Renaissance *for* Guitar

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About the Author

Howard Wallach was born in Cleveland, Ohio where, at the age of ten, he began performing on both jazz and classical guitar. After studying with guitar virtuoso Miguel Rubio at the Conservatory of Lausanne, Switzerland, he completed his Bachelor of Music at the Peabody Conservatory of the Johns Hopkins University under the renowned educator Aaron Shearer. His graduate studies were undertaken at the University of Houston.

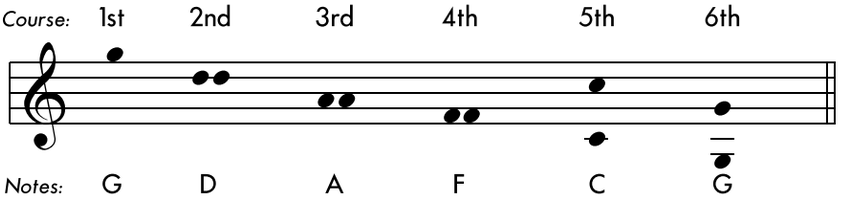
Mr. Wallach has given many solo and ensemble performances on both the guitar and lute in Switzerland, Baltimore, Houston, Washington. D.C., Cleveland and Philadelphia. Currently residing in Houston, he teaches at Houston Community College and at Lee College in Baytown, Texas.

Introduction

The Renaissance era (roughly 1400-1600) saw a flowering of the arts at a level unprecedented since the days of classical Greece, with whose humanistic ideals the artists and scholars of the time identified.

A great variety of plucked stringed instruments were in common use during this era. The four-*course* guitar (a course is a string or pair of strings), the cittern, bandora, orpharion, and the harp, were just some of these. But the most important and popular by far was the lute, for which the bulk of the music in this collections was written. The lute has the largest surviving repertoire of any instrument of the era and was used throughout Europe, with the exception of Spain. The Spanish used a guitar-shaped instrument with the same tuning as the lute called a vihuela.

The standard tuning of the Renaissance lute was as follows:



The first course was usually a single string, and the lowest basses were paired in octaves. More bass strings were added as the era progressed.

Tablature was the exclusive system of notation for all fretted instruments of the period. The French system of tablature used letters in place of numbers, while the Italian and Spanish tablatures used numbers, but with the highest sounding string represented by the lowest line. The German system assigned a different letter or number to every note on the fingerboard. It was rather cumbersome to use and was subsequently abandoned after 1594.

Lute music of the era falls into four different categories:

- Dance pieces.
- Popular song arrangements—often with variations (called *divisions* at the time).
- Arrangements or *intabulations* of ensemble vocal music—motets, chansons and madrigals.
- Abstract pieces—preludes, ricercares and canzonas which are instrumental in nature with no reference to dance or vocal music.

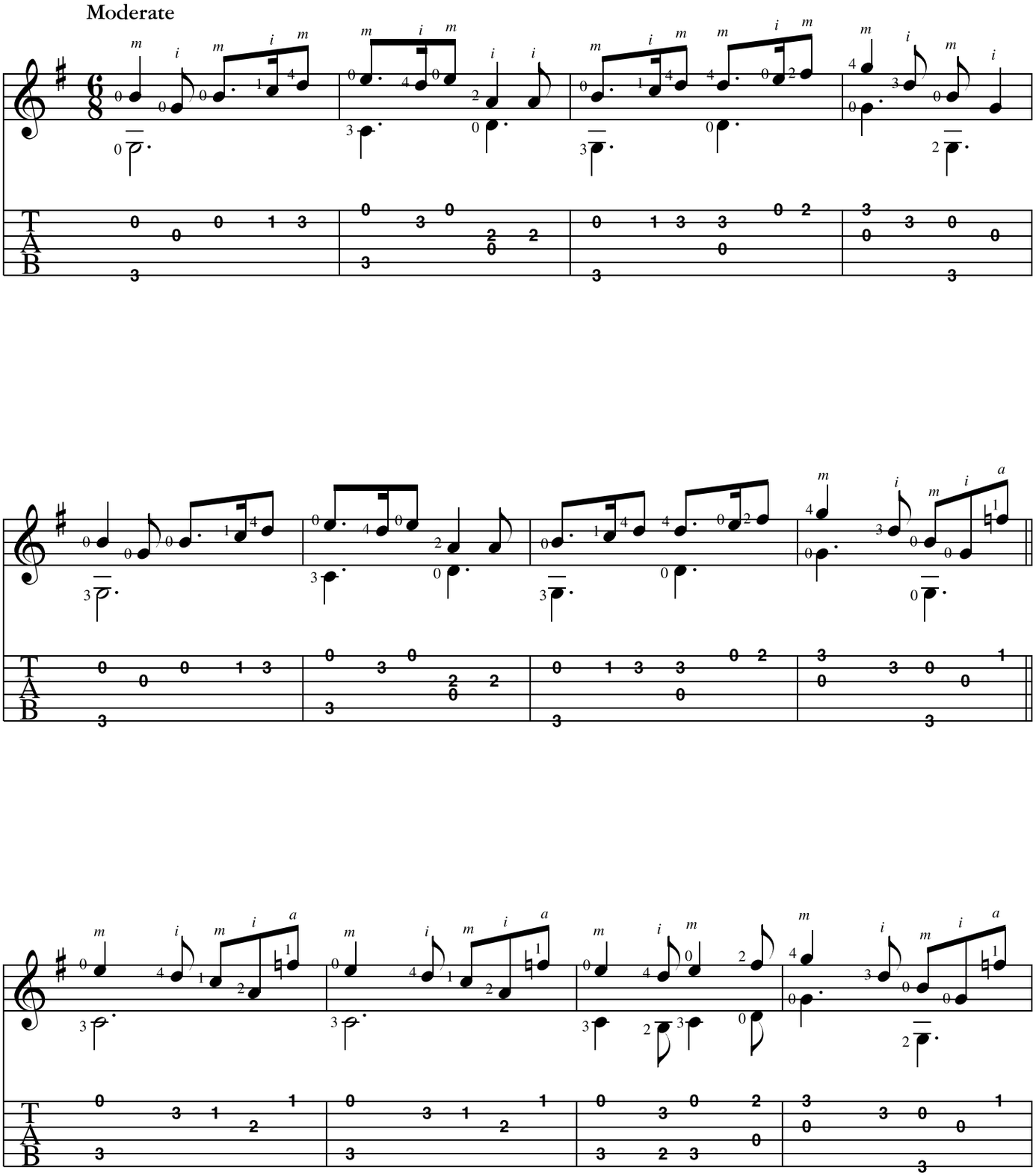
The professional musicians and composers of the time were all employed at the different courts of the nobility. Though many of their names and much information about them has come down to us, many pieces survive only in the handwritten collections of amateurs (printed music books were costly and rare) without credit to any composer.

