NICOLAS DEROISIER:
TWO INTERMEDIATE PIECES FOR
BAROQUE GUITAR

by Craig H. Russell

The guitar is a difficult instrument to master, but an even harder instrument to begin!

What frustration and despair I have felt—and on more than one occasion—as I have rummaged around in my filing cabinet trying to ferret out a decent intermediate-level piece that will reignite some poor, depressed student’s interest who has just been lured to sleep by yet another tune marked andante or adagio. There the student sits before me: he has struggled along with a couple of Sanz tunes, muddled through a lethargic etude or two, and is now interminably mired in a Carcassi study after bogging down in line two (not even within sight of the double-bar). I can see the despondency in his eyes and can almost hear the internalized screaming question, “Will I ever be competent enough to play this instrument?”

Well, one antidote to the “beginner’s blues” is this unpretentious but charming gigue by Nicolas Derosier, one of the many neglected baroque guitarists that I have discussing in past editions of Soundboard. The gigue is brief, tuneful, and easily memorized. It fortuitously has no bar chords or finger-crunching passages. Students of even modest abilities can usually learn the piece quickly, and everyone involved is refreshed and rejuvenated to hear something that is brisk enough that it cannot be mistaken for a funeral dirge. The accompanying sarabande makes a pleasant companion piece, and can offer the opportunity to teach beginning students something about baroque ornamentation. The peculiar little sign that appears above the bottom staff of the “Sarabande” indicates the location of the petite reprise: the guitarist is to repeat this short phrase at the conclusion of the work.

With respect to the composer Nicolas Derosier, modern performers and scholars pay him scant attention—and when he is mentioned, it is usually only in passing and exclusively with respect to his guitar treatises: *Les principes de la guitare*... (Amsterdam, 1690?/1694) and *Nouveaux principes pour la guitare* [sic], avec une table universelle de tous les accords qui se trouvent dans la Basse-Continu sur cet Instrument (Paris, 1699). His guitar works are found in the *Douze ouvertures pour la guitare*, opus 5 (The Hague, 1688) and in the anthologized section of the “Recueil des pieces de guitarre,” Ms. 5.615 in the Bibliothèque du Conservatoire Royal de Musique in Brussels. The “Sarabande” and “Gigue” that I have arranged for this issue of Soundboard are found on page 84 of the “Recueil des pieces de guitarre.” Derosier composed not only for the baroque guitar, but ventured into the realm of chamber music as well: Robert Strizich—in citing a list of original Derosier works—including a “Psalm 150” for violin and basso continuo that is inserted in the Essai de critique où l’on tâche de montrer en quoi consiste la poésie des Hebreux (Amsterdam, 1688) and a “Suite du royd’Angleterre” for two violins or flutes and basso continuo (Amsterdam, 1689). 

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2. A facsimile edition is available: François Le Coq [who is the author of half of the works in the manuscript], *Recueil des pièces de guitare*, Thesaurus Musicus Nova Series, Série A: Manuscrita (Brussels: Editions Culture et Civilisation, 1979).

Sarabande  (c. 1690)
Nicolas Derosier
arranged by Craig H. Russell
Gigue (c.1690)

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