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SOME INFORMATION ABOUT
HENRICUS ALBICASTRO TOGETHER
WITH A THEMATIC CATALOGUE OF
ALBICASTRO'S VIOLIN
AND CONTINUO SONATAS

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It is something of a cliché to describe a musician's life as 'mysterious', particularly when all that is meant is that it has proved hard to establish hard facts about it, but the description is certainly deserved in the case of Henricus Albicastro, who, if he did not positively seek to mislead posterity about his origins and career, certainly acted as if he did.

'Henricus Albicastro', for a start, is a pseudonym taking the form of a partly Latinized, partly Italianized, version of the composer's real name, which was Johann Heinrich (von) Weissenburg.¹ Prior to the initiation, in 1701, of a series of nine published collections by 'Albicastro' brought out in quick order by Estienne Roger in Amsterdam,² he had in fact always used in manuscripts and in at least one print (a collection of trio sonatas in both church and chamber styles issued in Bruges in 1696 as 'Op. 3') his baptismal name. Several of the collections published by Roger append 'Del Biswang' (or its abbreviation 'D.B.W.') to the surname Albicastro. This, it is generally agreed, refers to Bieswangen in Bavaria, but the significance of the tag is unclear. Bieswangen is probably not Albicastro's place of birth but, rather, the recognized seat — that is, the distinguishing mark — of the particular branch of the Weissenburg family to which he belonged. Uniquely, Johann Gottfried Walther, in his musical dictionary of 1732, stated that Albicastro was a Swiss.³ This could be true as a description of the remote origin of Albicastro's family. It could also be a simple error on Walther's part or an invention put out by the composer that had taken root.

There are other clues. On 30 August 1684 'Johan Hendrik Weisenbergh' matriculated as a student in the Faculty of Philosophy and Liberal Arts at the University of Leiden.⁴ The register describes him as 'Viennensis' – of Vienna – and

¹ All components of the composer's name undergo much orthographic variation in primary sources, and appear in both German and Dutch forms. 'Albicastro' is peculiar to musical sources, a few of which, however, retain 'Weissenburg'. The adoption of a pseudonym implies that the composer wished to draw a clear distinction between his musical and non-musical *personae*.

² The most complete, modern and authoritative source of information on Albicastro's publications is Rudolf Rasch, *The Music Publishing House of Estienne Roger and Michel-Charles Le Cène 1696–1743* (= My Work on the Internet, Volume Four), Part Four: Catalogue: Abeille-Antoniotti: <<http://www.let.uu.nl/~Rudolf.Rasch/personal/Roger/Catalogue-Abeille-Antoniotti.pdf>>. We are grateful to Rudolf Rasch for his advice in the preparation of this biography. A further invaluable online source, especially exhaustive in its biographical investigations (albeit ultimately inconclusive in relation to the composer's birthplace and family origins), is <<http://www.hum.uu.nl/medewerkers/r.a.rasch/Albicastro/Albicastro-Titel.htm>>: Otmar Tönz, Rudolf Rasch, Joost Hengst and Marcel Wissenburg, *Henrici Albicastro: Komponist und Geigenvirtuose (*1660/61 (?) †1730): Zur Herkunft und Biografie des Barockmusikers Johann Heinrich Weissenburg*.

³ Johann Gottfried Walther, *Musicalisches Lexicon oder musicalische Bibliothec* (Leipzig, Deer, 1732), 23, where the composer is called 'ein Schweitzer'. Walther's knowledge of Albicastro's military career suggests personal contact or at least an intermediate biographical source.

⁴ *Album Studiosorum Academiae Lugduno Batavae MDLXXV—MDCCCLXXV Accedunt Nomina Curatorum et Professorum per Eadem Secula*, ed. Willem Nicolaas Du Rieu (The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1875), *ad datam*. We thank Rudolf Rasch for privately communicating information on the details of both this entry and the one to which note 7 refers. Extraordinarily, this appears to be the first time that the existence of two separate entries on Albicastro in this register has been noted.

gives his age as twenty-five.⁵ A date of birth in 1660 or 1661 is entirely believable, but was Vienna his place of birth, the city from which he travelled to Leiden or, again, a convenient invention? It is impossible to give a clear answer, although it is certain that Albicastro was schooled as a violinist and composer in the South German (including Austrian and Bohemian) musical milieu of Schmelzer, Muffat, Biber, J. J. Walther and Westhoff, with which his works, particularly the earlier ones, have strong affinities. The register of Albicastro's second marriage, to Baroness Petronella de Rhoe de Opzinnig, which took place in Breda in 1722, gives his place of origin as 't Kasteel van Neuburg in de Overpfalz' ('the Castle of Neuburg in the Upper Palatinate'), the reference being to the *Schloss* of the city in modern Bavaria known as Neuburg an der Donau.⁶ Was this true, or was it a fiction designed to make Albicastro appear more worthy of a Baroness? Clearly, we must await further information before coming to any firm conclusions about Albicastro's whereabouts prior to his arrival in Leiden.

