

# The London Manuscript unveiled

## 12 Analysis Conclusions

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The ideas that were developing during my twelve years artistic and musicological project devoted to the London Manuscript by Silvius Leopold Weiss (1687-1750) brought me to the following conclusions. I can now put up this list on historical and mostly practical verifications. My hope is that these few precisions will bring observers a bit closer to the original intentions. Other musicians and analysts will find, I am sure, even more details of interpretation in the coming years. My thanks go to the persons who nourished my research by their important discoveries: Douglas Alton Smith, Tim Crawford, Markus Lutz, Frank Legl, Claire Madl, and many others that I cannot mention here. Each point is taken from my texts constituent of *The London Manuscript Unveiled*, completely updated and now available on the [www.slweiss.com](http://www.slweiss.com) website, in which the same topics are described in a broader context of tonalities, sources, technical and aesthetical implications. The points here summarised are:

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### [1. Unity and chronology](#)

There is no possible real chronology for the London Ms yet, but Tim Crawford has methodically encircled the general dates of composition in relation with the Weiss visits to Prague (See the *Lute Society of America Journal* of 2000).

Meanwhile, music itself reveals a concern for unity in setting this big volume. The Allemande of the last solo sonata no 26 S-C32 is exactly in the same form as the one of the first sonata S-C1. This is also true for all the movements of both sonatas, especially the Courante, with its same style, same construction, same voice interplay, rhythms and harmonic patterns as in the first sonata. Moreover, one realises that there is the same style of composition and same tonality at the beginning (sonata no 1), the middle (sonata no 14 S-C19) and at the end of the manuscript (sonatas 25 S-C31 and 26 S-C32). One can feel

with this organisation the author's preoccupation for a homogenous whole, representative of his first grand period of composition even though some works already contain the wit found in the last large sonatas (the 14 late ones among the 20 original sonatas of the Dresden Manuscript). This preoccupation for unity is such that the opening measure of the last sonata is the same as the one of the Allemande of the first sonata. In addition, one can remark easily that the allemandes of these four sonatas in F really have a 'family likeness'.

As for unity of movements within a sonata, it is most of the time rather easy to find it, thanks to similar ascending-descending melodic formulae, recognizable thematic cells, well balanced complementary harmonies. This refutes the idea that any sonata movement can replace another one of same tonality and that we can reconstruct sonatas at will. Of course, this is a possible proceeding in itself since Weiss himself did it sometimes from a manuscript to another. Nevertheless, one must not forget that he did it knowing all the implications, and that we are not Weiss and that we are breaking framings that are set as they are. It is not possible anymore to use the old wrong argument of so called 'uneven quality' justifying such mangling. We know now indeed how regularly dazzling is the quality of this manuscript from beginning to end. Can we imagine any pianist playing a Beethoven sonata in concert and replacing one or two of its movements by others from other sonatas?

## 2. Quality of the works, importance of basses and ornamentation

As a matter of fact, it would seem that decisions of an editorial nature concerning the content of this important book of music have been proven to be judicious. Contrary to the views of some, all of the works contained in this manuscript are of great value and worthy of inclusion in any series of recordings or concert program. Weiss's qualities are seen of course in the original sound effects, the surprising pedals, dramatic suspensions, long elaborated phrases, daring modulations, as well as technical advancements like the 'faked slur' on two strings (well before Tarrega), the active use of the *a* finger, sonic superpositions containing hidden harmonies, etc. However, in order to really understand the scope of this originality, one must take in consideration two important elements: the ampleness of the basses, which implies a complex sonic richness, difficult in its control, and the non written implicit ornamentation.

Weiss belongs to those composers who need this double implication from the player in order to have their music presented at their right value, 1) the 'full sonority' or 'sonority without compromise', and 2) the 'active ornamentation'. Sonority must indeed be first worked out almost at an orchestral level, which induces two precise difficulties called the overlegato and the bass dampening, and secondly enriched with not only scattered simple mordents or little arpeggios. One must reinvent the musical phrase at the reprises; this is, in my opinion, an interpreter duty. It means a real personal intervention in the creative process, without which the music seems to be of medium interest. Weiss was anticipating this kind of collaboration from the performers (at least from those he accepted as such) as much as, I am sure, their technical capacities.

