

Zeitschrift: Basler Jahrbuch für historische Musikpraxis : eine Veröffentlichung der Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, Lehr- und Forschungsinstitut für Alte Musik an der Musik-Akademie der Stadt Basel

Herausgeber: Schola Cantorum Basiliensis

Band: 29 (2005)

Artikel: What did violin consorts play in the early sixteenth century?

Autor: Holman, Peter

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-869036>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 14.02.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

WHAT DID VIOLIN CONSORTS PLAY IN THE EARLY SIXTEENTH CENTURY?¹

by Peter Holman

Traditional histories recognise that the violin was invented at some point in the early sixteenth century, but are rather stumped by the question: what did it play? The problem, of course, is that there is hardly any sixteenth-century music that specifies the violin, but that is because particular voices or instruments were virtually never specified before the late sixteenth century. Composers only began to call for specific instruments when they began to write in idioms that favoured one type rather than another, and that only happened around 1600. The odd exception, such as the five part-pieces printed in the text of the *Balet comique de la Royne* (Paris 1582), proves the rule.² There is nothing intrinsically violinistic about them, and they are only hailed as „the earliest printed violin music“ because the accompanying text happens to mention that they were played on violins in the original performance.³ Nor is there anything exceptional about the four-part „Pavanne des dieux“ in Claude Gervaise's *Sixième livre de dancieries* (Paris 1555), which has the note „Qui est fait bonne pour les violins“ added in manuscript to the contratenor part of the only surviving copy.⁴ In short, we are not going to identify the violin's early repertoire by looking for pieces that specify the instrument, or by trying to formulate a set of criteria to identify „violinistic“ pieces in the consort repertory.

However, the violin had a more clearly defined role in sixteenth-century musical life than most instruments. From the first it was strongly associated with dance music. To understand how and why this came about we need to understand some of the changes that instruments and instrumental music underwent at the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries. I believe that an understanding of these changes can also help us to understand why the violin was invented, and can help us to pinpoint more accurately than in the past where and when this happened.

¹ Many of the ideas in this paper have been developed from the first chapter of my book *Four and twenty fiddlers: the violin at the English court, 1540–1690*, Oxford 1995, 1–31.

² Howard Mayer Brown, *Instrumental music printed before 1600, a bibliography*, Cambridge MA 1965, 1582³. English translation by Carol and Lander MacClintock, *Le Ballet comique de la Royne, 1581* [Rome] 1971 (= Musicological Sources and Documents 25).

³ David Boyden, *The history of violin playing from its origins to 1761 and its relationship to the violin and violin music*, London 1965, 55–56.

⁴ Modern edition in Claude Gervaise, *Sixième livre de dancieries 1555*, ed. Bernard Thomas, London, 1972 (= The Attaignant Dance Prints, 6), no. 2. See also Daniel Heartz, *Pierre Attaignant, royal printer of music*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1969, 372–373; Brown, *Instrumental music printed before 1600*, 1555⁵. Brown reads the phrase as „qui est fort bonne pour les violons“.

In the fifteenth century courtly dance music was typically played by a loud wind ensemble, the *alta capella*.⁵ Pictures repeatedly show a three- or four-man group consisting of one or two shawms, a bombard or tenor shawm, and a slide trumpet. This was an improvising ensemble in which the bombard played a slow-moving *cantus firmus*, each note of which corresponded to a step of the dance. Around it the shawm and slide trumpet wove stereotyped florid counterpoint. The *alta capella* embodied an idea that was to have far-reaching consequences for European music. It was the first instrumental ensemble that embodied what we might call the „consort principle“. That is, it had two instruments of different sizes, the shawm and the bombard. A set or consort of instruments of different sizes, its three or four sizes pitched a fourth or fifth apart, mimics a polyphonic vocal consort – which in turn exploits the natural differences in pitch between adult males and children or women, and between high and low voices within these categories.

It needs to be emphasized that the consort instruments we are familiar with from the sixteenth century – flutes, recorders, crumhorns, viols and so on – were not always made in sets of several sizes. Mediaeval pictures show instruments of all shapes and sizes, but there is no sign of structured sets, and the fact that instruments with built-in drones such as the bagpipe and the hurdy-gurdy, or resonant instruments with no dampers such as the dulcimer or the clavictherium, played a prominent part in courtly musical life is powerful evidence that instrumentalists were part of an essentially monophonic musical culture. Things began to change in the middle of the fourteenth century, when the tenor-size bombard was developed – the word is first recorded in a musical context in 1342.⁶ However, until the end of the fifteenth century the consort principle was apparently confined to wind instruments.

