

The Transcriber's Art – #54
Henriette Renié and Alfred Holý
by Richard Yates

What beginning guitarist has not had at least a brief enchantment with campanella fingering commonly kindled by our first exposure to Alonso Mudarra's greatest hit from 1546, *Fantasia that imitates the harp in the style of Ludovico*. Campanella, or "little bell" in Italian, is produced on the guitar by placing consecutive scale notes on different strings and so allowing the durations of the notes to overlap. It can make a shimmering sonority much like such a passage played on a piano with the sustain pedal pressed, or on a harp without damping any notes. This is well-illustrated by a few measures from Mudarra's celebrated fantasia as played or published by countless guitarists.



Pressing a pedal raises the pitch of all octaves of that note. The tuning with all pedals up is a diatonic C flat scale, so pressing one pedal down one notch raises all C flat strings to C natural. Pressing it two notches makes all those strings C sharp. The other six pedals raise the pitches of, respectively, all D flat strings, the E flat strings, and so on. This allows one to play in all keys by beginning with the pedals in the necessary configuration or changing them during performance for altered notes or modulations. I find it interesting that, despite all the thought and technology that has gone into the development of the harp, it still cannot play Mudarra's fantasia, and so presumably cannot imitate some of Ludovico's performances. While it is admittedly a terribly obscure bit of trivia, look at the following measure, one about which Mudarra famously wrote "does not sound too bad." Notice the cross-relation between the D natural in the bass and D sharp in the melody and remember that on a pedal harp the Ds can be either natural or sharp, but not both at once.



Figure 3

But whether campanella technique is historically accurate or not in most guitar transcriptions of Mudarra's fantasia, it is an idiomatic sonority of the harp and is a useful addition to the guitarist's technical bag of tricks. A thoughtful and informed transcription takes into account the characteristics of the original instrument. This does not mean a slavish imitation of the original that too often results in caricature. But rather, the composition may rely in part for its persuasiveness on the strengths and quirks of the instrument for which it was composed. This can suggest analogous methods on the guitar or even lead to inspiration and exploration of the edges of guitar's capabilities.

Harp music is a natural source for transcription material, but one that seems to be largely overlooked. Certainly much of its repertoire, with its characteristically wide-ranging arpeggios and *glissandi*, must be skipped by guitarists. And the modern pedal harp has quite a large range—seven full octaves. But it is also close to the guitar in that it is a plucked string instrument with a modest dynamic range, and so it is well-suited for simpler pieces.

The harp repertoire has its virtuosic concert pieces, but also a wealth of smaller scale works. Prominent harpists of the previous century were also composers. Guitarists would do well to look for music by Alphonse Hasselmans (1845–1912), Henriette Renié (1875–1956), Carlos Salzedo (1885–1961) and Marcel Georges Lucien Grandjany (1891–1975).

Alfred Holý

An accomplished harpist and composer of Czech origin, Holý performed in orchestras under the most famous conductors of his day, including Bruno Walter, Gustav Mahler and Richard Strauss. A career of solo recitals was followed by years as the principal harpist for the Boston Symphony Orchestra and professor at the New England Conservatory of Music. Although many of his compositions were lost in the Second World War, a portion survived and are still performed.

Oriental

The first harp piece I transcribed included many grace notes. Being unsure if these were long or short, on the beat or before it, I listened to solo harp recordings. While doing this answered my questions, it also strongly impressed on me the characteristic resonant sonority of the harp. Those grace notes were played as is most natural on that instrument—without damping of the initial note. On the guitar, slurring on one string is far more common and natural. So the differences in the instruments immediately led to a fundamental issue about the transcription. Rather than trying to force the music into the guitar’s idiom, for a time I went with the harp sound using campanella fingerings in many contexts, some successful and some awkward. I soon came across Holý’s *Oriental* and in it found a delicious merging of uncomplicated cross-string resonance and exotic tonality.

Campanella technique does take close attention as it is often not the most natural way. Small details in the length of time that fingers are kept on their frets can make a large difference in the sound. Our ingrained tendency is to leave notes when their nominal duration is finished, so in a campanella passage always look for places where a finger can be left where it is. For instance, in the first measure of *Oriental*, it is easy to overlook leaving the 4 finger on the second C natural so that it rings over together with the following D sharp. In this piece, that clash of the interval of an augmented second is entirely characteristic of the tonality and should be relished rather than avoided. This can even be emphasized with careful adjustment of dynamics, sometimes in ways that are not obvious. In those two notes, the most natural way of playing them is for the C natural to be a weaker upbeat leading to a stronger sounding, on-the-beat D sharp. But try reversing the dynamic. Play the D sharp more softly so that its volume merges and blends in equal parts with the C natural, which has already started to decay. The dissonance is heightened. Sometimes several notes in a row can be played this way—with a decreasing dynamic—so that after the last note all are still sounding in equal volume. It is easiest to hear and practice this in places where all left-hand fingers can remain in place so that attention can be on the subtle right-hand dynamics. Figure 4 is from a guitar transcription of the opening of Henriette Renié’s *Petite Valse*. Start with the 4 and 2 fingers in place and put the 1 finger down (and leave it there) only when needed for the B. Playing these notes with a decreasing dynamic yields an Impressionistic wash of color instead of a less interesting linear, directed melody fragment.



