

ORCHESOGRAPHY

THOINOT ARBEAU

[1589]

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be deformed by the gout or otherwise defective of limb. Also whether they be comely and modest. We read that Clisthenes, having seen Hippoclidès dancing and swaggering in an impudent manner, refused him his daughter in marriage, saying that he had danced his wedding away.

CAPRIOL

God be thanked, I have no such infirmities, and only a sister twelve years old whom I shall instruct when you have taught me.

ARBEAU

Galen says, in his book of rules for health, that all things have a natural desire for movement and that everyone should practice gentle and moderate exercise, such as the dances invented by the Ionians for this purpose.^a These contribute greatly to health, even to that of young girls, who, leading sedentary lives, intent upon their knitting, embroidery and needlework, are subject to a variety of ill-humours which have need to be dispelled by some temperate exercise.

CAPRIOL

Dancing is a very suitable exercise for them since they are not free to take walks, or go here, there and everywhere about the town as we may without reprehension. In fact, we need to dance less than they, but for all that I am desirous of learning this art, which is at once so old, so honourable and so beneficial.

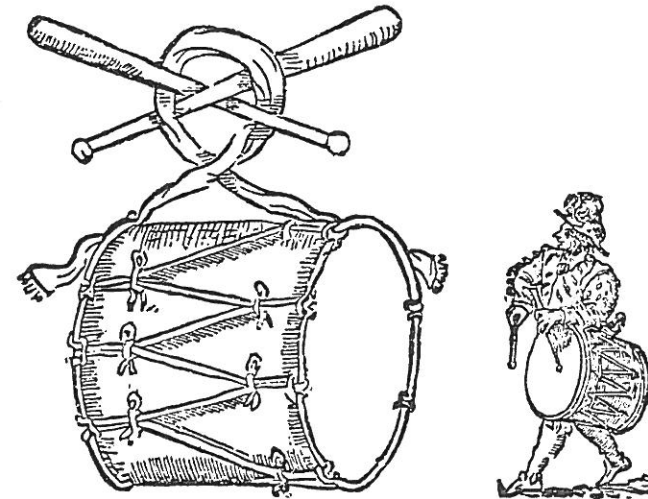
ARBEAU

To please you I will tell you what I know although it would ill become me, at my present age of sixty-nine, to practice the subject matter. Let us speak first, then, of martial dances, and afterwards of those for recreation. The instruments used for military marching are long trumpets, trumpets, bugles, clarinets, horns, cornets, flutes, fifes, pipes, drums and others resembling the said drums.^b

The Persian drum (used by some Germans who carry it at the saddle bow) consists of a half sphere of leather closed with strong parchment, about two and a half feet^c in diameter, and it makes a noise like thunder when the skin is struck with the sticks.

The drum used by the French, and familiar enough to everyone, is of hollow wood about two and a half feet deep, closed at each end with parch-

ment skins secured by two bands, about two and a half feet in diameter, and bound with cords to keep them taut. It makes, as you have often heard, a great noise when the skins are beaten with two sticks which the drummer holds in his hands. The appearance is well known by all, nevertheless I shall place a picture here as we are dealing with the subject.



CAPRIOL

You have put little straps and buckles at each crossing of the cords on the drum.

ARBEAU

This is to tighten the skins when one wishes to beat the drum, by slipping the straps towards the centre, and to loosen them when the drum is not in use by slipping the straps towards the bands and edges. I do not know whether the Children of Israel made use of a drum with one parchment only, as was done at Rome in the sacrifice to the mother of the gods, but the fifteenth Chapter of Exodus tells us that Mary, sister of Moses and Aaron, played the drum exceedingly well. Virgil, in the sixth book of the Aeneid, speaking of Misenus, who was trumpeter to Hector and afterwards to Aeneas, uses these words,

Quo non praestantior alter

*Aere ciere viros, martemque accendere cantu.*¹⁰

and later: *Et lituo pugnas insignis obibat et hasta.*¹¹

The sound of these various instruments serves as signal and warning to the soldiers, to break camp, to advance, to retreat, and gives them heart, daring and courage, both to attack the enemy and to defend themselves with manful vigour. Now, without them, the men would march in confusion and disorder, which would place them in peril of being overthrown and defeated by the enemy. This is why our Frenchmen are instructed to make the rankers and bondsmen of the squadrons march to certain rhythms.

CAPRIOL

How is that?

