

## Hidden Gems: French Baroque Works for Oboe in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

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In the summer of 2000, I received a faculty grant from the University of Kansas to conduct research in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, France. Nearly every day for two months, I walked through the unassuming doors of the old Bibliothèque Nationale (a new bibliothèque has been completed recently; however, the music collection is still stored in the original building), found my assigned seat for the day, and began poring over scores of mostly eighteenth-century prints composed for the oboe. The fruit of my labor was the compilation of over 800 works for my Doctoral Project at the University of Illinois entitled, *An Annotated Bibliography of Works for Oboe by French Composers from 1697-1748, Preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, France, not Published in Modern Editions.*

For the purposes of this study, I examined the original eighteenth-century prints which were published during the composers' lifetimes, though in some cases original manuscripts were also available for study. Five criteria were used to determine which works to include in this list, as follows: 1) all are located in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, France, 2) all specifically indicate oboe on the title page, 3) all are complete works, i.e., only pieces with all solo parts and bass line (when included) in a finished state and with entire movements intact, 4) all are by French composers, 5) none are published in modern edition. The majority of composers included in the bibliography grouped their sonatas or suites into groups of six, much like their Italian counterparts. In the Bibliothèque Nationale, each of the sonatas were bound together under one title such as *Amusements Champêtres* or *Les Danses Amuzantes*, and were then numbered 1 through 6 and entitled *Première Sonate*, *Deuxième Sonate*, *Troisième Sonate*, etc.

Many of the works in the bibliography were written for one, two or three solo instruments with or without **basse continue** (bass continuo). In none of the works was the **basse continue** realized. In addition, the solo parts were commonly written in French violin clef, placing G on the bottom line of the staff. To date,

I have prepared three modern performance editions of sonatas from the list by realizing the figured bass and transcribing the solo parts to standard treble clef. The edited works are *Première Sonate* from *Sonates Amusantes*, *Oeuvre Cinquième* and *Sixième Sonate* from *Troisième Livre d'Amusements Champêtres* by Nicolas Chedeville (1705-1782) and *Première Sonate* from *Première Oeuvre de Sonates* by Jacques-Christophe Huguenet (1680-1729). I performed these three works at the IDRS Conference in Greensboro, North Carolina on June 21, 2003.

The prints of nearly all of the works in the bibliography included an elaborate title page or **avertissement**, which contained the title of the work, a litany of possible instruments on which the work could be performed, the publisher, the address of the publisher complete with directions to the publisher's office if the address was not obvious, the composer's name with a biographical word or two, the

dedication, if any, and often an ornate border or picture etched around the text. Composers usually listed at least three, and often more, instruments on the title page, even though the piece might have been for only one or two players. A typical title might read *First Sonata from Amusing Sonatas for musettes, hurdy-gurdies, transverse flutes, oboes and violins, opus 5*. One possible reason for this seemingly indecisive behavior was that the creators of these works wanted to sell as many copies of their music as possible. Equally as likely, is that timbre was not a critical issue to musicians of the time. Composers were more or less indifferent to the instrument on which their pieces were performed. Choice of instruments for performance was based, more often than not, on convenience or circumstances, such as the availability of a particular instrument at the time of performance. Wind musicians of the time customarily negotiated both oboe and flute with equal ease and most musicians owned more than one instrument. Only occasionally did composers indicate a specific instrumentation for their work, and this indication may not have appeared on the title page, or may have been inconsistent. On the score itself,



composers showed their indifference to the instrumentation by using the generic term **dessus** (literally “above” or, in this case, “treble” instrument) to indicate a solo part.

A further important feature of the title page was the date of privilege, which was the date on which the composer received permission from the court to publish. The second page of the print included a lengthy and humble dedication to the composer's patron who was customarily a member of French aristocracy. These two items are historically significant because they provide us with the approximate date of composition, and based on the social standing of the dedicatee, an assessment of the demand for a particular composer's work.

French composers of these early eighteenth-century works had a predilection for colorful titles and tempo markings. Titles often alluded to a light-hearted or pastoral nature, as in *Festes Champêtres* (Pastorale Celebration). Movement titles included *La Rivier d'hier* (The River of Yesterday), *Dans Noir Bois* (In the Dark Woods), or *Entreè de Bergers* (Entrance of the Shepherds). In her dissertation entitled *Un Siecle de Hautbois en France 1660-1750*, Marie-Cécile Gilly, indicates that the pastoral theme was all the rage in the mid-1700's. She points out that pastoral instruments such as oboes, musettes, flutes and hurdy-gurdies, came into vogue around 1730-1740. As a popular pastime at Court, royalty would don the costumes of shepherds and play their pastoral instrument of choice for amusement. These instruments were often made of ebony and ivory and were decorated with brightly colored pompons.

