



(LEMS 8040)

JEAN –PHILIPPE RAMEAU (1683-1764) PIECES DE CLAVECIN EN CONCERTS 1741

Elaine Comparone, harpsichord
With members of The Queen's Chamber Band
Daniel Waitzman, flute
Marsha Heller, oboe and oboe d'amore
Robert Zubrycki, violin
Lori Miller, violin
Peter Seidenberg, cello

RAMEAU: THE COMPOSER'S LIFE

In 1683, Jean-Philippe Rameau, the seventh of eleven children, was born into a musical family in Dijon. His father played the organ at two churches there. At eighteen he decided to become a musician, although his father preferred that he enter the legal profession. He traveled to Italy and spent a few months in Milan, playing violin with a group of itinerant musicians. Subsequently, he held various organ posts in Dijon (replacing his father), Lyons, Clermont, and Paris. Two years after settling in Paris at the age of forty-two, he married a nineteen-year old girl, Marie-Louise Mangot. They had four children. He composed cantatas and motets, and he published books and articles on music theory and several small collections of solo harpsichord works. All the while he longed to compose for the operatic stage. He sublimated this desire in his harpsichord works, lavishing on them all the imagination, passion, and drama that would later enliven his great operas.

Perceived as a learned theoretician who had composed a few keyboard works, he had trouble attracting a compatible librettist. After developing a friendship with the wealthy financier Le Riche de a Poupliniere and his artistic circle, he met Abbe Pellegrin, who would become his first librettist. Together they created *Hippolyte et Aricie*, which had its first performance a few days after Rameau's 50th birthday.

He ultimately composed well over 20 operas and opera-ballets, establishing himself as Lully's successor in Parisian cultural life. With Voltaire as collaborating librettist, he composed *La Princesse de Navarre* and *La Temple de las Gloire*. The King appointed him Royal Chamber Music Composer. Toward the end of his life, painfully aware of his waning creative powers, he continued to study and research music theory. He succumbed to an attack of fever aggravated by scurvy several days before his 81st birthday.

THE MUSIC

Jean-Philippe Rameau's *Pieces de Clavecin en concerts* have fascinated me since I discovered them in the early 1970s. I had been longing for chamber music that would challenge and excite me as much as the vast, rich, and profound body of solo harpsichord literature. Playing continuo harpsichord did not fulfill that desire for me. I gravitated naturally to the chamber works with obbligato harpsichord by J.S. Bach, his sons, and then, Rameau!

Rameau published his *Pieces de Clavecin en concerts* in 1741. He followed the lead of Gaspar LeRoux and Jean-Joseph Cassanea de Mondonville, who had published harpsichord pieces with violin accompaniment.

"The success of recently published sonatas which have come out as harpsichord pieces with a violin part, has given me the idea of following much the same plan in the new harpsichord pieces which I am venturing to bring out today. I have given them the form of little suites for harpsichord, violin or flute, and viol or second violin."

Rameau considered this collection, his entire chamber music output, to be first and foremost pieces for solo harpsichord:

"These pieces lose nothing by being played on the harpsichord alone; indeed, one would never suspect them capable of any other adornment; such, at least, is the opinion of several persons of taste and skill whom I have consulted on the subject, most of whom have done me the honor of giving names to some of them."

He published these works in score and suggested that the accompanying musicians play from it to achieve a heightened awareness of each other's parts as well as the proper blend and balance. He designated violin and viola da gamba as the instruments of choice, but made an allowance for a flute to replace the violin. If a viola da gamba is not at hand, another violin, for which he provided a separate part, may serve as substitute.

This practice of using whatever instruments were readily available went as far back as medieval times and continued well past the middle of the eighteenth century. Among French composers, Marin Marais and François Couperin were notable in specifying freedom of choice in instrumentation.

For example, Couperin suggested that his pieces croisees (pieces requiring a two-manual harpsichord) be taken up as duets for two melody instruments, such as flutes, oboes, violins or viols. In his collection *Les Gouts-Reunis*, he wrote suites for “two viols or other instruments of the same pitch.” Marin Marais, in his pieces for viols, allowed for performances as well on organ, harpsichord, lute, theobo, violin, treble viol, transverse flute, recorder, guitar, or oboe.

