

The
Wire Connection By Andrew Hartig
A Brief Survey of Plucked Wire-Strung Instruments, 15th-18th Centuries

- Part Four

Wire-Strung Instruments in the 18th Century

The development of new wire-strung instruments in the 18th century took primarily two paths: the modification of already successful forms (such as modifying the body of the cittern to make the new French *cistre*), and the adding of wire strings to instruments originally strung in gut (e.g. mandolin and chitarra battente). The trends that had started in the 17th century such as chordal tunings and extended basses, became more commonplace for many of the 18th century wire-strung instruments.

One of the distinguishing marks of 18th century wire-strung instrument development is the segregation of instrument types by region when compared to previous centuries. Whereas in the 16th century one could find the 4-course diatonic cittern played throughout almost all of Europe, by the 18th century citterns existed as specific regional variants: the English guittar, French *cistre*, German *Zister*, Norwegian *sister*, Spanish *citara*, and Corsican *cetera*. On the other hand, other instruments seemed easily to transcend national bounds, as did the mandolin.

Mandolins

Mandolins had been around in all but name since at least the 15th century, essentially modified forms of the Renaissance mandore (or “mandour”) and the even earlier Medieval bowl-backed gittern. However, by the middle of the 18th century, some mandolins had been modified to accept wire strings. A 4-course variety known as the **Neopolitan mandolin** was developed in Naples in the 1740s and had a very small string length (c. 30-33cm), tuned in 5ths like a violin, *g-d'-a'-e'*, but with doubled courses. The smallest ones could have employed wire stringing throughout; the larger ones might have used a gut top-string or could have opted for a lower tuning. A 6-course version, the **Genoese mandolin**, was built in the middle of the century in Genoa and employed common guitar tuning (but an octave-higher), *e-a-d'-g'-b'-e'*, also in doubled courses. Both types feature deep bowled backs and a “canted” soundboard, in which the soundboard is actually bent backward near the bridge in order to increase the downward pressure of the strings over the low bridge.



Genoese mandolin

The mandolin was quite popular, spreading beyond Italy throughout most of Europe, where much music was published for it. For instance, around 85 volumes of original mandolin music, including tutors, were published in Paris

alone over about a 50-year period. Much of this music, in both printed and manuscript form, still exists, including around 30 concertos and above 1000 duets, trios, quartets, and sonatas. Many manuscript collections survive in France, Sweden, Austria, and Hungary.¹

Chitarra battente

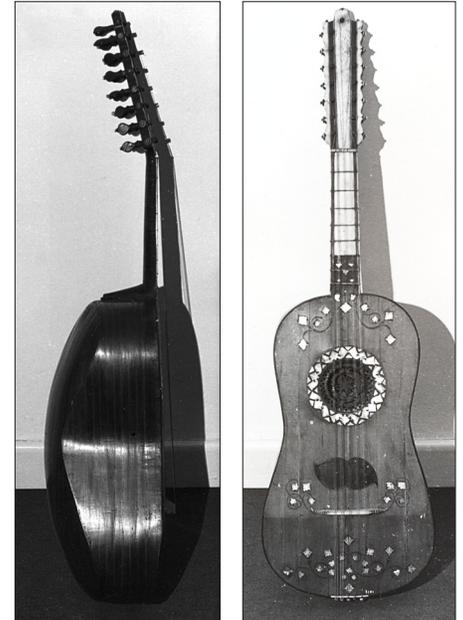
The **chitarra battente** can be found today as a folk instrument in the southern regions of Italy. Though musicologists have typically given an 18th century date for its development, new research suggests that this wire-strung guitar was in use at least as early as the first half of the 17th century,² though possibly was not used commonly until the 18th.

In structure, the chitarra battente is essentially a baroque guitar with a shorter neck (due to the wire strings) and often — though not always — a much deeper body with a vaulted back. Later models feature a “canted” soundboard like on the wire-strung mandolin. Early models may have been nothing more than guitars converted for use with wire strings.

The chitarra battente was used primarily for strummed accompaniment, as the name itself indicates (*battente* = “strummed” or “beaten”). The five courses were either double- or triple-strung, and a re-entrant tuning *a-d'-g-b-e'*, such as that on the baroque guitar, appears to have been used. With the exception of possibly one manuscript,³ no music specifically identified as being for chitarra battente has survived, presenting the modern player with the creative task of reconstructing a possible repertoire.