Bowed stringed instruments seem to have made the transition from monophony to polyphony in several stages over a considerable period. There is no doubt that until the middle of the fifteenth century they were essentially monophonic instruments. They are shown in pictures with flat bridges or no bridge at all. They commonly have large unwieldy bows, not well suited for choosing one string rather than another, and the known tunings for vielles seem intended for the playing of drone-accompanied melodies rather than single polyphonic lines.⁷ Even as late as the sixteenth century there are a remarkable number of pictures of flat-bridged or bridgeless bowed instruments, and in his

⁵ For the *alta capella*, see especially Edmund A. Bowles, „Iconography as a tool for examining the loud consort in the fifteenth century“, *JAMIS* 3 (1977) 100–113; Lorenz Welker, „Alta Capella“. Zur Ensemblepraxis der Blasinstrumente im 15. Jahrhundert“, *BJbHM* 7 (1983) 119–165; Keith Polk, *German instrumental music of the late Middle Ages: players, patrons and performance practice*, Cambridge 1992, 50–86; Keith McGowan, „The prince and the piper: Haut, Bas and the whole body in early modern Europe“, *Early Music* 27 (1999) 211–232.

⁶ Herbert W. Myers, „Slide trumpet madness: fact or fiction?“, *Early Music* 17 (1989) 383–389, at 383–384.

⁷ For the vielle and its tunings, see in particular Christopher Page, *Voices and instruments of the Middle Ages: instrumental practice and songs in France 1100–1300*, London 1987, 111–133.

Istitutioni harmonici of 1558 Zarlino mentioned early types of stringed instruments with strings tuned „in octaves, fifths and fourths“ which produced a continuous sound, „without a pause when they were being played“, with the melody played on the higher strings.⁸ This began to change in the middle of the fifteenth century when it became fashionable to play decorated versions of polyphonic chansons on pairs of soft instruments such as lutes or vielles.⁹ On bowed instruments this must have involved the development of a bridge of the modern curved type, which enables any string to be played on without sounding the others.

At this stage there was no need for bowed instruments in more than one size. That came when bowed instruments were required to play the sort of secular polyphony that was beginning to be written around 1500, with overall ranges of nearly three octaves. It is generally accepted that the viol was the first bowed instrument to be developed as a consort in several sizes. This seems to have happened in shortly before 1495 when Isabella d'Este (1474–1539), wife of Francesco Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua, ordered three „viole“ for the Mantuan court from an unnamed maker in Brescia.¹⁰ It is clear from subsequent correspondence that these *virole* were bowed rather than plucked and were made in two sizes. The viol seems to have been chosen to be converted into a consort instrument because it was much larger than the other main types of bowed instrument, the alto-range vielle or the soprano-range rebec, and therefore could easily be developed in sizes that could play the lowest parts of vocal polyphony.

This is because it was based on the single-size Valencian viol, which was essentially a bowed guitar with a guitar-like neck and a long string length. Ian Woodfield proposed that this Iberian instrument was brought to Italy as the result of the migration of Catalans to Rome in the wake of election of Rodrigo Borgia as Pope Alexander VI in 1492.¹¹ However, the fact that many early viol players in northern Europe have been shown to be Jews from northern Italy suggests that another catalyst was Ferdinand and Isabella's expulsion of the

⁸ Renato Meucci, „Early evidence of the viola da gamba in Italy“, in: Susan Orlando (ed.), *The Italian viola da gamba: proceedings of the international symposium on the Italian viola da gamba, Magnano, Italy, 29 April-1 May 2000*, Solignac and Turin 2002, 17–34, at 20, 22.

⁹ For pairs of soft instruments, see in particular Laurence Wright, „The mediaeval gittern and citole: a case of mistaken identity“, *GSJ* 30 (1977) 8–42; Howard Mayer Brown, „St. Augustine, Lady Music, and the gittern in fourteenth-century Italy“, *MD* 38 (1984) 25–65; Timothy J. McGee, „Instruments and the Faenza Codex“, *Early Music* 14 (1986) 480–490; Keith Polk, „Voices and Instruments: Soloists and Ensembles in the Fifteenth Century“, *Early Music* 18 (1990) 179–198; id., *German instrumental music*, 22–39.

¹⁰ William Prizer, „Isabella d'Este and Lorenzo da Pavia, „master instrument maker“, *EMH* 2 (1982) 87–127, at 102–104. Rodolfo Baroncini has found documentary evidence of a „Maestro de la viole“ active in Brescia from 1495, see his paper in this volume, 43. See also Clifford M. Brown, *Isabella d'Este and Lorenzo da Pavia: documents for the history of art and culture in Renaissance Mantua*, Geneva, 1982; Louise Jameson, *Isabella d'Este as a Patron of Music* [York], 2002.

¹¹ Ian Woodfield, *The early history of the viol*, Cambridge 1984, 80–98.

