

Performance
Douce Dame Jolie by Guillaume Dufay

The instrument is a viola a chiavi (Italian for keyed viol) There are no existing instrument, but there are a number of different pieces of iconography depicting them from the mid 14th C thru the 16th C. It eventually evolves into the moraharpa and ultimately the nickelharp (a Scandanavian folk instrument still played today). Due to an accedient at the beginning of Covid, I made this instrument because I could still play using all of the fingers on my left hand. I have chosen to interpret the style of instrument to have the melody strings on the outside and the drone strings on the inner pair. This way, just the melody can be played and a more intimate sound achieved, or the melody can be played with a drone, thus giving more volume.

The piece I have chosen is Douce Dame Jolie by Guillaume de Mauchaut (14th C). Not the most complex piece, but it fits in the time period of the instrument and allows me to play it both with and without drones.

Alternative piece

Cantigas de Santa Maria 119

The instrument is a citole based on a number of 13th iconographic examples. There is only one existing citole found in the British Museum and it has been altered, probably in the 16th C. Again, this instrument can play just the melody or all of the strings as drones while fingering the melody. The paired strings offer an amplification effect that we can today measure at 3-5 db, but would still be noticeable in a world without amplification. The highest note was almost never doubled because the thin gut strings were very, very difficult to get to match. The lowest strings were often an octave pair, if low enough. A low gut string lacks the higher harmonics when played and adding the octave higher string offers these harmonics while the lower string offers the root note.

The Cantigas de Santa Maria are a collection of music collected in the 13th C. Not all of the music and lyrics were originally associated together. Thus, I have chosen to only play the musical portion of the piece. I will play it through with just the melody, then with drones. And, finally, with just the melody again. I like the dynamics that this offers.