CLAVECIN PIECES OF LOUIS COUPERIN

THESIS

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CHAPTER I

THE CLAVECIN SCHOOL

Louis Couperin (c. 1626-1661) was an outstanding member of the seventeenth-century clavecin school and an important link in the Couperin dynasty.

His works for the harpsichord, or clavecin, have been neglected. This is due primarily to the fact that there are relatively few of his works, in comparison with those of his nephew, François Couperin Le Grand, who greatly overshadows him. Louis wrote no treatise on how his works are to be played, and there are few accounts of him, or his works, that are written in English. There is no biography of Louis Couperin.

A more detailed study should be made of his music and its place in the French clavecin literature. Before examining the music itself, however, it is necessary to trace the origins and development of the clavecin school and its style.

The music written for clavecin in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is of great importance in the subsequent development of keyboard music. It must be understood that the evolution of the clavecinists' style is not entirely dependent upon that of the instrument itself, but, to a large extent, is inherent in the development of the lute.
The classic European lute was a round instrument with a clearly defined neck separating it from the body of the instrument. Its back had from nine to thirty-three ribs and in the center of the upper surface there was a large circular rose, a highly ornamented opening. The lute's most interesting aspect was its backward head. Five pairs of unison gut strings and one single string composed the eleven strings. There were seven or eight frets, which were generally pieces of gut tied across the fingerboard. At the height of its development, there were bass strings added in courses (unison strings) which ran alongside the fingerboard and could not be altered in pitch. The other strings were tuned: A-D-F-A'-D'-F'.

The lute apparently originated in the East. The Persians introduced it to the Arabs, who took it to Europe in the Middle Ages, probably during the Crusades (c. 1250). It is highly probable that it was introduced first in Spain where it developed its distinct neck and central soundholes.

By the fourteenth century... at least one bowed string instrument (the viella) and its successors appear to have been capable of executing any of the contemporary vocal music.¹

The viella (or vihuela) had only two strings and was played in first position only. Since its range was that of the

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male voice, it was probably used for accompanying singers.\(^2\)
The lute spread from Spain to other European countries. From
the fifteenth century on, the lute could play more than one
part, but it was still used primarily to double or fill in
for the voice. Gradually its music became more independent.

Henri de Ganière was the first French lutenist of whom
there is a record.\(^3\) The lutenists developed their own form
of notation, called tablature, and in 1529 this appeared in
Pierre Attaignant's works, eighteen basse-danses. There
were lines to indicate the strings and figures (or letters)
to designate the frets. The French indicated the lowest
string by the lowest line, which seems more logical than
the Italian and Aspanish practice of indicating the lowest
string by the highest line.

The editors and the printers, whose principal interest
was to publish books that assured them a profit, were very
much occupied with the lute books.\(^4\) In 1551, there were
1,500 copies of the works of Albert de Ripe published.\(^5\) This
indicates the large number of amateur lute players there were
at that time.

\(^2\)Hibberd, p. 87.

\(^3\)Michel Brenet, Notes sur l'histoire du luth en
France, p. 637, cited in Gustave Reese, Music in the

\(^4\)Daniel Heartz, Le luth et sa musique (Paris, 1958),
p. 77.

\(^5\)Reese, p. 553.
The members of the Gaultier family were the most renowned lute players of the sixteenth century, the most famous being Ennemond Gaultier ("Le Vieux") and Denis Gaultier ("Le Jeune"). Students of the Gaultiers founded the Parisian lute school: Mouton, Gallot, Du Bout, and Du Faux, who carried this highly developed art all over Europe.

During the sixteenth century the lute occupied a prominent place in musical culture as the chief instrument of domestic music. It was considered extremely fashionable, even a sign of good breeding, to play the lute. This increase in popularity was due, in large part, to the fact that nobility and royalty were becoming interested in learning to play the lute. Anne of Austria, mother of Louis XIV, took lute lessons from a member of the Gaultier family. The lute was also employed more and more in the orchestras, so lutenists were compelled to adopt the pitch and tuning of the other instruments.

The French lute school reached a point of perfection which almost coincided with the real beginnings of keyboard music in France. The lutenists modified the ideas of the English virginal school, but, unlike the virginalists, they

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 began to lose contact with their popular origins, and to connect themselves with the organized précieux movement in society.  

Around the middle of the seventeenth century, the Marquise de Rambouillet, Catherine de Vivonne, had attracted a large group of followers composed of the leading writers and most outstanding people of Paris. They attempted to purify the language and to carry their activities to a high degree of refinement and sophistication.

Wishing to have only the most cultured people about her, the Marquise had an extremely large drawing room constructed which also served as her bedroom. On each side of the bed were spaces known as the devant and ruelle. The Marquise frequently received guests while seated on the bed; thus the term ruelle became synonymous with a reception, or being received. Within the ruelles or salons witty conversation alternated with imported parlor games, music, and dancing.

Imitators of the Hôtel de Rambouillet carried this refinement to extremes. It was not uncommon to hear such expressions as "sustenance of life" used to describe a piece of bread.  

Préciosité suffered a terrible blow in 1659 when Molière presented Les précieuses ridicules, a satire not

only on the imitators of préciosité, but also on the movement itself. The nobility, who had been the leading exponents of préciosité, eventually realized the absurdity of their affectations, and the movement disintegrated during the reign of Louis XIV (1643-1715).