Jews from Spain in 1492.¹² The first Brescian viols seem to have been made in tenor and bass sizes, as in the two apparently Brescian instruments shown in Lorenzo Costa's 1497 altar-piece for the church of St Giovanni in Monte in Bologna; like some surviving Brescian instruments, they have only two corners, with the lower part of the body larger than the upper part.¹³ Another picture, by the Ferrarese artist Garofalo, shows a pair of instruments also with the Brescian two-cornered shape.¹⁴ However a document of 1499 tells us that a third size, presumably a treble, had been developed by 1499, and also that viol making had begun in Venice. While in Venice in that year Alfonso d'Este (1476–1534), Isabella's brother and the future Duke of Ferrara, reportedly wanted to order a set of five Venetian *viole d'archo*, „made in all the possible sizes [*modi*] in the world“.¹⁵ By 1501, when Alfonso married Lucrezia Borgia, the Ferrara court could muster „una musica di sei viole“.¹⁶

There were several reasons why Isabella d'Este would have concerned herself with the creation of the viol consort. In the 1490s a repertory of serious instrumental music based on French and Flemish chansons was developing in northern Italy, attracting composers of the calibre of Josquin and Heinrich Isaac. This repertory of what we might call „songs without words“ was not very suitable for the established groups of loud wind instruments, for it came at the moment of transition between the old *alta capella*, with three shawms and trombone, to more modern groups with two shawms and two trombones.¹⁷ Also, the ranges of the parts were often too wide. A Ferrara manuscript of the repertory, the Casanatense Chansonier, seemingly compiled for the Ferrara court wind players, has the ranges of some of the pieces narrowed, apparently to fit their instruments.¹⁸ In humanist circles, where we might expect such serious music to be appreciated, wind instruments were regarded as inferior to strings, following the authority of classical authors such as Plato and Aristotle, and the example of myths that feature Apollo and his lyre triumphing over the pipe-players Pan and Marsyas.¹⁹

Furthermore, wind instruments, with their indecorous warlike and phallic associations, were considered doubly unsuitable for court ladies. By tradition

¹² For Jewish string players in northern Europe, see Roger Prior, „Jewish musicians at the Tudor court“, *MQ* 69 (1983) 253–265; Holman, *Four and twenty fiddlers*, 81–87, 104–108.

¹³ Reproduced, for instance, in Woodfield, *The early history of the viol*, 88. For Brescian instruments, see Laurence C. Witten II, „Apollo, Orpheus and David: a study of the crucial century in the development of bowed strings in North Italy 1480–1580, as seen in graphic evidence and some surviving instruments“, *JAMIS* 1 (1975) 5–55, at 19–28.

¹⁴ Reproduced in Woodfield, *The early history of the viol*, 92.

¹⁵ Prizer, „Isabella d'Este“, 104.

¹⁶ Woodfield, *The early history of the viol*, 87, 89.

¹⁷ See the paper by Adam Gilbert in this volume, 109–123.

¹⁸ Lewis Lockwood, *Music in Renaissance Ferrara 1400–1505*, Oxford 1984, 142–143, 224–226, 266–272. See also Arthur S. Wolff, „The Chansonier Biblioteca Casanatense 2856: its history, purpose and music“, Ph. D. diss., North Texas State University 1970; Johannes Martini, *Secular Pieces*, ed. Edward G. Evans jr., Madison WI 1975 (= Recent Researches in the Music of the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance, 1).

¹⁹ For an extended discussion of this point, see Prizer, „Isabella d'Este“, 112–116.

the chief musical symbol of manly magnificence, a band of *haut* instruments, did not form part of their households. Instead, they tended to patronize *bas* ensembles such as lute-duet teams.²⁰ It is not surprising, therefore, that Isabella d'Este, the greatest female patron of music of her time, should have gone to some lengths to promote stringed instruments at the expense of winds in her Mantuan circle. She commissioned a cycle of seven allegorical paintings for her *studiolo* in which stringed instruments are consistently associated with virtue, spiritual love and harmony, while wind instruments are associated with vice, sensual love, and strife.²¹ On one occasion she even rejected the offer of a bone recorder from her favorite instrument-maker, Lorenzo da Pavia.²²

We can now begin to understand why the violin came into existence in northern Italy shortly after 1500. If the viol was developed in Isabella d'Este's circle so that „noble“ strings could replace „ignoble“ winds in contrapuntal consort music, then it seems likely that the violin was developed so that it could replace wind instruments on the dance floor. More has been written about the origin of the violin than any other instrument, but one aspect has been all but ignored: it was the first bowed instrument to be made from the first as a consort instrument in three sizes. The process paralleled the development of the viol consort in that two new sizes were extrapolated from an existing single-size instrument. Since the model was the alto-range *vielle*, smaller than the Spanish viol and played on the shoulder, the violin family as a whole was smaller and livelier in articulation than the viol consort. The violin and the viol were initially distinguished either by adding the phrases *da braccio* and *da gamba* or by qualifying the root word *viola* with diminutives and augmentatives. Thus violins were often referred to as *violette* and *violini*, while viols were called *violoni*. I should emphasise that these words applied to violins and viols as families, irrespective of the size of particular instruments. *Violino* did not come to mean a soprano violin, or *violone* some sort of bass instrument, until much later.

