

Interval and Chord Balance Part 4

By Douglas Niedt

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In the past three months I have discussed methods of controlling the balance of notes within intervals and chords. The development of this ability to control balance is essential. Imagine what an orchestra would sound like if each instrument played at the same volume. Beautiful melodies or sparkling counterpoint would be lost in a mass of uniform sound.

It is important to remember that a listener can only really hear or concentrate on one aural idea at a time—a melody, a harmony, a bass line, etc. No one can hear for example, the linear movement of all four voices simultaneously in a Bach fugue. Our ears can "jump" to listen first to one, and then to another but cannot follow all four voices continuously at the same time. Therefore, one of our duties as performers is to guide the listener through the composer's work emphasizing its most beautiful and interesting features.

As an example I would like to use Luis Milan's *Pavane No. 6*, an exquisite example of early counterpoint. But before going on, I must acknowledge the fact that there is a school of thought on contrapuntal music performance that says the performer should not act as a "tour guide" but merely play the music in an evenly balanced manner so that the listener may choose what he wants to hear. This is fine if your audience knows the piece or has heard it before, but it is not an appropriate approach for most listeners. I believe this school of thought springs from the problem of having to publicly perform pieces of the Renaissance and Baroque eras which were originally intended only for private performance. (Most lute and vihuela music falls into this category.) Charles Rosen, the eminent concert pianist, expressed it well when he noted a "remark by Mozart who said that when you play fugues you must play them moderately slowly so that the entrances can be heard in each voice. Whereas, of course, Bach often didn't care because you weren't playing in public and you knew the entrances were there".

But again, because we guitarists, vihuelists, or lutenists are presented with the opportunity (or problem depending upon how you view it) of playing early contrapuntal music in public performance, I feel we must act as guides for our listeners. I mentioned we must emphasize the interesting and beautiful features of a work. Knowledge of historical style, a composer's compositional style, the form of a piece of music, counterpoint, etc. will often give the artist clues to what is important. But in the end it is entirely up to the artist to decide or interpret for himself what is beautiful and what is most important.

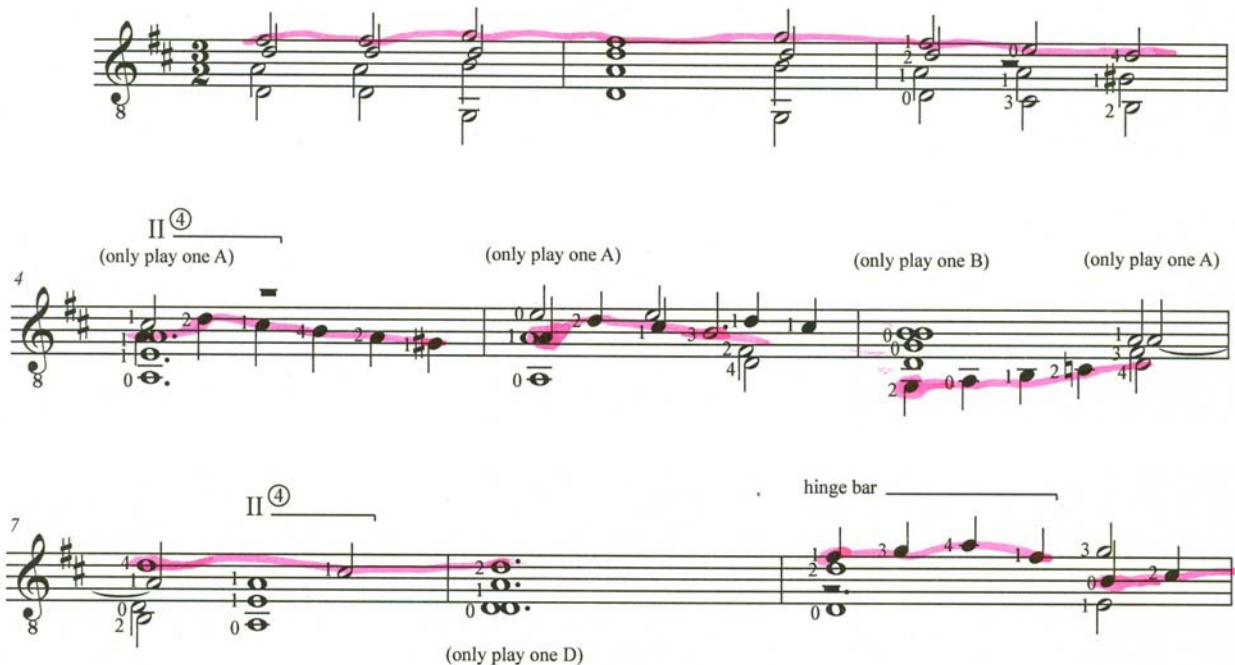
For me, the most beautiful aspect of Milan's *Pavane No. 6* is the unbridled vitality of the counterpoint characterized by quick entrances and exits of melodic fragments darting in and out without warning. Bear in mind that the indicated voice leading in example #1 is my personal version (voice leading is of course not indicated in vihuela tablature) and is subject to slightly differing interpretations. Each voice is highlighted in a separate color.

Handwritten musical score for Milan's *Pavane No. 6*, showing six staves of music. The score is written in treble clef, key of D major (two sharps), and 3/8 time. The music is presented in four-part counterpoint, with each voice highlighted in a different color: blue (top), orange, green, and pink (bottom). The pink voice is often written as a single line with a common 8-measure bar line. The score includes measure numbers 4, 7, 10, 13, and 16 at the beginning of each staff. The word "Divisi" is written in blue ink below the pink voice line at measures 4, 10, and 13. The notation includes various note values, rests, and accidentals, with some notes marked with a common 8-measure bar line.



In example #2 of the *Pavane* I have simply indicated that the performer emphasize those notes comprising the most actively moving part at any one time. In this way the listener has the feeling of hearing many voices in joyous interplay.

Notes to be brought out louder than others are highlighted in pink. Use the techniques discussed in the previous three issues to emphasize these notes.



hinge bar

10

II ④

(only play one A)

(only play one G)

(only play one A)

13

(can't actually hold tie)

(only play one D)

16

hinge bar

II

hinge bar

II

19

hinge bar

II ④

(only play one A)

(only play one A)

22

(only play one B)

(only play one A)

II ④

(only play one D)

Milan's mastery of counterpoint is such that by the performer's emphasizing the entrances and notes of the melodic fragments, the piece comes alive virtually playing itself. Thus the ability to control the balance between the notes one plays is the key to a successful performance of this piece.