

NICOLAS DEROSIER: 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 re-ignite some poor, depressed student's interest who has just been lulled 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 will 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 guitarrre* . . .

(Amsterdam, 1690?/1694) and *Nouveaux principes pour la guitarrre* [sic], *avec une table universelle de tous les accords qui se trouvent dans la Basse-Continuë sur cet Instrument* (Paris, 1699).¹ His guitar works are found in the *Douze ouvertures pour la guitarrre*, opus 5 (The Hague, 1688) and in the anthologized section of the "Recueil des pieces de guitarrre," Ms. 5.615 in the Bibliothèque du Conservatoire Royal de Musique in Brussels.² The "Sarabande" and "Gigue" that I have arranged for this issue of *Soundboard* are found on page 84 of the "Recueil des pieces de guitarrre." 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—includes 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 roy d'Angleterre" for two violins or flutes and basso continuo (Amsterdam, 1689).³

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1. With respect to Derosier's *Les principes de la guitarrre*, Robert Strizich mentions only an edition published in Amsterdam in 1694. James Tyler, on the other hand, places the publication date of one edition in 1690 and another edition in 1696. See Robert Strizich, "Nicolas Derosier" in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. 5 (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 383; and James Tyler, *The Early Guitar: A History and Handbook*, Early Music Series, No. 4 (London: Oxford University Press, 1980). Forni Publishers of Italy offer a facsimile edition of Derosier's *Les principes de la guitarrre*.

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

3. Strizich, "Derosier," *Grove*, vol. 5, p. 383.

Sarabande (c. 1690)

Nicolas Derosier
arranged by Craig H. Russell

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