The evidence, such as it is, suggests that the impetus for the creation of the violin consort came from Ferrara rather than Mantua. On 20 December 1511 „maestro Sebastian da Verona“ was paid to look for timber for making „violette“ for the Ferrara court, and for repairing its „viole e violoni“. ²³ We cannot be sure that these *violette* were violins, but it is likely in view of the fact that they are juxtaposed with *viole* and *violoni* – which may have been plucked instruments and viols respectively. There is a clearer case in a Ferrara court inventory of the same year, which, under the generic heading of „Viole“, lists „Una viola, zoè un basso“, „Una viola, zoè un tenore“ and „Viole da gamba,

²⁰ William Prizer, „North Italian courts“, in: Iain Fenlon (ed.), *The Renaissance: from the 1470s to the end of the sixteenth century*, London 1989 (= *Man & Music*, 2), 144–147; Polk, „Voices and Instruments“, 180, 188.

²¹ Prizer, „Isabella d'Este“, 115–116.

²² *Ibid.*, 113.

²³ Modena, Archivio di Stato, Libri d'amministrazioni dai singoli principi, no. 781, f. 161 v. I am grateful to William Prizer for this reference.

numero sei, con sei archetti“, while „Due lauti, uno con la cassa, uno l'altro no“ and „Quattro violoni alla napolitana“ are listed under the heading of „Lauti“. ²⁴ The first two instruments on the list can be identified as violins by a process of elimination. They were probably not plucked *viole* because they were the tenor and bass members of a consort, nor were they viols, given separately as *viole da gamba*; the latter were presumably the six instruments used at Alfonso d'Este's wedding in 1502. The *violoni alla napolitana* are listed under the heading of *lauti* and so must be plucked instruments. William Prizer has suggested that they were vihuelas, the instrument referred to in Mantuan sources variously as „viola spagnola“, „liuto ala spagnola“, „viola ala napolitana“ or just „spagnola“. ²⁵ We do not have any pictures of a complete family of violins before Gaudenzio Ferrari's well-known fresco at Santa Maria dei Miracoli in Saronno near Milan, painted in about 1530, ²⁶ though the Ferrara documents are paralleled by several Ferrarese frescos from the same period that include individual instruments. There is a small apparently three-string violin-like instrument in a fresco in the Palazzo di Ludovico il Moro, painted between 1505 and 1508, and a four-string viola-like instrument in a group that also includes two viols, a rebec and a vihuela in the church of Santa Maria della Consolazione, painted between 1510 and 1515. ²⁷

Little is known about how the violin consort spread outside the Este-Gonzaga circle, for there are few reliable references to it until it is found widely distributed on both sides of the Alps in the second quarter of the sixteenth century. The problem is partly that the violin was the preserve of professionals, and thus does not figure so much in the literature of the time as the viol, which was played by members of the literate classes. Early sixteenth-century northern Italy, repeatedly fought over by French and Imperial armies, was not a promising environment for the creation and survival of documents. There is also the recurring problem of terminology: we have no means of knowing in most cases whether the many unqualified references to *viole* – such as the „quattro suonatori di liuto, viole e altri strumenti“ who appeared in a Bolognese triumphal car in 1512, or the *viole* heard in a play during the Roman carnival of 1519 – are to viols, violins or plucked instruments. ²⁸ French is less ambiguous in this respect: musicians and scribes seem to have used *viole* and

²⁴ Prizer, „Isabella d'Este“, 110.

²⁵ Ibid., 110–112.

²⁶ Reproduced, for instance, in Boyden, *The History of Violin Playing*, frontispiece and pl. 2. See also Emanuel Winternitz, „The school of Gaudenzio Ferrari and the early history of the violin“, in: Gustave Reese and Rose Brandel (eds.), *The commonwealth of music: writings on music in history, art and culture in honor of Curt Sachs*, New York and London 1965, 182–200; id., *Musical instruments and their symbolism in Western art*, London 1967, 99–109.

²⁷ Reproduced, for instance, in Mary Remnant, *Musical instruments of the west*, London 1978, ill. 42, 45.