Figure 4

While harp notation includes some special symbols, the standard layout is the same as for keyboard instruments. There will be occasional signs such as ‘F#’ between the staves that are instructions to press harp pedals. Guitarists can ignore these. Octave harmonics on a harp are notated on the string where they are played, not where they sound. A small circle indicates harmonics. The harmonics you see in measure 15 of the guitar transcription of *Oriental* are also harmonics in the original, and fell quite happily as strong, natural harmonics on the guitar.

The two transcriptions with this article make frequent use of campanella fingering. You may not want to employ all of them, but consider the pieces as small studies in this technique, that is, concentrated applications of the technique for training. You may find it

helpful to listen to my recordings of them at the link listed below in Useful Resources. Then keep what works for you and ignore the rest.

Henriette Renié

As an early pupil of Alphonse Hasselman's at the Paris Conservatoire, Renié showed precocious talent and rapid development. At age 12 she won the Premier Prix for harp performance and was herself giving lessons to students twice her age. (Renié's most famous student was Harpo Marx!) Instruction in composition by teachers including Jules Massenet, led to a body of work that spanned the concerto, chamber music, transcriptions from other instruments, and solo pieces ranging from the didactic to the virtuosic. Perhaps because the instrument was rather new, most harpists of the era added to the repertoire through both composition and transcription. Although she and Hasselmans had a falling out for many years over competition for students, they eventually resolved their differences, and he recommended her as his successor at the Conservatoire. A distinguished career of performing, teaching, composing and recording led to her being awarded France's highest accolade, the Legion of Honor.

Grand'mère Raconte une Histoire

Although she was a key figure in promoting the pedal harp, Renié also wrote music for the diatonic harp. The compositional challenge there is to convey harmonic interest without any alterations to the notes of the diatonic scale. In *Grand'mère Raconte une Histoire* ("Grandmother Tells a Story") she deftly moves from a sunny G major to a darker E minor modality without a single leading tone.

The second half of this piece has an phrase that reaches the top of the fingerboard with some octave harmonics for accompaniment. Attempting to transpose this down so that it is more convenient would do great damage to the episodic story. The transcription is not so difficult with a bit of slow practice.

Useful Resources

John Griffiths, *Mudarra's Harp Fantasy: History and Analysis, Australian Guitar Journal 1 (1989): 19-25.*

International Music Score Library Project (IMSLP),
http://imslp.org/index.php?title=Category:Scores_featuring_the_harp.

Xavier Maistre, *Pièces pour Harpe, Volume 1*, CD recording, Vanderbilt Music Company, 2006.

Richard Yates, <http://www.yatesguitar.com/Soundboard/harp.html>. (There you will find sound files and scores for both pieces featured in this article.)

Please send comments, suggestions or your transcriptions to:

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Grand'mère Raconte une Histoire

Transcribed for guitar
by Richard Yates

Henriette Renié
(1875–1956)

Moderato, sans lenteur

The musical score is presented in five systems, each on a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#).
- **System 1 (Measures 1-4):** Starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic. A fermata is placed over measures 3 and 4. Fingering numbers 2, 3, 4, and 3 are visible.
- **System 2 (Measures 4-8):** Features a crescendo (*cresc.*) leading to a fortissimo (*fz*) dynamic. A fermata is placed over measures 6 and 7. Fingering numbers include 4, 1, 3, 4, 3, 4, 3, and 4.
- **System 3 (Measures 8-12):** Starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic and moves to mezzo-forte (*mf*). A circled 2 indicates a second ending. A fermata is placed over measures 10 and 11. Fingering numbers include 2, 4, 4, 2, 1, 3, 1, 2, 4, 3, and 1.
- **System 4 (Measures 12-15):** Starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic and moves to mezzo-forte (*mf*). Fermatas are placed over measures 13-14 and 14-15. Fingering numbers include 0, 1, 3, 2, 3, 2, 4, and 1.
- **System 5 (Measures 15-18):** Starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic and includes a crescendo (*cresc.*). Fermatas are placed over measures 16-17 and 17-18. Fingering numbers include 2 and 1.

18 *f* *mf* II

22 *pp* II

26 *p*

29 *p* V

32 *p* VII

36 *dim.* *p* V₃ VII₃ III

Oriental

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by Richard Yates

Alfred Holý
(1868–1948)

Lento, ma non troppo

8 *p* *dreamingly* *espressivo* V

4 *pp* *mf* V

8 VII V₃ ② IV₃

11 *p* *mp* ⑤

14 *espressivo* *nat. harm.* *p* V₃

17 IX ⑤ *espressivo* ⑤ *rit. sempre.*

20 *pp* ④ ② ③ V₃ *pp*