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REVIEWS

David Dolata, *Meantone Temperaments on Lutes and Viols* (Indiana University Press, 2016).

The declared purpose of this book is to be a complete practical guide for fretted instrument players who wish to explore the use of meantone temperaments. That in itself fills a gap,¹ but the book is much more than this. Over its course Dolata explores the history and theory of temperament on fretted instruments as well as the other factors affecting the tuning of lutes and viols. In addition, he offers many useful practical insights on how to tune better regardless of the tuning scheme used.

In Part One he reviews a wide variety of historical and secondary sources to clarify which temperaments were theoretically understood and which were actually used in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries on renaissance lutes and on viols. He follows this with analyses of surviving fixed-fret instruments and of iconography. The conclusions can only be tentative given the ambiguity of much of the evidence, but it seems clear that a kind of meantone temperament was used by some musicians, as was equal temperament by others. There is evidence for what he calls 'compromise' frettings where one or more frets was placed somewhere between the sharp and flat positions, with other frets placed in a meantone configuration. For players, he suggests, tuning was a practical affair to get the sound they wanted and not just an exercise in ratios and proportion. Mark Lindley agrees with this point,² although he argues that equal temperament was the overwhelming standard from the mid-sixteenth century onwards. It is therefore difficult to re-create historical practice as, from our perspective of ubiquitous equal temperament, we cannot know what intervals were considered acceptable. This is a complex and poorly documented area of musical history, where even the theoreticians at the time fell into confusion and error. But in this period the theory certainly existed to justify and construct a variety of temperaments including meantone, Pythagorean and equal. Meantone temperaments were typically used on keyboards, and playing with a keyboard would require the lute or viol player to tune similarly. Dolata concludes that amateurs probably used equal temperament, or something close to it, some advanced players used compromise systems and professionals used a purer form of meantone, especially with keyboards. All three approaches were certainly used and from our perspective it is hard to say definitively how much and by whom.

Part Two goes into the theory of temperament in enough detail for the diligent reader to gain a good understanding of the key issues, and to understand that on fretted instruments there can be no simple implementation of standard meantone. He works from first principles, which is easier for the uninitiated than, for instance, Lindley, who presupposes greater initial familiarity with the theoretical concepts. He starts by discussing pure intervals and demonstrates how they cannot be added to make integral octaves,

hence the Pythagorean and syntonic commas and the need for two different semitones, which is what makes life especially difficult for fretted instruments. He then explains how the theory is applied in tuning systems to remove the discrepancy of the comma in various ways. For meantone, this involves reducing each fifth by up to a quarter of the syntonic comma and dumping the sum, minus the Pythagorean comma, in the 'wolf' fifth, normally between either G sharp and E flat or D sharp and A flat. He analyses the different forms of meantone and the later irregular³ temperaments based on meantone such as Werckmeister III and Vallotti and contrasts them with Pythagorean and equal temperament. The reader is encouraged to construct his own Cents Charts for each temperament to ensure that the principles are fully understood. Dolata is particularly good at explaining the various compromises between the systems and which intervals and triads are particularly pure or troublesome in each. Standard meantone temperaments cross over at the 'wolf' and so do not allow both G sharp and A flat, or D sharp and E flat, for example. On the lute, the fact that a fret covers a number of strings causes difficulties, most noticeably on the first fret where, for instance, both B flat and F sharp are often needed, but the fret can only be in one of either the sharp or flat positions. This feature of fretted instruments brings a benefit too, in that a meantone temperament can be extended by placing E flat and D sharp, for example, on different frets. In Part Three he deals with ways to minimise any problems and make meantone usable. A useful additional feature of the book is a website,⁴ accessible to all, that gives illustrations of intervals, progressions and even entire pieces in different temperaments. Particularly interesting is a set of four versions of 'Tarleton's Riserrectione' in 1/4 comma, 1/6 comma and 1/8 comma meantone as well as in equal temperament. For Dolata, choice of temperament is a compromise based on the key and the level of chromaticism of a piece. The least dissonance overall is to be found in 1/4 comma meantone in the key range of three sharps to two flats (in the major) and A minor to G minor. These keys cover a very large part of the renaissance lute music repertoire, although for the more chromatic music he uses 1/6 or 1/8 comma meantone, or even equal temperament. He concludes: 'For day-to-day use, I think that 1/6 comma meantone temperament provides the best balance between beauty and pragmatism.'

Part Three applies this knowledge to the practice of tuning. After a discussion of the physical factors affecting tuning, with much useful advice, there comes perhaps the most important part of the book, entitled 'The Zen of Tuning'. This is where he explains how to use meantone in practice including overcoming the problem of sharps and flats on the same fret using slanted frets, split frets, *tastini*, pulling the string and so on. Clearly, the impact of temperament will vary according to the intervals between the strings, and up to this point the book has concentrated on renaissance tuning on the lute, viol and theorbo. There follows a short discussion of the baroque lute, and it is clear that this repertoire would repay further study. Baroque tuning arose in the 1630s as one of the *accords nouveaux* based on triads in the upper strings. This fact and the extremely

restricted key range of the *accords nouveaux* repertoire,⁵ suggests that at the time these tunings emerged, pure intervals were prized for their resonance, which probably rules out equal temperament. But as the baroque tuning took hold the usable range quickly expanded to keys from F sharp minor, the ‘*Ton de la chèvre*’ round to F minor⁶. Even Weiss kept within the range of three sharps to three flats, except for a few pieces in F minor and the two Tombeaux. This suggests use of a temperament that makes just these keys usable, but Dolata does not make a definitive judgement.