²⁸ Emilie Elsner, „Untersuchung der instrumentalen Besetzungspraxis der weltlichen Musik im 16. Jahrhundert in Italien“, Ph. D. diss., Berlin 1935, 85; William Prizer, „Lutenists at the court of Mantua in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century“, *JLSA* 13 (1980) 5–34, at 28.

violon consistently to distinguish the viol from the violin from the moment the two instruments arrived in France. It is no accident that the largest body of unambiguous early references to the violin is in the accounts of the dukes of Savoy, who ruled Savoy and Piedmont from Turin, for they were written in French until 1558.²⁹

There is a similar problem with the violin's early repertory. I have argued that the violin consort was developed to provide the Ferrara court with an alternative to wind instruments for dance music, and the main reason why it spread so rapidly across northern Europe was surely that it was quickly recognised as the best vehicle for courtly dance music. So in a sense all sixteenth-century consort dance music should be considered as potential violin music, though it is likely that only a small amount of it was specifically or exclusively conceived for the instrument. It is surely no coincidence that the violin emerged at a moment of profound change in the history of dance and dance music. Until about 1500 courtly dance music was normally improvised, and each dance had its own choreography, geared to the length of the *cantus firmus* played by the bombard.³⁰ However, the new dances that replaced the *cantus firmus* dances, such as the pavan, its related saltarello or galliard, and a new type of basse dance, were constructed in short repeated sections using simple patterns such as AAB or AABBC, and had a standard choreography – which meant that they could be danced to any music that had the right rhythmic patterns and phrase structure.³¹

The problem is that, although we have Italian lute and keyboard settings of the new dance repertory from early in the century, we have no sources of consort dance music in Italy before Francesco Bendusi's *Opera nova de balli*, published in Venice in 1553.³² The single exception seems to be the four-part piece, „caminata“, in Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Panciatichi 27, ff. 116v–117, a north-Italian manuscript from about 1500.³³ One might think that this was because Italian professional dance musicians continued to improvise, as their predecessors had in the fifteenth century. In fact, there are two reasons for thinking that this is not so.

First, violin consorts, like recorders, viols and the other new ensembles, normally played in four or five parts, with a soprano, a bass and two or three inner parts. While it would have been easy enough for the players of the outer

²⁹ S. Cordero di Pamparato, „Emanuele Filiberto di Savoia, protettore dei musici“, *RMI* 34 (1927) 229–247, 555–578; *RMI* 35 (1928) 29–49.

³⁰ See in particular Daniel Heartz, „The basse dance: its evolution c. 1450–1550“, *AnnM* 6 (1958–1963) 287–340; Frederick Crane, *Materials for the study of the fifteenth-century basse danse*, New York 1968.

³¹ Bernard Thomas and Jane Gingell, *The Renaissance dance book*, London 1987, is a convenient survey of sixteenth-century dance and dance music.

³² Brown, *Instrumental music printed before 1600*, 1553². Modern edition in Francesco Bendusi, *Opera nova de balli 1553*, ed. Bernard Thomas, London 1974 (= Italian Instrumental Music of the Renaissance 5).

³³ Modern edition in *Sing- und Spielmusik aus älterer Zeit*, ed. Johannes Wolf, Leipzig 1926, 66–67.

parts to improvise, those who played the inner parts would not have had readily defined or discrete functions, making it difficult to avoid glaring consecutive. Music of this sort, unlike that played by the earlier *cantus firmus* ensembles, would therefore have had to have been composed or arranged in advance, though it does not necessarily mean that the musicians played from music. Pictures show that professional instrumentalists frequently played without music even as late as the middle of the seventeenth century. There is evidence from many sources that they played composed music from memory. To take a single example: British Library, Royal Appendix MSS 74–76 seems to have been used in England in the 1550s to create a bank of material from which the members of a violin consort memorised their parts.³⁴

Second, an early sixteenth-century Italian consort dance repertory does in fact exist, but in northern European sources. Two substantial manuscripts of four-part dances, one in Munich and one in the British Library in London, seem to contain an early Italian repertory even though they date from the middle of the century.³⁵ The Munich manuscript, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Mus. MS 1503h, was owned by the Augsburg book collector Johann Heinrich Herwart (1520–1583), while the British Library set, Royal Appendix MSS 59–62, was apparently brought to England by Henry Fitzalan, twelfth earl of Arundel (1512–1580) on his return from Italy in 1567.³⁶ In addition, the first two of Pierre Attaignant's books of consort dances, *Neuf basse dances, deux branles, vingt et cinq pavannes avec quinze gaillardes en musique a quatre parties* and *Six gaillardes et six pavanes avec treze chansons musicales a quatre parties*, published in Paris in 1530, include some pieces that are unquestionably Italian in origin.³⁷ There are a few others scattered in other manuscripts, such as Augsburg, Staats- und Stadtbibliothek, MS mus. 2° 142a,³⁸

³⁴ Holman, *Four and twenty fiddlers*, 90–103. Modern edition in *Elizabethan consort music: I*, ed. Paul Doe, London 1979 (= *Musica Britannica* 44), 153–177, 199–208. See also John Milsom, „The Nonesuch music library“, in: Chris Banks, Arthur Searle and Malcolm Turner (eds.), *Sundry sorts of music books: essays on the British Library collections presented to O. W. Neighbour*, London 1993, 146–82.

