**5. William Lawes: What would my music have looked like?**

William Lawes (baptized 1602 - 1645) was a prominent English composer working in the court of King Charles I (reigned 1625-1649). He and his brother Henry Lawes (1596-1662) wrote music for a large variety of venues, including **consort** music, which is defined as music written for an instrumental ensemble of two to eight players. Consort music can be performed by **whole** or **broken** consorts: consorts for viols alone or consorts for viols mixed with other instruments, respectively. Lawes often combined viols with theorbo, harp or organ in his broken consorts. His extant consort music includes the Consort Suites, Fantasia-Suites, violin Sonatas, Harpe Consorts and Royall Consort. The Harpe Consorts are obviously of particular interest here.

These Consorts consist of thirty dance movements arranged in eleven suites:

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| No. 1 in g minor: Alman | Corant | Corant | Saraband | |
| No. 2 in g minor: Aire | Corant | Corant | Saraband | |
| No. 3 in G major: Alman | Corant | Corant | Saraband | |
| No. 4 in d minor: Aire | Aire | Corant | Saraband | |
| No. 5 in D major: Alman | Corant | Corant | Saraband | |
| No. 6 in D major: Alman | Alman | Corant | Corant | Saraband |

No. 7 in G major: Aire

No. 8 in G major: Pavan and Divisions

No. 9 in D major: Pavan (On a theme by Cormacke) and Divisions

No. 10 in g minor: Pavan (On a theme by Coperario) and Divisions

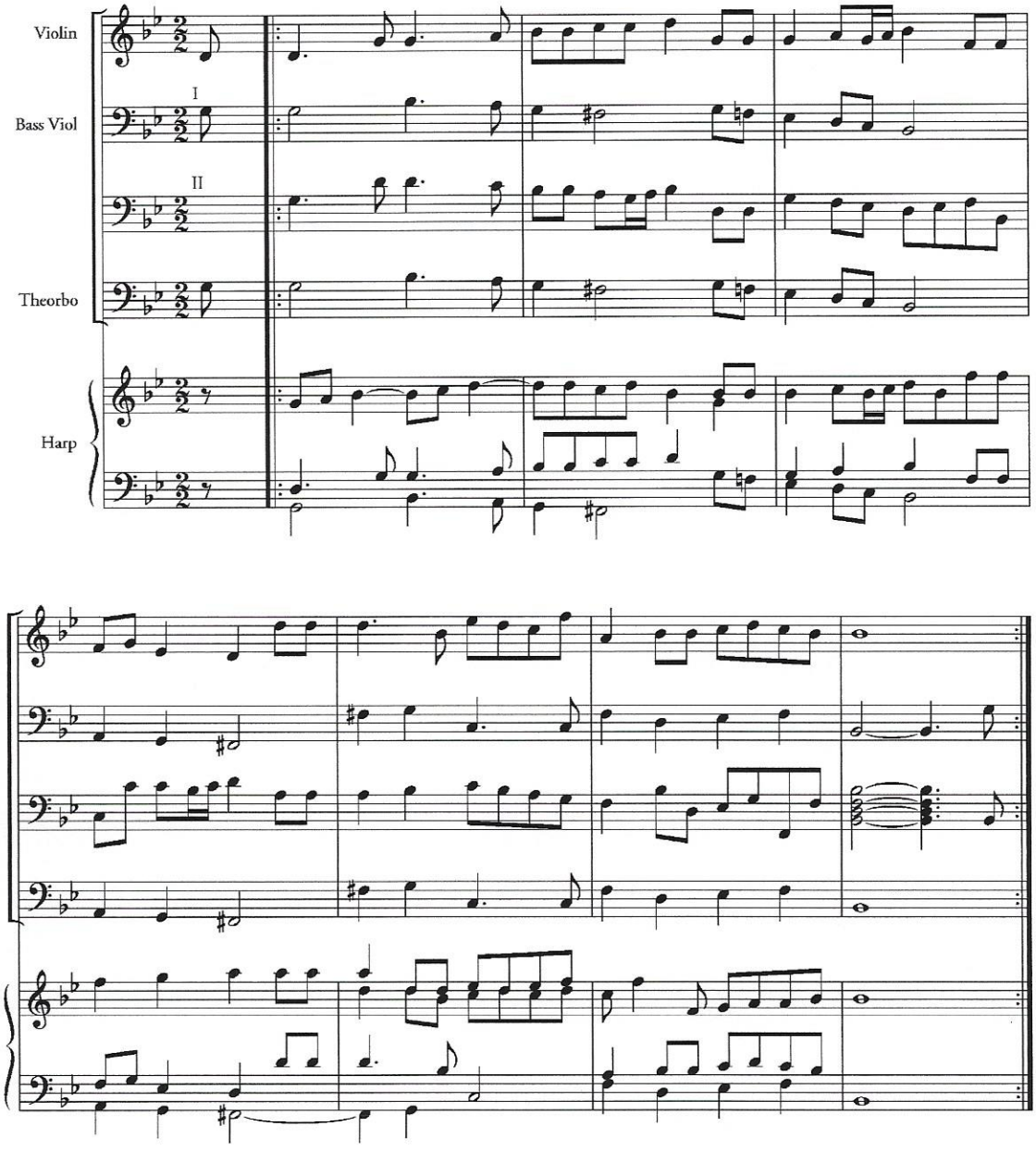
No. 11 in d minor: Fantazia

Figure 49. An overview of William Lawes' Harpe Consorts

The Harpe Consorts are scored for violin, bass viol, theorbo and harp throughout. Each of the parts is **through-composed**, including any **divisions** for the violin and bass viol, a thoroughbass for the theorbo, and a fully realized part for the harp.

Valuable information about continuo performance practices on the harp can be obtained by studying these fully realized harp accompaniments. Most other relevant extant continuo examples from this period are actually written for keyboard, lute *or* harp. The harp is not specified, and it can be assumed that a performer would have made slight changes to a keyboard or lute part in order to suit the harp. The extant Harpe Consort parts reveal an emerging concept of basso continuo realization on the harp that is quite advanced both technically and musically. The harp often provides an independent line in addition to the anticipated harmonic support, and the part is fairly technically challenging.

First, notice that the part is presented in full score. Baroque harpists would have been accustomed to reading from scores, although they would have occasionally received an actual harp part. Indeed, the harp part for Lawes' consorts is extant (see below). Also, the score is presented here in modern notation. All Baroque parts and scores would, of course, have been hand written, either by the composer or a hired scribe, or printed in a limited edition by means of copper or wooden plates or moveable type.


