

## BOOK REVIEW

### **Jan W.J. Burgers. *The Lute Music Published by Pierre Phalèse 1545–c. 1575***

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**Reviewed by Casey Fitzpatrick**

In 1545, Pierre Phalèse Sr composited and published his first book of lute music *Des chansons reduictz en tablature de lut*. It was the first of twenty-two lute books that were published and later printed by Phalèse over the period 1545–75. Though five editions are now lost, the sixteen extant publications preserve a collection of 946 separate lute pieces, comprising vocal intabulations of polyphonic works, ensemble music, fantasias, preludes, and dances.

Despite the immense scale of Phalèse's corpus, the historical worth of his lute music has been underplayed in modern times. Douglas Alton Smith—the man who, quite literally, wrote the book on the lute—considered Phalèse's tablatures to be little more than mistake-riddled, pirate editions of publications from across the European continent.<sup>1</sup> Admonishment from such a heavyweight in the field undoubtedly impacted the collection's perceived historical value, and until recent years, Phalèse's lute music received only occasional scrutiny from players and scholars alike.

Jan Burgers has remedied the situation with his monumental, three-volume set of *The Lute Music Published by Pierre Phalèse 1545–c. 1575*. Burgers reveals that only 32 percent of the music in Phalèse's lute books can be traced to a concordant source, meaning two thirds, or 645 pieces, exist in Phalèse's corpus and nowhere else. Though the collection is undoubtedly centred around the transcription of Phalèse's lute music into modern tablature, the substantial research that has gone into the production of these editions cannot be denied; the appendices alone contain a body of archival and concordance research that is reminiscent, in scale and ambition, of the appendices in Julia Craig-McFeely's landmark doctoral dissertation *English Lute Manuscripts and Scribes 1530–1630* (University of Oxford, 1993).

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas Alton Smith, *A History of the Lute from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Lexington: Lute Society of America, 2002), 216.

The first volume comprises the written portion of the study, beginning with a biographical account, and an overview of Phalèse's activities as a Flemish printer, publisher, and bookseller. The structure and content of Phalèse's sixteen lute books are examined alongside the intabulation techniques, composers, and printed pedagogical instructions. Throughout the first volume, Burgers references and interprets an extensive pool of data that has been accumulated as part of the archival and transcription process. For instance, Burgers describes Phalèse as an erudite businessman, carefully monitoring the musical vogues of the time to ensure his publications reflected consumer demand. As a result, Phalèse's sixteen lute books are seen to provide chronological evidence of the comparable popularity of specific styles of lute music at specific times. Through this methodology, Burgers reveals that French intabulations were more popular than Italian, that dance forms were nearly twice as common as *fantasias*, and that the *galliard* was four times more popular than the *allemande*. He also identifies the exact publications Phalèse is likely to have owned and referenced when preparing his lute books, establishing that the majority originated in Parisian, Venetian, and Spanish publishing houses.

Volumes II and III contain Burgers's transcriptions of the sixteen lute books. Accounting for a few revised duplicates, this amounts to a colossal 983 pieces. While there is no denying the diligence and ambition of the transcriber, I found myself questioning the utility of transcribing such a vast quantity of published French lute tablature—after all, reading printed lute books is something of a luxury for those used to deciphering handwritten manuscripts. However, consultation with the original facsimiles reveals that Phalèse used a variant of the French tablature system that omitted the sixth stave line entirely. Six-course notes are instead written below the stave, with an auxiliary line through the relevant tablature cipher. Burgers also notes that Phalèse's tablatures are cramped and harder to decipher than the Parisian editions of Le Roy, Ballard and Fezandat, and because Phalèse prints the letters *on* the stave lines rather than *between* them, the letters *l* and *f* are particularly difficult to discern (p. 8). Though Phalèse claimed that his system was easier to read, a combination of the above factors had largely the opposite effect.

