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Albert Cohen

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### The Performance of French Baroque Music: a Report on the State of Current Research

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Albert Cohen

The recent tercentenary celebrations spurred by the birth of Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683) and the death of Jean-Baptiste Lully (1687) — undeniably the two most significant musical figures of the French Baroque — have focused attention not only on their production, but also on the period itself. The past decade has witnessed a flowering of scholarly interest in this field of study, and the growth in research activity has been matched by that in numbers of performances of French Baroque music in historically-authentic style.

What has become increasingly clear from the renewed attention paid to this music is that the transmission of its performance traditions are, at best, imperfect, and that much remains to be done to clarify both the techniques and the attitudes of French Baroque musical expression if we hope to comprehend the significance assigned to that music in the literature of the time. Since it is in practice where the true art lies, knowledge of that practice is central to comprehension of its expression.

French Baroque musical style does not transfer well to today's instruments or aesthetic. The delicacy of feeling, the predilection for understatement, the graceful ornamentation of ideas, the nobility of themes, and the love of theater, color and pageantry — all contribute to



an expression that is at once dramatic and personal, served by performance media and techniques designed to enhance this expression. Scholarly research into the performance of French Baroque music has contributed much to the rebirth of interest in the practice of this music. Performers of early music who specialize in this style have come to understand its special qualities, and their performances increasingly reflect the singular nature of early French expression.

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What follows is a survey, arranged principally by medium, of published research on French Baroque performance that has appeared during the past decade (1978-1988). This is followed, in turn, by a bibliography of that research arranged alphabetically by author. The survey aims to be as comprehensive as possible; yet in the interest of space, few studies whose main aim is not performance practice are included, even though they may, in fact, contain information applicable to performance. Exceptions are made for larger studies that have substantial portions devoted to performance questions, and for smaller essays that make unique contributions relative to such questions. It has also not been possible to include introductions to editions of music, or booklets supplied with sound recordings.

In the interest of completeness, a list of "Publications Announced" has been added to the bibliography. These items have not been examined, but they are expected to include information pertinent to the subject of French Baroque performance.

Recent bibliographies that touch on the literature include those by Anthony and Hajdu (1981), Graham and Roles (1986), Schwartz and Schlundt (1987), Jackson (1988), and Foster (exp. 1988).

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## **1. Dramatic Music and Vocal Performance**

New information on the production of Lully's operas is found in Rosow (1981), where textual changes in the eighty-year performance history of *Armide* (1686-1766) are examined and compared in light of changing Parisian taste. Elsewhere, Rosow (1983) studies the French Baroque recitative as a reflection of seventeenth-century French theatrical declamation, with implications for its performance. A similar study is found in Pinson (1984). Tunley (1987) addresses the recitative in light of



the *Traité du récitatif* (1707) of Grimarest, which deals with principles of public speaking and theatrical declamation, and with their application to singing. Wolf (1978) examines the role of meter in French recitatives, and in their performance.

The choral movements in Lully operas are addressed in Rosow (1987), including questions of the size and makeup of the performing force, voice types used, position on stage, and the role of accompaniment. Sawkins (1987) studies the makeup of the *dessus* part in seventeenth-century French choruses, determining that for opera and ballet, women were joined by boys and falsetti on the top part, while in the Royal Chapel, boys and falsetti were joined by castrati retained at court for this purpose. La Gorce (1979) describes detailed records concerning the personnel at the French Opéra in 1704, based on recently-uncovered notarial documents.

Several recent studies address performance questions during the time of Rameau. Early eighteenth-century operatic singing style is the subject of an article by McGegan and Spagnoli (1987). A newly-discovered inventory of effects at the Paris opera (1748) is the subject for an essay by La Gorce (1983) on operatic "décors et machines." Sadler (1983) examines a little-known inventory (1738) of singers and instrumentalists at the opera for information on performing forces for a Rameau production. Cyr (1980) addresses "Rameau's writing for the voice," stressing the influence of the Italian declamatory singing style of the time. Elsewhere, Cyr (1983) reviews evidence to clarify the performance practice of Rameau's church cantatas in the early eighteenth century. Performance questions in the cantatas of Bernier are addressed by both Nelson (1979) and Voloshin (1984); covered are such matters as the makeup of the chorus, the nature of the solo singing, and the orchestration of the accompaniment. Coeyman (1987) addresses similar questions relative to the stage works of Delalande, while Sawkins (1986) examines time-markings found in original sources of his motets and their implications for modern performance of these works.

French Baroque vocal style and technique, as described in singing treatises of the period, are studied in detail by Sanford (1979), where they are contrasted with the contemporary Italo-German vocal practice. A portion of the study by Griffith (1984) is devoted to questions of vocal performance in specific songs of the literature. Ryhming (1982) examines Bacilly's *Remarques curieuses sur l'art de bien chanter* (1668) for guides to performance of the French "air de cour." Green (1979)



provides an annotated English translation of Rousseau's *Méthode claire, certaine et facile pour apprendre à chanter la musique* (1678).