English guitar (guittar)

One of the best known of the 18th century plucked wire-strung instruments today (after the mandolin) is the **English guitar**



Side and front view of chitarra battente, Brussels Conservatoire, Inv. No. 3181. Photos courtesy of Peter Forrester.



Preston guitar, c.1770, NY State Historical Society in Cooperstown NY. Photo courtesy of Andrew Rutherford.

(or **guitar**), which historically went by other names, including *cittern*, *cetra*, *cetera*, and *kitara*.⁴ The guitar was created some time in the middle of the century. It shares some features with the cittern of the 16th and 17th century, but evolved to have a deeper body of uniform depth, a complete (as opposed to partial or “cutaway”) neck, and often (but not always) a cambered fingerboard. Some features new to the 18th century were the introduction of geared tuners and a “watch-key” tuning mechanism, both of which assisted in the finer tuning of strings; the addition of holes through the fingerboard for the use of a capo; and the addition to some instruments of a “key box,” which allowed the instrument to be played by depressing keys with the right hand, turning the instrument into what Longman & Broderip referred to as a “piano forte guitar”!⁵ An additional change was that the guitar was usually plucked with fingers rather than being played with a plectrum.

The guitar typically had ten strings in six courses with the top four courses doubled and the bottom two courses single, and was nominally tuned (low to high) *c-e-g-c'-e'-g'*. Though most of the surviving guitars have a sounding string-length of about 42cm, some larger examples are known (and would presumably have had a lower tuning).

There is a large number of surviving sources of music, on the order of more than 150 sources (although some of these are short). The surviving repertoire is comprised mostly of dances and songs for theater. Some pieces are simply arrangements of works extant in another form, though there are quite a few original works, as well.⁶ Arrangements exist for a varied combination of guitar solos and duets, and duets and trios with violin and other instruments.

French *cistre* or *guitthare allemande*⁷

French *cistre* or *guitthare allemande*⁷

Around the time the English guitar was developing in England, a similar instrument in both shape and size was developed in France. Publications of the time used several names, including *cistre*, *cythre*, *cytre*, and *guitthare allemande*. Structurally, many features of the standard *cistre* were the same as on the guitar, as they both shared the same tuning mechanisms, use of capo, stringing, and so forth. The main differences were in the actual tuning, the number of courses, and body shape.

Most of the tunings for the *cistre* were essentially that of the guitar's, but with the fifth course lowered a tone, nominally (low to high) *c-d-g-c'-e'-g'*. Larger instruments (50cm mensur and larger) had seven fingered courses tuned *E-A-d-e-a-c#'-e'* (a tuning essentially a minor third lower than the smaller instrument with the addition of a bass course a fourth below). Larger *cistres*



Cistre by G. Le Blond, Rouen 1773. University of Leipzig, Inv.Nr. 618. Image courtesy of Andreas Michel.

also sometimes featured a second pegbox with up to five unstopped bass strings tuned diatonically.

As for the shape, the smaller *cistre* had the same general shape as the guitar, sometimes with the addition of prominent “shoulders” or “horns” in the upper third of the body. Other body styles were also used, including an exaggerated pear shape, lute-shaped bodies evocative of the German *Lautenzister*; and flat-backed bodies evocative of carved Italian citterns of the 16th century, which had backs smaller than the fronts so that the sides sloped. On some theorboed *cistres*, we even find instances where the body extends further up the neck on the bass side than on the treble.

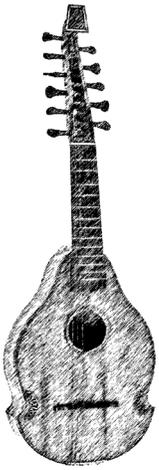
The repertoire of the *cistre* is similar to that of the guitar, including songs, dances, opera numbers, and duos. There were more than 30 collections of music and several tutors published in the last three decades of the 18th century, most of which survive today.