ARBEAU

You are a musician and well know that it is to the beats of time. Some are duple¹² others are triple¹³, and either of these in their turn may be slow, moderate or quick.

CAPRIOL

That is true.

ARBEAU

You will concede that if three men are walking together and each one moves at a different speed they will not be in step, because to be so they must all three march in unison, either quickly, moderately or slowly.

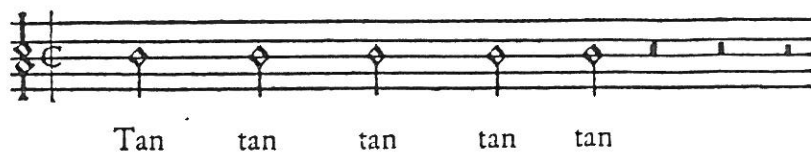
CAPRIOL

There can be no doubt about it.

ARBEAU

That is why, in military marching, the French make use of the drum to beat the rhythm to which the soldiers must march, especially as the majority of soldiers are no better trained in this than they are in other branches of the military art. Wherefore, I shall not delay in setting down the methods.

The drum rhythm contains eight minims,¹⁴ the first five of which are beaten and struck. The first four of these with one stick only and the fifth with both sticks at once. The other three beats are silent.



During the time occupied by the five minims and three rests the soldier takes one pace, that is to say, on the first note he places his left foot on the ground, and during the succeeding three notes raises his right foot so as to bring it down on the fifth note.^a During the three rests, which are the equivalent of three notes, he raises his left foot to recommence another pace as before. Consequently, if the march continues for two thousand five hundred drum beats, the soldier will have covered a league.

CAPRIOL

Why do you start off with the left foot?

ARBEAU

Because most men are right footed and the left foot is the weaker, so if it should come about that the left foot were to falter for any reason the right foot would immediately be ready to support it.

CAPRIOL

It seems to me that one pace, *passus*¹⁵ in Latin, is said to be the span of the two arms extended and not the two feet.

ARBEAU

Look closely, and confirm by measuring, if one pace of the two feet is not the same span as both arms when extended, which geometers estimate to be five feet.

CAPRIOL

Have you not miscalculated when you say that to march a league two thousand five hundred drum rhythms are sounded, as one league only contains two thousand paces which, allowing one pace to each rhythm as you say, would make two thousand?

ARBEAU

A single pace does in truth contain five feet, which would make two thousand to the league, but when successive paces are taken to the drum rhythm each pace is only four feet, inasmuch as the foot completing the first pace is already in position for the second and so on from pace to pace, so that the said paces contain four feet only, and thus it takes two thousand five hundred to cover a league, which is two thousand lengths of five geometric feet.

CAPRIOL

I quite understand now.

ARBEAU

Besides this, you must reflect that when the drum beats are varied the sound is more pleasing, wherefore the drummers sometimes use the five minims and three rests noted above, and sometimes instead of the minims they employ two crotchets¹⁶ or four quavers,¹⁷ according to their fancy. However, the fifth note must always be a minim, unless they wish to repeat the rhythm two or three more times, in which case the three rests occur only at the end.

CAPRIOL

I come near to understanding that but I should very much like an example of these various rhythms.

ARBEAU

The variations are obtained by different combinations of the minims, crotchets and quavers.

CAPRIOL

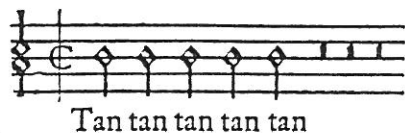
Let me see a list or tabulation of them.

ARBEAU

You are well aware that one minim is equal to two crotchets and that one crotchet is equal to two quavers, therefore during the beat of one minim, two crotchets or four quavers can be beaten. To understand it better, let us call the sound of a minim, made by one tap of the stick, Tan or Plan and the sound of two crotchets, made by two taps of the stick, we shall call Tere, and the sound of four quavers, made by four taps of the stick, Fre.^a Let us then combine these different beats and we shall find a great variety. Here is a tabulation from which you may select those that please you most.

TABULATION CONTAINING ALL THE DIFFERENT DRUM RHYTHMS

The first manner is composed of five Tan only, as has been noted before.



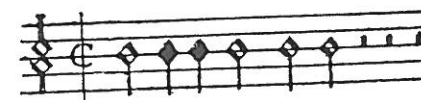
The other rhythms are composed of a combination of Tan with Tere, the said Tan with Fre, and of all three together, Tan, Tere and Fre. First of all, here is a combination of four Tan and one Tere which can be arranged in four different ways.



