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 re- 
ignite some poor, depressed student’s interest who has just been 
humbled 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 étude 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 unpreten- 
tious 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 opportu- 
nity to teach beginning students something about baroque orna- 
mentation. 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 per- 
formers 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-Continué 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 antholo- 
gized section of the “Recueil des pieces de guitare,” 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 “Re- 
cueil des pieces de guitare.” 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 royd’ Angleterre” for two violins or flutes 
and basso continuo (Amsterdam, 1689).

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1. With respect to Derosier’s Les principes de la guitare, 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 
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 
guitare.

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 
guitare, Thesaurus Musicus Nova Series, Série A: Manuscrita (Brus- 

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

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