Norwegian *sister*

The Norwegian *sister*⁸ was invented by Åmund Hansen (1734-1812), an oboist and violin maker in Fredrikshald (what is today Halden). It can perhaps best be described as a French *cistre* with two “horns” protruding from the sides towards the tail end and two small extra soundholes close to the bridge. While the *sister* is often referred to as a hybrid between an English guitar and a Hamburger *Cithrinchen*,⁹ this is not entirely correct. Hansen had been building both *Cithrinchens à la Tielke* and French *cistres à la Le Blond*, and it's likely that he simply



Theorboed lute-bodied *cistre*, probably by Le Blond, Dunkerque, 1780. University of Leipzig, Inv.Nr. 629. Image courtesy of Andreas Michel.



Norwegian *sister*

combined the two designs for his own design. The extra soundholes may have been added at this time. The earliest known *sister* dates back to 1787 and has, like all early models, ten strings in six courses: four double courses and two single fretted basses. An 11-string variant with one more single bass first appears in 1797, though it is unclear if it was for 6 or 7 courses.

Since the Norwegian *sister* is based on the French/Flemish *cistre* with some influence from the Hamburger *Cithrinchen*, it is likely that the tunings were borrowed from these instruments as well. The fretting from the surviving instruments indicates a number of tempered patterns, some suggestive of those of the guitar and *cistre*, others of tunings unique to Norwegian music.

Since *langeleik*¹⁰ music was occasionally played on the *sister*, it's likely that those tunings were used as well.

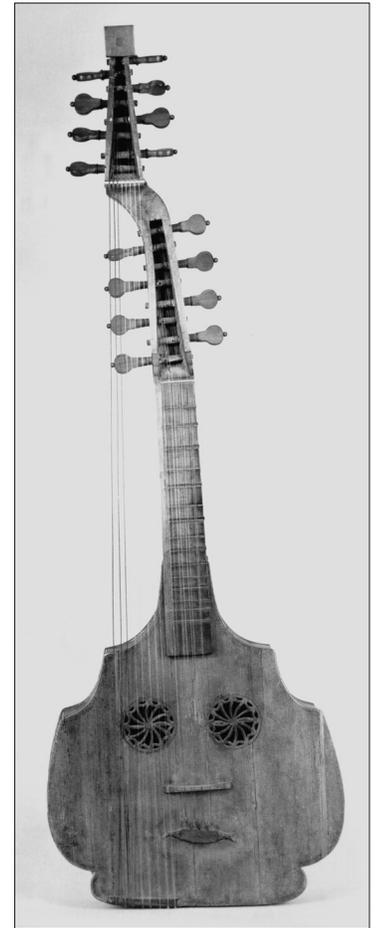
There is very little surviving music specifically identified for the *sister*. One surviving source, the *Dedekam Manuscript* (dated to 1799), contains some songs with simple *sister* accompaniments. We also know of a single printed Norwegian *sister* tutor by Lorents Nicolai Berg, published in Kristiansand in 1782, though no copies appear to survive. Other possible sources of music for modern players include the *Storm Manuscript*¹¹ and music that ordinarily would be played on the citterns of Germany, France, and England. While none of these sources specify the Norwegian *sister*, it is probably a safe bet that this music would have been played on it, since instruments were imported from all these countries into Norway.

German *Zister*, *Lautenzister*, and *Theorbenzister*

From the time of the 16th century, the cittern continued in popularity in Germany. Some citterns remained virtually unchanged

from their 16th century counterparts, such as a surviving instrument by Johannes Bochum (Cologne, 1790),¹² which retains both the tapering body depth and the diatonic fretting of two centuries before. By contrast, the **Thuringian *Zister*** had developed slightly more along the lines of the English guitar, having a constant body depth rather than tapering toward the tail. However, it did retain the partial or “cutaway” neck of the early instrument. *Zisters* varied in the number of courses, from four to six or more, sometimes with bass strings riding on a nut that overhung the bass side of the fingerboard. A number of sizes existed, and the instrument continued in popularity into the beginning of the 20th century.

