



95509

BRILLIANT
CLASSICS

WEISS



SONATAS

WOLFGANG RÜBSAM

LUTE-HARPSICHORD

SILVIUS LEOPOLD WEISS 1687-1750

Sonatas for Lute transcribed by Wolfgang Rübsam

SONATA WeissSW.61 IN D MINOR

- | | | |
|----|----------------|------|
| 1. | I. Overture | 3'37 |
| 2. | II. Bourée | 1'40 |
| 3. | III. Menuet | 1'51 |
| 4. | IV. Gigue | 1'45 |
| 5. | V. Menuet | 1'30 |
| 6. | VI. Gigue | 1'38 |
| 7. | VII. Sarabande | 3'26 |

SONATA WeissSW.97 IN F

- | | | |
|-----|---------------|------|
| 8. | I. Andante | 5'06 |
| 9. | II. Courante | 2'41 |
| 10. | III. Bourée | 2'42 |
| 11. | IV. Polonoise | 0'44 |
| 12. | V. Gigue | 1'46 |

SONATA WeissSW.93 IN D MINOR

- | | | |
|-----|--------------|------|
| 13. | I. Allemande | 3'00 |
| 14. | II. Gavotte | 2'09 |
| 15. | III. Bourée | 2'30 |
| 16. | IV. Menuet | 1'35 |
| 17. | V. Gigue | 2'17 |
| 18. | VI. Rigaudon | 3'02 |

SONATA WeissSW.95 IN G MINOR

- | | | |
|-----|--------------|------|
| 19. | I. Allemande | 4'55 |
| 20. | II. Courante | 3'20 |
| 21. | III. Gigue | 2'39 |
| 22. | IV. Paysanne | 2'34 |
| 23. | V. Polonoise | 1'39 |

SONATA WeissSW.96 IN G

- | | | |
|-----|---------------|------|
| 24. | I. Prelude | 1'43 |
| 25. | II. Andante | 4'09 |
| 26. | III. Courante | 2'29 |
| 27. | IV. Bourée | 2'16 |
| 28. | V. Sarabande | 2'23 |
| 29. | VI. Menuet | 2'20 |
| 30. | VII Presto | 2'31 |

WOLFGANG RÜBSAM

lute-harpichord

Silvius Leopold Weiss (1687-1750) was a German composer and lutenist, the master lutenist of the 18th century, and one of the greatest players of all time. He was born into a lute-playing family, and his father, from whom he first learned the instrument, and his brother were also lutenists of distinction.

In 1706, Weiss made his professional debut in the Breslau court, in which his family served. Weiss' extraordinary talent gained the attention of Elector Johann Wilhelm, dedicatee of Arcangelo Corelli's Op. 6 and an intelligent patron of music. Weiss served in Wilhelm's court in Düsseldorf for the next two years, and his earliest known compositions date from this time.

In 1708 he was engaged as a musician in the service of the Polish court, specifically for the Queen's son, who joined his mother in Rome later that same year. Weiss left Düsseldorf for Rome and resided there until 1714, absorbing new Italian styles firsthand and touring with the Prince to various courts. By the time of the Prince's death, Weiss' reputation was already well established, and he spent the next several years touring the continent and taking steady employment only briefly.

In 1714, Weiss returned to Germany and briefly served at the Hesse court in Kassel. He first played in Dresden in 1717, and in 1718 he decided to accept a lucrative post offered him at the Dresden court in the famous orchestra of the Saxon elector and King of Poland, August the Strong. Although he was still able to travel on occasion, Dresden remained his home base for the rest of his life. Weiss was also in demand as a teacher, numbering the young Frederick the Great among his many aristocratic pupils.

At his death in 1750, Silvius Leopold Weiss was 66 years of age. He was, and still is, regarded as the greatest of all lutenists, and the instrument fell into decline within two decades of his death. An evaluation by the Margrave Wilhelmine de Bayreuth, sister of Frederick II of Prussia and herself a composer, would serve well as epitaph; "(Weiss) excels so much in playing the Lute that no one has ever matched him, and those who will come after him will only be left with the glory of imitating him." Weiss' son, Johann Adolph Weiss, succeeded him as a Saxon court lutenist.

