

**Silvius Leopold  
WEISS**

**(1687–1750)**

**Works  
for Lute  
arranged  
for guitar**

**Danijel  
Cerović**



## Silvius Leopold Weiss (1687–1750) Works for Lute (arr. guitar)

Silvius Leopold Weiss, born in Breslau, capital of Silesia, (now Wrocław, Poland), is now acknowledged as the greatest Baroque lutenist of his epoch. It is only quite recently that the true date of his birth has been confirmed by scholars as 1687 and not 1686 as previously thought.

Taught by his father, Weiss studied the lute from an early age and by 1706 had entered the service of Count Carl Philipp of the Palatinate in Breslau. Between 1710 and 1714 Weiss resided in Rome with the Polish Prince Alexander Sobiesky (1677–1714), whose mother Queen Maria Casimira employed both Alessandro and Domenico Scarlatti from 1709. After Sobiesky's death in 1714 Weiss returned to the north and was appointed to the court of Carl Philipp, Imperial Governor of the Tyrol. By 1717 Weiss was a member of the chapel at the Saxon court in Dresden, being formally engaged in 1718 to the chapel with a substantial salary. Weiss remained in this post until his death in 1750.

During his time in Dresden, Weiss travelled to various courts to perform including Prague (1717 and 1719), the Emperor's court in Vienna (1717) and the Bavarian court (1722) among others. In 1739 he visited J.S. Bach in Leipzig and there have been well documented accounts of the two composers improvising together. Bach arranged Weiss's *Sonata No. 47* for violin and keyboard (*BWV 1025*).

Weiss married Marie-Elizabeth around the time of his appointment to Dresden and had eleven children, seven of whom were still living at the time of his death. Despite the fact that by 1744 Weiss was the highest paid musician at the court it appears that by the end of his life he was in difficult financial circumstances. His son, Johann Adolf Faustinus Weiss, born in 1741, continued his father's tradition as court lutenist in Dresden from 1763 to 1813.

Throughout his career Weiss composed over 600 pieces for solo lute organised into suites or *Sonaten*. The majority of these are contained in two manuscripts, one located in The British Library, London, and another in the Sächsische Landesbibliothek, Dresden. Weiss was also a renowned teacher, and among his pupils were the youthful Frederick the Great as well as the renowned lutenists Adam Falckenhagen and Johann Kropfgans.

The term 'capriccio' has been used since the 16th century to denote a musical creation of imaginative whimsy, signifying an individuality of form and content. Weiss's *Capriccio* enacts this formula by deploying two essential styles, the contrapuntal opening in three parts (reiterated throughout by beginning the sequence at a different pitch each time in fugal mode) and arpeggiated episodes over an elegant bass line. The piece ends with a remarkable coda of elaborate chordal embellishment and dramatic flourishes.

Only two of Weiss's *Sonatas* were given poetic titles. *L'Infidèle* ('The Infidel') has become one of the composer's best-known suites through its inventive melodies and poignant harmonies. Michel Cardin, the renowned Weiss scholar, has commented that the title must be understood in the context of 1683 when the 'Turkish advance through Europe was arrested at the gates of Vienna'. The leader of the Christian army was Johann III, King of Poland, whose offspring ruled Dresden during the period of Weiss's lifetime.

*Entrée* begins with dotted rhythms and dignified chords supporting a plaintive melodic line. The second half of the piece introduces rapid ascending scale runs after the initial theme. The *Courante* enlivens the mood with its scurrying quavers though not without touches of pathos in its wistful descending sequences.

The *Sarabande* intensifies the sense of nostalgic melancholy with its subtle interplay of bass and treble, tasteful ornamentation, and sweet dissonances. In the second half a mournful downward movement on the top string is delightfully reflective.

The *Menuet* is an expression of joy in its interplay of voices and the fast quavers which hark back to the *Courante*. Michel Cardin observes that the movement is 'idiosyncratically "luthish" in its skilful use of *campanellas* [sounding open strings with fretted strings to produce a bell-like sonority] where most of the notes are distributed one per string', and thus 'the resultant shimmering texture fully exploits the inherent richness of the late Baroque lute'.