Violin
Bass Viol
I
II
Theorbo
Harp

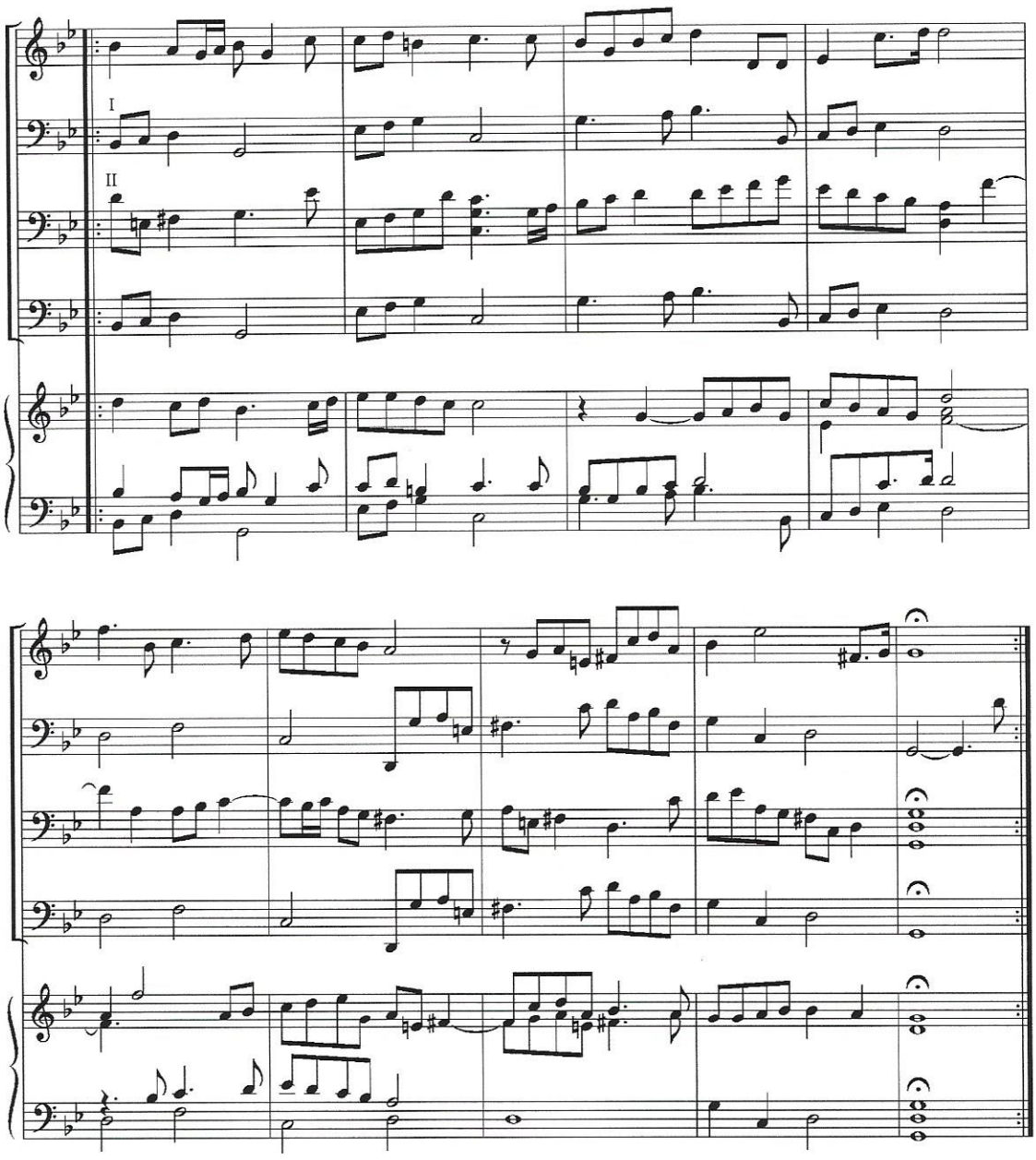

I
II

Figure 50. Alman from *Consort No. 1 in g minor*.[53] Reprinted, by permission, from Murray Lefkowitz's *William Lawes: Select Consort Music*, in a publication of The Musica Britannica Trust, vol. 21 (London: Stainer & Bell Limited, 1963), page 64.

Lawes' score indicates two flats, but the Alman can also be played with only one tuned flat on a multi-row harp. Note that the low F# can also be tuned in advance on multi-row harps. The harp part for this Alman serves a dual role: it subtly supports the violin, bass viol and theorbo, and provides a moderately independent melodic line for interest. The violin line is virtually doubled in the harp bass line (tenor voice), with just a few exceptions. The bass viol line, first time through, is also virtually doubled in the harp bass line (bass voice), and it is identical to the theorbo part. The second time through the Alman, the bass viol takes a more prominent role with a completely independent line. Meanwhile, the treble line of the harp part is fairly independent and provides some interaction with the violin and bass viol. The Baroque Alman, or **allemande**, was composed and performed in a wide range of tempos. An Alman for instrumental ensemble was often quick,[54] which would make the harp part for this Alman rather fast moving. With this interpretation, the part requires a good deal of facility.