## 2. Instrumental Ensemble

Cyr (1982) studies the role of the double-bass in the French opera orchestra during the early eighteenth century, clarifying the different string instruments assigned to play the bass part at this time and their changing roles. Lemaître (1987) addresses the question of what instrument played the orchestral *haute-contre* part, confirming that it was intended for viola (and not violin) and should be scored for viola in modern editions of operas from this period. Duron (1984) raises questions about the range of the *quinte de violon* part, suggesting that on occasion, it is clearly not the lowest viola part, but rather the highest bass part, and may then be intended for a small 'cello. Elsewhere, Duron (1986) examines the makeup of Charpentier's orchestra.

Chapter I of a new book on the 'cello in eighteenth-century France by Milliot (1985) provides a useful review of evidence regarding its use in different settings relative to the viol. Similar concerns related to bowed continuo instruments in chamber music are addressed by Sadie (1978-79). Green (1983) examines printed title pages of early eighteenth-century French chamber music, for guides to alternative instrumental combinations acceptable in performance. Schwarze (1983) includes an investigation of performance styles in the concertos of Jean-Marie Leclair, drawn from historical evidence.

## 3. Keyboard

In his study of the keyboard continuo in French opera (1678-1776), Sadler (1980) determines that the absence of bass figures in a work generally suggests the absence of a keyboard accompaniment (that is, a fully realized part), except perhaps for vocal airs and recitatives. Mangsen (1984-85) questions Sadler's findings, citing instructions on realizing unfigured basses in the literature of the time.

Ledbetter (1987) seeks to compare the development of the harpsichord tradition in seventeenth-century France, with those of spinet and lute, in which basic features of performance styles used on these instruments are covered. Solo keyboard practice in the Baroque is the central topic of two other recent studies, by Lister (1979) and Troeger (1987), portions in both of which are devoted to French practice. Lister identifies the French Baroque keyboard school with a progressive performance



tradition centered in Paris, which spread to England and Germany from the 1730s; he derives details of that tradition from treatises of the time (most of which are quoted *in extenso*). Troeger addresses "the practical matter of playing the harpsichord and clavichord" as a generalized style in the Baroque, rather than in terms of national schools. Nevertheless, he does deal with French practice in Chapters 5 ("Timing") and 6 ("Ornamentation and Embellishment").

The life and work of Jean Henry d'Anglebert form the focus for the book by Scheibert (1986), in which sections devoted to ornamentation and ornamental practice, style and tempo, and the unmeasured prelude provide useful summaries of performance style drawn from contemporary sources. The unmeasured prelude is also the subject of separate essays by Troeger (1983), who argues for an implicit duple meter in such preludes found in France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and by Gustafson (1984), who considers the significance of slurs in these works. Prévost (1986) compares examples of the unmeasured prelude by Louis Couperin with those by Nicolas Lebègue for a general guide to rhythmic interpretation of this style type. More extensive, however, is the later study by Prévost (1987), in which he examines the notation and literature of the unmeasured prelude in detail, and attempts to arrive at general principles regarding its composition and methods of performance.

Studies of keyboard tuning are found in Sloane (1986), which reviews the procedure for an irregular tuning recommended by Salomon de Caus in his *Institution harmonique* (1614), and in Panetta (1987), which supplies an English translation with commentary of Jean Denis' *Traité de l'accord de l'espinnette* (1650). Other recent English translations of keyboard treatises are those by Burchill (1979) of Saint-Lambert's *Nouveau traité* (1707), Rowley (1979) of Corrette's *Le maître de clavecin* (1753), Harris-Warrick (1984) of Saint-Lambert's *Les principes du clavecin* (1702), and Mattax (1985) of Delair's *Traité d'accompagnement* (1690).

#### 4. Organ

Interest in French Baroque organ practice is also apparent in recent publications. Shannon (1978), while principally devoted to a study of the French organ literature of the seventeenth century, provides a useful summary of registrations available on the classical French organ. The organ works of Nicolas Lebègue form the focus for the study by Liberman (1984), where Chapter 5 is devoted to concerns of performing this music (including liturgical use, registration, tempo, meter, and



ornamentation). Hughes (1985) examines dance characteristics in the organ masses of François Couperin, with implications for the performer, especially as they relate to tempo, phrasing, and articulation.

Performance on the French classical organ is dealt with by Musch (1986), who covers the different registrations and stops available to the performer, and by Kooiman (1981, 1986), who provides two studies: one on the performance of rhythmic inequality on the instrument, and the other on the realization of ornaments. Pruitt (1986) discusses the performance of French organ music in the late seventeenth century, based principally on an anonymous treatise of the time (provided in English translation); covered are tempo, ornaments, fingering, registration, and interpretation.