³⁵ Modern editions in *Italian dances of the early sixteenth century*, ed. Michael Morrow, London, 1976 (= *Dance Music of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, 1); *Italian dance of the sixteenth century*, ed. Michael Morrow, London, 1978 (= *Dance Music of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, 2, 3).

³⁶ For Herwart as a collector see H. Colin Slim, „The music library of the Augsburg patrician Hans Heinrich Herwart (1520–1583)“, *AnnM* 7 (1977) 67–109. For the earl of Arundel, see Julian Lock, „Henry Fitzalan, twelfth earl of Arundel“, in: Colin Matthew, Brian Harrison and Lawrence Goldman (eds.), *The Oxford dictionary of national biography*, on line at www.oxforddnb.com.

³⁷ Brown, *Instrumental music printed before 1600*, 1530⁴, 1530⁵; Heartz, *Pierre Attaignant*, 230–231, 234–235. Modern editions in Pierre Attaignant, *Neuf basse dances deux branles vingt et cinq pavannes avec quinze gaillardes*, ed. Bernard Thomas, London 1989 (= *The Attaignant Dance Prints* 1).

³⁸ Modern edition in *Das Augsburger Liederbuch: die Musikhandschrift 2° Codex 142a der Staats- und Stadtbibliothek Augsburg*, ed. Luise Jonas, Munich and Salzburg 1983 (= *Berliner musikwissenschaftliche Arbeiten* 21).

Cambrai, Bibliothèque de la Ville, MSS 124–128,³⁹ and Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, MS mus. 1516.⁴⁰

Of these sources, Augsburg MS Mus. 2^o 412a is the earliest: it seems to date from between 1505 and 1514. It also contains the pieces with the most archaic features. There are six readily identifiable dances: an untitled four-part pavan-like piece in four sections (no. 12); a four-part pavan-like piece in four sections entitled „La Gambetta, Mantuanner dantz“ (no. 20); an untitled three-part elaboration of the *Passamezzo moderno* in triple time (no. 22); a three-part pavan entitled „La Monina“ (no. 23); „Camminata“ (no. 24), a four section four-part piece mostly derived from the *Passamezzo antico* chord sequence; and an untitled single-section four-part piece (no. 25) that elaborates a simple cadential progression in the major. Their titles and their use of chord sequences suggest that they are mostly if not entirely Italian in origin, a point to which I shall return. So far as I am aware, nos. 22 and 23 are the only surviving examples of the new dance music in three parts rather than four or more, though it is difficult to see how no. 23 could have been performed as it stands, since it clearly requires a bass part similar to the one in the four-part setting in Royal Appendix MSS 59–62.

Ex. 1: Opening of „La Monina“

a. Augsburg Ms 142a

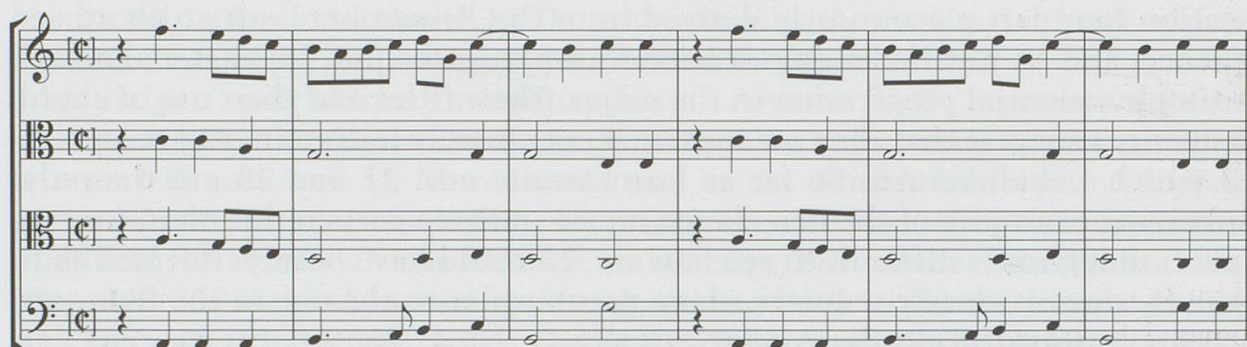
b. British Library, Royal Appendix Mss 59–62

³⁹ For the manuscript, see Thomas and Gingell, *The Renaissance dance book*, 7. Four dances are in *Music for crumhorns: 43 pieces for four instruments*, ed. Bernard Thomas, London 1980, nos. 30, 32–34.

⁴⁰ Modern edition in Bruce Allen Whisler, „Munich Mus. ms. 1516: a critical edition“, Ph. D. diss., U. of Rochester NY 1974. See also Thomas and Gingell, *The Renaissance dance book*, no. 22; *Music for crumhorns*, ed. Thomas, no. 31.