### 3. Musical care and editorial negligence

The recent discovery of the owner of the manuscript, the Count Adlersfeld of Prague, helps us understand why the London Ms is in the same time a careful and imperfect compilation. Adlersfeld was more a collector than a lutenist and he probably did not care for a precise classification. Wanting nonetheless to keep this exclusive treasure among his collections to be left to inheritance, he was giving Weiss the motivation to hand down to posterity a long lasting artistic production. This care for details seen from beginning to end supports the thesis that the manuscript was meticulously revised by an author who viewed the individual pieces as part of a unified whole, but was not intended to publication. This would explain the contradiction between the musical perfection and the disregard for titles, minute chronology (specific dates are provided for only a few pieces and sonatas) and precise separations between the works. This strong dichotomy should help us in the end, and contrarily to our first beliefs, to seriously consider the London Manuscript as generally being *musically* the most reliable document in a comparative study of sources.

### 4. Pieces replaced in their context

With regular practice, one realises that some pieces can not be classified like Smith did. The Bourrée p.299 is not a Bourrée II of the previous sonata since it is impossible to link each other not only because of lack of thematic association, but also because of their different speeds and mostly their different harmonic density (see below about minuets and bourrees). Contrarily to this, *La belle Tiroloise* is in fact a second Rigaudon of solo sonata no 21 S-C27. I don't agree either on the three so-called too many movements of the *Divertimento à solo*. On the contrary, they actually form pairs with their respective counterparts, with conscious complementarities of themes and developments, whatever they were composed at different times or not, giving a perfectly well balanced work, not a work with too many movements.

Another better balanced work is, in my opinion, the capriccio in D if we operate a fusion with the two existing sources, Warsaw lacking the grand cadenza and London lacking the long central development, each entity being justified by the presence of the other one. We can also remark that the courante of solo sonata no 6 S-C10 is present in Dresden too, although this concordance is not mentioned by Smith, probably because when counting measures, one source having two more, he thought they were different pieces (these are actually two repeated measures). The minuet p.242 is likewise to be put back in its sonata, the solo no 26 S-C32 (see Dresden). Now concerning the four C major pieces and the four D major pieces near the end of the manuscript, I wouldn't say they absolutely need a sonata number, but they should be considered as potentially identifiable as sonatas, giving almost the impression that London has 34 rather than 32 sonatas.

I would even say 33 rather than 31, sonata S-C4 being a special case. Instrumental practice has inevitable logics exigencies, and I am simply not to make up my mind to consider these pieces as a full London sonata. Conversely, this helps to see them as such in Dresden! If performers name it as a complete one in London, they have to refute it in

Dresden since a recording or public performance doesn't allow to play the same work twice, and what would be left for Dresden would be scraps, although this is the real complete version! There are too many differences between the two sources. We would have to break an entirety and enlarge too much a small version. They are concordant, yes, but not enough, in my honest opinion, to give the same sonata number for both.

Let's not forget that the *Praelude* p.290 in E flat is actually a prelude and fugue, this giving a number of three fugues in all for the manuscript.

### 5. Other composers' works and dubious works

The general attitude of lutenists and analysts so far was to think that if a piece of the London manuscript was not in the mould of the typical pieces having some stature, if it was rather light in structure, repetitive in motifs, had incongruous harmonies, etc., it was common statement to say that the piece was probably not by Weiss. If we play one by one and with real commitment the 237 pieces of the manuscript, this impression falls off pretty much because of one good reason: very many of these discrepancies are as present in the 'assuredly by Weiss' pieces as in these suspect pieces, but they are only less visible at first reading. A good example of this incomplete analysis can be seen in a piece like *Comment Sçavez-Vous?* Visible indications bring doubts, like the fact that it was added later in the manuscript. Nevertheless, musically and technically, it contains no more strange phrases, harmonies or finger positioning than in the very similar Angloise in the same key of the sonata S-C18. But nobody has doubts about the authenticity of this Angloise because its first appearance conforms to most of the surrounding pieces. We could mention other pieces, even some in Weiss's own autograph, and say they could be dubious according to the same principles of atypical writing observed superficially. Look at the bourree of the same sonata S-C18, or at the courante of sonata no 2.