The bibliography represents a variety of genres and styles, the titles of which require some explanation. Sample titles included *Suittes*, *Sonates*, *Sonates en Trio*, *Sonates Amusantes*, *Amusements Champêtres*, *Gentilleses*, *Simphonies*, *Simphonies du Concert*, *Concerts Champêtres*, *Musettes*, *Amuzettes* and *Divertissements*. The term *suite* is certainly familiar enough, being a work containing a collection of dance movements. However, what exactly are **Gentilleses** or **Concerts Champêtres**? Frequently, other works with names such as *Sonates* or *Amusements* were used to label works that were suites for all intents and purposes, in that they consisted of an abundance of dance-inspired movements. In the case of the **sonates** or **sonates en trio**, there was little consistency in number and type of movements from work to work. A **sonate** could indicate a work for two **dessus** with no **basse continue** or one **dessus** with **basse continue**. In general, *Sonates en Trio* were works for two **dessus** and **basse continue**, but this is not to say that the identical instrumentation could not be found under another title such as *Six Fetes Rustiques* by Jacques-Christophe Naudot (c.1690-1762) or *Festes Champêtres et Guèrièrès Balet* by Jacques Aubert (1689-1753), both

of which called for two **dessus** and **basse continue** in their titles. *Sonates* and *Sonates en Trio* contained as few as three movements and as many as twelve. In his book *French Baroque Music from Beaujoyeux to Rameau*, James Anthony explains that the first half of the eighteenth century “was a period of experimentation and a period that witnessed the rapid absorptions of elements from the Italian sonata and concerto, which by then co-existed with the traditional French forms of overture and dance suite. Added to this was the penchant, particularly French, for descriptive or programmatic music, which had been virtually elevated to aesthetic dogma by the end of the seventeenth century.” (Anthony, 361)

Works containing the word or phrase *Simphonie*, *Concert* or *Concert de Simphonie* in their titles add to the confusion and fall into a separate category from the works mentioned above for one or two **dessus** with or without **basse continue**. *Simphonies*, *Concerts* or *Concert de Simphonies* were most likely intended for two or three players performing each of the parts labeled **dessus**. This doubling or tripling of each part is not glaringly apparent from the title page, however the indications of **seul**, **trio** and **tous** found within the score itself, are clues that the composer intended for the piece to be performed by a larger ensemble. For example, in *Livre de Simphonies* for two **dessus** and **basse continue**, Louis Antoine Dornel (c. 1660-after 1756) specifically called for solo violin or oboe with the terms **violons seuls** or **hautbois seuls** in a particular **rondeau** movement. The absence of such markings indicated that the violins and oboes doubled each other and were no longer soloists in the remainder of the piece. Another similar indication occurred in Aubert's *Festes Champêtres*. In this work, the composer marked **trio** in several passages, most likely indicating only a trio of two **dessus** and **continuo** were to play. By default, the entire ensemble, with two or three performers on a part, joined when **trio** was not indicated.

Gilly points out that the word *Concert* (as in Jacques Aubert's *Concert de Simphonies*) indicates that the composition was to be played by an ensemble, without soloists. Pieces with *Concert* in their titles were most likely executed with violins doubling the flutes or oboes or possibly three of these instruments playing each line. The thought of three instruments performing the same line of music may seem excessive and even nightmarish from the perspective of intonation to the modern-day chamber music musician. However, in the eighteenth-century many performances occurred outdoors or in the Grand Stable of the King, where volume was often a concern, especially given the fragile sonic output of the instruments of the period. In the **avertissement** for *Concert de Simphonies*, Aubert explains that doubling or tripling the parts would not only amplify the music, but also

allow the performers not to distort their tones by overblowing:

C'est ce qui m'a déterminé à essayer un genre de musique qui, non seulement est plus aisé à entendre, mais aussi dont l'exécution fut à la portée des écoliers plus ou moins habiles comme à celle des maîtres, et où toutes sortes d'instruments pussent conserver leurs sons naturels.

I have attempted a kind of music which is not only easier to hear, but also whose execution was within the capabilities of the more or less skillful schoolboys, like that of their teachers, and where all types of instruments could preserve their natural sounds.

Anthony likens Aubert's *Concert de Symphonies* to the Italian concerto grosso. Throughout the work, the composer indicates **trio** when he wishes the solo group to play alone and **tous** where the entire ensemble joins. This practice results in "some use of concertato effects between solo instruments and tous." (Anthony, 362). Anthony also reports that *Suites de concerts de symphonies en trio pour les violons, flûtes et hautbois (Opus 8-13)* by Aubert "is the first item listed by Barry Brook as an antecedent of the French symphony (1962, 1:45)." (Anthony, 369). Some works of this ilk may have in fact been intended for a small chamber symphony as in *Concert de Chambre a Deux et Trois Parties* by Jean-Joseph Mouret (1682-1738). Of all the composers included in the bibliography, Mouret was the most particular about instrumentation. In his article on Mouret in *Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, James Anthony asserts that Mouret's *Concert de Chambre a Deux et Trois Parties* "moved the French ensemble closer to an orchestral concept through the use of specific instrumentation."