Be that as it may, these pieces may mark a point of transition from the old *cantus firmus* dance repertory, which was frequently in three parts, to the new composed repertory in four parts or more. The other archaic feature is a detail of the part-writing. In some cases where there are perfect cadences one of the inner parts descends 2–1 as we would expect, but the bass, instead of rising or falling 5–1 ascends an octave to make a fifth with the tenor, like a fifteenth-century contratenor part.

Ex. 2: „La Gambetta“, Augsburg Ms 142a, last section



Munich Mus. MS 1503h probably contains the next-earliest music. The ascending octave in the bass is found in nearly every perfect cadence, and there is another archaic feature: nine of the 14 dances appear to have the tune in the tenor rather than in the soprano. I say „appear“ because in some cases, such as „El marchese“ (no. 1) and „Basela un trato“ (no. 3), the tune is known from other sources; „El marchese“ is a popular song from around 1500, „El marchese di Saluzzo“. However, in other cases there are no concordances and the tenor part just seems to be more melodious than the soprano. The other five pieces, including the famous galliards „La rocha el fuso“ (no. 5), „La cara cossa“ (no. 7) and „La traditora“ (no. 8), have the melody in the soprano. In one case, „El fransosin“ (no. 6), the melody migrates between the tenor, soprano and alto. We can guess that the 44 dances in Royal Appendix MSS 59–62 are a little later than those in the Munich manuscript. Although some of them still have the archaic cadence with the bass ascending an octave, and one or two have an odd variant in which the bass ascends a sixth to provide the third of the final chord, none appear to have the tune in the tenor. However, as we have seen, the manuscript includes a version of the pavan „La Monina“, which is also in the early Augsburg manuscript.

Although only a few of the dances in the first two Attaignant prints have Italian titles, we can identify many more of them as Italian in origin from their use of Italian chord sequences such as the *Passamezzo moderno* and the *Romanesca*. Italian dance musicians began to use these bass patterns soon after 1500 instead of the old tenor *cantus firmi*, and they remained a distinctive feature of Italian dance music for most of the century; contemporary northern European dance music tended to be based on popular tunes, placed in the soprano rather than the bass and often adapted from French chansons. The earliest chord sequence dance seems to be the „Caminata“ already men-

tioned in Florence, Panciatichi 27. It is based on the kernel of the *Passamezzo antico*, the pattern I-VII-I-V in the minor – assuming that there are a number of flats missing.

Ex. 3: „Caminata“, Florence, Panchiatichi 27, opening



The version of „Caminata“ in the Augsburg manuscript (which does have a partial B flat key signature) is essentially the same setting, though with an extra section. The Augsburg manuscript also contains a rather corrupt piece that seems to be based on the kernel of the *Passamezzo moderno*, the pattern I-IV-I-V in the major. These two chord sequences are by far the most common in Italian dance music, and lie behind many of the pieces printed by Attaingnant in 1530. For instance, two of the basse dances from *Neuf basse dances*, „La gatta in italien“ and „La scarpa my faict mal“, are elaborations respectively of the *Passamezzo antico* and the *Passamezzo moderno*.

Ex. 4:⁴¹ „La scarpa my faict mal“, basse dance, opening

⁴¹ Brown, *Instrumental music printed before 1600*, 1530/5, nos. 4, 5.

Interestingly, only two of the pieces in these collections have the archaic cadence, suggesting that, although the two main manuscripts are later than 1530, they contain earlier repertoires, though of course it could just be that they were composed or arranged by more conservative musicians.

The dances in these collections, like most later sixteenth-century ensemble dance music, seem to have been arranged in a neutral style so that they could be played by a number of different types of ensemble. All the parts tend to have small ranges, with the bass almost never going below F and the inner parts never going below tenor C. They mostly use the standard *chiavi naturali* combinations C1–C3–C4–F4, C1–C3–C3–F4 or the still lower variant C2–C4–C4–F4. Interestingly, the soprano parts, particularly in the two main manuscripts, are rather low pitched, sometimes going down to *a* or even *g* below middle C and never going above *e'*. In the late sixteenth century this would suggest that the music was intended for low-pitched instruments such as recorders and viols, or that the music would have been transposed up a fourth for high-pitched instruments such as cornetts and violins. However, we cannot assume that the *chiavette*-related distinction between *stromenti choristi* and *stromenti acuti* obtained in the early sixteenth century, even though there is evidence of transposition by a fourth in the dance repertory I have been discussing.⁴² To take just two examples: the setting of „La battaglia“ (a pavan derived from Jannequin's „La bataille de Marignan“) in Royal Appendix MSS 59–62 is found a fourth higher in Moderne's *Musique de joye*, published in Lyons in the 1540s,⁴³ while the first basse dance in Attaingnant's *Neuf basses dances* is a fourth lower in the first book of dances published by Paul and Bartholomeus Hessen in Breslau in 1555.⁴⁴

