

# Domenico Rainer, Music for Baroque Guitar

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Brilliant Classics 95866

## The Manuscript

In the library of the Accademia Santa Cecilia in Rome, a musical treasure has recently been discovered: a large manuscript consisting of 230 pages, with guitar music notated in guitar tablature.<sup>1</sup> Probably in the second half of the seventeenth century, an unknown guitarist started to copy music from books by composers such as Angelo Michele Bartolotti (c. 1655) and Francesco Corbetta (1648), organized in sections by key, which he marked with the letters of *alfabeto* (the chord-letter alphabet of the five-course guitar). In those sections, pages were left blank, to leave room for future additions in the same key.

Later, another anonymous guitarist added works in a newer style into the blank pages. In this second handwriting, the name of Domenico Rainer appears many times. Until now nothing is known about the life and work of this composer. Based on the style of the music and how it is notated, including certain archaic *alfabeto* symbols for strummed chords<sup>2</sup>, we could estimate that the music was composed shortly before 1700, or in the first decades of the eighteenth century. This present recording provides an unexpected view on a repertoire created by a solitary composer, from the time of the decline of the Italian baroque guitar.

What we have here is probably just a glimpse of Rainer's musical output. It is not even known if he ever published a guitar book, or whether his works were copied from an autograph. The Santa Cecilia manuscript is not in a very good condition, and, unfortunately, the ink is washed away from some of the pages, so that several pieces have become illegible.

## The Works

In the second half of the seventeenth century, dances for solo instruments such as harpsichord, lute, or guitar were usually grouped in a certain order, as 'suites' or 'ordres'—though usually not labeled as such. In earlier sources, we often find smaller groups of works, existing of *alemanda-corrente*, *alemanda-sarabanda*, or *alemanda-corrente-sarabanda*. Later, the *giga* was added to what eventually would become the standard order of the baroque suite (prelude, *allemande*, *courante*, *sarabande*, and *gigue*—typically written in French). With Rainer, we find pairs consisting of *alemanda* and *corrente*, *alemanda* and *sarabanda*, or *alemanda* and *giga*.

In this manuscript, no less than eleven pieces are attributed to Rainer. It can be supposed that when his name appears at one or more of the movements of larger groups of works, it may also apply to some (or all) of the other pieces in that group.

Central to Rainer's work are his majestic *alemandas*, often with a deeply serious tone, like for example the mournful *Alemanda Il Pentimento* (the Repentance).<sup>3</sup> The *alemanda* can serve as a first movement of a group of pieces, when there is no prelude. Usually, the *alemandas* are followed by one or more shorter-scale dances, such as *corrente*, *sarabanda* or *giga*. While the majority of Rainer's dances are small-scale, at the same time they are truly original, like finely-crafted miniatures. The very short [*giga*], [*sarabanda*], and *gavotte* in G minor (nrs. 4, 5, and 6), for example, display the features of these dance genres in a perfectly effective way.

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<sup>1</sup> I-Rama-A-Ms-4912.

<sup>2</sup> In some of the pieces, chord letters such as Q and S appear, which had become obsolete in the second half of the seventeenth century.

<sup>3</sup> Five pieces are inscribed 'alemanda', but two others (nr 2 in G minor and nr. 9 in C major) should probably be considered to be *alemandas* as well.

Several of the works in the manuscript are untitled. However, based on their specific dance rhythms and texture, I have identified them here as sarabandas, gigas, etcetera (placing the titles between brackets). Often, the movements of these ‘suites’ share particular features, such as melodic patterns or similar harmonic progressions. In each of the groups of works included on this recording the name ‘Rainer’ appears at least once, with the exception of the Fuga in D minor, and the two pieces in D major which I have labeled here as [giga] and [allegro]. However, the composition of these pieces seems to match the style of the other works.

### The Style

With one foot in the tradition of the seventeenth-century Italian-French mixed *battuto-pizzicato* style (with chord strums mixed into plucked lute-style textures), of virtuosi such as Angelo Michele Bartolotti, Francesco Corbetta, and Robert de Visée, Domenico Rainer also took inspiration from the innovative style of composing of Arcangelo Corelli (1653 -1713), whose influence extended to Antonio Vivaldi and Johann Sebastian Bach. It comes as a surprise that some of Rainer’s works, like for example his gigas, demonstrate a distinctly ‘violinistic’ approach, with abundant broken-chord figuration, and a modern sense of tonality and chord hierarchy.<sup>4</sup> Rainer created a highly effective and unique version of this style, perfectly adapted to the guitar.