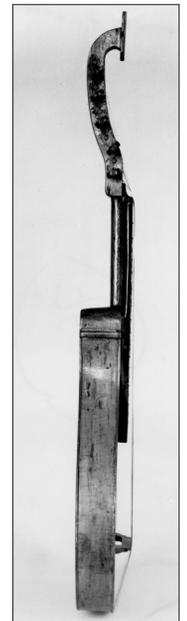
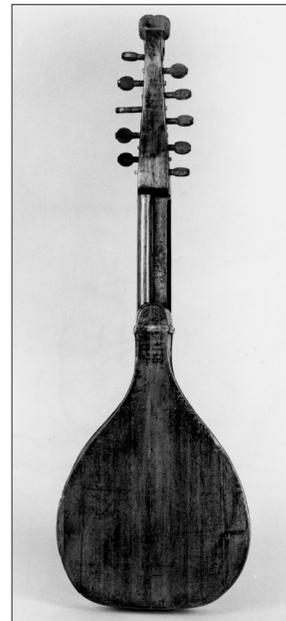
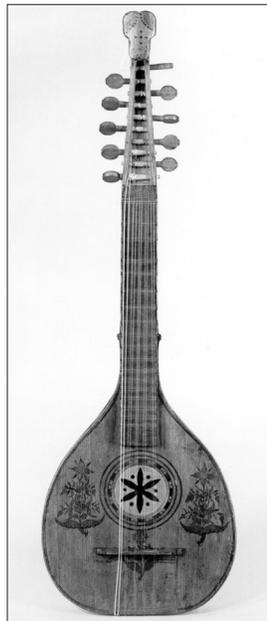
By the middle of the 18th century, we also find that a hybrid between lute and cittern — the so-called ***Lautenzister*** — had been established.¹³ These instruments are characterized by their lute-shaped bodies, with necks and peg-



Theorbzister by Johann Gottfried Klemm, Radeberg, 1755. University of Leipzig, Inv.Nr. 632. Image courtesy of Andreas Michel.



Front and side view of a *Lautenzister*, probably by Johann Goldberg, Danzig, 1760. University of Leipzig, Inv.Nr. 3358. Images courtesy of Andreas Michel.



Thuringian *Zister* by Johann Wolfgang Wolf, Crawinkel, 1798. University of Leipzig, Inv.Nr. 635. Image courtesy of Andreas Michel.

Demostracion de los Puntos comunes de la Citara.

Diapason que demuestra los Signos, que corresponden á sus cuerdas, y trastes.

Trastes 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 P.M.F.

Chord and fingerboard diagram for citara from Minguet y Yrol's *Reglas, y advertencias*, c. 1745.

boxes typical of those found on citterns of the 16th century, and six courses of strings usually attached to pins at the end of the instrument rather than directly to the bridge (as on lutes). It is likely that the tuning used on the *Lautenzister* was comparable to those used on the English guittar and the French *cistre*, though an alternate tuning possibly for *Lautenzister*, *G-c-e-g-b-e'*, can be found in the Moravian *Choralbuch*¹⁴ that currently resides in Bethlehem, PA.

In other regions, like Saxony, the *Zister* took on a different shape entirely. From the end of the 17th century, we find the *Theorbenzister* with a body outline comprised of the “horns” of the *cistre* in the top half and festooned outline in the bottom half. Its strings were arranged in four fingered courses with up to nine unstopped diapason strings going to a second pegbox. At least one manuscript for a 13-course instrument survives: an *Evangelisches Choral Buch* from 1765.¹³

Spanish citara

In 18th century Spain, the cittern (this time by the name of **citara** or *cithara*) was also used. While there is only a little bit of anecdotal and iconographical evidence of the cittern's use in Spain and Portugal in the 16th century, we do have both music and treatises that survive from the 18th century. Some physical features of the 16th century cittern were retained (such as diatonic fretting and the number of courses), but the tuning was altered. While the tuning did retain both the characteristic re-entrant intervals between the 3rd and 4th courses and the use of major seconds between the pairs of outside courses, it used a perfect fourth rather than a perfect fifth between the inner courses for a nominal tuning of (low to high) *b-a-d'-e'*.

