

Cleaning

A few spots on the theorbo may need occasional cleaning. The areas of the soundboard where the little finger rests, and where the arm crosses the soundboard rim, may quickly become grimy. A soft tissue (not one which sheds fibres) lightly moistened with saliva will gently remove surface dirt. Oily or greasy grime may require lightly moistening the tissue with surgical spirit (NOT white spirit). Gently and repeatedly wipe the grimy area in one direction. Change to a clean piece of tissue when the cloth becomes dirty, to avoid transferring the grime back to the instrument. Don't scrub and don't press too hard on the soundboard. If in doubt about the finish on your soundboard, try a tiny and inconspicuous area first.

If your theorbo's back has a coloured oil-varnish finish (common on many light-coloured woods such as yew and sycamore) it is advisable to wipe the back gently with a piece of clean silk each time you finish playing, especially the top edge of the body which gets warmed and moistened by its proximity to the player's breath, and any areas which are handled repeatedly. Skin oils and condensed moisture from the breath can all damage delicate oil varnish finishes.

The fingerboard can become very grimy over time. Prevention is better than cure, so washing your hands before playing is advisable, but hardwood fingerboards (ebony or rosewood) can easily be cleaned. It is best to remove the tied frets, or at least slide them all up to the nut before doing this. Cotton wool lightly moistened with surgical spirit (NOT white spirit - it's worth saying it again!) will remove built-up greasy grime. Alcohol-based perfume is also an effective cleaning agent, traditionally used on the ebony fingerboards of expensive violins. However, make sure that it NEVER touches any oil varnish elsewhere on the instrument. Perfume does leave some residual smell for a while, so if you don't habitually wear it perhaps surgical spirit is the easier option...

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