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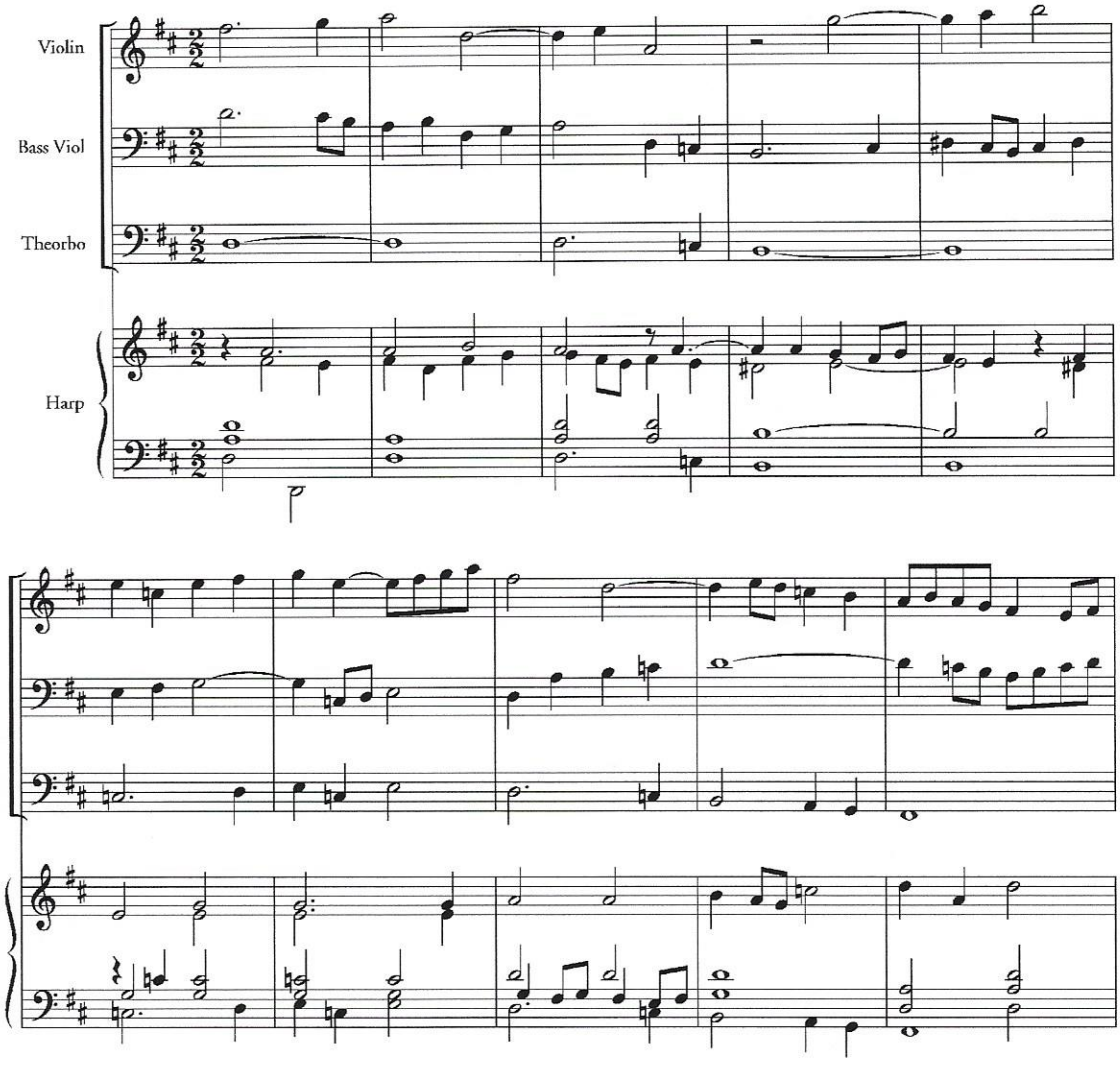
