

• **Women of Good Courage** •  
**Program Notes**

**Elisabeth von Hessen** (1596-1625) grew up in the cosmopolitan, artistically flourishing court of Kassel, an atmosphere directed by her father, the German ruler, composer, and arts patron, Landgraf Mortiz of Hesse. Elisabeth attended the *Collegium Mauritanum* alongside her brothers, other children of nobility and the carefully selected choirboys of the Hofkapalle in Kassel. All of the students, regardless of gender and or social background, were trained in a highly varied curriculum of various languages, grammar, rhetoric, logic, mathematics, science and music. Elisabeth was a prolific writer, particularly of poetry. She collaborated with Georg Schimmelpfennig, an alumnus of the *Collegium* and musician employed at the court, on a collection of madrigals, *Madrigale a voce sola*, which used her Italian texts. She most likely composed music as well, though none is known to survive, and, based on the difficulty level of the pieces in her lutebook, she reached a high level of proficiency on the lute.

The music in Elisabeth von Hessen's lutebook attests to the progressive and cultured atmosphere in which it was created. Ironically, the most conservative pieces are probably those by Landgraf Mortiz of Hesse, which are lute solo versions of dances originally written for various instrumental ensembles. We also see the most famous European composers represented, such as the pioneer of the new Italian baroque, Guilio Caccini, and the English lute composer and virtuoso John Dowland. There are also pieces that are unique to this collection, many of which are surprisingly progressive, such as the *Prelude, Fuga* and *Finale*. These idiomatic works explore the full range and capabilities of the lute.

Born into a family of musicians and instrument builders, the French composer and harpsichordist **Elisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre** (1665–1729) was first introduced at the court of Louis XIV at the age of five as a child prodigy. She continued to maintain a relationship with the court, including musical training there from the age of twelve, alongside the royal children. Although other women excelled in Paris at this time as professional musicians, Elisabeth was a uniquely prodigious composer amongst even her male colleagues. She wrote an impressive variety of works, including two published volumes of harpsichord works, violin sonatas, sacred and secular cantatas and a well-received opera, *Cephale et Procris*. She also was quick to incorporate new ideas and techniques, particularly those coming from Italy.

For the pieces included here, I have borrowed a *Prelude* and *Cannaris* from Elisabeth's first books of harpsichord music, and several movements from the Violin Sonata IIa. The *Prelude* is notated in the style of the French unmeasured prelude, meaning that the piece should progress in an improvisatory manner, with the exact rhythms determined by the performer. Although this genre is most frequently associated with the harpsichord, musicians of the time thought of the unmeasured prelude as coming from the lute tradition. Elisabeth wrote some of the earliest violin sonatas in France, though it was a widespread movement amongst French composers. While large entertainments, such as *tragédies lyrique*, were popular and enjoyed great support from the court during the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, as Louis the XIV aged music of the chamber and chapel came to the forefront. Elisabeth's inclusion of an *Aria Affettuosa* in her sonata is a nod to the dance songs of Lully's stage music. The other movements illustrate Elisabeth's ability to mix conventional French lyricism with complex harmonies and dramatic Italianate elements.

**Princess Anne** (1709–1759) was the daughter of King George II of England who married and ruled alongside the Dutch ruler William IV of Orange. Known for being strong-willed, Anne chose to marry William to have a position of independence and influence, even though their official titles were less than true monarchs. As Princess of Orange Anne took an active role in politics, sometimes to the chagrin of her husband's advisors. When William IV died in 1751 she became regent for their young son and ruled until her own death 8 years later.

Princess Anne's manuscript of solo guitar works (originally, but mistakenly, named Princess Anne's lute book) is a charming collection of mostly French dances in the popular gallant style. These works aim to balance simplicity with gracefulness, and thus are generally light in mood, very melodic and highly ornamented. This style was initially associated with music for the instruction and entertainment of noblewomen players—so it is not a surprise to see it in this manuscript. Somewhat more unusual are several remarkable examples of music with a distinctive Scottish influence. Most obvious of these are several pieces with the title “Scotch Anne,” which is Gaelic for “Royal Anne,” though some of the *Gigues* also seem more in touch with their Scottish/Irish roots than the baroque gigue. Returning to the French-style, the *Trompette* imitates the call of a military trumpet, achieved through lively strumming.