Minguet y Yrol's *Reglas, y advertencias* (c. 1745) discusses the citara's stringing¹⁶ and fretting,¹⁷ and mentions that it was played with a plectrum. While it does not include music specifically for the citara, it does present a table of citara chords alongside Italian alfabeto for guitar — a pairing that creates the possibility of opening up a very large repertoire for modern players.¹⁸

However, one highly significant (and substantial) source of music does survive: a handwritten copy of the *Ramillite florido*, dated 1743. This manuscript appears to be either a copy of a book that was published or the manuscript version of a book that was intended to be published. In either case, the manuscript is the most significant surviving source of citara music, being comprised of 173 pieces over 458 pages in two parts: songs with accompaniment and solo dances. The manuscript presents the pieces in a combination of staff notation and tablature.¹⁹

Corsican cetera

The Corsican *cetera*, an 8-course large bodied cittern, is an interesting example of how close and yet how far we are from fully understanding early instruments. It seems to be that at some time during the 17th century, the large, diatonic Italian cittern made its way to the island of Corsica. It is not known whether it arrived in the already modified form of a deeper body and greater number of

courses or was modified after its arrival in Corsica. Iconographical evidence exists for both the Corsican *cetera* and a similar instrument on the island of Sardinia.

There is one surviving Corsican 8-course instrument (the “Merusaglia” *cetera*) that is probably from the late 17th or early 18th century, which shares many features with the earlier Italian cittern: diatonic fretting, imitation carved body, partial or “cutaway” neck, and pegs inserted into a pegblock rather than a pegbox. In addition, a neck and pegbox discovered in the early 1990s in Tavagna (the northeast end of the island) also resembles those of the earlier Italian citterns: a pegblock with sagittally inserted pegs, a “hook” at the back of the pegblock, and a partial or “cutaway” neck. Other surviving Corsican *ceteras* were discovered in the 1970s and appear to date from the late 18th or early 19th centuries. They share many of the same physical features as the Merusaglia *cetera* and Tavagna neck, though with chromatic fretting.

Direct evidence of the music played on the *cetera* in the 18th century comes from one sole surviving musical source, the *Allegrini Manuscript*, which is dated 1720. The manuscript contains a little more than twenty pieces, including dances, song accompaniments, and airs, all written in Italian tablature for eight courses and for the nominal tunings (low to high) of either *G-A-c-d-b-g-d'-e'* or *G-A-c-d-a-g-d'-e'*. Other sources mention that the *cetera* was played more or less everywhere in Corsica (but was very popular in the north), and that it was a very popular instrument played by both men and women. It was used for serenades, dances, songs, and laments, while some sources even mention it as an accompaniment for Corsican polyphonic vocal music, which today is sung (and traditionally has been sung) *a cappella*.

In a sad twist of fate, our knowledge of the later tunings of the *cetera* and the way it was played were lost only as recently as the second quarter of the 20th century. The last known *cetera* player of Corsica, Francesco Luigi Succi from the village of Cervioni, died in 1934. There are two pictures of him playing the cittern from c. 1915-1920. Following his death, there was little to no interest in the *cetera* until the 1970s. Over the four intervening decades between the death of Succi and the revival of interest in the *cetera*, all of the information about the tuning, construction, and playing technique had been lost. Today there are several makers and players trying to revive and promote the *cetera* in Corsica, but we may never come to know much more than we currently do about its use in the last four centuries.



Francescu Luigi Succi with cetera, c. 1920. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved, Association ADECEC Cervione.

Conclusion

Hopefully, this four-part survey of wire-strung instruments through four centuries has given you a glimpse of the many and varied instruments that shared the musical sphere with their gut-strung brethren. Due to space considerations, I have had to leave out some instruments and details, and it is my sincere hope that this survey will inspire others to go out and learn more. There is much more research to be done on these instruments and their repertoires. Only through the effort and hard work of musicologists, luthiers, and performers will these instruments and their music be restored to their rightful place in history, as the lute and its music have been.

Thanks to Doc Rossi for information on performance practice on the English guitar; to Frank Nordberg for information on the Norwegian cittern; and to Damien Delgrossi of the Centre de Musiques Traditionnelles de Corse for providing information and sources on the Corsican cetera. Special thanks also goes to the late James Tyler for his invaluable and generously given information on several of the 18th century wire-strung instruments and their repertoires, and to Andreas Michel for generously allowing the use of many photos of instruments from the University of Leipzig Musikinstrumenten-Museum collection.