The *Musette* as a movement takes its name and style from a small bagpipe, usually of aristocratic design, which achieved popularity in France in the 17th and early 18th centuries. Weiss's *Musette* is an energetic propulsive work

full of sudden surprises and moments of expressiveness in the midst of abundant rhythmic characterisation.

*Paysane* is the French word for 'rustic' or 'peasant', but Weiss's composition here would not disgrace the Dresden court in terms of its sophistication and musical expertise. Michel Cardin summed up the piece with his comment that this *Paysane* 'retains the omnipresent majesty of the sonata, providing in addition, an engaging dance feel: a heroically victorious conclusion to the work'.

*Tombeau sur la mort de M. Comte de Logy* (1721) is Weiss's most renowned composition and a remarkable elegy of the most poignant kind. It mourns the passing of Count Jan Antonin Losy (sometimes also spelled Logy) von Losinthal (c. 1650–1721). The manuscript is now in The British Library, London. Written as an *allemande*, traditional for *tombeaux*, this is an extended work which thoroughly explores the many textures of the plucked strings such as sonorous chords, part writing, melodic inventiveness, and a variety of harmonic colours. A true masterpiece in every sense.

A *passacaglia* (or *passagaille*) is essentially a set of variations over a ground bass line, a form originating in early 17th century Spain and becoming a popular structure for organists of the 18th century such as J.S. Bach. Weiss's *Passacaglia* seizes the attention from the opening with its confident chords supporting a memorable theme. What follows is an extended sequence of variations of enormous ingenuity and inventiveness exploring the possibilities of creativity over this particular bass to the utmost. The variations range from the deeply expressive to brilliant display.

*Tombeau sur la mort de M. Cajetan Baron d'Hartig* appears in the same manuscript as the previous *Tombeau*, and the title carries the words 'arrivé le 25 de Mars 1719', thus supplying us with an accurate date of composition. The Hartigs were a well-known family in Prague but the actual Baron d'Hartig named has not been identified. The original piece was written for lute in the unusual key of E flat minor which in guitar transcriptions readily transfers to E minor.

The *Fantasia*, originally in C minor but usually performed on the guitar in E minor or D minor, carries the inscription on the manuscript of 'Weiss 1719 à Prague'. This masterpiece

of the lute repertoire was performed on the guitar by Andrés Segovia, who recorded the piece in 1962. Other eminent guitarists with notable recordings of the *Fantasia* include Julian Bream, John Williams, and Narciso Yepes. The work takes the form of a prelude and fugue, the early section being written without time signature and clearly intended to be played in a free manner. The advent of the fugal episode is well marked by a return to a strict tempo though the second half makes occasional references to aspects from the first section.

'*Le Fameux Corsaire*' ('The Famous Pirate') is a somewhat enigmatic title which may refer to the English pirate Edward Teach, known as Blackbeard, who died in battle on 22 November 1718. The title does indeed endow the suite with elements of mystery.

The opening *Allemande* has been described by Michel Cardin as 'a veritable elegy, extremely contemplative by design, delighting the ear with the grace of its serene majesty'. It is technically complex with a superb melodic line reinforced by a comprehensive bass accompaniment. The *Courante* is an extended statement of great virtuosity and charm, setting up a perpetual motion between bass and treble of a dynamic kind.

This is followed by a jaunty *Bourée* propelled along by an all pervasive bass line which, as Michel Cardin points out, can also be found in J.S. Bach's C minor *Fugue, BWV 847*, in the first book of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. The *Sarabande* is surely one of Weiss's finest statements with an exquisite melody and delicate triplets as well as stately embellishment and a variety of rhythmic patterns. The *Menuet* echoes the opening of the *Allemande* and provides an active dance theme with sparse chords contrasted against clusters of quavers.

The concluding *Presto*, according to Michel Cardin, has elements of the hornpipe, and he sees the movement as re-acquainting the listener 'with an atmosphere of joyful exhilaration'. With energetic scale runs and rapid filigree this movement is ideally suited to a guitarist's technique and provides a finale bursting with virtuosic exuberance.

