

“Er hat sie nicht nur von elf Chören auf dreyzehn gesetzt; sondern da er auch ihren Hals gerade gemacht oder theorbiret”

(“He has not only taken it from 11 to 13 courses, but given it a *theorboed* neck.”)

- from the article on S.L. Weiss in the *Handlexicon* published by J.C. Gottsched, Leipzig 1760

In 2002, German musicologist Dr. Frank Legl positively identified the author of that quotation as Luise Adelgunde Victorie Kulmus (1713-1762), poet and wife of the publisher, and a favorite pupil of Silvius Leopold Weiss's. Madame Gottsched's statement authenticates Weiss as inventor of both the “bass-rider” Baroque lute and its later variant with a longer “swan neck.” In 1723 Weiss himself wrote to Johann Mattheson that he had “accommodated” another of his lutes to have a longer neck while retaining its traditional d-minor tuning, so he could play continuo on this louder lute in a larger ensemble, “in church or in the orchestra.” Weiss stressed though, that he still preferred his bass-rider instrument for its intimacy in solo playing and in accompanying “cantata per voci sola.”

J.S. Bach composed his 6 Cello Suites around 1722, right in the middle of Weiss's lute innovations. While there is still lingering skepticism today on Bach's instruction “*pour la luth*” for BWV 995, no doubt he was keenly aware of the new instrument designed by Weiss. The idea of a transcription for this new lute with its expanded bass tessitura might have presented itself to Bach even as he composed the cello suites. I would go further and suggest that Bach had the bass-rider and not the swan-neck 13-course lute in mind, for there are some phrases – for example just before the coda of the Prelude of BWV 995 – which have to be fingered rapidly below the 8th course, an impossible feat on a swan neck.

Sadly the period 1719-1723 is both the zenith as well as the very beginning of decline for the German Baroque lute. Princess Wilhelmina de Bayreuth, sister of Frederick the Great and a pupil of Weiss's, predicted in 1728: “everyone who comes after [Weiss] is left only with the honor of imitating him.” There were good lutenists who contributed interesting works after Weiss, and there was a thriving lute community in the city of Königsberg where Johann Friedrich Reichardt grew up. But no one attained the level set by Weiss: “Simply, he was the master of his instrument and could do with it what he will,” just as Luise Gottsched told us. I think it has a lot to do with Weiss being the inventor of this instrument.

The lute was to enjoy a protracted albeit not entirely glorious sunset. On 16 February 1812, Carl Maria von Weber noted in his diary that he heard “the old Weiss played.” This was Johann Adolph Faustinus Weiss (1741-1814), youngest son of the great Weiss and successor to his post as Dresden's court lutenist. But by 1812, as Weber recorded, the junior Weiss's role had been reduced to playing for church services, apparently only “on Wednesdays and Sundays during Lent, with bass bassoon, theorbo, violin and viola, and organ.” Might the “theorbo” possibly be the same swan-neck Baroque lute designed by his father, now useless to the Dresden orchestra and too expensive to upkeep? The court released this instrument to the impoverished children of “Old Weiss” after his death on 21 January 1814, the same year Napoleon abdicated and was exiled to Elba. The Congress of Vienna convened in September to redraw national boundaries in Europe. One *Mauro Giuseppe Sergio Pantaleo Giuliani* (1781-1829), who 8 years before had left wife and young child in Trieste to seek fame and fortune in that musical capitol of the world, was appointed by Metternich as “official performer” at the Congress.

Without question Giuliani was then the world's greatest performer on his instrument. He was fortunate to be in Naples when the world's first 6-string guitar was made there. While Giuliani initiated the popularity of an instrument which today is the world's most played, his guitar (possibly by Gennaro Fabricatore I) also gave rise to a style of lutherie unique to Vienna during 1806-1822.

Published in late 1814, Giuliani's *Grande Ouverture* Opus 61 was so perfectly timed with the Congress of Vienna that the composer likely wrote it for this event. It is a masterpiece combining the most prevalent musical styles of the early 19th century – grand opera and the Viennese classical style. It obviously pays tribute to Gioachino Rossini's opera overtures. One of the longest works for guitar or lute, it is written in classic sonata-allegro form, with its second theme promptly recalling Beethoven's piano sonatas such as the "Quasi una fantasia." What is equally interesting is the meticulously notated dynamic markings, which shows how Giuliani "recalled the good old days of true lute playing" with sharply contrasting forte and piano, and long rising-falling phrases using the "Rossini crescendo." In short, Giuliani projected the same virtues in his playing as the great Weiss.

I was invited to visit Vienna after my ensemble's performance at the 1989 Tage Alter Musik Regensburg. There I was very fortunate to find the 1811 Rudert guitar which we will hear today. It was in terrible condition – the back was split, the neck broken, and the soundboard was dangling from a disintegrating edge binding – but the price was *very* reasonable (assuming it could be restored.) I really had no idea what I bought until January *this* year, when I began researching this program. I have since learned that most Viennese guitars before 1822, the year of Stauffer's "Legnani Model", have a fingerboard *inlaid* into the soundboard. This means neither the guitar's fret and bridge positions nor its string length can be altered – the instrument is kept permanently in "original condition." The next revelation is the action – top string height at the bridge saddle – is less than 7 mm, practically a lute action. So *voilà!* I can play this with lute technique. And therein the message behind this recital: the lute did not entirely perish; it was replaced by something more convenient...

Postscript

Giuliani found all he desired in Vienna – fame, fortune, social status. He performed with J.N. Hummel and dined with Beethoven (and for the world premiere of whose Seventh Symphony Giuliani had played in the cello section.) All that came to a mysterious crashing end in 1819, when Giuliani left in a hurry and for good. In one of the university archives in Vienna, there is a dossier on Giuliani compiled by the police. But only the cover is preserved, the content having long been removed or stolen. Still, the road to today's rock stardom was already in motion, and the vacuum left by Giuliani quickly taken up by one Luigi Legnani, duo partner to Niccolò Paganini. Giuliani had worked closely with Georg Stauffer, Vienna's top luthier, in developing the *Terzgitarre* (tuned up a third in g'). Legnani followed suit and in 1822 Stauffer patented his "Legnani Model," history's first guitar with a floating "slab" fingerboard and bolt-on neck, features that would reappear more than a century later in archtop and solid-body electric guitars.