A further category of work whose title belies its instrumentation is the *Gentillesses* by Joseph Bodin de Boismortier (1689-1755). In several of these works such as *Nouvelles Gentillesses pour une musette ou vièle et un violon ou hauboïs avec la basse, Oeuvre Centième*, Boismortier marks **tous** to indicate doubling and **seul** when he prefers one player. The composer provided some explanation for the markings when he wrote, "On peut doubler toutes les parties par les en droits marquer seul, et duo". (One may double all the parts marked **seul** and **duo**). Robert Green describes these works in the following manner: "Although the *Gentillesses* are generally simpler and depend more heavily on unison textures, they have one important difference. The composer suggests doubling of upper parts. This is their fullest realization. These works would consist of a ripieno group as well as two principals who would play the solo lines." (Green, 474).

The bibliography also includes one collection of works called *Pieces de Clavicin* by Marchand (1709-1799), which were a somewhat rare genre of keyboard works with treble instrument accompaniment. Another unfamiliar genre is the *Concerto Comique* by Michel Corrette (1707-1795). The composer himself describes his comic concertos as "recreational works." Interestingly enough, the titles belie the overall nature of the works, in that these pieces were not necessarily humorous; rather they were intended for use in the theater, perhaps at the end of a theatrical work. (Pleurot, 144). Anthony suggests that they were probably choreographed at the Opera Comique. (Anthony, 372). The titles of these works have an undeniably theatrical flavor, such as *La Servante au bon tabac*, or *Tante Tourlourouette et le plaisir d'être avec vous*.

Though all of the works included in this bibliography are by French composers, it is clear that certain composers adhered to a compositional style that was distinctly French while others were undeniably, if not entirely, influenced by the prevailing Italian flavor. Jean-Baptiste Anet (1676-1755), Espirit-Philippe Chedeville (1696-1762), and Jacques Aubert, for example, tended toward the French style. Their works possess a distinct French quality--a quality profoundly influenced by dance, which pervaded all French musical thought through much of its history. Adhering to dance forms, composers wrote movements in binary or rounded binary form, with both sections of the each of the movements repeated. Many of the works contained exclusively dance movements such as **courantes**, **rigaudons**, **menuets**, **tambourins**, etc. These dance movements were often paired in like kind, as in *1er Rondeau* and *2e Rondeau*. In most cases, at the end of the second of the paired dances, the composer indicated **on reprend le rondeau** (repeat the first rondo) with **fin** marked at the end of the first dance indicating that the performers should end the movement with the repeat of the first of the paired dances. Often, one of the dances was in a minor key while the other was in major, or they were in related keys. In some cases, **alternativement** was indicated next to the movement name. According to Bruce Gustavon's article, "Alternativo" in *The Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, **alternativement** indicates that the first movement of a pair of movements should be performed again after the second, resulting in an ABA form. Composers included anywhere from one to as many as twenty-five dance movements in a single work, and the majority contained from twelve to sixteen movements. First movements of longer works were often in French overture form, with the first of its two sections in a slow, duple meter with pervasive dotted rhythms, and the second section in a lively tempo, usually in triple meter. Final movements, frequently labeled as *Chaconnes*, were often through-composed. These movements were also

more musically interesting in that they possessed more melodic and rhythmic variety.

Veering from the French style, the compositions of Boismortier, Naudot and Corrette have more in common with their Italian contemporaries than their compatriots. Some composers, such as Nicolas Chédeville, began their careers composing in the French style but were gradually drawn to Italianate techniques of composition. The Italian leanings in these works are apparent through the use of florid, sometimes virtuosic, sequential passage work, Italian tempo markings, lack of dance-inspired movements, closer adherence to the four-movement slow-fast-slow-fast sonata form, chains of suspensions and more adventurous harmonic vocabulary.

The Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris contains a virtual treasure trove of music for oboe from the French Baroque period. This period is one of the most significant eras of repertoire development for the oboe, yet it is also one of the most neglected by modern scholars and performers. Many of the pieces in this collection are charming, well crafted and certainly worthy of many performances. It is unfortunate that they are relatively inaccessible to most oboists. Besides being valuable, artistic works, these compositions could serve as excellent pedagogical pieces for teaching French Baroque performance practice. It is the author's intention to bring this valuable and currently unexploited collection of music and its composers to the attention of modern oboists.

#### SOURCES:

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