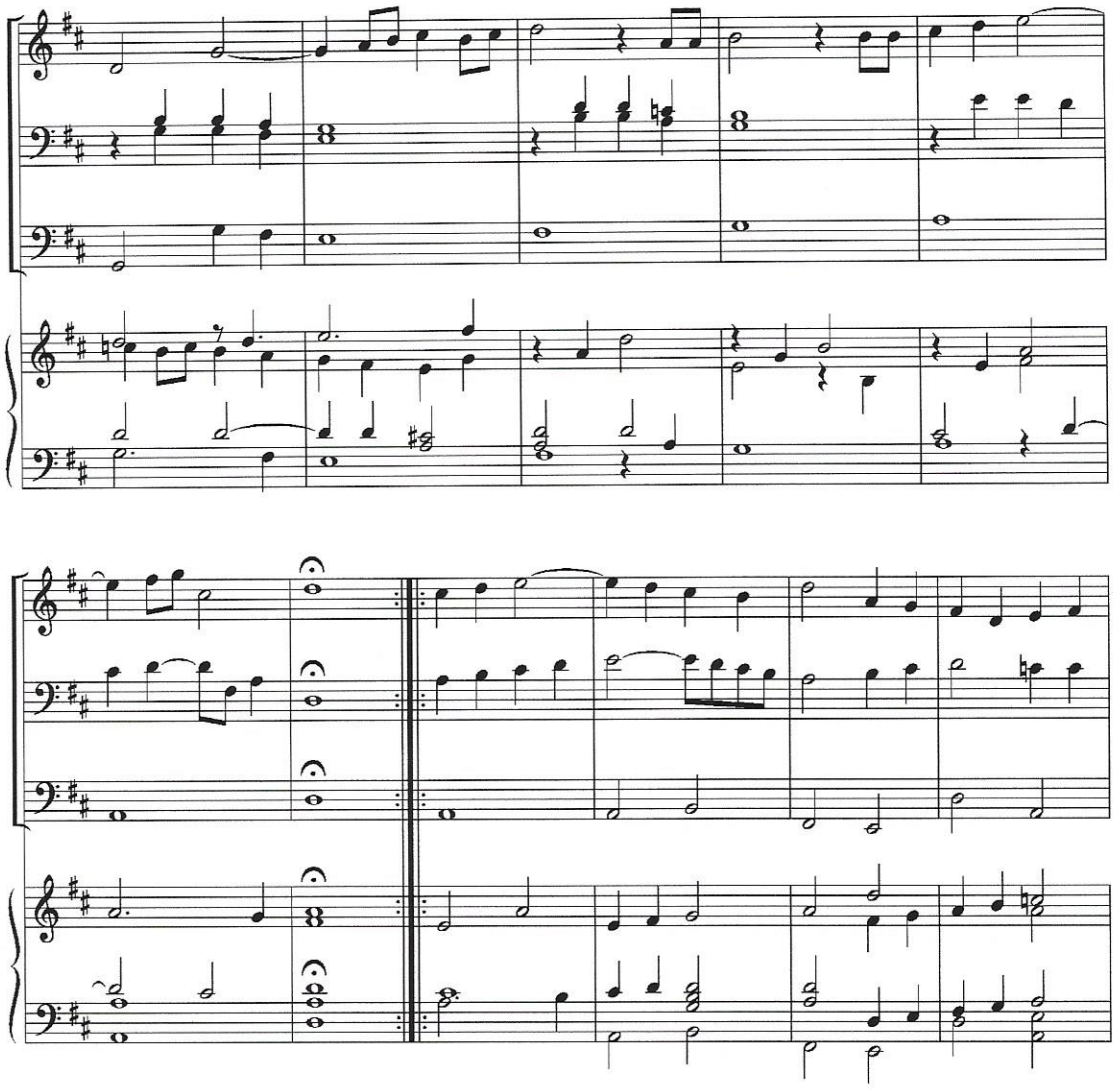
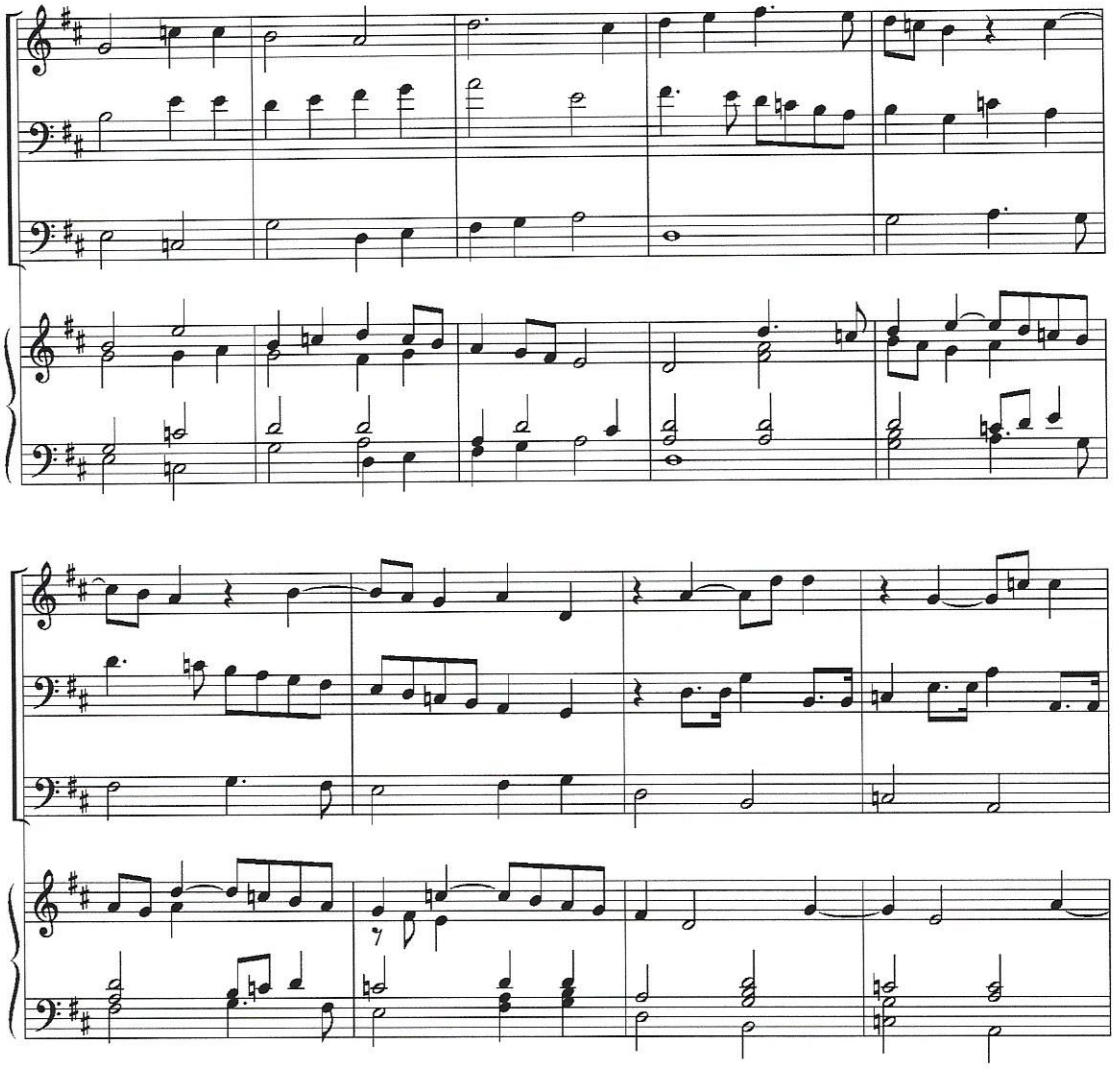