Sources and Additional Reading

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- ◆ *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* [Available online: <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>]
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- ◆ Michel, Andreas. *Studia Instrumentorum Musicae*: <http://www.studia-instrumentorum.de> [Site in German]
- ◆ Schlegel, Andreas and Joachim Lüdtke. *The Lute in Europe 2: Lutes, Guitars, Mandolins, and Citterns*. (2011). ISBN 978-3-9523232-1-2. [Available directly from The Lute Corner: <http://www.accordsnouveaux.ch/en/BookLt/BookLt.html>]
- ◆ Segerman, Ephraim. *The Development of Western European Stringed Instruments*. [Available for purchase online: <http://www.lulu.com>]
- ◆ Walsh, Stuart. "Cythre: an introduction to the *cistre ou guitharre allemande*." <http://www.tuningsinthirds.com/cythre/instrument.html>

Notes

¹ For a complete and detailed history of the instruments, their technique, their repertoire, and the surviving sources of music, the reader is encouraged to see the very thorough article by James Tyler and Paul Sparks, "Mandolin." *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/46239>.

² See Lex Eisenhardt's "Nouve suonate de Chitarriglia Spagnuola, battute e piccato," in *Michaelsteiner Konferenzberichte 66: Gittare und Zister — Bauweise, Spieltechnik und Geschichte bis 1800*. (2005), pp.186-187.

³ The mid-18th century manuscript *I-Mc Nosedà 48A* contains parts in alfabeto for a "chitarr' a battendo."

⁴ While some have used the name to point to English origins for the instrument, this is not at all certain, since several very similar or identical instrument types were played also in Scotland, Portugal (surviving today as the *guitarra portuguesa*), and France (*cistre*). For more information on the different names and spellings used for the instrument, see Doc Rossi's article, "Citterns and Guitars in Colonial America," in *Michaelsteiner Konferenzberichte 66: Gittare und Zister — Bauweise, Spieltechnik und Geschichte bis 1800*. (2005).

⁵ For more detailed information on the workings of the keyed box, see http://www.studia-instrumentorum.de/MUSEUM/zist_tast.htm.

⁶ According to James Tyler, "The majority of material consists of anonymous arrangements of other people's songs and instrumental music, though there is plenty of original material by people like William Bates, Thomas Bolton, G. B. Gervasio, Ghillini di Asuni, Joseph Lefevre, Edward Light, G. B. Marella, G. Merchi, James Oswald, D. Ritter, J. F. Zuckert, and so on." Missing from this list are pieces by Rudolf Straube. For more information on Straube and his works, see Doc Rossi's articles "Thoughts on Geminiani, Straube, and performance practice on the baroque cittern." *Lute News* 88, December 2008, and "Lute Connections with the English Guittar." *LSA Quarterly* Volume XLV, No. 1, Spring 2010.

⁷ Although much information for this section was gleaned from both the *New Grove* and Segerman's *Development of Western European Stringed Instruments*, the interested reader is especially encouraged to visit Stuart Walsh's web pages dedicated specifically to the *cistre*, which has very detailed information on the instrument, its composers, and its music: <http://www.tuningsinthirds.com/cythere/>

⁸ Although the instrument is known today by the name *sister*, this is somewhat anachronistic; early documents refer to the instrument by the name of *zither* or *zithar*.

⁹ For more information on the *Cithrinchen*, see the third column of this series, "The Wire Connection: A Brief Survey of Plucked Wire-Strung Instruments, 15th-18th Centuries - Part Three." *LSAQ* Volume XLV, No. 2, Summer 2010.

¹⁰ The *langeleik* is a kind of dulcimer similar to the *scheitholt* or *epinette du Vosges*. For more information on these instruments, see the entry under "Scheitholt" in the second column in this series, "A Brief Survey of Plucked Wire-Strung Instruments, 15th-18th Centuries - Part Two," *LSAQ* Volume XLIV, No. 4, Winter 2009.

¹¹ For more information on the *Storm Manuscript*, see Frank Nordberg's article, "The *Storm Manuscript*: A Rare Glimpse into a Forgotten Chapter of Cittern History." *LSAQ* Volume XLV, No. 1, Spring 2010.