The importance of these suspect details is strongly minimized when they are seen within a complete evaluation of the piece and explained by the general structure within a controlled application of artistic originality. In fact, solidity and homogeneity of structures, in short of the musical language, have a strong psychological importance in evaluating the music when playing the works with equal artistic implication, and if one is to have doubts, it is not enough to consider only what looks like writing weaknesses or discrepancies. One must feel while playing that the work clearly came out of the brain of a different creator. We should at least feel another phraseologic world. And after getting used to all the surprises of all compositions of Weiss, in parallel with a general recognizable discourse, I saw practically but a great homogenous and constant Weiss, except for, we'll see in a minute, two or three cases. When I play the works of Baron or Kropfgans, for example, I easily feel a different world, a different way of framing musical elements; there is something obvious in the difference of origin. Whereas for almost all of the dubious works of the London Ms, the music is finally too similar, peculiarities do not interfere with the well known discourse.

In other words, I find that so far the music was much analysed on the presentation side (graphology, etc.), but not enough *stylistically* speaking. Let's take only the example

of the bass treatment: with Silvius – this is different even with Sigismund – there is a kind of maximum use, not of the notes, but of the double tessitura according to the principle of *continuation* of the resonance of a bass parallelly with an intermediary voice containing the *next harmonic bass* of the musical passage, which diminishes the actual number of low basses and enhances the importance of the intermediary voices sharing unofficially but efficiently this bass character. I have not seen yet a composer use like he does this principle of ‘tessitura-duration’, one could say. This kind of analysis will exist one day and will take hundreds of pages. All has to be done concerning the stylistic analysis of Baroque composers/lutenists.

Two exceptions are to be mentioned: the Allegro in G p.38 and the Menuet in G p.92, which raise serious doubts. Even after studying them, one is wondering if the allegro is from somebody else, although all the weissian writing and fingering elements are present, as for example the melodic dialogues recalling the gavotte of sonata S-C27. We would expect indeed a title such as gavotte or paysanne. The title Allegro doesn’t seem to come from Weiss. Style is close but certain measures betray another hand, and the overabundant usage of the two lower courses do not ‘sound’ Weiss at all, rendering as they are a generally disordered sonority whereas Weiss usually uses them carefully. Suspicion is also present for the minuet p.92, even if it is difficult to state that it is not by Weiss, but suspicion because again of stylistic digressions and heavy low basses, not at all in his style. A third dubious case could be the Courante Royale, although, as a matter of fact, after a close stylistic examination, one could say that if it is not by Weiss, it is by a student or disciple who wanted to use all the idiomatic formulae of the master. Indeed, one finds again the motifs, and not only the arpeggios, of the courante of sonata S-C11, of *Le Fameux Corsaire*, of the allegro of sonata S-C22 and exactly a motif of the allegro of sonata S-C35 (Dresden).

Let’s have a quick look at the other pieces. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Concert is clearly by Sigismund Weiss, the younger brother of Silvius. *L’Amant malheureux* is by Gallot, yet rewritten for the 13 course lute by Weiss including his personal nuances, this allowing us to say that this work is different enough from the original to be considered as being by ‘Gallot-Weiss’. The Menuet p.136 could be also by Sigismund, because of both the style and the inscription *Junior Weiss* in the Warsaw version, albeit two other sources indicate Silvius Leopold as the author. For this ambiguity, two possible explanations could be 1) that Silvius has put the finishing touches to his brother’s piece and included it in his repertoire, or 2) that *Junior* means Silvius in relation to his father Johann Jakob, himself a lutenist, although the style is a very late one for silvius. The minuet (no title there) and Trio in G p.292 is usually considered by lutenists as not being by Weiss. There is a unanimous body of opinion that claims the work either to be a composition by someone other than Weiss, or, as a best possible alternative, a duo from which the second part is missing. I admit that during my initial readings, I also found the piece to be the work of a less able hand, of limited technical prowess. Once ‘in the fingers’ however, one realises that the delightful ritornello is anything but monotonous and that what seems to be of simple or incomplete construction is in fact a refined, learned discourse. I now consider on the contrary that this minuet and trio is on the same level as the Loure for solo violin or lute by Bach. The spirit, I would even say the wisdom, is very close. The Gavotte in F

p.13, the gavotte and double p.22 and the Bourree p.295 are also pieces to be mastered before being understood. Once this is done, we feel the familiar world and craftsmanship of Weiss. The same apply to minuets pp.92 and 303.

