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## "Monsieur de Saint Lambert: A New Treatise on Accompaniment." Trans. and Ed. by John S. Powell

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Monsieur de Saint Lambert. *A New Treatise on Accompaniment with the Harpsichord, the Organ, and with Other Instruments*. Translated and edited by John S. Powell. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991. [xvii, 155p. ISBN 0-253-34561-8.]

Performers and scholars alike will welcome John Powell's translation of Monsieur de Saint Lambert's *A New Treatise on Accompaniment, with the Harpsichord, the Organ, and with Other Instruments*. Although Saint Lambert's *Principles of the Harpsichord* has been translated and edited by Rebecca Harris-Warrick, Powell's is the first published English translation of the *Nouveau traité*. A significant and influential work in its time, this treatise contains a wealth of information of interest to keyboardists, addressing such topics as the realization of figured and unfigured basses, ornamentation of the bass, the texture of chords, recitative accompaniment, and differing styles of basso continuo realization on the organ and harpsichord. Moreover, the book sheds light on aspects of French baroque theory, notably tonality, enharmonicity, and notation.

One of the most useful parts of Powell's brief introduction is his listing of thoroughbass manuals published in France between 1660 and 1764. Saint Lambert's volume, published in 1707, stands at the midpoint in a series of about twenty French continuo tutors. Saint Lambert admits that he is not the first to write about the realization of figured and unfigured basses, having been preceded in this by Nicolas Fleury, Guillaume Gabriel Nivers, Denis Delair and others, but defends his treatise on the grounds that he brings a new perspective to the subject. Powell chronicles the influence the publication had in both Germany and France. The work is cited by the German theorists Johann David Heinichen and Johann Mattheson; Jean-Philippe Rameau, in *Traité de l'harmonie réduite a ses principes naturels*, goes so far as to borrow entire passages from Saint Lambert.

Despite the wide circulation of Saint Lambert's book, not much is known about his life. There is inconclusive evidence to suggest that he attended the premiere of Lully's *Armide* in 1686 while still a young man. From this, Powell surmises that he was born around 1650-70. Harris-Warrick observes that biographical information about Saint Lambert has been obscured by the fact that he has often been confused with Michel Lambert, a singer and composer of court

airs in the employ of Louis XIV. Although he held no official title, Saint Lambert seems to have been a teacher of some repute in Paris and the provinces. Furthermore, as Harris-Warrick points out, the sophistication of the thoroughbass treatise suggests that he was an experienced basso continuo player as well.

The *Nouveau traité* is intended to help the beginning accompanist gain facility in playing the proper harmonies above both figured and partially figured basses. To teach the struggling novice how to connect figured-bass signatures with a particular hand position at the keyboard, Saint Lambert reduces the number of chords the accompanist must learn, by grouping together those that share the same right-hand accompaniment. This method probably originated with Delair; Rameau in his *Dissertation*, also links chords with the same right-hand realization. Saint Lambert gives a somewhat simplified version in which complicated figures are associated with 5/3 triads above different bass notes. This approach could be resurrected as a short-cut to deciphering complicated figures.

Thoroughbass players, then as now, are sometimes called upon to play from unfigured or partially figured basses. Delair discusses this topic in greater detail than Saint Lambert, but Saint Lambert's chapter is easier to digest and would provide a good starting point for the beginner. Following the custom established by his predecessors, Saint Lambert teaches the accompaniment of unfigured basses by having the student memorize the harmonies appropriate to typical bass progressions. Remarkably, Saint Lambert's realizations of 4- and 5-note progressions anticipate by a decade the rule of the octave, a scale harmonization popularized in France by François Campion in 1716.

Of particular interest are the eighth and ninth chapters, which give a glimpse into the actual performance of an 18<sup>th</sup>-century continuo part. Saint Lambert permits certain liberties, such as playing parallel fifths and octaves when accompanying large ensembles. However, when accompanying only a single voice, he stresses that "one cannot adhere too religiously to correctness . . . for then everything is exposed, & the Critics will let you get away with nothing." He encourages taking other licenses as well, including subtracting or adding notes to the bass (what Delair calls *supposition*), changing the register of the bass, adding trills to the bass, and leaving out chords above the bass. Like Delair, who suggests adding dissonances even if they are not indicated in the figures, as long as they have been

prepared, Saint Lambert gives the keyboardist the freedom to alter the harmony above the bass when desired.