Silvius Leopold Weiss was one of the most important and most prolific composers of lute music in history. He wrote around 600 pieces for lute, most of them grouped into "sonatas" (not to be confused with the later classical sonata, based on sonata form) or suites, which consist mostly of Baroque dance pieces. Weiss also wrote an extensive repertory of chamber music, lute duets, and concertos, but only the solo parts have survived; in every case the parts that accompany the solo lute

are lost. Some of his “Suonate” (Weiss’ own term) for solo lute, which have come down to us in a variety of tablature manuscripts, are missing their preludes, which were usually improvised. Seventy suites, however, are known in their entirety; most lasting about 20 to 25 minutes in performance. As a composer, Weiss shows extraordinary originality and his suites stand comparison with those of J.S. Bach. Only one of the suites appeared in print during Weiss’ own lifetime; his work was not intended for amateur players but for virtuosi whose skills approached his own.

Weiss’ music is characterised by a unique understanding of the capabilities of his instrument, its strengths and its weaknesses. Like Bach’s, his music represents the culmination of a high Baroque style a little at odds with the more progressive aspirations of his younger contemporaries.

An Encounter with Johann Sebastian Bach

Weiss’ skill as a player and accompanist was legendary, as were his powers of improvisation. In this he was even compared with J.S. Bach, though it is doubtful whether they actually formally competed in improvisation, as the following contemporary account by Johann Friedrich Reichardt describes:

“Anyone who knows how difficult it is to play harmonic modulations and good counterpoint on the lute will be surprised and full of disbelief to hear from eyewitnesses that Weiss, the great lutenist, challenged J. S. Bach, the great harpsichordist and organist, at playing fantasies and fugues.”

Weiss and J.S. Bach had probably been well known to one another even before they actually met. In later life, Weiss became a friend of Wilhelm Friedemann Bach. In 1739, Weiss stayed in Leipzig for four weeks, together with W.F. Bach and one of his own pupils, and he visited the Bach house frequently; Johann Elias Bach, J.S. Bach’s personal secretary, reports that the music he heard then was “extra-special.” He wrote that that “we heard some very fine music when my cousin from Dresden came to stay for four weeks, together with the famous lute-player Mr. Weiss.” J.S. Bach’s Suite for violin and harpsichord in A major BWV1025, recently identified as an arrangement of one of Weiss’ lute sonatas, may owe its origin to one of these legendary meetings.

It has been suggested that J.S. Bach, accomplished at the lute himself and an enthusiast of the hybrid lute-harpsichord, may have written his lute music (BWV 995-1000, 1006a) for Weiss, or

could even have been commissioned by him, but there is no concrete evidence for this, despite the musical and personal links between the two men. J.S. Bach was connected with a circle of professional and amateur lute players in Leipzig, and Weiss, as a fine composer, is unlikely to have felt the need to ask Bach to write for him. On the other hand, Bach undoubtedly would have known Weiss’ music through playing it on his lute-harpsichord, probably in transcriptions like the one he made as the basis for the BWV1025 arrangement. It is conceivable that Weiss returned the compliment in some way.

The *cantabile* style of playing heard in these marvelous performances is directly inspired by the instrument, a lute-harpsichord built for Mr. Rübsam in 2015 by the acclaimed American instrument-maker Keith Hill. It consists of one manual with one set of eight-foot gut-strings, and two sets of jacks which pluck the strings in two different places. One, positioned farther from the nut, produces a flutey sound, and the other, closer to the nut, produces a more nasal timbre. A second set of brass four foot strings gives a halo-effect by resonating with the registers that are played by the performer. It causes the rather dry sound of the gut strings to have a much more singing quality of tone.



Wolfgang Rübsam, upon winning the 1973 Grand Prix de Chartres in Interpretation, became professor of Church Music and Organ at Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois. During this 23-year tenure, he also served as University Organist of the University of Chicago at Rockefeller Memorial Chapel. From 1996 to 2010, he taught in the Hochschule für Musik, Saarbrücken, Germany. Rübsam is internationally known through over a hundred highly acclaimed recordings of organ repertoire from the Baroque and Romantic periods including recent Bach recordings on the lute-harpsichord. He gives frequent recitals and masterclasses in the United States and Europe and has served on the juries of the most prestigious international competitions.

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