In this spirit of “creative instrumentation” I have orchestrated each suite with a different pair of accompanying melody instruments from The Queen’s Chamber Band, selecting the colors, timbres, and musical personalities that best bring out the essential nature of each suite. As Rameau remarks in his *Notice to Performers*, “it is by grasping the spirit of each piece that everything will be played as it should be.”

When Rameau named these pieces with the help of his friends (“several persons of taste and skill have done me the honor of giving names to some of them”), he had already composed the, so they are not necessarily programmatic. Cuthbert Girdlestone, in his exhaustive *Jean-Philippe Rameau: His Life and Work* – fascinating reading for anyone with a serious interest in Rameau – makes the connections between the titles and the people or events, which may have inspired them.

Five of the titles are names of Rameau’s musical acquaintances (*La Laborde*, *La Boucon*, *La Forqueray*, *La Marais*, and *La Cupis*) while *La Livri* and *La popliniere* were two patrons of the arts, the former having died the year Rameau published this collection. To which family member he dedicated *La Rameau*, we have no idea. *Le Vezinet*, now a suburb of Paris, was part of the countryside in Rameau’s day. One can imagine a jaunt on horseback or carriage through a fragrant, pastoral scene. *La Coulicam* is a corruption of Thomas Kouli Khan, eponymous hero of a pseudo-historical novel about a revolution, set in Persia. The rest are dances (*Menuet*, *Tambourin*, *La Pantomime*) and character pieces (*L’Agacante*, *La Timide*, and *L’Indiscrete*).

INTERPRETATION

Interpretation of written music for performance involves many decisions for musicians. We seek tempo, dynamics, and articulation that fit the mood we want to create and that suit the character of the piece, as we have determined it. The same piece played by different performers is sometimes unrecognizable as the same music. Tempo often plays a large part in this discrepancy. As Rameau says, in his *remarques sur les pieces de ce Livre* of about 1728, “technical mastery of a piece lets one quite imperceptibly grasp the character of it so that a sense of its proper pace is soon acquired.”

In 18t-century French music, the problem of interpretation is compounded by the ornaments (for which specific signs are given) and by the eternal question of equality and inequality. Do we play 8th-notes evenly as they are written, or as two members of a

triplet, the first note being about twice as long as the second? The practice of “swinging” 8th-notes survives in jazz and other popular-based music. Early French composers drew upon popular songs and dance-tunes of the day for their art-music, and French musical culture retained the rhythmic device that had originated as a folk idiom. In his *L’Art de Toucher le Clavecin*, François Couperin explains how the French style differed from other national styles, specifically the Italian, which was exerting a profound effect on musicians of his day:

“In my opinion, there are faults in our way of writing music, which correspond to the way in which we write our language. The fact is we write a thing differently from the way in which we execute it; and it is this, which causes foreigners to play our music less well than we do theirs. The Italians, on the contrary, write their music in the true time-values in which they have intended them to be played. For instance, we dot several consecutive quavers in diatonic succession, and yet we write them as equal; our custom has enslaved us; and we hold fast to it.”

So whenever we look at a piece of early French music, we have to decide which pairs of notes, if any, we play evenly and which we play as trochees (metrical feel consisting of one long or stressed syllable followed by one short or unstressed syllable.)

Performing Rameau’s music is further complicated by the fact that the time he was composing, Italian musicians had been assimilated into the musical culture at court. A love-hate relationship existed between the French and the Italians as Couperin implied, and by Rameau’s time, the Italian influence had grown even stronger, leaving its marks on his music. So our dilemma is as follows: Do we play Rameau in the French style as if we were unaware of the Italian style, or do we allow ourselves certain liberties by combining elements of the two? Might we, perhaps, play similar passages in certain pieces both evenly and unevenly? La Rameau in the Quatrieme Concert particularly offered this latter quandary. Indeed, we solved it, if you can call our fluid approach a solution, by combining even passages with uneven, and letting our feelings be our guide. Somehow this mix of approaches infuses the piece with extra vitality.