A Toy

Anonymous (16th Century)

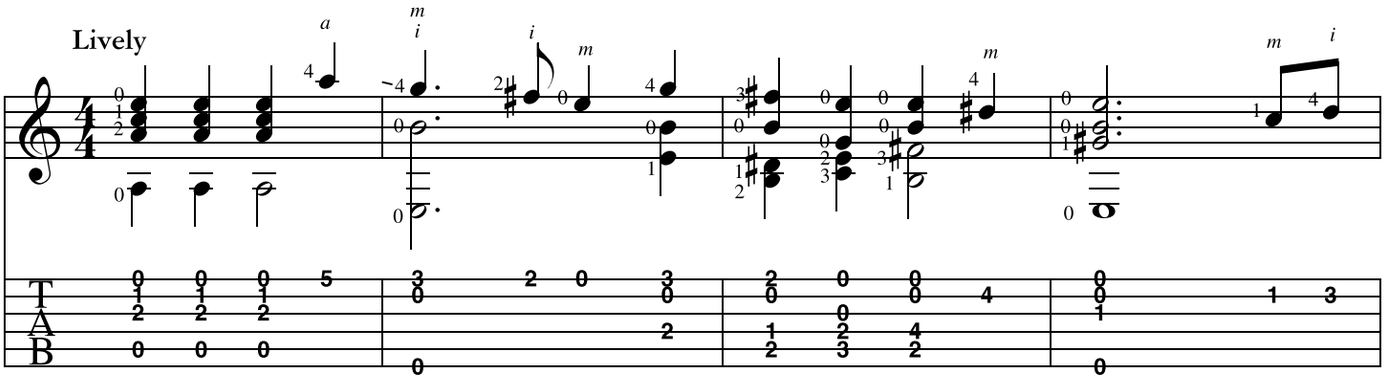
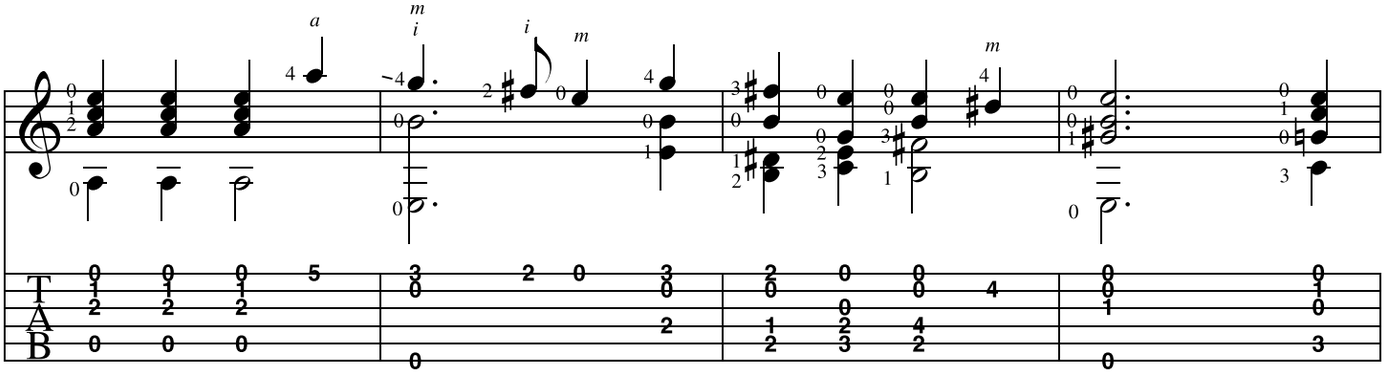
One of hundreds of anonymous lute pieces of 16th century England, this piece is from the *Jane Pickering Lute Book*, a manuscript collection of a dedicated amateur. A *toy* is a simple piece for the lute or keyboard based either on dances such as the *jig* or *alman*, or on popular tunes of the time.

Pay close attention to measures 8 - 16, as the composer alternates between using F♮ (1st fret, 1st string) and F♯ (2nd fret, 1st string).



Allemande

Anonymous (16th Century)

Though one of the most popular dances of the Baroque era (1600-1750), the allemande originated around the early or mid-16th century. The first known use of the title "allemande" was in 1521, but in Germany earlier examples of this type of dance appear as "Teutscertanz" or "Dantz."

This piece has a simple and straightforward texture and fits easily under the fingers of the left hand. Practice it slowly and carefully, so you'll be able to perform it at a brisk tempo with full control.