

Changing Strings

Changing a string on a theorbo is not much different from changing a string on any other sort of lute, though another pair of hands can be useful when changing a diapason on a large theorbo. Strings are best changed one at a time, both to keep control of the potential bird's nest and to maintain even tension on the instrument.

Remove the old string by tuning it down then untying it, don't just cut it off. I run a soft sharpened pencil along the nut groove and put a tiny bit of peg paste on the peg where it contacts the pegbox walls. This routine bit of maintenance can save a lot of problems with sticking strings and pegs.

Unravel the new string with care, especially if it is gut, because kinks become potential break points. First attach it to the bridge. Pass one end of the string through the bridge hole towards the endclasp. Bring this end up and over the bridge, under the rest of the string, and back over the bridge, tucking the end of the resultant loop around itself a couple of times as you go. Well-designed bridges have an indented ridge at the back, under which the final loop of the string can be caught. This precaution provides added security for the string and also prevents the ends creeping up and catching on your clothes when you play, so try to make sure that the strings are caught under this ridge. Gut strings and metal-overspun strings are highly textured and will usually hold if the end is caught only once under the loop. Nylon strings need another twist or two, and slippery fluoro-carbon strings may need as many twists as you can fit on the width of the bridge. Pull lightly on the string to tighten this loop and lock the string to the bridge.

Lead the rest of the string to its peg, making sure that it goes from the nut to its peg without wrapping over any other strings in the pegbox on the way. Clip off any excess length, leaving enough length to go through the peghole and make three or four turns around it. With the theorbo's soundboard facing you, wind the peg clockwise away from you. With the first turn make sure that you catch the end of the string under the first winding, to secure the string. Wind up the rest of the string, making sure that the string runs in as straight a line as possible over the nut, and that it is not bunched up against the pegbox wall. Leading the string at a sharp angle when it crosses the nut will tend to unseat the peg in the pegbox, or may cause the string to break on the nut.

When changing a diapason make sure the theorbo is secure on a safe surface, because you will need to walk up and down its length to get from bridge to peg.

If you are changing strings in order to change pitch, make sure you keep track of the strings of the other set and label them as you go.

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