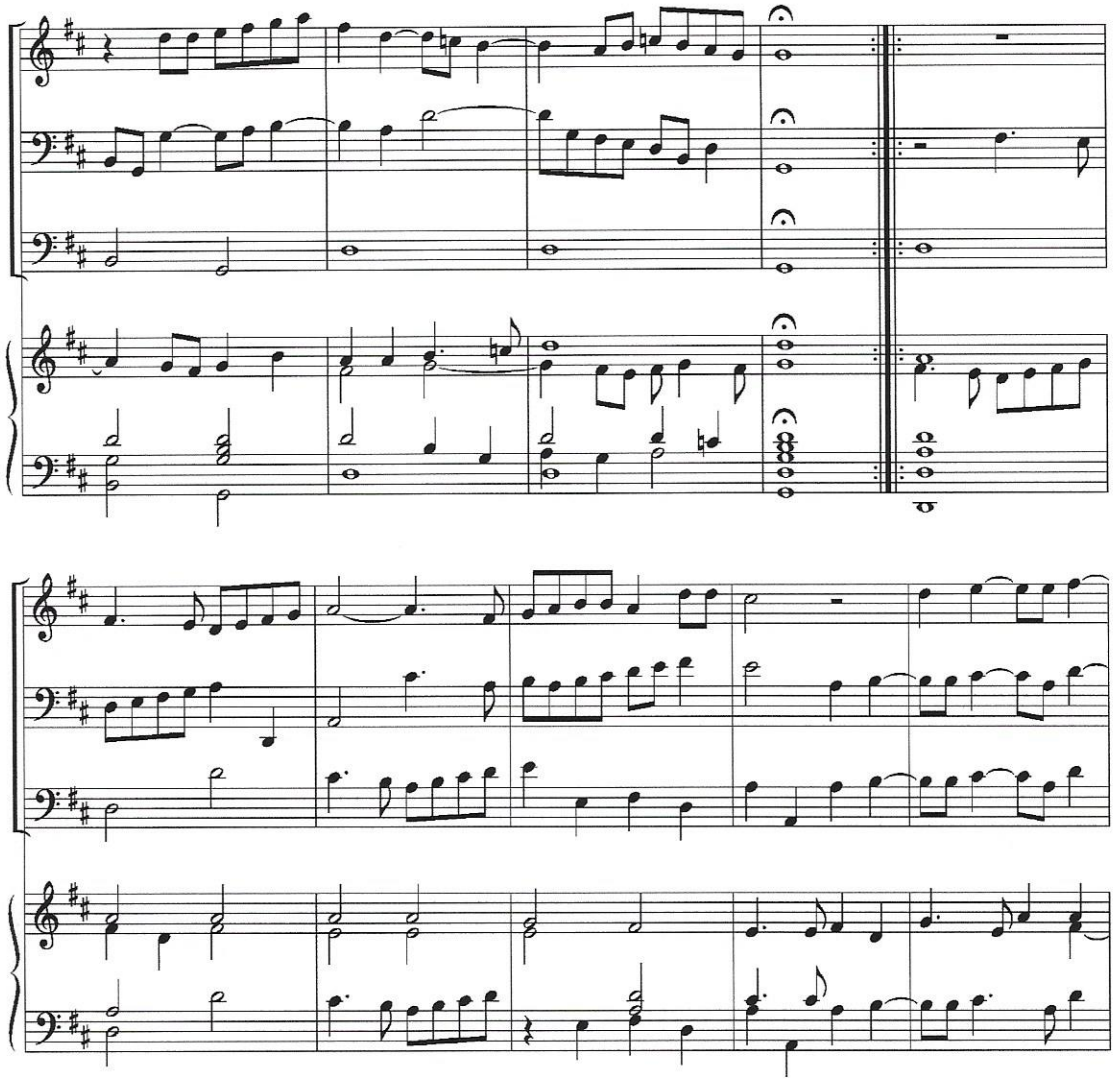
[53] Murray Lefkowitz, ed., *William Lawes: Select Consort Music*, Musica Britannica: a National Collection of Music, vol. 21 (London: Stainer and Bell Limited, 1963), 64.