While not every single piece is explicitly attributed to Rainer by the second scribe, the singular style of most of the works raises doubt about whether other composers—equally unknown—could have been involved, taking into consideration that at the turn of the century the guitar had fallen out of favour in Italy. Until today, no other Italian solo music from after 1692, the year that Ludovico Roncalli’s *Capricci armonici sopra la chitarra spagnola* was printed, has surfaced.

In other countries, music for the five-course guitar was still being written until c. 1750, by a small number of composers such as François Campion, François le Cocq, and Santiago de Murcia. However, their compositions are very different from Rainer’s, regarding the latter’s *cantabile* style and the instrumental technique required.

Today, it is generally supposed that around 1700 the era of Italian solo repertoire in *battuto-pizzicato* style had come to an end. With the discovery of Rainer’s works we should probably revise our ideas about this period in the history of the five-course guitar.



### The baroque guitar

In our time, the guitar of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century is called the baroque guitar. The instrument had five courses (pairs of strings), which in Italy were often tuned like the first five strings of the modern guitar (A – d – g – b – e’). High octave strings were added to the bass courses, and were placed at the ‘outside’, which results in the following stringing arrangement: a/A – d’/d – g/g – b/b – e’ (the first string often being single).

It is known that some of the leading guitarists from the time (Granata, Pellegrini, and Corbetta) played with their nails—indeed on gut strings. Using your fingernails brings a great advantage with regard to chord strumming, which was one of the defining features of the mixed *battuto-pizzicato* style (strumming and plucking) of most of the Italian solo repertoire.

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<sup>4</sup> As exemplified for example by the very characteristic conjunct downward progressions of first inversion chords. See the Giga del Rainer (nr. 7), second half, and the Giga del Istesso Rainer (nr. 26), ending.

**Lex Eisenhardt** (1952) is a performer on early plucked instruments, such as the vihuela, the baroque guitar, and the 19th-century Romantic guitar. He taught at the Conservatory of Amsterdam from 1981 till 2018. He has given solo recitals and lectures in Europe, Australia, and the United States. Lex Eisenhardt has made several solo recordings on period instruments. In the forefront of the Historically Informed Practice (HIP) on the guitar, he was the first to make recordings (in 1981 and 1984) with music by the Catalan composer Fernando Sor, on a period instrument from the early 19th century. In 1993 he made a world premiere recording of works from the *Secondo Libro* (c. 1655) by Angelo Michele Bartolotti. Together with soprano Maria-Luz Alvarez he recorded two CDs: one with Spanish songs by Esteban Daza and José Marin, and another with Italian songs and solos from the time of Monteverdi.

In 2015 he published a widely acclaimed monograph on the baroque guitar, *Italian Guitar Music of the Seventeenth Century, Battuto and Pizzicato* (University of Rochester Press).



## Tracklist

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| <p>1. <i>Alemanda Il Pentimento</i> (the Repentance) in B minor<sup>5</sup></p> <p><i>Works in G minor</i></p> <p>2. [Alemanda]</p> <p>3. Allegro</p> <p>4. [Giga]</p> <p>5. [Sarabanda]</p> <p>6. Gavotta</p> <p>7. Giga del Rainer</p> <p>8. Passacaglia</p> <p><i>Works in C major</i></p> <p>9. [Alemanda]</p> <p>10. Sarabanda in tempo di minuet</p> <p>11. Minuet del Rainer</p> <p><i>Works in A minor</i></p> <p>12. [Preludio]</p> <p>13. Corrente del Rainer</p> | <p><i>Works in D minor and D major</i></p> <p>14. Fuga</p> <p>15. [Giga]</p> <p>16. [Allegro]</p> <p><i>Works in B minor</i></p> <p>17. Preludio</p> <p>18. Sarabanda del Rainer</p> <p>19. Giga del Rainer</p> <p><i>Works in G minor</i></p> <p>20. Alemanda del Rainer</p> <p>21. Sarabanda</p> <p>22. Capriccio</p> <p><i>Works in C minor</i></p> <p>23. Alemanda del Rainer</p> <p>24. Corrente dell' istesso</p> <p><i>Works in B minor</i><sup>6</sup></p> <p>25. Alemanda del Rainer</p> <p>26. Giga dell' istesso Rainer</p> <p>27. Alemanda</p> |
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<sup>5</sup> Alternative tuning: b/B – d'/d – f#/f# – b/b – d'

<sup>6</sup> Alternative tuning: a/A – c#/c# – f#/f# – b/b – e'