A second entry in the Leiden University register, dated 12 April 1686, records the appointment of 'Johannes Hendrik Weysenbergh', still described as 'Viennensis' and now given the age of 26, as a 'musicus academiae'.⁷ The term 'musicus' is a little ambiguous. Ordinarily, one would think of a professional musician, but in Albicastro's case that status seems very improbable, given his self-description in the Bruges Op. 3 and the Amsterdam Op. 1 as 'amatore (di musica)', and his use of the title *Cavaliere* (correctly, *Cavaliere*) in the Amsterdam Opp. 2–4.⁸ Albicastro was probably employed by the academy in Leiden as a teacher and musical director of its amateur members (mostly university students) in the manner of a professional, while, technically, remaining a gentleman-amateur himself.

At some point during the 1690s Albicastro removed to the Southern Netherlands, where he collaborated on a publication project with François Barbry, an amateur who had obtained a privilege for the publication of 'Italian' music. The sole

⁵ The fullest existing biographical account of Albinoni's life and career, by now rather dated, is Etienne Darbellay, 'Giovanni Henrico Albicastro alias Heinrich Weissenburg: Un compositeur suisse au tournant des XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles', *Schweizerische Musikzeitung/Revue musicale suisse*, 116 (1976), 1–11 and 448–9. It is, of course, ironic that Albicastro's reported, but probably spurious or remote, Swiss connection should have acted as a launch pad for the modern revival of his music — not only in the case of this article, but also in Max Zulauf's edition of Albicastro's *magnum opus*, the Op. 7 concertos, which in 1955 inaugurated the national monumental edition *Schweizerische Musikdenkmäler*.

⁶ The information on Albicastro's marriages is taken from the entry for 'Johannes Henricus van Weijssenburgh' on the web site <<http://geneagraphie.com>>, which gives information on the primary sources.

⁷ See note 4.

⁸ Strangely, the surviving publications from Op. 5 onwards give Albicastro the title only of plain *Signore* and omit 'Del Biswang'. Had something happened to cause him to suppress his noble credentials? Is there some connection with his membership of a Dutch military unit, in the light of the fact that his presumed homeland of Bavaria took the side of the French enemy during the Wars of the Spanish Succession? One notes, however, that the prefix 'von' or 'van', a mark of nobility placed before the German or Dutch form of his surname, appears with an inconsistency hinting that its use was not wholly legitimate.

surviving trace of this collaboration is the first of two books comprising a so-called Op. 3, already mentioned, published in 1696 in Bruges by François van Heurck. Albicastro gave the set the title *Il giardino armonico sacro-profano di 12 suonate*, a formula not only expressing the dual church-chamber character of the set but also recalling, perhaps deliberately, the titles of similar sets published by Schmelzer in 1662 and Biber in 1683.⁹ The second book of the same opus, containing chamber sonatas, is lost, as are the putative Opp. 1 and 2 of the same series.¹⁰ In commercial terms, it appears that the venture was a failure. Albicastro republished all six sonatas from the first book of the Bruges Op. 3 in the Amsterdam Op. 4 (1702), which implies that only six years later the original publication, perhaps produced in only a few copies, was no longer readily obtainable in the Netherlands.

In the late 1690s Albicastro will have come increasingly under the direct influence of Italian violinist-composers, in part through the activity of Estienne Roger, who republished, substituting handsome engraving for cumbersome typography, much of the repertory then being produced by Corelli and his contemporaries. He may also have made the personal acquaintance of the leading Bolognese composer Giuseppe Torelli (1658–1709), who visited Amsterdam in 1697–98, and whose music seems to have left traces in his style that are particularly evident in the *Concerti a quattro* of Op. 7 (1704). The characteristic ‘Albicastrian’ style that emerges in the nine collections published by Roger, all packed into a six-year period, is one that marries the older Austro-German heritage (itself, of course, Italian-influenced), seen, for example, in a lavish use of double and multiple stopping, to the emerging Corellian and post-Corellian manner of Italian masters. This is a unique synthesis achieved harmoniously and with commendable artistry.