[54] *Harvard Dictionary*, s.v. "Allemande," by Bruce Gustafson.


Violin
Bass Viol
Theorbo
Harp







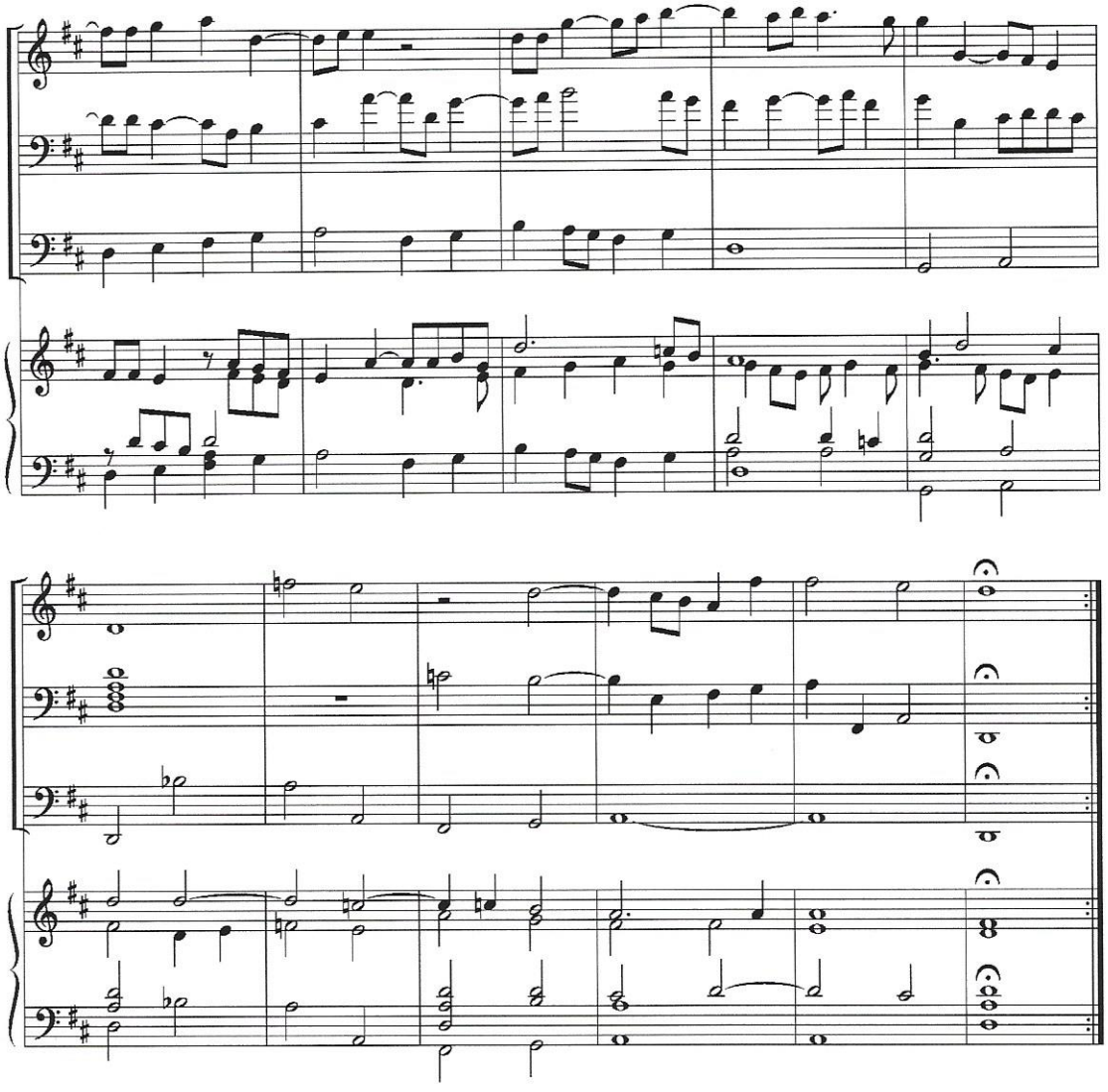


Figure 51. Pavan from *Consort No. 9 in D major*, divisions not included.[55] Reprinted, by permission, from Murray Lefkowitz's *William Lawes: Select Consort Music*, in a publication of The Musica Britannica Trust, vol. 21 (London: Stainer & Bell Limited, 1963), pages 75-76.

The key signature for this consort requires two sharps, but careful scrutiny of the harp part reveals that a multi-row instrument should be tuned with one sharp. Be particularly attentive to the intonation of the D#'s. The harp part for Consort No. 9

[55] Ibid., 75-76.

doubles the theorbo line, accentuates the structure of the bass viol line, and is completely independent of the violin. The part is a rich accompaniment that provides both strong harmonic support and some forward moving lines that interplay with the bowed strings. At letter C for example, the harp introduces an eighth note pattern that is imitated by the bass viol, violin, and finally the theorbo. Throughout the divisions, which are not printed here, the theorbo and harp parts remain intact, while the bowed strings spin variations above the foundation. The harp part does lose some of its opening sense of musical participation but continues to provide structure for the entire piece. Lawes also provides the harp with some delightful solo moments in the divisions, richly layered with the complicated bowed variations. This Consort is an excellent example of true chamber music.

Unfortunately, only a few of Lawes' consorts have been published, making them somewhat inaccessible to modern harpists interested in learning more about the period. The Harpe Consorts were not published during Lawes' lifetime, and, according to Murray Lefkowitz, they were never mentioned in print until Lefkowitz's book *William Lawes* was published in 1960.