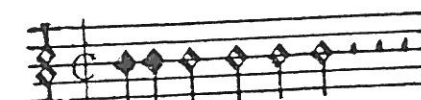
Tan tan tan tere tan



Tan tan tere tan tan

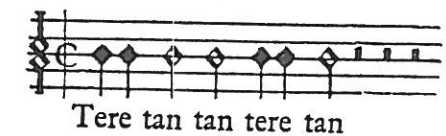
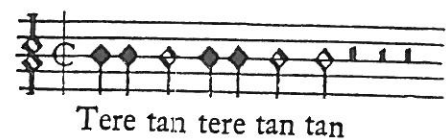
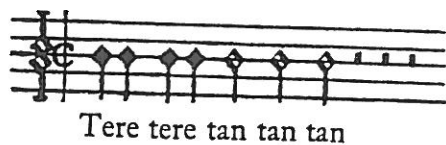
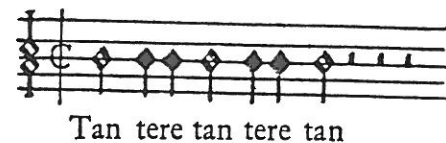
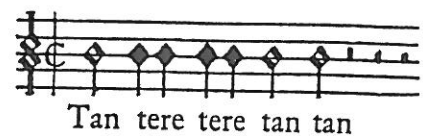
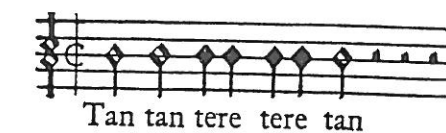


Tan tere tan tan tan

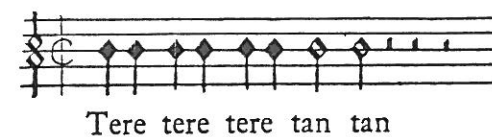
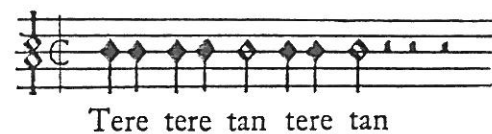
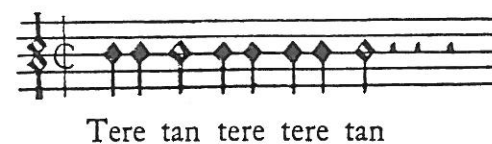


Tere tan tan tan tan

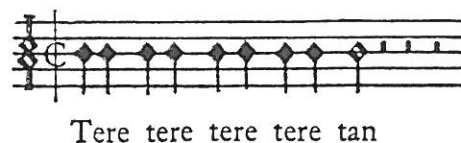
Combination of Three Tan and two Tere



Combination of two Tan and three Tere

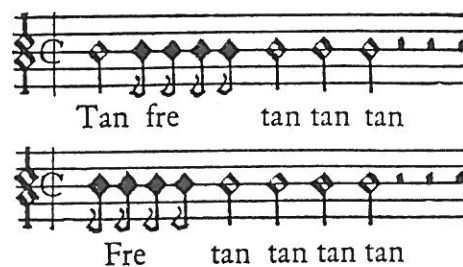


Another combination of four Tere and one Tan which can not be arranged otherwise because the Tan must be at the end to mark the cadence.