## 6. Instrumental polyvalence

For Baroque composers like Weiss, the solo/ensemble ambiguity supervenes frequently enough to consider that polyvalence was accepted not only as a possibility but as a practice in its own sake, from which the musical literature takes profit as an enrichment. Accepting two or three possibilities is better life than torture oneself trying to decide whether we have exclusively a solo, a duo, a concerto, etc. Current practice seems to have been to adapt at will, according to the needs, a piece at the very time of execution, without rewriting it afterwards in most cases, this leaving the piece open to other possibilities, not unlike common Jazz concepts. It shows also that the performers were quite capable in improvising and ornamenting. This being said, our circumspection must remain high and refrain us from believing, even if a good proportion of the works in the London Ms is in itself adaptable, that every questionable piece must be declared 'duo' immediately. Let's review the most questionable ones:

- Solo sonatas no 12 S-C17 and 21 S-C27 are also found in the Salzburg manuscript as ensemble works. The Salzburg book is quite astonishing in that it contains 46 *Parties* and 4 *Concertos da camera* with clear numeration, all supposed to be played in trio formation since every beginning indicates *Liutho, violino è basso* (except one as a quartet with mandora). Eight of these partitas are by Weiss.

- Menuet in F p.11 : the first fifteen bars of this minuet are the same as those found in the minuet in B flat, from the duo sonata S-C14 in g minor (both of which exist only in the London Manuscript). Everything changes after these initial fifteen measures. There was indeed an adaptation, followed subsequently by a new composition. But was it first a solo or duo work? With such a short passage, it is impossible to know.

- Gavotte in F p.13 : could give the impression that it is a duo, but I have my doubts. The repetition of a seemingly unique motive does not necessarily indicate any melodic lacuna, or the necessity of another voice, as witness the numerous Scarlatti sonatas thusly constructed.

- Gavotte and Double in D p.22 : as with the preceding gavotte, I find no evidence of weakness of writing, nor do I discern a hidden duo.

- Menuet in G p.92 : stands correctly as a solo although it would not come as a surprise to learn that it had also existed in a parallel duo format.

- Largo p.117 : it is not impossible to consider that this duo, a perfect insertion for the *Duo 5* S-C20, is adaptable for a solo performance, especially with the inherent ornamentation potentiality.

- Chaconne and Duo 4 in g minor S-C14 : both lutenists and guitarists have been playing this work for years as a solo. Indeed, if we vary the chordal sections with arpeggios and ornamentation, the result can be very satisfactory as a solo, which brings me to reiterate the possibility of Weiss playing such versatile pieces in one format or another. If the piece were played as a solo, the *reprises* would be justified. However, it is clear that as a duo, the result is splendidly balanced. The idea that the movements preceding the chaconne could be played as solos as well is valid since they are adaptable too (the minuet whose 15 first bars are used in the solo minuet p.11 reinforces this idea) but it is clear for me that the lute writing here is for a duo concept: look at the regular alternation between melodic lines and steady chord progressions.

- Menuet in C p.180 : exists as a *Trio* of another solo minuet in Warsaw. Harmonically thin, it seems deliberately simplified. The structure strongly suggests a duo or other ensemble work, without necessarily excluding any of the charm of a solo piece.

- Menuet and Trio in G p.292 : in my opinion, this is not a duo. Please see no 4 of this text.