[56] Since this publication, Lawes' music has become the focus of some scholarly research. Modern editions of Consort No. 1 in g minor, Consort No. 8 in G major, Consort No. 9 in D major, and Consort No. 10 in g minor can be found in Lefkowitz's *William Lawes: Select Consort Music* by Musica Britannica. Most of the other consorts can be pieced together by means of several extant manuscripts, held primarily in the Bodleian Library and the Christ Church Library, both in Oxford, England. These

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[56] Murray Lefkowitz, *William Lawes* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Limited, 1960), 88.

extant manuscripts, including fifteen autograph books, comprise the bulk of primary source material for Lawes' consort music. The Bodleian Library alone holds autograph scores for some of the Harpe Consorts, the autograph harp part book for most of these consorts, and the autograph violin, bass viol and theorbo parts for the complete Harpe Consorts (MS Mus. Sch. B.3, MS Mus. Sch. D.229, and MSS Mus. Sch. D.238-240, respectively). Christ Church's MS Ch. Ch. 5 also contains a portion of the consorts. Apparently, the harp part is missing for Consort No. 6.[57]

Lawes' good standing and involvement with the court of King Charles I insured that his manuscripts were maintained in excellent condition. Beautifully bound and labeled and carefully kept, the majority of Lawes' manuscripts have been preserved near their place of origin in England. Harvester Press Microfilm does circulate some microfilm copies of the above manuscripts, but no facsimile edition has been printed to date.

**Suggested Readings:**

Fulton, Cheryl Ann. "For the Harpe, Base Violl, Violin and Theorbo: The Consorts of William Lawes (1602-1645)." *American Harp Journal,* Vol. 10, No. 2 (Winter 1985): 15-20.

Lefkowitz, Murray, editor. *William Lawes: Select Consort Music.* Musica Britannica: a National Collection of Music, vol. 21. London: Stainer and Bell Limited, 1963.

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[57] Lefkowitz, *William Lawes*, 90.