THE SETTING OF LYRA VIOL TABLATURE IN SIBELIUS

Sibelius is a sophisticated and wide-ranging music notation programme, but it does have weak spots – the setting of tablature in an early music context is one. The handbook includes instructions for lute tablature, but what is really built in to the programme is modern (electric) guitar tab, the lute tablature function is derived from this. It works by separating the notehead and stem; the notehead appears as a tablature letter in the six-line staff, the stem appears above the staff as a rhythm symbol.

But there are problems: in 17th century lute tablature the rhythm symbol for a semibreve is a vertical line, like the detached stem of a crotchet, the symbol for a minim is like the stem of a quaver, and so on. This means that the music has to be entered in quartered note values for the correct rhythm symbols to appear, which leads to difficulties when setting ensemble music with other instruments or voices, or if you want to have a staff notation transcription in the score. The second problem is that of the diapasons, which have to be fudged by entering them in a text style which can be made to look right, but which does not play back. This is why lutenists on the whole prefer to use the specialist tablature software packages such as Fronimo or Django.

Nevertheless there are good reasons for persevering with Sibelius for lyra viol, as it does so many other things so well. In fact, most of what is needed for the satisfactory notation of viol tablature is built in to the programme; what is missing is the page of instructions which draws it all together.

The following is written assuming familiarity with Sibelius 5 or 6 (Sibelius 4 users will probably have no difficulty, but for Sibelius 3 or earlier versions there are increasingly significant differences), and with the normal conventions of 17th century viol tablature.

The approach is to separate the tablature letters and rhythm symbols in a different way from that adopted by the built-in lute tablature, and here I will describe two methods.

METHOD 1: two instruments

Here the rhythm symbols and the six-line tablature staff are separate instruments.

For the rhythm symbols a suitable instrument already exists: when starting a new score or subsequently creating an instrument, in the **Instruments** menu select **Others>No instrument (hidden)**. This behaves like a normal five line staff, but only the notes appear, everything else is hidden (even when you switch on **View hidden objects**). It does not play back.

A suitable instrument for the tablature staff needs to be created by editing an existing instrument, and here there are two options. The first is found in **House Style>Edit Instruments>Other Fretted Instruments>Gamba (tab)**; this might seem to be just the thing, but it nevertheless needs to be edited, as by default it uses numbers and not letters. Click on **New Instrument**, and **Yes**: in the dialogue which opens, enter a suitable name ('Lyra viol edfhf' in this example) and then click on **Edit Staff Type**. In the **Tab** tab set the tuning required and select the options **Use letters** and **Draw notes between lines**. The remaining properties do not need to be altered. By default this instrument plays back, rather disconcertingly, with piano sound.

The second option, and my own preferred one, is to edit the existing bass lute, which is found here: **House Style>Edit Instruments>Lute>Bass Lute, D tuning, French/English [tab]**; again, click on **New Instrument**, and **Yes**, and enter the new name(s). In the **Edit Staff Type** dialogue set the required tuning, and then in the **Notes and Rests** tab deselect the **Rhythms** option (top left) – this ensures that the detached stems etc. of the notes do not show. This instrument plays back, not surprisingly, with an acceptable lute sound.

For the worked example, the score has three instruments, the third is a perfectly normal bass viol, for the staff notation transcription.

To enter the music in the tablature staff, see under 'Lute Tablature' in the handbook (if you have difficulty finding where the next note should be, try switching on **View Hidden Objects**, as once the first note in each bar has been entered the hidden rests appear in the remainder of the bar). Select the lyra viol staff and copy to the bass viol for the transcription:

The hidden instrument staff is a little tricky to find as no notes have yet been entered (try switching on the Staff Rulers – **Ctrl+Shift+Alt+R**); once you have it, enter the rhythms. These should all be on the same note, and below the centre of the stave so that the stems point upwards. Tip: once you have successfully clicked on the first bar of this staff, click 'minim' on the 1st keypad (or appropriate keyboard shortcut) – the minim rest(s) which appear helpfully locate the middle line of the staff. Rhythm symbols may be entered either for all the notes, in which case the unwanted ones must be hidden, or just for those needed, in which case the rests must be hidden. Either way the beams should be removed (3rd keypad layout).