## 5. Strings

Several recent studies on the viol in France offer new information on Baroque performance practice. Vertrees (1978) provides a valuable study of the bass viol in French chamber music, including: its different roles in solo performance and in large and small ensembles; continuo practice; specific playing techniques (bowing, fingering, position playing); use of ornaments and embellishments; and questions of liberties taken in performance. Hsu (1981) supplies a graded, practical handbook, based on materials derived from historical sources, intended for the present-day performer who wishes to develop proficiency in playing the French Baroque viol. (It includes material first published in Hsu [1978], which is restricted to bowing techniques and seeks to "recapture the musical rhetoric of French viol playing.") A similar approach is adopted by Teplow (1983), whose detailed instructions are derived primarily from the works of Marin Marais. Pond (1978) studies the development of idiomatic ornaments for the solo viol in France.

Green (1982) surveys the use of the *pardessus de viole* in eighteenth-century France. Elsewhere, Green (1979) provides an annotated English translation of Rousseau's *Traité de la viole* (1687). Lindemann (1978) supplies information on performance features of the *musette* and the *vielle*, two pastoral instruments introduced to French art music in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, especially in stage works.

Lute practice as described in Champion's *Traité* (1716) and *Addition* (1730) is reviewed in Mason (1981). But only brief attention is given to performance questions in Horrix (1981). Buch (1985) examines the concepts of "style brisé" and "style luthé" in Baroque France, with



implications for performance of works written in those styles. Bailes (1984) includes a brief review of performance techniques on the lute, as derived from contemporary sources, in an introductory essay on French lute music of the seventeenth century.

The French Baroque guitar is examined by Martin (1986), who studies ornaments and their interpretation derived from seventeenth-century guitar manuals, and by Ribouillault (1986), who investigates the decline of "Baroque tuning" in the eighteenth-century guitar.

## 6. Winds

Recent studies on wind instruments clarify their use in the French Baroque. Bowers (1979) tackles the problem of determining whether the recorder or the transverse flute was intended in unmarked flute parts; evidence indicates that the transverse flute was not favored in France during the Baroque until about 1680, and that before the early eighteenth century, the theorbo was preferred to the harpsichord for accompanying flute parts. Recorder fingerings from Jacques Hotteterre's *Principes* (1707) are the subject of inquiry in Hunt (1986). A guide to Baroque flute fingerings, in general, is found in Neuhaus (1986), where examples of fingerings and techniques for performing ornaments are quoted from original sources. New English translations of wind treatises include those by Smith of *La véritable manière* (1700) by Freillon Poncein (1982), and by Semmens (1983) of Étienne Loulié's undated, manuscript recorder method. The art of preluding on eighteenth-century wind instruments is described in a portion of Bang and Lasocki (1984), a practical handbook derived from tutors of the time that include French sources.

Whitwell (1983) devotes a part of his study on "The Baroque Wind Band and Wind Ensemble" to the makeup of wind bands in France: court, military, civic, and church. Boydell (1982) treats the nature and use of the French *cromorne* in the early Baroque (Part I, Ch.6).

## 7. Interpretation

Publications by Neumann (1978, 1979, and 1982) continue to dominate investigations into interpretation of Baroque ornaments, with emphasis on French practice. Fuller (1981) describes the ornamental table by Toinon of 1699, and Lohmann (1984) reviews "inégalité" in French Baroque music. Houle (1987) provides a detailed study of meter and



rhythm in Baroque music (including French practice), with important implications for performance.

Saint-Arroman (1983) is the first to appear of six projected volumes devoted to providing a comprehensive set of materials to help guide the performer of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French music. This volume is arranged as a dictionary of terms, each of which is defined and illustrated by examples drawn from the musical and theoretical literature of the period.

A similar objective is evident in Veilhan (1977 and 1979, published in both French and English), though on a smaller scale and not limited to (but stressing) French practice. Rules for "good taste" are compiled from the principal treatises of the time, and arranged according to categories of performance concerns.

## 8. Dance

The performance of French Baroque court dance and its music has become an area for scholarly inquiry of increasing interest. The bibliographical study on "French Court Dance and Dance Music" published by Schwartz and Schlundt (1987) is an annotated guide to primary source writings on the subject that is rich in information on Baroque performance practices related to dance and to its music. Topics covered in the annotations include: form, expression, performance techniques, accompaniment, articulation, dynamics, embellishments, tempo, and rhythm. Hilton (1981) is a work central to the interpretation and recreation of French court dance, aimed at scholar and performer alike. Additional studies of this repertory are found in: Witherell (1983), which provides means for reconstructing the performance of court dance using Feuillet notation; Hilton (1986), where the surviving choreographies for dances by Lully are investigated; Harris-Warrick (1986), in which the sources and settings for court dance are studied; Ranum (1986), who traces the evolution of the Sarabande as both a dance and a musical style in seventeenth-century France; and Mather (1987), in which an extended study of dance rhythms is undertaken, directed primarily toward performers.



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