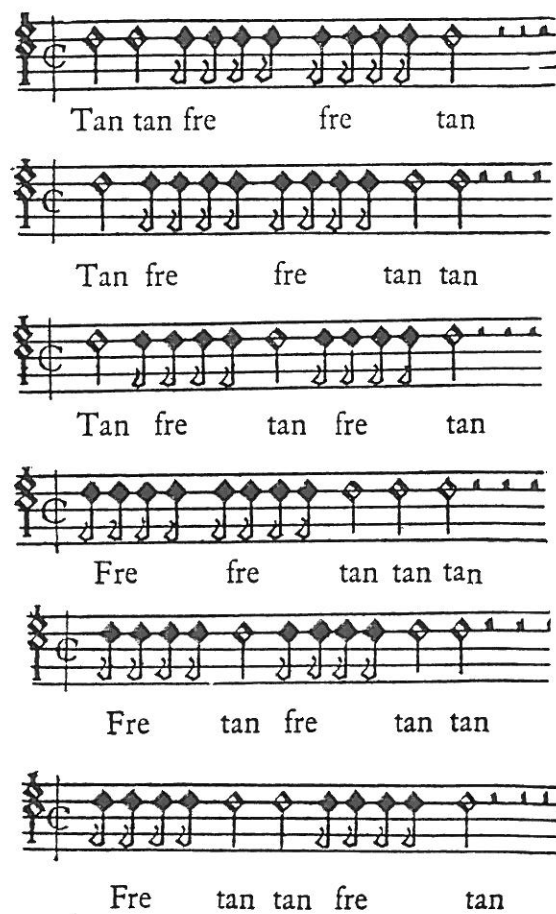


Combination of four Tan and one Fre





Combination of three Tan and two Fre, of which there are six variations, as follows:



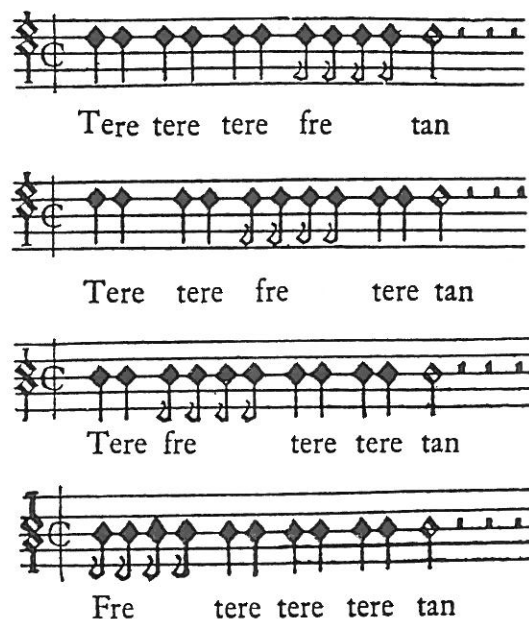
Combination of two Tan and three Fre of which there are four different sorts.



Another rhythm composed of four Fre and one Tan, which cannot be arranged otherwise.



Combination of three Tere and one Fre with the final Tan.



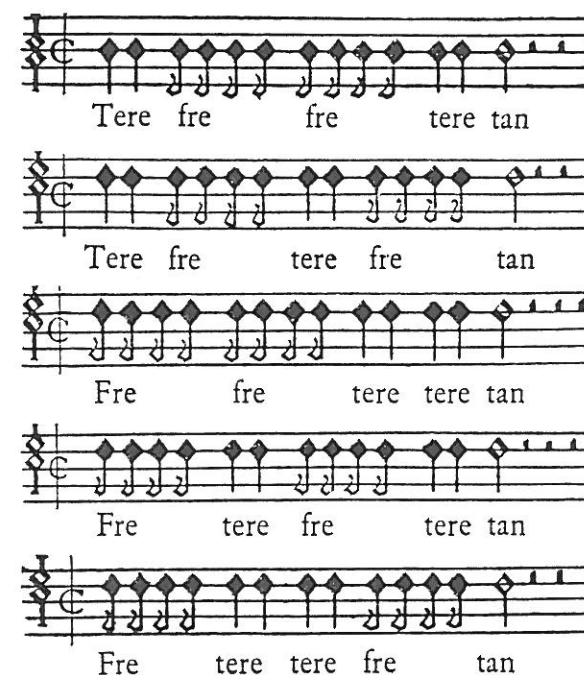
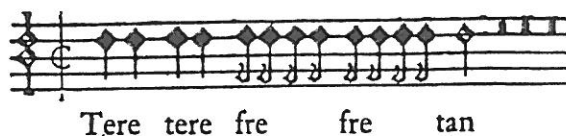
CAPRIOL

I do not believe the drum is capable of any further varieties of rhythm than those you have mentioned above.

ARBEAU

The enumeration of them has wearied you, but there are still others and I must complete the list as I would not leave unfinished what I have begun.

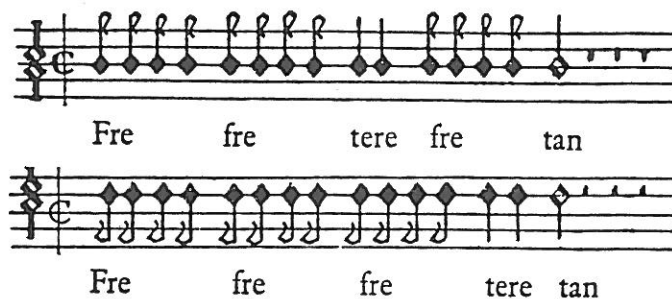
Combination of two Tere and two Fre with the final Tan



Combination of one Tere and three Fre with the final Tan, which can be varied in four ways, after which I will show you the remaining combinations.