Regardless of which option has been used for the tablature staff the time signature, which is suppressed along with the stems and dots, has to be restored. Go to **Create>Text>Special text>Time signatures**, the resulting 'non-functional' time signature shows in all the visible staves. If you have a staff notation part in the score, it is best to hide the 'functional' time signature and position the new one over it, even if they are the same.

Refinements: The size of the rhythm symbols may be altered by making the hidden instrument a 'small staff' (**Create>Instruments**, select the hidden instrument and click on the **Small staff** button – this can of course be done at the start when creating the score). The size relative to the normal staff may then be adjusted in the **House Style>Engraving Rules>Staves** dialogue (it can be bigger, as well as smaller). The spacing between the rhythm and tab staves will vary according to the engraving rules and the number of staves on the page; it may be adjusted by dragging staves or (stepwise) by changing the 'pitch' of the rhythms.

By default the font for the tablature letters is Times New Roman, bold and italic. This may be edited in **House Style>Edit Text Styles>Tablature letters**.

The alignment of the rhythm symbols with the tablature letters may be improved if necessary by selecting the whole of the rhythm staff and adjusting the 'x' value in the **General** menu in the **Properties** window (here set to +0.3).

The rhythm symbols for notes tied over a barline require special treatment. If they are dotted, the correct appearance can be achieved by creating a triplet (with no number or bracket) in the rhythm staff. Here is the start of the second strain of the same almaine, the dotted crotchets are entered as triplets:

This does not work for tied-over notes which are not dotted, as Sibelius does not allow a 2:1 'tuplet'. Here the true rhythm symbol has to be hidden and the required note value superimposed as a 'symbol' (**Create>Symbol**). Fortunately such symbols attach themselves to the hidden note and are not usually a problem when layout changes are made.

Even when the score has only tablature staves, Sibelius by default leaves a space for the (non-existent) clef and key signature at the start of each system. The size of this space may be adjusted in **House Style>Engraving Rules>Clefs and Key Signature**. If a barline at the start of each system is wanted (by default it will not be there in a part, or if there is only one instrument in the score) go to **House Style>Engraving Rules >Barlines** and switch on the **Barline at start of single staves** option.

METHOD 2: one instrument

The second method for notating the rhythm symbols abandons the hidden instrument and uses instead the text style **Lyrics above staff**, suitably formatted. In **House Style>Edit Text Styles>Lyrics above staff>Edit** set the font to 'Opus Text' (this is one of the Sibelius special fonts). Font size and default position may be set in the usual ways. The rhythm is then entered as lyrics text in the normal way, typing the following letters (basically the initial letters of the American note names):

w	semibreve	x	semiquaver
h	minim	y	demisemiquaver
q	crotchet	full stop	dot
e	quaver		

As with the hidden instrument method, there is the choice of either giving each note a rhythm symbol and hiding the unwanted ones, or typing only those which are needed. If the second option is chosen any unwanted automatic 'Lyric lines' will have to be disposed of: in the **House Style>Engraving Rules>Text** dialogue set 'n' in **Lyric lines 'n' spaces after text** to something very big.

The advantages of this method are that the spacing between the tablature staff and the rhythm symbols remains constant throughout the score, and there is no problem notating the rhythm for tied-over notes, as the symbols do not have to 'add up'. However, notating tied rhythm symbols is awkward. Typing '_' in Opus Text produces a slur/tie, but it is of fixed length and usually does not reach the next note. Creating a slur in the tablature staff and dragging it up to the correct place is a little fiddly, but produces a more satisfactory appearance.

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