

RECOMMENDED PITCHES for LUTES

Pitch of 1st course (a' = 440 Hz)	Recommended mensur for single or double first course	Longest mensur possible for single first course (not double)
d'' (soprano)	35-36 cm	38 cm
c#''	37-38 cm	40 cm
c''	39-40 cm	42 cm
b'	41-43 cm	45 cm
b ^b ' (soprano/alto)	44-45 cm	47 cm
a' (alto)	46-48 cm	50 cm
g#'	49-51 cm	53 cm
g'	52-54 cm	57 cm
f#'	55-57 cm	60 cm
f'	58-61 cm	63 cm
e' (bass)	62-64 cm	67 cm
e ^b '	65-68 cm	71 cm
d'	69-72 cm	75 cm
c#'	73-76 cm	80 cm
c'	77-81 cm	84 cm

The above table is based on the experiments by Donna Curry made with commercially available moderate twist gut. This gut used is made in essentially the same way as the early moderate twist gut.

Gut first courses can safely be used with reasonable life expectancy for the string if pitches for the mensurs (vibrating string lengths) are used as indicated. It is possible to use single gut first courses at slightly longer mensurs but shorter life expectancy of the string will result. Exceeding the pitch as indicated for the "longest mensur possible" column will result in total frustration due to string breakage.

The results of gut string experiments are of great value in realizing the correct pitch that lutes of various mensurs should be tuned to. With nylon string it is the tendency of most twentieth-century lutenists to pitch lutes higher than they can be pitched with gut strings. Because it is possible to tune the lute higher with nylon does not mean the lute **should** be pitched higher. It is this writer's experience that most lutes have a richer sound pitched in the range they would be to utilize gut strings regardless of the use of gut or nylon. This writer prefers the tone of gut strings over nylon in any event.

Ephraim Segerman and Djilda Abbott, England, independently conducted similar experiments with moderate twist gut, arriving at essentially the same results. A complete discussion of their results may be read in *Communication No. 4 of the Fellowship of Makers and Restorers of Historical*

Instruments, November, 1975. Segerman and Abbott have further experimented with high twist gut and Venice Catlins (not commercially available) and the results are reported in the same *Communication*.

Further, it is recommended to read Segerman and Abbott's discussion "On Single, Octave, or Unison Courses in Early Stringed Instruments" in FoMRHI *Communication* No. 30, July, 1976.

FoMRHI *Communications* may be obtained by joining the organization. Membership inquiries to: <http://www.nrinstruments.demon.co.uk/fomrhi.html> or in writing to

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We are obliged to American Lute Seminars of California for permission to reprint this monograph.

————— Donna Curry

* Note: Contact information has been modernized for this retro-publication. DFH, November 2008