

The Weiss Lutebook: Pieces from the Warsaw MSS, 2003/3

Edited by Clive Titmuss

Foreword:

Notation:

In editing these pieces for a practical edition of the music, obvious rhythmic errors were corrected without comment, but illegible or erroneous tablature letters were corrected and appear in square brackets. Following modern conventions of notation as much as possible in tablature, the rhythm flags reflect the underlying beat structure. The scribe's distinction between downward and upward slurs, using upward and downward facing bracket lines (sometimes inconsistently) are conveyed in the tablature. The text is substantially as it was copied in the MS.

Scribes:

All the pieces in D were copied in a group. The D major *Allegro* is a variant of the same piece, with a different ending and other small details, titled *Capricio* in the British Museum Weiss MS.

Four pieces, a fugal *Allegro* and a *Courante de Weiss* in A and the untitled pieces in B flat [*Andante*] and [*Fuga*] are in a different hand.

The Music:

Evolving away from the late Baroque stylized dance movements of the classic suite: Allemand, Courante, Sarabande and Gigue, Weiss wrote increasingly less formal, more *galant* music. Among other changes, his groups dispensed with the final Gigue in favor of *Allegro* concerto-style movements typical of Italian string writing. In this type of music, he used short melodic fragments worked into a rhythmically continuous texture, using traditional techniques of extension: sequences, imitation, modulation.

Many of his pieces in the British Museum MS are in the key of D major, especially the notable Passacaille, Aria, Anglaise and other masterpieces. The Dresden MS is a legacy of his best work in its most polished form, collected into Folios, carefully edited and copied by professionals, including Weiss himself. But it lacks a group in the most natural open-string major key for the lute. Is this D major group from his middle period (identified by style only) at least one of the "missing"?

The anonymous [*Prelude*] employs the device known as *bebung* or vibrato holding of notes, written-out arpeggiation, and some pandiatonicism. The rhythmic notation appears incomplete.

The [*Allegro*] in D allows for a comparison with its more concise BM version. The Warsaw version has significant differences in the final bars, concluding with short octave scales, rather than an *ad libitum* cadenza.

The *Allemande* has features which seem from an earlier style: handling of the cadences, appoggiaturas of m. 10-11, 31-32, the cultivated atmosphere of *style luthée*.

The *Courante*, is circumscribed, even prefatory in its formal organization. Dispensing with melodic interest in favor of figuration, it extends over the entire range of the lute, including techniques with which we are familiar in the concerto-style movements. The pieces' enlarged form makes room for an idiomatic display of the difference in color between open and stopped strings in all the lute's registers. There is

underlying thematic unity among the pieces, heard for example, in the striking broken-register sequences of m. 34-42 of the D major Courante and m. 23-24 of the Presto.

The *Menuet* in this group is an example of the use of parallel minor within a group, also found in several of the Dresden groups.

The D major *Presto* resembles middle-period Allegros written from the Dresden MS, in F major, C major, B flat (a published work, by G.P. Telemann in *Der Getreue Musikmeister*).

The *Courente de Weis*, in A, begins with sweeping broken chords and has the feel of an early work, not as long as later examples, but with all of the later features.

There are two fugal movements, one in A major [*Allegro*], the other in B flat, without title. For the *da capo* fugue in B flat, the case for authorship by Weiss is weak on stylistic grounds. It's interesting because it is important to see this work as a lute piece which shares elements seen in J. S. Bach's lute-related tryptich Prelude, [Fuga, Allegro] in E flat BWV 998, and the *da capo* Fuga of the Suite in C minor, BWV 997.

The Anonymous [*Andante*] is an *arioso da capo* in Menuet or Polonoise rhythm. The delicacy and melodic interest make the work a pleasant final inclusion, though it is probably not by Weiss.

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