In working out the interpretation of *L’Indiscrete*, for instance, I discovered something interesting Rameau included this piece in his *Cinq Pieces*, (solo keyboard versions of movements taken from *Pieces de Clavecin en concerts*, in which he demonstrates that the pieces “lose nothing by being played on the harpsichord alone.”) At the beginning of the first and second reprises, Rameau writes even 8th-notes in the solo harpsichord version. But when he gives the same material to the accompanying melody instruments in the concerted pieces, he writes dotted 8ths and 16ths! My theory is he expected that whoever played the harpsichord part (undoubtedly a French musician) would know about *les notes inegales*, while the strings, writes a generic cross, marking only the location of the ornament. The Italians might not know the meaning of the specific keyboard ornament signs, but their keyboard colleague could explain which trill, turn, or *appoggiatura* would go best in that specific spot.

In the 20-odd years that I've studied these pieces, I've played them in a variety of ways – facing afresh, in rehearsals preceding a performance, the notion of equal or unequal 8th-notes. From my early days in the 1970s when I played the notes as written, like a true Italian, to the time just before this recording was made, my interpretation evolved steadily. The pace of evolution increased as the recording time drew near. In fact, I called an extra eleventh-hour rehearsal with Dan Waitzman and Marsha Heller to deal with the Cinquieme Concert, which we had all played many times for many years. Up till then, I had always played the 8th-notes in La Cupis and La Marais like an Italian, completely unevenly. But now it seemed that to gently swing La Cupis would make it far more sensuous and flowing. When we tried it, all the ensemble problems with the 32nd-note runs vanished. I asked my colleagues to change the interpretation of La Marais as well. We had injected new life into an old friend!

Marsha had for a long time favored consistent inegalite, but always deferred to me. Dan admitted that this was a far easier way to play the pieces than the combination of equal and unequal notes as we had used before. All of us had trouble remembering what the latest decision was and we had so many marks on our music that deciphering them was almost impossible. Dan suggested that we go all the way with inequality in La Forqueray as well, but for that piece I held fast to my Italian ways and to the memory of having read somewhere in an old French source that les notes inegales had no place in fugal pieces. As it turned out, we compromised by using an articulation that stressed the off-beats without dotting the 8ths. This was Marsha's idea.

Throughout this recording project, Marsha, Dan, Bob, Lori, and Peter all cheerfully showed flexibility, tolerance, and openness to my changing ideas. For this they have my profound thanks.

-- Elaine Comparone

TRACKS

Pieces de clavecin en concerts,
for harpsichord, violin (or flute)
and viola da gamba (or second violin)

1. Concert I (harpsichord, oboe, cello) La Coulicam - 3:35
2. La Livri - 3:19
3. Le Vezinet - 3:45

4. Concert 2 (harpsichord, flute, violin) La Laborde - 5:51
5. La Boucon - 5:43
6. L'Agacante - 2:39
7. Menuets 1 & 2 - 4:39

8. Concert 3 (harpsichord, 2 violins) La Popliniere - 4:42
9. La Timide - 5:20
10. Tambourins - 2:20

11. Concert 4 ((harpsichord, oboe, cello) La Pantomime - 4:53
12. L'Indiscrete - 1:39
13. La Rameau - 4:30

14. Concert 5 (harpsichord, oboe, flute) La Forqueray - 4:28
15. La Cupis - 6:33
16. La Marais - 2:27

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anthony, James R., *French Baroque Music from Beaujoyeux to Rameau*, New York, 1974.

Girdlestone, Cuthbert, *Jean-Philippe Rameau: his Life and Work (Revised Ed.)*, New York, 1969.

Couperin, François, *L'Art de toucher le Clavecin*, (Ana Linde, tr. 1933), Edition Breitkopf Nr. 5566.

Couperin, François, *Pieces de Clavecin (4 Volumes)*, (Brahms & Chrysander, ed., 1888), Augener Edition 8100A, New York (Galaxy) Norfolk, UK (Galliard, Ltd.).

Rameau, Jean-Philippe, *Pieces de Clavedin en concerts*, (Erwin R. Jacobi, ed. & tr., 1960), Barenreiter 3803, Basel.

Rameau, *Pieces de Clavecin*, (Jacobi, ed. & tr., 1960), Barenreiter 3800, Basel.

