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  
hulled 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-Continué sur cet Instrument (Paris, 1699).  
1 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.  
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 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—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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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 guitarre, Thesaurus Musicus Nova Series, Série A: Manuscrita (Brussels: Editions Culture et Civilisation, 1979).

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