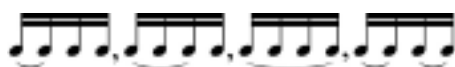


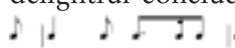
## Sonata No. 11 in A major (S-C 16)

Of the six movements of this sonata from the London source, all but the pastorale can be found in other manuscripts. The Vienna and Dresden versions contain all five of the other movements while replacing the pastorale with the gigue from the eighth solo sonata S-C 12. The Podebrady and Haslemere manuscripts have two pieces each. The London copy is written entirely in the hand of the composer. The Vienna and Dresden manuscripts are entitled, respectively, *Partita Mons. Weiss* and *Suonata del Sigre S.L. Weisfs*. As Tim Crawford pointed out, this sonata could be called the ‘Weiss Christmas sonata’. Pastorales, paysannes and echo effects were indeed associated with the theme of the Nativity.

The *Air en echo* comes as a bit of a surprise since it is sub-titled as *Largo* whereas in the other three manuscripts it is clearly indicated as *Vivace*. What is one to make of this? Some considerations should be taken into account. First, the air occupies the same space normally reserved for a courante and is in three of four sources marked *Vivace*. Secondly, in London only, the score of this ‘echo’ piece alternates continuously and clearly between *f* and *p* (loud and soft), which is extremely difficult to realise at a quick tempo (even the more so when the ornamentations are brought to bear). That makes me think this is the real reason for a slow tempo decided for London. Thirdly, let’s not forget that for the 17<sup>th</sup> century lutenists, it was normal to play sometimes a piece in completely different tempi. A good example is the *Testament de Mézangeau*, an allemande by Ennemond Gautier however convincingly presented as a gigue in other manuscripts. Ideally, one might play the piece twice in a row, very slow and very fast. The fourth consideration is quite simply that the piece has all the essential ingredients (accents, phrase lengths, etc.) of a minuet. All things considered, a performance of this piece at a largo tempo would seem inappropriately slow coming after an allemande while a vivace tempo would be too rapid. My preferred compromise solution to date has been to perform the work as a moderate courante, close in spirit to the feel of a minuet.

Not only from a manuscript to another there are several variants in slurring, in every piece, but the *Paisañe* appearing in four different sources, we can see that there are four different articulations indicated for one of the phrases in this work:



In my opinion this underscores once more the fact that finer interpretational details were left to the discretion of the performer. The minuet (*Men:*), which bears the sub-title *Madame la Grondeuse* (the scolding woman) in the Vienna version, reminds one, in a melodic sense, of a game of leap-frog that is constantly being interrupted by a grumpy person, characterised by the descending bass figure. The delightful concluding *Pastorrell* is in 6/8, in the manner of a gigue with a rustic rhythmic figure of , substituting for the more usual continuous flow of notes commonly associated with the aforementioned dance form. This piece is unusual (perhaps the spirit of Christmas) in that it is constructed with one entirely repeated section whereas the conventional format would require the usage of two repeated sections.

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## Sonata No. 15 in F minor (S-C 21)

The Dresden Manuscript contains the same sonata in its entirety from which one can, as is often the case, choose several interesting variants, especially for the sarabande. In the London Manuscript, this last is placed, astonishingly enough and following J.S. Bach's fashion, before the bourrée. From the *Allemande* onward, the chosen key causes unusual left hand positionings. One can imagine that the composer was experimenting with instrumental resonance, a unique relationship between his playing and the harmonic vibration from the wood of the instrument. There is, near the end of the composition, a cadential chord with a low contra E on the tenth course requiring an index finger bar that covers eighteen strings! This is one of those positions that would indicate clearly the use of a standard lute, as opposed to the theorbo-lute, as is also true of a few other sonatas. This long suspended chord justifies Mattheson's description of f minor, causing indeed a 'shivering' sensation.

In this sonata, more so than ever the composer indulges in progressions of modulations to remote key areas, giving strong evidence of his desire to make of each work a unique statement, notwithstanding the discrete and conventional nature of the musical language. This he appears to do whilst making light of the technical difficulties frequently encountered in this music. We can well empathise with Princess Sophie Wilhelmine, sister of Frederick II of Prussia and student of Weiss, who opined that he 'never had an equal and that his successors must remain content to imitate him'.

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