## [7. Works for the non theorbated lute](#)

Nine pieces out of two hundred and thirty-seven of the London Ms need a standard lute, but this implies in reality five full sonatas (six according to the S-C4 nomenclature) if we play them entirely, since it's rather difficult to change models in the middle of a performance! Thanks to this obligation, I have made four recordings on a total of twelve CDs with a standard model (volumes 4-5-6-10), to show the sonority nuances between the two kinds of lutes. Two of these nine pieces (indicated by an asterisk) could even have their chromatic bass or phrase section taken up the octave without adversely affecting the music. These include: the overture and courante in B flat (S-C4), the allemande\* in c minor (S-C7), the allemande and gigue in B flat (S-C15), the prelude\* in d minor (S-C20), the allemande and sarabande in f minor (S-C21) and the fugue in G (S-C22).

## [8. The added preludes](#)

As an explanation for the addition of certain preludes in a second phase of the manuscript, Tim Crawford offers the interesting observation that if the performers didn't improvise the prelude of a sonata, they could stretch out what Weiss had quickly composed, usually within a restricted page space. Indeed Weiss's preludes often fill all in the space accorded to them, occasionally small as it may be. This suggests a spontaneous desire to give, after the fact, an example-prelude that was not included in the first phase of the compilation since it was assumed that the performer would improvise one before playing the sonata. Weiss's preludes were to serve as examples or backgrounds upon which one could embellish or elaborate musical material. This would explain the lack of concern regarding the possibility of exceeding allocated space. Thus, in a sonata without a prelude, it would be quite natural to concoct one from ideas taken from the other

movements. This is a procedure that is gaining favour with contemporary lutenists and might become commonplace with future generations of performers.

### 9. Two categories of minuets and bourrees

In the long run, one realises that Weiss wrote two kinds of minuets and bourrees. I would call them the 'light-fast ones' and the 'thick-moderate speed ones'. In his compositional universe, Weiss tends to sub-categorise works of same type by their speed and sonic thickness. For example, the large Menuet (p.308) and Menuet 2 (p.309) are part of a broader group of heavier minuets that stand in opposition to the group of lighter sprightly minuets. This constant returning to three-voice texture at the conclusion of every cantabile line leads to a sonic thickening that reinforces a certain philosophical character in the work. Due to technical difficulties, it is not easy for the interpreter to allow the phrases to sing. It is not easy, but it is nevertheless very necessary because the work of Weiss is of a continuously singing quality. Inversely, the light minuets are so aerated that we must refrain from the temptation to play them even faster, like the one of sonata no 4 S-C5, in which the soprano and bass voices joyously rebound by means of close entries.

Concerning the bourrees, an interesting comparison can be made between those in F of pages 295 (S-C31) and 299 that have, contrarily to a first impression, simply no connection for these same reasons of fluidity and rapidity for the first one, and harmonic density for the second one. This bourree could never attain the same speed as that of sonata S-C31 due to the technical demands placed on the performer, to say nothing of a certain ridiculousness that would be the result of an attempt to play this bourree at the faster tempo. Conversely, the bourree p.295 would fall apart at the tempo of the other one. When performing many Weiss bourrees or minuets, one gets used to the logical coexistence of both styles and serenely applies them according to controlled sonority principles.

### 10. The two repetition signs' question

Firstly, the repetition dots of the last section of the Passacaille in D and the Chaconne in A raise a question. Performers are used to avoid them because the other instrumentalists traditionally never do repetitions either in their own works of the same kind. However, if they are clearly indicated, I would say that we must respect this indication because it helps tremendously to reinforce the emphasis of the last section, in which a proper *Rallentando* will assist the dramatic amplex of the work. The conventional treatment of unrepeated last sections should be at least revised, anyway in lute music.

Secondly, I was for a long time wondering about the repetition signs in works that are by definition non repeatable: why are these markings there? Finally, like Robert Donington, I would give as best explanation that they meant an optional repetition. If we try indeed to think the same way an amateur did in this time, we can imagine that a fugue could be often asked as an encore by the listeners, due to the



complexity of the work and the greater difficulty for the auditors to remember the themes and counter-themes. The powerful and fugitive richness of a prelude similarly solicits the brain. We could then call these 'anticipated encores', so to speak, as though the composer had agreed in advance to play the piece twice in a coming performance. This idea reminds me the Renaissance lute works that are so short in the tablature albeit we know by witnesses that they were actually very long in a recital with the help of variations and repetitions of themes.