While Burgers's modern typesetting certainly remedies these aesthetic concerns, in my opinion, the real value of the transcriptions lies in the editing. Musical and concordance analysis has allowed Burgers to correct copious numbers of compositor errors, all of which are transparently indicated by the editor on the score, and in his extensive commentary. This allows performers to make up their own minds, and decide to what extent they agree with the original facsimile or with Burgers's editorial suggestions. The methodology for error detection and correction prioritises historical accuracy, and aims to reproduce Phalèse's tablatures faithfully, while correcting glaring errors and incongruities with known concordances in the original versions (pp. 37–40).

The collection presents performers with a diverse sampling of the lute music that was circulating Europe between 1545 and 1575, including a rare volume of lute trios by Giovanni Pacolono, and 48 lute duets by various composers. Each volume tends, formulaically, to begin with simpler pieces, and progress to more complicated polyphonic transcriptions and instrumental dances. For this reason, most volumes contain music that will satisfy beginner, intermediate, and advanced players. Composers of renown with significant representation are: Melchior Neusidler (with 46 pieces), Albert de Rippe (32), Francesco da Milano (31), Pietro Paulo Borrono (30), Simon Gintzler (24), Pietro Teghi (24), Joan Maria da Crema (22), Jean-Paul

Paladin (14), Giulio Cesare Barbetta (14), Antonio Rotta (14), Enríquez de Valderrábano (15), Pierre Attaignant (11), Guillaume Morlaye (8), and Luys de Narváez (8).

Beyond the transcriptions, Burgers's commentary, appendices, and index contain a wealth of supplementary information for lutenists and scholars. The commentary alone occupies 198 pages, and is a resource that will undoubtedly be referenced for years to come. Much of the commentary is built upon the research of John Robinson, Peter Steur, Markus Lutz, Howard Mayer Brown, and Henri Vanhulst, which Burgers has collated, supplemented, and organised into 983 notes. Where applicable—and possible—each title is annotated as follows:

- [A] 1) Number in the present edition. 2) The title as it appears in the source.
- [B] Composer(s), if known.
- [C] Location in the source.
- [D] Composer and title of the vocal model and contemporary editions of the model.
- [E] The lute exemplar from which the piece was taken.
- [F] Reprints of the piece by Phalèse in later editions.
- [G] Revised reprints of the piece by Phalèse in later editions.
- [H] Other versions of the same work or the same vocal model in Phalèse's lute books.
- [I] Occurrence of the piece in other lute books, prints as well as manuscripts.
- [J] Modern edition(s) of the piece.
- [K] The song text, and its translation into English.
- [L] Editorial commentary.

The appendices are likewise full of practical information that has been painstakingly collated and organised. Appendix A lists Phalèse's known publications for lute, cittern and guitar, with the original French and Latin titles appearing alongside English translations and manuscript descriptions. Appendix B gives word-for-word translations of the prefaces, poems, and tutorials in Phalèse's prints. Appendix C lists the known publications and pieces that Phalèse (likely) copied to form his sixteen lute books. Appendix D provides the original printed sources of the vocal models of the intabulations, and Appendix E lists the contents of Phalèse's lute books, with reference to the source facsimile pages, publications, and the corresponding transcriptions in Volumes II and III. Additionally, the index of composers and lutenists is of considerable practical utility for performers, allowing lutenists to search for a specific continental composer, browse their entire repertory (as printed by Phalèse), and follow the links to relevant pages in the transcribed editions.

Occasional typographic and grammatical mistakes were distracting—as were some of the convoluted digressions into concordance comparisons—yet these are minor reservations given the overall robustness of the research. In his closing remarks, Burgers reflects on the irony that Phalèse's practice of reprinting other people's music contributed to the poor reputation of his lute books in modern times. However, these diligent reproductions have led to the preservation of nearly 650 compositions that might otherwise have been lost. Rather than condemning his editions for inaccuracies or lack of originality, Burgers rightly asserts (p. 36) that we should be grateful to Phalèse for preserving this music for posterity.

#### **About the Author**

Casey Fitzpatrick teaches historical-performance practice, music history, and instrumental music at the University of Melbourne. In 2022, he became the first person at any Australian university to obtain a performance-based masters degree on the Renaissance lute. His current PhD research explores the music and provenance of the so-called *Cosens Lute Book*.