**Graham Wade**

Acknowledgements are due in the writing of these notes to the scholarly work of Roberto Barto, Michael Cardin, Ruggiero Chiesa, Tim Crawford and Jakob Lindberg.

## Danijel Cerović

Danijel Cerović is an award-winning musician, recording artist and pedagogue from Montenegro. He is frequently invited to play at international festivals and concert halls, as a soloist or chamber musician, and performs with orchestras all over the world. Ensembles and orchestras Cerović has worked with include the Montenegrin, Daejeon and Shenyang Symphony Orchestras, Mossani Strings, Camerata Quartet and Rubikon String Quartet. He has also given masterclasses at international conservatoires, festivals and competitions. Cerović is one half of the Montenegrin Guitar Duo (represented by Tashmina Artists) together with virtuoso guitarist Goran Krivokapić. The duo arranged and recorded J.S. Bach's six *English Suites* in world premiere recordings for Naxos (Nos. 1–3: 8.573473, Nos. 4–6: 8.573676) garnering critical praise from *American Record Guide*, *Gramophone*, *Classics Today*, *Guitare Classique* and *Soundboard*. Danijel Cerović is a co-founder and artistic director of the Nikšić Guitar Festival and the Montenegro International Guitar Competition. He has lectured at the University of Montenegro Music Academy in Cetinje since 2003, and is a guest professor of guitar at the Sarajevo Music Academy. [www.danijelcerovic.com](http://www.danijelcerovic.com)



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Silvius Leopold Weiss was acknowledged as the greatest lutenist of his age, composing over 600 pieces for the instrument organised into suites or sonatas. In these arrangements for guitar, Danijel Cerović has selected the only two of Weiss's sonatas to have been given poetic titles, *Sonata No. 29 'L'Infidèle'* ('The Infidel'), with its bell-like sonorities and triumphant conclusion, and *Sonata No. 28 'Le Fameux Corsaire'* ('The Famous Pirate'), thought to refer to the buccaneering pirate Blackbeard. Cerović also includes two of the great *Tombeaux*, elegies of profound and poignant depth.



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|--|--------------|--|-------------|
| <b>1</b> Capriccio in D major                    | <b>2:33</b>  | <b>10</b> Tombeau sur la mort de M. Cajetan Baron d'Hartig | <b>7:05</b> |
| <b>2</b> I. Entrée                               | <b>3:56</b>  | <b>11</b> Fantasia in C minor                              | <b>2:14</b> |
| <b>3</b> II. Courante                            | <b>2:04</b>  | <b>12</b> I. Allemande                                     | <b>4:49</b> |
| <b>4</b> III. Sarabande                          | <b>3:39</b>  | <b>13</b> II. Courante                                     | <b>3:51</b> |
| <b>5</b> IV. Menuet                              | <b>1:39</b>  | <b>14</b> III. Bourée                                      | <b>2:05</b> |
| <b>6</b> V. Musette                              | <b>3:21</b>  | <b>15</b> IV. Sarabande                                    | <b>4:40</b> |
| <b>7</b> VI. Paysane                             | <b>2:13</b>  | <b>16</b> V. Menuet  | <b>2:13</b> |
| <b>8</b> Tombeau sur la mort de M. Comte de Logy | <b>10:07</b> | <b>17</b> VI. Presto                                       | <b>3:33</b> |
| <b>9</b> Passacaglia in D major                  | <b>5:24</b>  |  |             |

**Danijel Cerović, Guitar**

Recorded: 10–12 April 2019 at St Paul's Anglican Church, Newmarket, Ontario, Canada  
 Producer and engineer: Norbert Kraft • Editor: Bonnie Silver • Booklet notes: Graham Wade  
 Publisher: Les Éditions Doberman-Yppan: (DO 1264) **1–7** **10** **11**, (DO 1263) **8** **9** **12–17**  
 Guitar by: D. Marvi, Granada • Recording supported by the Ministry of Culture of Montenegro  
 Cover images: Lute © Dm\_Cherry / Shutterstock.com • Guitar © Drugoy66 / Dreamstime.com



8.574068

DDD

Playing Time  
65:47



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