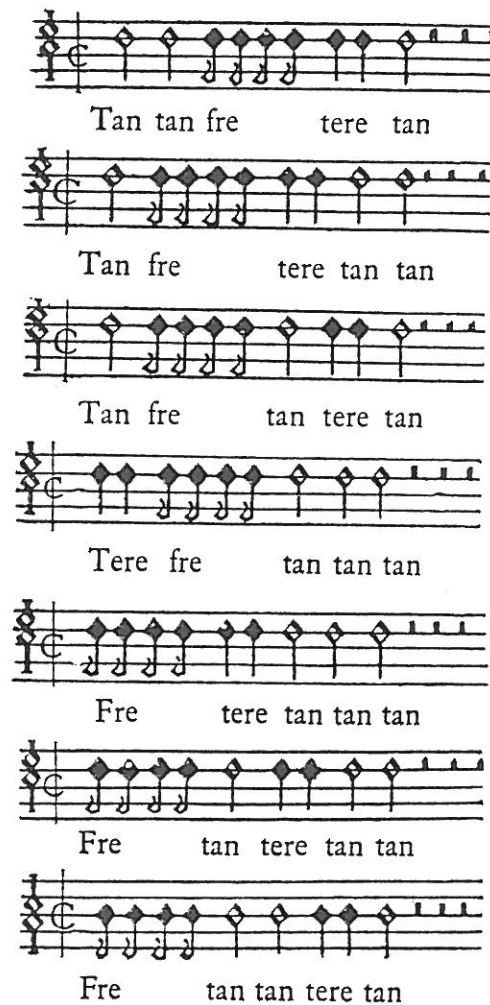
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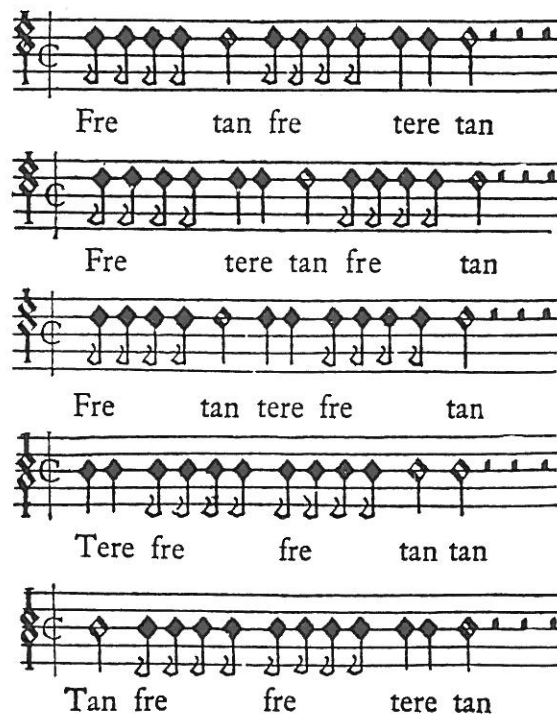


Combination of three Tan, one Tere and one Fre, from which the following twelve variations can be made.



THOINOT ARBEAU





From all the above named varieties the drummer can choose those that seem to him most pleasing and euphonious.

CAPRIOL

Why are the rests put down? Why should not the drummer use eight minims for each step? Four for the left foot and four for the right.

ARBEAU

If the drummer did not use the rests the soldiers would fall out of step, because, as I have told you, the left foot must be brought down on the first note and the right on the fifth, and if all the eight notes were struck a soldier might bring his feet down on notes other than the first and fifth. This cannot

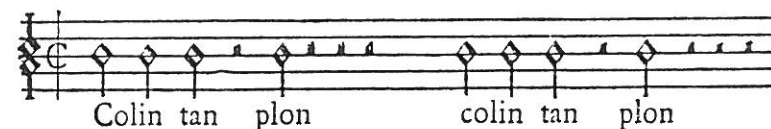
happen with pauses and rests because beaten thus he easily distinguishes the first and fifth notes.

CAPRIOL

Can one only put a rest after the fifth note of a drum rhythm?

