

Most of us have read what Thomas Mace wrote in *Musick's Monument* (London, 1676):

And that you may know how to *shelter your Lute*, in the worst of *Ill weathers*, (which is *moist*) you shall do well, ever when you *Lay it by* in the day-time, to put *It into a Bed*, that is *constantly used*, between the *Rug and Blanket*; but never between the *Sheets*, because they may be *moist* with *Sweat*, &c.

This is the *most absolute and best place to keep It* in always, by which doing, you will find *many Great Conveniences*, which I shall here set down.....

.....no Person be so *inconsiderate*, as to *Tumble down upon the Bed whilst the Lute is There*; For I have known several *Good Lutes spoil'd with such a trick*.

Yesterday Mace's words made me start to think. Those of us who own lutes tend to keep them in hard cases. If you've spent £2000 or more on a good instrument, you don't feel like letting it occupy the back seat of your car in an unprotected state. But many of us keep our lutes in their hard cases whenever we aren't actually playing them. Is that good? Never mind the sad loser who objects to a fibreglass case as 'unauthentic'. Is it good for a lute to be kept in a state of near-mummification when it isn't being played?

Something in me feels like saying *No*. Imagine that you're so fond of your lute that you want to enjoy its visible presence throughout your waking hours. You make an artistic little bracket that allows your lute to hang safely in one corner of the living-room. Visitors come in. They are fascinated by the instrument. They talk about it appreciatively. For their part your loved ones soon come to treat the lute as part of the living-room furniture. After a while they're able to live their domestic lives without being aware of its presence. They talk, they argue, they laugh, and they discuss things. They pass on pieces of good and bad news. Whatever they say, the lute reacts sonically to their words. It is more than part of the furniture. It is almost part of the family.

I could go on, but I've said enough. A real lutanist who knows more than I do may like to answer the following question. Will the emancipated lute that we have imagined feel better or worse, in the hands of a good player, than a lute which spends most of its life in a case, or will it feel exactly the same? If you say that a bad flautist has damaged the keyless wooden flute that you made for him *merely by the manner in which he has blown it*, over a six-month period, unmusical people will accuse you of raving. They will make the same accusation if you say that your beloved old double bass has been knocked out of kilter by a bus journey from Edinburgh to London. But FoMRHI members will realize that you are speaking the sober truth. I wonder whether some genial piece of truth is waiting to be declared about the liberated lute.