

PLUCKED CONTINUO INSTRUMENTS – WHY HISTORY IS IMPORTANT

MICHAEL LOWE (GB)

There is a crisis in the lute world. A significant number of professional lutenists have taken the decision to ignore many of the things which are known about historical instruments and the way of playing them, preferring, instead, to invent their own ways of doing things. This manifests itself most clearly when members of the lute family are employed as continuo instruments and I shall, therefore, concentrate on the theorbo and the archlute.

I shall maintain that this modern approach displays great disrespect for the composers of the past, whose music we are playing, and for the instrument-makers for whose instruments the music was written. Only when we respect the composers and instrument-makers of the past will we be able to deepen our understanding of their music and to say anything worthwhile in our performances.



MICHAEL LOWE

made his first lute while still at school in order to have an instrument on which to learn to play. The next three years spent reading Classics at Durham University and the following five studying Greek Archaeology at Merton College, Oxford did not provide much opportunity for lute-making although he did introduce a work bench into his college room in Oxford on which he could build bits of lutes in spare moments.

After attending a lute course in Holland with his latest lute, he returned with nine orders and his archaeological research was shelved indefinitely. For the past forty three years Michael Lowe has been a full-time lute-maker and during that time has built lutes for many of today's leading players. For twenty years he gave termly lectures on the history of the lute to the students of the Early Instrument Making Course at West Dean College in Sussex and for twenty seven years was the organist of his village church in Wootton-by-Woodstock where he still plays for a monthly service.

For the past four decades Michael Lowe has tried, through his research and his instrument-making, to deepen our knowledge of the lute and its music.