Albicastro, who was conveniently living close at hand, was the first major composer for stringed instruments of whose music Roger brought out first editions in quantity. The series running from Op. 1 (1701) to Op. 9 (1706) comprises: three sets of trio sonatas (Opp. 1, 4 and 8); five sets of trio sonatas (Opp. 2, 3, 5, 6 and 9), of which Opp. 2 and 6 are lost and Op. 9, of which the sole known example was previously held by the Collection André Meyer, is at present inaccessible;¹¹ one set of

⁹ Darbellay, ‘Giovanni Henrico Albicastro’, 4, discusses Barbry’s publishing project in some detail.

¹⁰ It is impossible to know whether music from these other early publications, if they existed, was utilized in other Roger publications. One should not take it as axiomatic, however, that every collection bearing an authentic opus number was published. Occasionally, sets still only in manuscript state (such as the Op. 6 concertos of Giorgio Gentili) were given an opus number by their composer, doubtless in the hope – not always realized – of later publication. There is also a possibility that the opus numbering was not Albicastro’s, but that of his associate Barbry, who was responsible, according to the title page of the 1696 publication, for collecting and ordering the music. Could Barbry have used the opus numbers 1 and 2 for music by different composers? Certainly, the privilege mentions several other masters, including G. B. Vitali, Corelli, Gabrielli and Matteis.

¹¹ Op. 2 breaks the general pattern by having fifteen rather than the normal twelve works; Op. 5 and Op. 6, each of which holds six works, are identifiable from a description on the title page of Op. 6 as the separately published halves of a single collection. The ex-Meyer example of Op. 9, sold by the firm of J. and J. Lubrano in late 2015, has reportedly been acquired by a library and is likely, therefore, soon to be accessible again.

concertos in four parts with no separate partbook for principal violin (Op. 7). Clearly, given the rapidity with which these publications succeeded one another, Albicastro must have composed and stockpiled much of the music well in advance.

At least three of the collections bore dedications. Op. 1 was dedicated to the Burgomaster of Leiden, Coenraad Ruysch (1650–1731); Op. 2 to Cornelius Sasbout van der Dussen (1671–1707), an aristocrat whom Albicastro will have encountered as a student in Leiden in 1692;¹² and Op. 9 to Johannes van der Bergen, otherwise known as Johan Johannesz van den Bergh (1664–1755), who was at the time Burgomaster of Leiden but in addition, significantly, the secretary of its musical academy. Interestingly, and uniquely within the series, the title page of Op. 3 declares the publication to be ‘aux Dépens d’Estienne Roger’ (‘at the expense of Estienne Roger’) — a clear sign that Albicastro’s violin sonatas had become popular enough with the public not to need a subsidy from the composer or from a patron.

A noteworthy, if not particularly large, proportion of Albicastro’s music remained, so far as we know, in manuscript. Best known is the Italianate solo motet *Caelestes angelici chori*, which circulated quite widely in his lifetime.¹³ A four-movement suite, probably for keyboard, in G minor existed before the Second World War in the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek, Berlin; it is today lost, but a modern edition of it survives.¹⁴ Another lost item appears as no. 2920 in the sale catalogue of Nicolaas Selhof, a music dealer at The Hague whose property was auctioned there in 1759.¹⁵ The text of the entry runs: ‘Albicastro, XII Sonate a 2 Viole de [*sic*] Gamba & Basso Continuo, opera X’. The Selhof catalogue contains manuscripts of several collections submitted for publication to Roger’s successor, Michel-Charles Le Cène, but which this publisher, lethargic in his last years, failed to bring out. However Albicastro’s ‘Op. 10’, which is not among the compositions recorded in the inventory of Le Cène’s stock made at his death in 1743, is more likely, on balance, to have been a manuscript of an unpublished collection compiled shortly after Op. 9 that reached Selhof by another route. The choice of two viols in place of two violins brings Albicastro into the orbit of a close contemporary, the Dutch gamba-player Johannes Schenk (1660–1710 or later), who was likewise of German descent. Schenck’s famous collection *Le nymphe di Rheno*, Op. 8 (Amsterdam, 1702), features, similarly, two obbligato bass viols in place of the more usual one, while his lost collection of trio sonatas, Op. 2 (1691), entitled *Il giardino armonico*, pre-echoes in its title Albicastro’s 1696 collection. Did Albicastro perhaps aim to steal a little of Schenck’s thunder by treading in his footsteps?