In the ninth chapter, Saint Lambert discusses "Taste in Accompaniment." As he explains, "This taste principally consists of a careful handling of the harmony of one's Instrument—in such a way that one does not draw so much sound [*son*] from the Harpsichord that it entirely overwhelms the solo voice [*la voix qui chante*], or, on the contrary, that one does not draw so little [sound] that it does not support [the solo voice] enough." To make more sound at the harpsichord, he recommends playing full-voiced chords by doubling all the notes of the right hand in the left hand. The accompanist can also restrike chords in large ensembles to increase the volume. Saint Lambert goes on to show the accompanist how to play single chord tones on off beats in triple meter in order to fill out the sonority and keep the rhythmic motion going. For light voices, he counsels playing fewer parts and disengaging one or two stops on the harpsichord.

Another option Saint Lambert gives the harpsichordist is the arpeggiation of chords. Although Powell rightly notes that Saint Lambert allows arpeggiation only in recitatives, this should not obscure the fact that for him the arpeggio is one of the embellishments most suitable for accompanying on the harpsichord: "Even when one does not double Parts, one still should arpeggiate them. One could repeat a single chord even several times, by arpeggiating it first in ascending & then in descending. But this [arpeggiated] repetition must be carefully handled, and it cannot be taught to you by a Book: rather, you must see someone actually doing it."

Especially pictorial is Saint Lambert's description of recitative accompaniment. The player may linger on chords, and then restrike a single note by itself with discretion. Conversely, "when doubling Parts one may restrike all the notes one after another in a continual repetition—thereby drawing from the Harpsichord a crackling a bit like a volley of musket fire . . ." He concludes by emphasizing that the greatest taste one might show in accompaniment is to know how to adapt completely to the character of the Air being sung—entering into the spirit of the words . . .

By his description, Saint Lambert suggests that a florid, full-voiced texture, replete with ornaments and arpeggios was the norm for accompaniment on the harpsichord. This is corroborated by the treatises of Jean-Henry d'Anglebert and Delair. However, Saint



Lambert makes a clear distinction between organ and harpsichord continuo, prohibiting arpeggios, the restriking of chords, and the doubling of parts on the organ.

The treatise has theoretical as well as practical value. In his discussion of the rudiments of music, Saint Lambert presents for the first time concepts or usages now commonly accepted. He anticipates Rameau in being one of the first French theorists to clearly differentiate between tone (the tonic note), and mode (the intervallic species, i.e., major and minor). Although he labels certain keys as rare, such as f# minor, he is one of the earliest, after Jean-Pierre Freillon-Poncein, to list all 42 keys<sup>1</sup>—the major and minor keys with their enharmonic equivalents. He is also innovative in the area of notational reform. He advocates reducing the number of clefs and adding a flat to key signatures for the minor flat keys.

John Powell's *A New Treatise on Accompaniment* brings to life a significant treatise which deserves to be better known. He does an admirable job of translating Saint Lambert's convoluted prose, although the bracketed interpolations sometimes confuse rather than elucidate. The computer-generated examples use treble instead of soprano clef, making them easy to read. Powell gives the page numbers of the original publication in the margins, making possible ready comparison between the two versions. His footnotes are informative and enrich the value of the publication, although it is regrettable that they appear at the end of the book, necessitating an inordinate amount of page turning. It is also unfortunate that Powell neglected to translate all the foreign texts cited in the footnotes, making German and French quotes inaccessible to some readers. Also surprising is the lack of bibliography and paucity of secondary sources cited. All in all, John Powell has made an important contribution to current scholarship. Saint Lambert's work has considerable value for today's early music performer in documenting the styles and techniques of basso continuo realization in 18<sup>th</sup>-century France. In addition, the book is of interest to the student of theory in anticipating important new trends such as the transition from modality to tonality, the concept of enharmonic equivalence, and notational reform.

CHARLOTTE MATTAX

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<sup>1</sup> I.e. 21 major keys (CDEFGAB, C#D#E#F#G#A#B#, C<sup>b</sup>D<sup>b</sup>E<sup>b</sup>F<sup>b</sup>G<sup>b</sup>A<sup>b</sup>B<sup>b</sup>) and their minor equivalents, 42 keys in all.