Nevertheless, this usage is not systematic since the Prelude and fugue in E flat p.290 doesn't have those reprise signs, and sometimes two versions of a same piece are different, like the Overture in E flat p.34 that has an allegro with a fugal theme. The Dresden version contains repeat signs for both the introduction and the allegro, and the London version has none. Other examples: two preludes in E flat follow each other in pp.80 and 81. The first has repeat signs, the other not. And the fugue in C p.118 has them while the neighbouring fugue in d minor p.130 hasn't.

### 11. The slur question

Except for special cases, the slurs were of secondary importance to the actual notes in the 18th century lute repertoire, providing an optional, deliberately imprecise adjunct to the musical gesture, and were providing first and foremost an important contribution to the visual flow of the calligraphy. This would account for the different copying styles, with some copyists using infrequent slurring while others would garnish the manuscript with same. Still other copyists were prone to enormous calligraphic gestures that slurred only two notes while their colleagues would use the tiniest of ink curves to combine several notes, or neglect the sign positioning to the point of breaking the performance's logics in the sake of pure calligraphic elegance. This often leads to the modern habit, visually oriented as we are, of performing these slurs incorrectly, and indeed often in a manner completely at odds with the intention of the composer.

This is why one could say that modern editions of Baroque lute music, like the Peters London Ms, could have included corrections for slurs as well as for notes, rhythms, etc. Many slurs could have also been added, *especially* where they are obviously needed. Of course, this would have meant a long supplementary process, to be in hands of an active performer who must find solutions for a flowing, equilibrate playing, not a musicologist. This consciousness of interpretative necessity for slurs can be done only with a long term practice schedule and even if most of them (existing or to be added) can be easily dealt with, a good number will have to be relocated or reinvented, this with parsimony because personal taste is an inevitable part of the choice. This will bring in the future various editions with different slurring, just as for modern guitar transcriptions. And, yes, I do believe that one day new editions will put the emphasis on slurs in order to help amateurs or students, restrained as they are with continuous indecision about slurs. They read original tablatures without this remake, their playing being directly affected. This being said, as for advanced guitarists annoyed by abundant fingerings in guitar editions, these lute editions-with-precise-slurring will be of short concern for advanced lutenists, who will do their own adjustment work.

## 12. Ensemble music

A striking revelation has recently perforated the musical world: the high value of Weiss among composers. Why? Because his chamber music is played increasingly and the auditors are more impressed with it than with his solo music. And why is the solo music, in my opinion even more original than the ensemble music, didn't give such an impact? Because no or little comparison with the traditional repertoire is possible. Bach's lute music is too well known and Weiss's music, although close enough to Bach's to suscite interest, is too 'exclusively idiomatic', one could say, disconcerting as a matter of fact those who want to make comparisons. For ensemble music, comparison is on the contrary very easy. If one is not too familiar with the lute, the realm of a lute/flute duo is more captivating than a lute solo, which seems to convey mysteries that are hard to elucidate. With a duo, the musical structure is analysed beyond the individuality of instruments; kinship is immediately admitted with Bach's flute/harpsichord duos or trio sonatas for example, or with Vivaldi, Telemann, etc. The appraisal is made on solid ground and Weiss's genius comes out at once.

I thoroughly analysed the reconstructions for flute by Eileen Hadidian (Peters Edition) and two working steps were decided with fautist Christiane Laflamme: 1) to do some corrections together to nine movements rewritten by Hadidian although leaving them almost untouched. We did these slight corrections to the Hadidian lines with a view to improving the sonic balance and the musical discourse. And 2) acting as a performing musician more concerned with obtaining a closer reproduction of Weiss's lyricism than with adhering to musicological rules, I have deemed it necessary to rewrite fifteen sections myself (of a total of 24). Having played previously in detail everything else in the London Manuscript, I got some advantage which helped me to understand the resulting sonority of the melodic/harmonic combinations of Weiss before reusing them when recomposing the flute parts.

Michel Cardin, Moncton, September 2005

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