¹² On Sasbout, see Rasch, *The Music Publishing House of Estienne Roger and Michel-Charles Le Cène* (see note 2), 16.

¹³ Brussels, Conservatoire Royal de Musique, F.G 3.

¹⁴ *Niederländische Klaviermusik um 1700*, ed. Hans Hermann Rosenwald (Berlin, Vieweg, 1931), 14–19.

¹⁵ *Catalogue d’une très belle bibliothèque de livres [...] auquel suit le catalogue d’une partie très considérable de livres de musique [...] deslaissez par Feu Monsieur Nicolas Selhof* (The Hague, Moetjens, 1759), 247. A reprint of this catalogue exists: *Catalogue of the Music Library, Instruments and Other Property of Nicolas Selhof, Sold in The Hague, 1759*, ed. A. Hyatt King (Amsterdam, Frits Knuf, 1973).

The largest group of unpublished compositions consists of violin sonatas, the heart of Albicastro's oeuvre. Because of the loss of Opp. 2 and 6 and the present inaccessibility of Op. 9, it is impossible to be sure which ones never reached the printed state. A collection of twelve such sonatas in the collection of the counts of Schönborn at Wiesentheid turns out to contain, differently ordered, all six sonatas contained in Op. 5; the remaining six sonatas could well belong to the complementary Op. 6.¹⁶ Otherwise, there is a group of four sonatas in a large anthology of violin sonatas copied in England around the first decade of the eighteenth century in the British Library, one of which exists also in an anonymous manuscript copied out for the Dresden *Hofkapelle*.¹⁷ There are two interesting singletons: a sonata originating from the collection of the Rose family, Lairds of Kilravock near Inverness (recently discovered by Andrew Woolley), and one belonging to the Di Martinelli collection at the Catholic University of Leuven.¹⁸

We must return to consider the rest of Albicastro's life. In 1705 he married, in the small town of Grave, his first wife, Cornelia Maria (Allegonda) Coebergh, who bore him one son and three daughters before her death, which had occurred by 1722. Grave remained the family's permanent home. In 1706 he is identified on the title-page of Op. 9 as a lieutenant-captain (*capitano luogotenente*) in the Dutch cavalry. From army records it emerges that on 28 September 1708 he was identified as the successor, as captain (*ritmeester*) in a regiment of horse commanded by Brigadier Chanclos, to a certain Jacques Watrigant, described as 'late' ('wijlen').¹⁹ He took the oath on 5 October 1708, becoming confirmed in his new post on 28 October. Stationed mainly at Maastricht, the Chanclos regiment saw serious action against the French and their allies, participating in the battle of Ramillies in 1706, the fighting around Ypres in 1710 and the battle of Denain in 1712. Albicastro remained in his post and regiment until shortly before 9 August 1729, when his place was taken by Henrik Carel, Count of Nassau. The latter was confirmed in post on 20 March 1730, with reference to Albicastro (known to the military, of course, always as Weissenburg) as 'wijlen'. And indeed: from an inventory of his goods (Raad van Brabant, inv. Nr. 225, 2.5.1730) taken after his death it appears that Albicastro died in February 1730.²⁰

There is no certain evidence that Albicastro continued to compose music or have it published after his promotion to captain. There are many cases from the same

¹⁶ Wiesentheid, Musiksammlung des Grafen von Wiesentheid, Hs. 405.

¹⁷ London, British Library, Add. ms. 31466; Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Mus.2-R-8,11.

¹⁸ Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Acc. MS 11420/3; Leuven, Katholieke Universiteit van Leuven, P206 (59/21).

¹⁹ The information on Albicastro's military career is taken from a typescript report prepared in 1963 by Lt.-Col. G. J. van Ojen Jr., Head of the Dutch army's Department of Military History and Ceremonial, for the violinist and music historian Willem Noske (1918–95). We are grateful to Kees Vlaardingebroek for informing us of this report and making a copy of it.