¹² Paris, Musée de la Musique, no. E.542. For images of Bochum's instrument, see http://cittern.theaterofmusic.com/old/bochum_542.html

¹³ In fact, the form of the *Lautenzister* may be much older than the 18th century. Although the entire body of it is not shown, it appears that the 6-course cittern on the title page of Sixtus Kargel's *Toppel Cythar* of 1575 may depict a cittern with a lute-shaped body. (Only the pegbox through the

end of the fingerboard — including the upper part of the body — is shown.) Also, the painting "The Lute Player" (1662) by Cornelius Bega, currently in the Gemaldegalerie, Dresden, shows a cittern with a lute-shaped body.

¹⁴ Manuscript BMB 4. The *Choralbuch*, currently in the possession of the Moravian Archives, belonged to Johann Andreas Huebner, who was principal of the Moravian Female Seminary in Bethlehem from 1785 to 1790. An extant instrument by Philip Christian Bader (1715-1797), possibly associated with the *Choralbuch*, is kept in Nazareth, PA. For more information, see "Lautenzisters, Moravians, and the Moravian Choralbuch," by Andrew Rutherford in the *LSA Quarterly* Volume XLV, No. 1, Spring 2010. The complete manuscript can be found on-line at <http://www.cittern.theaterofmusic.com/musicfiles/>.

¹⁵ Poland: Krakow, Biblioteka Jagiellonska, Mus. Ms. 40145.

¹⁶ In contrast to earlier citterns, Minguet states that the stringing of the first and second courses should be in "white" wire (i.e. iron or steel), with the remainder in brass. Octave stringing is not mentioned.

¹⁷ The fretboard diagram in Minguet is probably incorrect. If one reads the diagram as presented, it would suggest that all of the partial frets that fill in the chromatic notes would go beneath the lowest strings, not the highest ones. The enharmonics shown for certain fret positions suggest equal temperament.

¹⁸ My thanks to Peter Forrester for pointing out and suggesting this.

¹⁹ For a complete description of the manuscript and a listing of its contents, see Lothar Siemens Hernandez, "Fuentes bibliograficas para el estudio de la citara y su repertorio en Espana (siglos XVIII-XIX)." *Miscelanea en honor al Prof. Dr. Jose Lopez-Calo, S.J., en su 65 cumpleaños*. Vol. II. Santiago de Compostela, Universidad de Santiago de Compostela (1990).



(continued from page 6)

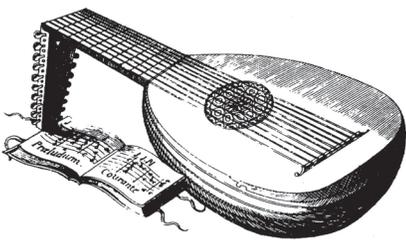
Lute Society Workshop West

The Vancouver Early Music Festival will be hosting the Lute Workshop West again this year from Monday, August 1 through Friday, August 5. The Faculty will include: **Robert Barto**, **Sylvain Bergeron**, **Pat O'Brien**, and **Stephen Stubbs**. **Grant Tomlinson** will be conducting classes in lute construction and maintenance and **Travis Carey** will be the "Lute Doctor" to take care of all your adjustment and repair needs. **Michael Miranda** is the Workshop Coordinator for the LSA.

Classes will cover lute technique, solos and duets, Continuo and accompaniment, lute construction and lute maintenance. There will also be masterclasses, lectures and special presentations. For complete information and registration, please visit the web site at: <http://www.earlymusic.bc.ca/W-LUT-0.html> ❀

Lute Society Seminar East

The Lute Society Summer Seminar at the Amherst Early Music Festival will take place the week of July 17 - 24 at Connecticut College in New London, Ct. The focus of the event this year will be Sacred music of 16th century Iberia. Instructors include: **Nigel North**, **Grant Herreid**, **Doug Freundlich**, and **Chirs Morongiello**. For information about the program, please contact: Amherst Early Music Inc. PO Box 229, Arlington, MA 02476, USA tel: ++1 781 488 3337 email: info@amherstearlymusic.org Details can be found on the web site at: www.amherstearlymusic.org ❀



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