The earliest description of the violin family, published by Giovanni Maria Lanfranco in Brescia in 1533, does not include exact tunings, though it tells us that the family of „Violette da Arco senza tasti“ (also called „Violetta da Braccio, & da Arco“) consisted of four sizes, „Soprano“, „Co(n)traalto“, „Tenore“ and „Basso“, but had only three tunings, with the alto and tenor tuned in unison.⁴⁵ In other words, the consort consisted of a single violin, two violas of different sizes, and a bass. This layout, analogous to that of contemporary

⁴² See Andrew Parrott, „Transposition in Monteverdi's vespers of 1610: an ‚aberration‘ defended“, *Early Music* 12 (1984) 490–516; Patrizio Barbieri, „*Chiavette* and modal transposition in Italian practice (c. 1500–1837)“, *Recercare* 3 (1991) 5–79; Peter Van Heyghen, „The recorder in Italian music, 1600–1670“, in: David Lasocki (ed.), *The recorder in the seventeenth century: proceedings of the international recorder symposium, Utrecht 1993*, Utrecht 1995, 3–63, at 19–23; Andrew Johnstone, „High' clefs in composition and performance“, *Early Music* 34 (2006) 29–53; Patrizio Barbieri, „*Chiavette*“, in: Laura Macy (ed.), *Grove music online*, at www.grovemusic.com.

⁴³ *Italian dances of the sixteenth century*, ed. Morrow, vol. 1, no. 12; Jacques Moderne, *29 dances (Musique de Joye)*, ed. Bernard Thomas, London 1986 (= *Early Dance Music*, 10), no. 11.

⁴⁴ Brown, *Instrumental music printed before 1600*, 1530/5, no. 1; 1555/2, no. 30. Modern edition in Pierre Attaingnant, *Neuf basse dances*, ed. Thomas, no. 1.

⁴⁵ See Barbara Lee, „Giovanni Maria Lanfranco's *Scintille de Musica* and its relation to sixteenth-century music theory“, Ph. D. diss., Cornell University 1961, 252–253. There are facsimiles of the relevant pages on line at www.greatbassviol.com/nlanfranco.html.

wind consorts, was the standard one for violins for most of the sixteenth century, though a third viola was added when five-part dance music became common in northern Europe after 1550. In his *Lettione seconda* (Venice, 1543), Sylvestro di Ganassi added the information that all three sizes had three strings, and that they were tuned a fifth apart as in wind consorts, with the bass tuned F c g, the violas tuned c g d' and the violin g d' a'.⁴⁶ This simple and logical arrangement was soon complicated by a fourth string, added to the top of the violin and the viola and usually to the bottom of the bass violin.⁴⁷ But the three-string instruments seem perfectly designed to play the early sixteenth-century Italian dance repertory, with a bass that goes down to F, violas that go down to C and a violin that goes down to g but has no e'' string, making it suitable for the low-pitched parts in the early sources that only go up to e''.

To sum up: I believe that the violin is best distinguished from earlier bowed instruments not by the shape of its body, which only became standard in Italy some time after it was first developed, nor by the ways it was held and tuned, which were borrowed from the rebec. Rather, its defining feature was that it was made from the first as a consort instrument in three sizes. This technology was borrowed from the northern Italian type of viol, and seems to have been applied subsequently to other bowed instruments, such as the rebec and the deeply waisted German type of viol. The viol and violin consorts were developed to cater for a perceived dislike of wind instruments in Isabella d'Este's circle at Mantua, and that of her brother, Alfonso d'Este in Ferrara. Just as the development of the viol consort coincided with the emergence of a new type of composed secular song for solo voice and instruments – the frottola – that replaced an earlier improvised genre,⁴⁸ so the creation of the violin consort seems to have coincided with the emergence of a new repertory of composed four-part dance music that replaced the older improvised types of dance music normally played by loud wind ensembles. This association with a new fashionable repertory, together with the beauty of its sound and the liveliness of its articulation, must have been why it spread so rapidly across Europe in the 1520s and 30s.

The first violin consorts seem typically to have consisted of four three-string instruments: a violin, two violas and bass violin. Later in the century a fourth string was added to each instrument, and in northern Europe, where five-part dance music was the norm after 1550, a third viola was added to the consort. In the second half of the century the association between the violin and dance music began to weaken as it began to be used in new performing situations, such as Italian churches, and it began to acquire new repertories, such as the canzona. But that is the subject for another occasion.

⁴⁶ Brown, *Instrumental music printed before 1600*, 1543²; facsimile edition: Sylvestro di Ganassi, *Lettione seconda*, Bologna 1978 (= Bibliotheca Musica Bononiensis, II/18b).

⁴⁷ On this point, see Holman, *Four and twenty fiddlers*, 24, 26–27.

⁴⁸ William Prizer, „The Frottola and the unwritten tradition“, *Studi musicali* 15 (1986) 3–37, esp. 8–12.