ARBEAU

The Swiss drummers put a rest after the third note and three rests at the end, but it comes to the same as the feet are always brought down on the first and fifth note.



CAPRIOL

This custom of marching to the drum looks very fine when well executed.

ARBEAU

It can be done otherwise in the said duple time, by putting only one rest after the five minim notes, and in this case the soldier brings his left foot down on the first note, then his right foot on the third note and again his left foot on the fifth. And in the bar that follows, he brings his right foot down on the first note, then his left foot on the third and again his right foot on the fifth, and so on for the distance to be covered.

CAPRIOL

According to this calculation each drum rhythm accounts for a greater distance than would be covered by a man's marching pace.

ARBEAU

Certainly, the first rhythm will cover seven feet and those that follow six feet only; and in this manner the soldiers will cover a league in one thousand six hundred and sixty six drum rhythms or thereabouts. It would also be possible to beat the said five minims and one rest and to march to them in triple time.^a



In the said triple time the soldier brings down his left foot on the first note and then his right on the fourth note, and so on accordingly.

CAPRIOL

This triple time is very nice; as the paces are similar to those taken to duple time there is only one pause and rest.

ARBEAU

When the warriors draw near to the enemy they march in closer formation

and must watch each step with care, always bringing down the left foot on the first note as I have told you.

CAPRIOL

Would it not be the same if the soldier brought his right foot down on the first note?

ARBEAU

Plainly not, because assuming most soldiers to be right footed they march with the left foot first. If any of them were to start with the right and finish with the left foot they would knock shoulders when in close formation and hinder one another, because we turn the shoulder slightly to the side of the foot that is leading. If, therefore, one soldier were to start on the left foot, his shoulder would swing towards the left and the shoulder of another who had started on the right foot would swing towards the right and they would collide. This does not happen when they march in step, as all the shoulders incline first to one side and then to the other without jostling or hindering one another, a thing you can easily prove for yourself by walking with some one. That is why the drummer beats a succession of repetitions of the rhythm, so that if confusion should occur, through a change in step, the soldiers can mend matters and easily get back on the left foot when they hear the pause or the three rests. And that is a great help in evolutions.

CAPRIOL

What does evolution mean?

ARBEAU

It is not our intention to deal with military art here. If you wish to know about evolution consult the book that Aelian¹⁸ dedicated to the Emperor Hadrian. I shall only tell you this, that besides the marches, saltations and war dances already mentioned here, the drummer employs a succession of lighter and livelier crotchet beats, intermingled with loud blows of the sticks which sound like discharges of arquebus. This is done as the soldiers approach the enemy, and when they wish to join battle they close ranks to form

a solid mass and lower their halberds and pikes, making them into a strong rampart difficult to force or break.

Meanwhile the drummer beats two crotchets in quick duple time, borrowed from the metrical foot that the poets call the Pyrrhic, and the soldiers advance, always leading with the left foot and bringing it down on the first note. And on the second note of the Pyrrhic they bring the right foot close up behind the left foot to brace it and serve as a buttress. And thus, leaping and dancing, they start to fight as if the drum were saying:—



Dedans dedans dedans dedans dedans dedans

CAPRIOL

It seems to me that by now I should be able to march and dance very well

in military step to the beats and rhythms of the drum. But why is the drummer accompanied by one or two fifers?

ARBEAU

What we call the fife is a little transverse flute with six holes, used by the Germans and Swiss, and, as the bore is very narrow, only the thickness of a pistol bullet, it has a shrill note. In place of a fife some use a flageolet called an *arigot*,¹⁹ which has a greater or lesser number of holes according to its size. The best ones have four holes in front and two behind and their sound is piercing; one might call them little *tibiae* as they were originally made from the shin bone and legs of the crane. The players of the said drum and fife are known by the name of their instrument, and we say of two soldiers that one is the drummer and the other the fifer of some captain.

CAPRIOL

Is there a particular way in which to play the fife or *arigot*?

ARBEAU

Those who play them improvise to please themselves and it suffices for them to keep time with the sound of the drum.^a However, we are told that the Phrygian mode, which musicians call the third mode,^b incites naturally to anger and that the Lydians used it when going to war. History records that when Timotheus played in it upon his *tibia*, Alexander the Great instantly arose like a madman raging for combat. Bacchus, that great leader called Dionysus, taught his soldiers, surrounded as they were by women camp followers, dancing and military marches to the sound of the drum and the Phrygian *tibia*. It was by this means that he subjugated the Indians who advanced in a disorderly mob, screaming and yelling, and consequently were thrown into confusion and easily scattered and vanquished.