²⁰ As ascertained by Joost van Hengst and reported in *Henrici Albicastro: Komponist und Geigenvirtuose* (see note 2).

period of enthusiastic musical amateurs — for instance the cellist and composer Domenico Silvio Passionei and the violinist and composer Sir John Clerk of Penicuik — who ‘put away childish things’ once they had achieved a certain level in their professions.²¹ In Albicastro’s case the shock is perhaps greater because of the extraordinary intensity with which he composed, and presumably also performed, music up to 1706, and the publicly acknowledged success with which he did so. His reputation lingered on for a few decades. In 1738 Antoine de La Barre de Beaumarchais singled him out as a leading Dutch musician (ignoring his German origins and stating rather surprisingly that he was from The Hague).²² In his autobiography, Johann Joachim Quantz related how, while learning his craft as a boy in Merseburg, he had to practise the solo sonatas of Albicastro, as well as those of Biber and Walther (the juxtaposition of the names is significant).²³ But Albicastro’s long silence during the last twenty or more years of his life certainly had the effect of causing his music to be forgotten, except as a distant memory, more quickly than it might otherwise have been.

At its best, Albicastro’s music unites a Germanic fondness for rich harmony and texture, careful attention always being given to the musical interest of inner parts, with an Italian concern for melodiousness and transparency. His fugal movements are well worked out and elegant, and there is much harmonic experimentation in his slow movements, where a particular fondness for the flattened (Neapolitan) supertonic is evident. Yet while the workmanship of his music is of full professional standard, there is also a boldness about it that suggests the amateur insistent on following his own inclinations whatever others may say. His experience as a violinist ensures that the notes always remain within the bounds of practicality, however much they may test the player. This is certainly music deserving of a wider hearing.

²¹ On Passionei, who rose to become a cardinal, see Michael Talbot, ‘Domenico Silvio Passionei and His Cello Sonatas’, *Recercare*, 23 (2011), 189–215.

²² Antoine de La Barre de Beaumarchais, *Le Hollandois, ou Lettres sur la Hollande ancienne et moderne* (Frankfurt, Varrentrapp, 1738), 179.

²³ *Herrn Johann Joachim Quantzens Lebenslauf, von ihm selbst entworfen*, in Friedrich Wilhelm Marburg, *Historisch-kritische Beyträge zur Aufnahme der Musik*, vol. 1 (Berlin, Schütz, 1755), 197–250, at 201.

Appendix:
A Thematic Catalogue of
Violin and Continuo Sonatas
by Henricus Albicastro
(c.1660–1730)
(December 2015)

Compiled from sources currently accessible
and from
Franz Zobeley, *Die Musikalien der Grafen
von Schönborn-Wiesentheid:
Thematisch-bibliographischer Katalog,*
Volume 1, Part 2 (Tutzing, 1967–1992),
pp. 2–3.

Sonatas from MS sources I

Sonata in C minor ('London' Sonata no. 1)

[I.] Affetuoso



[II.] Allegro



[III.] Adagio



[IV.] Allegro



Sonata in B flat major ('London' Sonata no. 2)

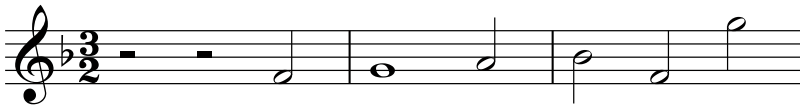
[I.] Affetuoso



[II.] Poco Presto



[III.] Adagio



[IV.] Presto



Sonata in F minor ('London' Sonata no. 3; Dresden)

[I.] Adagio



[II.] Presto



[III.] Grave



[IV.] Vivace



[V.] Passacala



Sonata in F major ('London' Sonata no. 4)

[I.] Aleg[ro]: [sic]



[II.] Presto



[III.] Adag[io]:



[IV.] Aleg[ro]:



[V.] Ad[agio]:



[VI.] Poco Presto



Sonata in A minor ('Kilravock') [= Op. 9 no. 1]*

[I.] Adagio



[II.] Vivace



[III.] Adagio



[IV.] Arioso



[V.] Allegro



* An apparently unique copy of *XII Sonate à Violino Solo Col Violone ó Basso Continuo*, Op. 9, was sold by J & J Lubrano in late 2015. Photographs of a few pages were supplied to Rudolf Rasch, who kindly informed us that the 'Kilravock'sonata is identifiable as Op. 9 no. 1.

