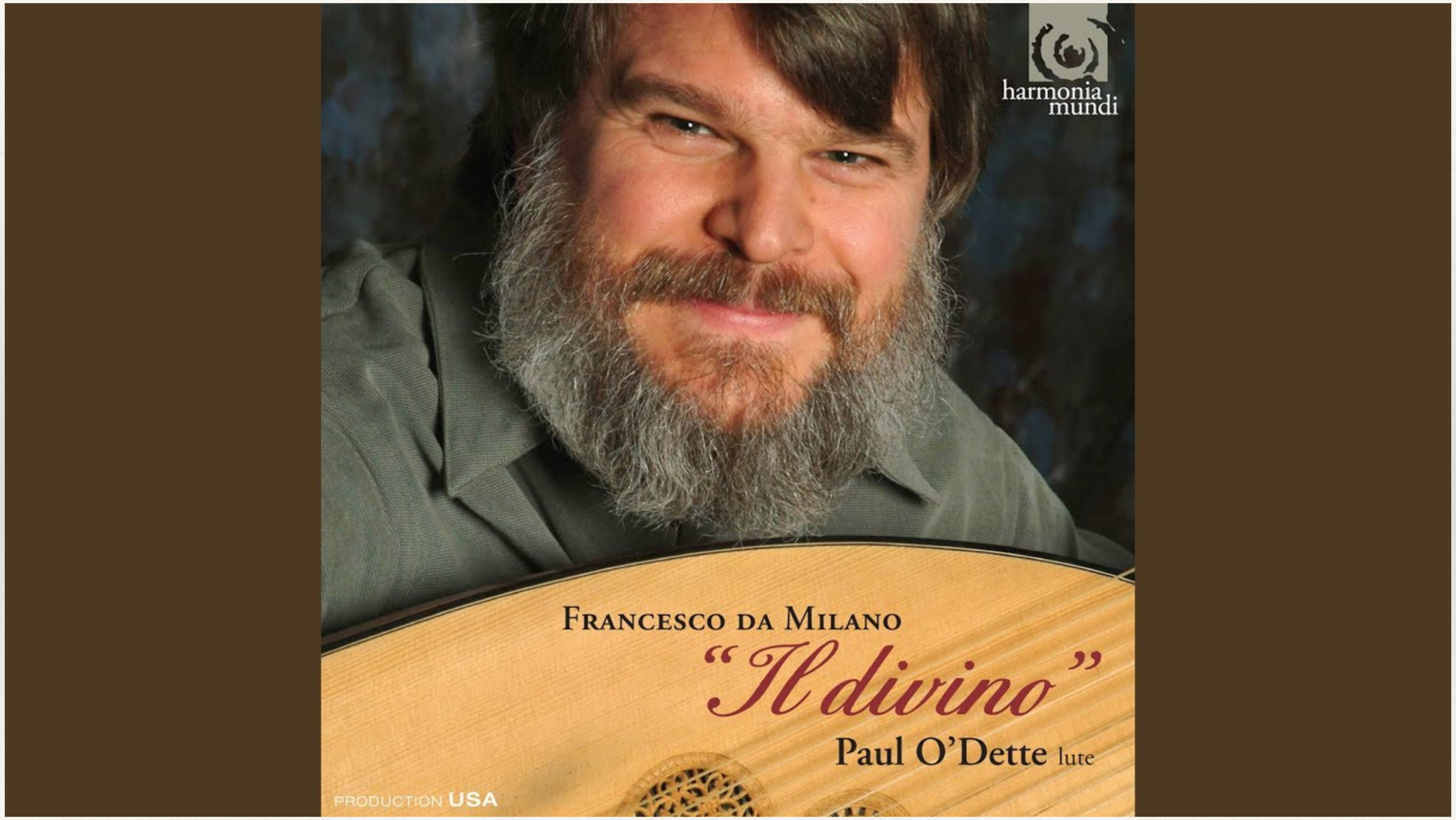
El Arte de Tañer la Fantasia

- As the vihuela scholar John Griffiths says, "The fantasia was the pinnacle of Renaissance instrumental music."
- In the first quarter of the 16th-century the ricercare and fantasia were free and spontaneous improvisations. Examples of these are by Francesco Spinacino (printed by Ottaviano Petrucci in what is probably the very first printed lute music in 1507).
  - Tastar de corde — testing the strings
- Writers like Tomás de Sancta Maria wrote an entire treatise dedicated to what he called the "arte de tañer fantasia" but the whole book is really focused not on the playing but on the composition of the fantasy through independent polyphonic lines with imitation.
- These gradually transformed during the middle of the century into a more structurally coherent polyphonic composition that mimicked complex vocal compositions like the motet.
- These more developed fantasias and ricercari anticipate the baroque fugue.

Francesco da Milano, Fantasia "La Compagna"

- Monothematic fantasia
  - Borrows theme from "Fantasia Ness 33": mi-fa-mi
  - So is often called a "parody" (like older "parody masses"—not parodies, but simply borrowing and reusing material).
- Imitative counterpoint in three voices



Fantasia (34) "La Compagna"

Paul O'Dette, lute