For the practical aspects of fretting and tuning Dolata strongly recommends the use of electronic tuners. He believes that these render other ways of tuning and setting frets obsolete and helpfully shows how to program any temperament from a Cents Chart into the leading iPhone/iPad and Android app, Cleartune.

There follows a section on continuo and ways of overcoming, at least partly, the problems of playing with keyboards set in meantone or irregular temperaments. The book concludes with a section on the special characteristics and requirements of viols. Dolata’s style is conversational, which on the one hand makes a very dry subject readable but on the other leads to some repetition. His somewhat didactic style is perhaps more suited to a learning environment than to the working musician (‘By now you have seen . . .’, ‘You are now well familiar with . . .’). But it is much to be preferred to the tables of ratios and dry mathematics of some other books on the subject. He is also refreshingly unpartisan and balanced in his review of the historical material and the options available to today’s musicians.

This is a most stimulating book and one which every serious lutenist should read and understand. While Dolata may not persuade us that all or even most professional lutenists used meantone he makes a strong case that some did, and that equal temperament, while understood and widely used, was avoided by the most fastidious. He gives the reader the means to understand the issues and lots of practical advice on going beyond equal temperament towards better sound.

JOHN REEVE

1 Other short discussions of meantone temperament applied to lutes can be found in: Mark Lindley, *Lutes Viols & Temperaments* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 43–66; Chris Coakley, ‘Tuning Temperaments for Lutes’, *Fellowship of Makers and Researchers of Historical Instruments Quarterly* 109 (2008); Andrea Damiani, *Method for the Renaissance Lute* (Bologna, 1999), pp. 190–2; Eugen Dombois, ‘Varieties of Meantone Temperament Realized on the Lute’, *Journal of the Lute Society of America* vii (1974); Ephraim Segerman, ‘A Note on Meantone Temperaments’, *Fellowship of Makers and Researchers of Historical Instruments Quarterly* 31, (1983); Martin Shepherd, ‘The Well-Tempered Lute’, *Lute News*, 41 (March 1997); Claudio di Veroli, *Unequal Temperaments: History, Theory and Practice*, 4th edn. (Bray, Ireland, 2017) especially pp. 60–79, 96–8 and 309–23 (eBook from Lulu.com).

2 Lindley, p.19

- 3 Irregular temperaments are those where not all fifths (ignoring the ‘wolf’) are equal.
- 4 http://www.iupress.indiana.edu/product_info.php?products_id=807988 ‘Related Links’ tab.
- 5 For each of the two main tunings, the ‘Flat’ and ‘Sharp’, 72% and 84% respectively of all known pieces are in just two keys.
- 6 See for instance ‘The Loss of the Golden Rose Lute’, an allemande in F minor, attributed to Ennemond Gaultier in the Burwell Lute Tutor and so presumably written before 1650.

Esaias Reusner (1636-1679), *Neue Lauten-Früchte* (Berlin, 1676), eds. A. W. Swoboda and J-D. Forget, Lute and Theorbo Music Collection, LLDE0011, General Editor Miguel Yisrael (Paris: Éditions le Luth Doré Urtext, 2015). French tablature for eleven-course D-minor lute with occasional scordature; introductory text in English and German; 13 pages of text and 88 pages of music, in portrait format.

The music of Reusner the Younger is less well-known to the lute world than that of the luthistes, and S. L. Weiss. How this has come to pass is a matter for conjecture but this apparent neglect is not the consequence of a lack of musical quality. True, the allemande–courante–sarabande–gigue sequence which found form as the classical suite of subsequent times was first known in Reusner’s music, but Reusner’s powers of invention overshadow this mere historical fact. Anything which expands knowledge of him is welcome and, without doubt, a clear and well-presented publication of one of his major works contributes to this goal. That said, it must be noted that a facsimile of the source used for the edition in question (D-LEM II.2.47) is available at a lower cost than this publication from Tree Edition, and Reusner’s own copy of the work, which is annotated with additional compositions, survives as D-B Mus. MS 18389, and was formerly available in a facsimile published in East Germany. Using this latter source for the new edition might have been preferable since the one chosen adds comparatively little to music currently available and the facsimiles may already be in the collections of players interested in music for the D-minor lute.

In the general description of the series, the publisher outlines the following aims of Le Luth Doré Urtext Editions, and the main features are stated as: ‘superb and aesthetically pleasing music engraving, optimized for practical use (page turns, fingerings); books originally in Italian tablature are published in both Italian and French tablature; high-quality and durable (cover, paper, binding); both original and modern prefaces, documentation of corrections made and explanatory footnotes in English, French, German etc.’

The above laudable aims are, in the main, achieved and the book, like all of those in the series known to me, is beautifully presented and, in my view, the equal of any lute publication currently available. It is far from clear, however, why these publications