THE PERFORMERS

Since her acclaimed New York recital debut as a Concert Artists Guild Award winner, harpsichordist ELAINE COMPARONE has maintained a varied career as recitalist, soloist with orchestra, chamber musician, recording artist, impresaria, teacher, arranger, and collaborator with composers, choreographers, and video artists. In 1978 she founded Harpsichord Unlimited, a non-profit organization dedicated to stimulating interest in the harpsichord, its history, and its music. For this recording she plays a replica of a 1721 Blanchet harpsichord, built in 1968 by William Dowd of Boston.

DANIEL WAITZMAN, winner of the Concert Artists Guild competition and the recipient of a Solo Recitalist's Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, performs on modern and Baroque flutes and recorders. An authority on the history of the flute, he is also a composer, with solo and chamber pieces and two symphonies to his credit. He plays a Brannen-Cooper white-gold flute, completed in 1997.

Oboist MARSHA HELLER won the Concert Artist Guild competition in 1970 and went on to become the principal oboist of the American Symphony Orchestra, the Queens Symphony, and Continuum. She is a frequent soloist with the Bronx Arts Ensemble, New Jersey Chamber Music Society, and the Arcady Festival in Maine. A talented painter, she focuses on landscapes and still-life. Both her oboe and obo d'amore were made by F. Loree & Co., Paris.

Violinist ROBERT ZUBRYCKI is Concertmaster of the Westchester Camerata and St. Peter's Bach Festival Orchestra. He is a member of Solisti New York, the Eros Ensemble, and the OK Mozart Festival Orchestras. As chamber musician he has performed with the Lincoln Center Institute, Philharmonia Virtuosi, and the Abaca String Band. He was Assistant Concertmaster for "Swan Lake" on Broadway. He plays a violin made by Giovanni Battista Grancino of Milano in 1700.

Violinist LORI MILLER, a graduate of the New England Conservatory, earned her Master's Degree from New York University. She performs with many orchestras including Concordia, New York City Opera National Company, and the New Jersey Symphony. Her orchestral work for musical theatre includes numerous Broadway shows, Papermill Playhouse Orchestra, Radio City Music Hall Orchestra, and most recently, Les Miserables.

Cellist PETER SEIDENBERG served for four years as Principal Cellist with Century Orchestra Osaka. He has performed throughout Europe, the US, and Asia, making his concerto debut in 1983 with the Chicago Symphony. He has recorded for RCA and Pantheon. His cello, "Ex Romberg," was made by David Tecchler in Rome in 1703.

THE QUEEN'S CHAMBER BAND

In 1762, John Christian Bach, youngest son of the old master, Johann Sebastian, journeyed to London for a lucrative position with the King's Theatre. Shortly thereafter, he was appointed Music Master to Queen Charlotte Sophia (wife of "Mad" King George III) and the Royal Family. With a few close musical friends, the "London Bach" formed an ensemble to entertain Her Majesty in her private chambers: The Queen's Chamber Band.

It is in this spirit of intimate, personal performance that Elaine Comparone, "a harpsichordist with few equals" (Donal Henahan, The New York Times), has successfully recreated The Queen's Chamber Band with eight distinguished soloists, whose mastery of both solo and chamber music thrills audiences worldwide.

The ensemble unites virtuosity, historical knowledge, and musical sensitivity to achieve a distinctive synthesis of historically informed performance, vitality, and immediacy.

CREDITS

Executive Producer, Nick Fritsch

Produced by John Ostendorf

Recording Engineer: David Smith of Triton Sound

Digital Editing: Stephen J. Epstein

Recorded at Town Hall, NYC, May 1999

Mastered by Vivian Stoll

Cover Illustration by Shanti Marlar

Booklet Design by G.S. Cram-Drach



The Lyrichord Early Music Series

PO Box 1977 Old Chelsea Station

New York, NY 10011 Ph: 212 404 8290 Fax: 212 404 8291

email: nick@lyrichord.com Web: www.lyrichord.com

© and (P) Lyrichord Discs Inc. These texts (including images) are published under copyright by Lyrichord Discs Inc. All rights are reserved.
The texts, and the music associated, with them, may only be republished, duplicated or sold, with written permission from Lyrichord Discs Inc.