CAPRIOL

Give me examples of the music for the fife or *arigot* as you have for the drum.

ARBEAU

As I have told you, the music for the fife or *arigot* is composed to the player's fancy. However, I will give you a little extract here that I have obtained from

M. Isaac Huguet, the organist. Its compass on his spinet extends from middle C or B up to high E. And for a bass accompaniment instead of the drum rhythm, he puts his left thumb on the C below and his little finger an octave lower and strikes them in turn, namely, the lower octave on the first beat and the middle C on the fifth, keeping his index finger on the G which makes a perfect fifth with the said lower octave, and a fourth with the upper C.

CAPRIOL

It seems to me, subject to your correction, that by the rules of music, this fourth should not be used as the bass.

ARBEAU

You are quite right, but that applies to voices singing in four parts. In this case we are concerned with the sound of the drum, serving as the bass, and because it has no definite pitch it blends with every thing and there is no objection to the spinet representing it in these euphonious discords. Before I give you the tabulation, you must remember that there are two ways of playing the flute, one by sucking, and the other by rolling the tongue. In the first case the player's tongue goes té, té, té, or teré, teré, teré, and in the second relé, relé, relé. I warn you of this because the example I wish to set down for you should be played té, té, and not rolled.

CAPRIOL

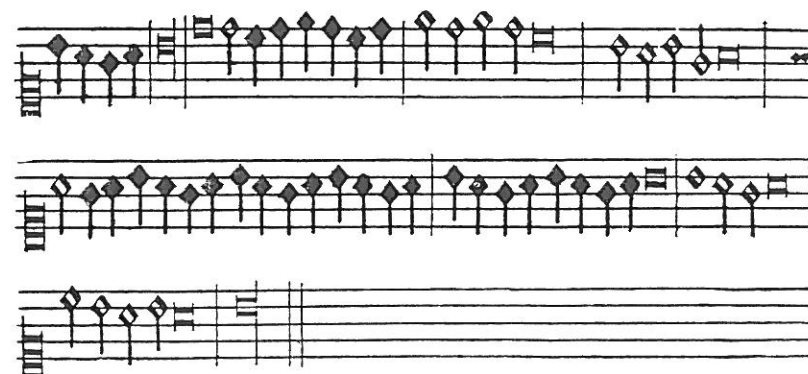
Why should one té, té, instead of rolling it?

ARBEAU

Because the sound of té, té, is shriller and harsher, consequently more warlike than the roll.

TABULATION FOR THE FIFE OR *ARIGOT* IN THE THIRD MODE²⁰





CAPRIOL

I am very pleased to have this tabulation. I have a little *arigot* and I shall try to play this tune on it.

ARBEAU

You can amplify this music to suit your pleasure and fancy. And if, for instance, you assume the drum is beaten in triple time, which consists of five minims and a rest, you can utilize the above music by subtracting two minims from each bar, sometimes at the end of the rhythm, sometimes at the beginning and sometimes in the middle, in such a way that the continuity is not broken.

CAPRIOL

Those who understand music can do it easily.