Sonata in D minor ('Leuven')

[I.] Adagio



[II.] Presto



[III.] Canzona Allegro



[IV.] Adagio



[V.] Allegro



[VI.] Grave



[VII.] Presto



Sonate, Op. 5

Sonata in D major (Op. 5 no. 1; Wiesentheid no. 5)

[I.] Adagio



[II.] Allegro-Poco Presto-Allegro



Poco Presto



[III.] Aria Affettuoso



[IV.] Presto-Adagio



[V.] Grave



[VI.] Allegro



Sonata in A major (Op. 5, no. 2; Wiesentheid no. 4)

[I.] Adagio-Presto-Adagio



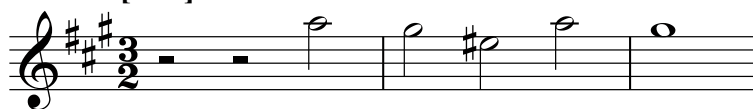
Presto



[II.] Allegro



[III.] Affettuoso



[IV.] Allegro



[V.] Aria Affettuoso



[VI.] Tempo di Gavotta



Sonata in E minor (Op. 5, no. 3; Wiesentheid no. 12)

[I.] Affettuoso-Adagio



[II.] Vivace



[III.] Affettuoso



[IV.] Allegro



[V.] Grave



[VI.] Vivace



Sonata in A minor (Op. 5, no. 4; Wiesentheid no. 8; Dresden)

[I.] Adagio-Allegro-Adagio



Allegro



[II.] Vivace



[III.] Adagio



[IV.] Allegro



[V.] Adagio



[VI.] Vivace



Sonata in C major (Op. 5, no. 5; Wiesentheid no. 6)

[I.] Grave



[II.] Allegro-Adagio



Adagio



[III.] Allegro



[IV.] Adagio



[V.] Allegro



Sonata in G minor: Folia (Op. 5, no. 6; Wiesentheid no. 10)

Adagio



Poco Vivace



Allegro



Adagio



Allegro



Affectuoso



Adagio



Staccato e Allegro



Poco Moderato



Presto e Staccato



Adagio



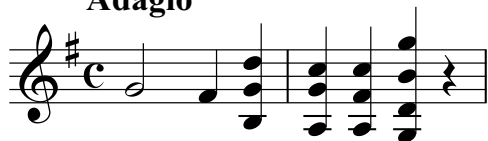
Allegro



Albicastro: Sonatas from MS sources II (Wiesentheid MS: Transcribed from Zobeley)

Sonata in G major (Weisentheid no. 1)

Adagio



Poco



Aria



Alla Polonesa



Rosignolo



Grave



Menuet



Piccino



Grave



[D major]

Aria moderato



Sonata in G minor (Wiesentheid no. 2)

Adagio



I. Adagio (C); II. Allegro (C); III. Adagio (C); IV. Allegro (C); V. Grave (3/2); VI. Allegro (3/8)

Sonata in B flat major (Wiesentheid no. 3)

Affectuoso



I. Affectuoso (C); II. Da Capella-Adagio (2/2-C); III. Adagio (3/4); IV. Allegro (C); V. Adagio (C); VI. Vivace (2)

Sonata in C minor (Wiesentheid no. 7)

Adagio



I. Adagio (C); II. Allemande Allegro (C); Grave (3/2); Allegro (C); Adagio (C); Allegro (6/8)

Sonata in D minor (Wiesentheid no. 9)

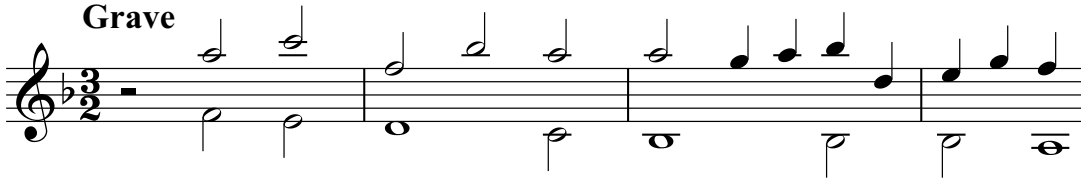
Scord: **Adagio**



I. Adagio (C); II. Allemande Affectuoso (C); III. Allegro (3/4); Ciaccone affectuoso (3/4); Spiritoso (3/8)

Sonata in F major (Wiesentheid no. 11)

Grave



I. Grave (3/2); II. Allegro (C); III. Adagio (3/2); IV. Allegro (6/8); V. Adagio (C); VI. Allegro (6/8)