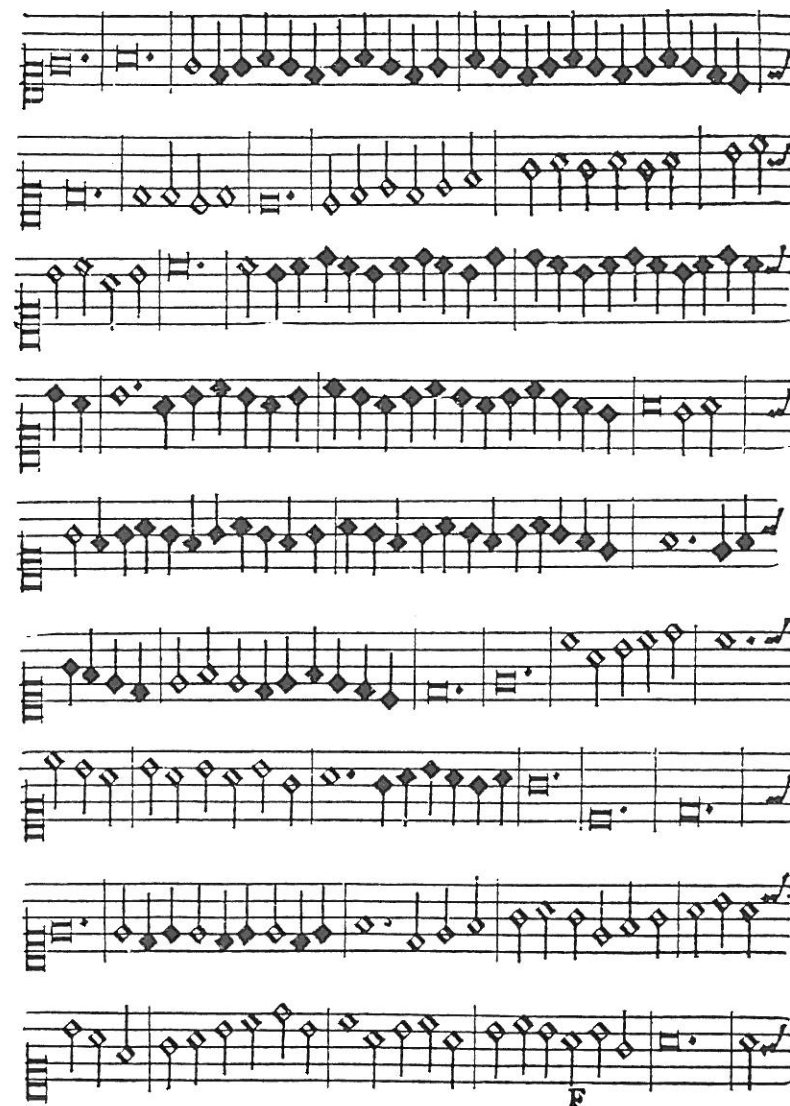
ARBEAU

I should like to give you an example in triple time which you can use without the trouble of abridging the above if you do not wish to; this you can also amplify as much as you wish.

CAPRIOL

Since it pleases you to take the trouble you will greatly oblige me.

TABULATION FOR PLAYING THE FIFE OR *ARIGOT* IN
TRIPLE TIME^a





CAPRIOL

I have no inclination whatever to go to war, still what you have taught me about the dances of war may be of service to me when we engage in military exercises in the town of Langres. But for the moment let us pass on and tell me about recreative dances.

ARBEAU

I must first inform you that, in the likeness of the drum of which we have spoken above, a little one has been made called the tabor, about two small feet long and one foot in diameter, which Isidorus calls a half-symphony.^a Twisted threads are placed at the extremities of both skins on the tabor, unlike the big drum where a double cord is placed across one of the skins only.^b

CAPRIOL

What is the purpose of these twisted threads?

ARBEAU

It is due to them that when the tabor is struck by a stick or the fingers the sound is strident and throbbing.

CAPRIOL

Symphony means harmony and not a tabor.

ARBEAU

In truth the Greek word *symphonia* means harmony and from this word the Symphonic Musicians derive their name. But it is not inapposite that the tabor should have received the designation of symphony, or half-symphony as Isidorus calls it, because it is usually accompanied by one or more other musical instruments with which it blends, adding charm and serving as a bass and diapason^a to all harmonies. It is very probably that which was used to accompany the instrument called the chorus^b to give praise to God in rejoicing, and of which the Holy Royal Prophet speaks when he says—*Laudate Dominum in tympano et choro*.²¹ In the fifteenth chapter of St. Luke the elder son of the family was indignant when he learned that they were making great celebration with the fatted calf and the symphony and chorus to welcome his brother. Daniel relates in his third chapter that Nebuchadnezzar proclaimed all should fall down and worship his statue when they heard the sound of the flute, the hautboy,²² the sackbut,²³ the harp, the psaltery,²⁴ the symphony and other musical instruments.^c

CAPRIOL

I had understood this word chorus to mean a company of dancers.

ARBEAU

I have seen a picture of the said chorus in a book describing all the musical instruments and it was shown with the symphony as we should link the latter with the flute or large *tibia* today.^d The Basques and Béarnais use another kind of tabor²⁵ which they hold suspended in the left hand while playing it with the fingers of the right. The wood is only half a foot deep and the skins a small foot in diameter. It is surrounded by tiny bells and little pieces of copper and makes a pleasant sound, not a horrible one as did the large drums filled with bells, used by the natives of India in battle, which Suidas describes. As for our tabor, we do not put any bells in it and usually accompany it with a long flute or large *tibia*. And the musician plays whatever