It was inevitable that the lutenists should be attracted to this movement, in their own efforts to be highly refined. They became the leading representatives of the ruelles and salons. Like the literary exponents of préciosité, they "strove in their ornamentation, their stylized refinement, even their methods of fingerling the instrument, to become a musical elect, preserving their music from popular contagion." They even invented their own fanciful language, imposing strange titles on many of their pieces.

Having reached the peak of its perfection around 1590, the lute began to decline in popularity toward the end of the seventeenth century. Its number of strings had increased to twenty, and many people did not want to go to the trouble to learn the tablature. It had been so highly developed that, in its completed form, it "belonged to the realm of absolute and artistic music." Many lutes were transformed into other instruments.

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8Mellers, p. 190.

A seventeenth-century dialogue between an author and his despairing lute reads: "Lute: How can that be, since Fame has Cry'd me down/ With that Fools-Bolt, I'm out of Fashion grown."  

There were sound reasons for the emergence of the harpsichord (or clavecin) in France. The lute was limited by human deficiencies. The hand could perform only a few simultaneous tones, and the tonal balance of parts was complicated by the resonance of the different strings. The lutenists were further limited by the number of fingers and strings, which sometimes made certain notes impossible to play. Also, there were a number of improvements in the construction of the harpsichords, due largely to the Ruckers family, famous for fine instruments in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Some harpsichordists actually wanted to take over the glittering places of honor occupied by the lutenists.

The keyboard suites of the clavecinists are linked with the lute music of Gaultier. Many of the characteristics of later clavecin composers can be traced to the technique and limitations of the lute. Weitzmann feels that the French school received its impetus from the English virginal school via the French lutenists.  

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Pieces written in lute style had to be played with the utmost sensitivity and delicacy. Gaultier particularly warned the player to play slowly. Pieces in this lute style can be recognized by their broken figuration, isolated snatches of melody, and wavering texture.

Many of the compositions were based on the modes. In France, there were theories about the proper effects of the modes, just as there were in other musically prominent countries during the seventeenth century. The titles of the modes were associated with certain keys and key signatures; pieces written in any of the modes were considered to embody the characteristics of that mode, and were to be performed accordingly.

Denis Gaultier's *La rhétorique des dieux* is a collection of lute suites composed in each of the twelve modes. Gaultier was an artist as well as a musician; he illustrated the moods associated with each of the twelve modes by drawing a picture and placing it at the beginning of each suite.

Lydiian mode was considered to be sombre and austere. Gaultier's picture reveals the inside of a dark tomb. There are two mourning cupids, one holding a torch, the other beating a muffled drum. Various instruments are in the foreground, one being a shawm, which is associated with funeral music. There is a skull and an owl.

Mixolydian mode was amorous. Heavy draperies and coverings form the background for two enamored cupids, who
sit on a bench. Other cupids play a portative, a lyre, and a psaltery.

Phrygian mode was oriental; accordingly, most of the instruments are of Eastern derivation: cymbals, double oboe, serpent, and small drums resembling tambourines. Hypophrygian was warlike. A male cupid is dressed in armour with sword and helmet. Instruments are trumpets, recorders, harp, lyre, viol, and viola da gamba. The lute is pictured in each of the modes. This might illustrate the various moods and styles in which the instrument could be used.

The importance of the literary associations of certain keys has perhaps been exaggerated, yet it is more than probable that many composers and players took them seriously.

Jacques Champion de Chambonnières (1602-1672) was the first in a series of brilliant keyboard composers. Besides teaching the Couperin family and introducing them to musical society, he taught nearly all the leading clavecinists of the latter half of the seventeenth century. He is considered the founder of the clavecin school, whose members include Jean Henri D'Anglebert (1628-1691), Nicolas-Antoine Le Bègue (1631-1702), Louis Couperin (1626-1661), Elizabeth Jacquet (1664-1729), François Couperin Le Grand (1668-1733), Jean-Baptiste Loeillet (1680-1730), Jean François Dandrieu (1682-1738), and which culminated in the works of Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764).
The name "Chambonnières" was added after Jacques Champion was married to a land-owning widow. He added the name of her estate, Chambonnières, to his own name. His father and grandfather had been organists, so Chambonnières had realized the importance of music from the time of his early childhood. He excelled in playing the clavecin, and, as a performer, he was noted for his soft, yet full, tone.

Chambonnières was not interested in writing for the church service. His position as court musician to Louis XIV required that he entertain the court society with dance music. So he devoted himself almost exclusively to the compositions modeled after dance types. While Lully was writing the first French operas and composing music for the ballet and court dances, Chambonnières was composing dances of every kind, largely the same that prevail in the suites of Bach. He grouped them in suites and gave each piece a descriptive title, although it seldom showed any real connection with the music. He did not reduce himself willingly to the role of a story-teller or a painter.  

"Like Gaultier, Chambonnières was a product of the précieux society, a leading musical representative of the Hôtel de Rambouillet." However, simplicity was one of the dominant qualities of his music. He left to others the

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13 Mellers, p. 195.
task of finding doubles, or variations, for his own pieces. "This sort of trivial work was not for a man who rode in a carriage and was treated like a baron."14

He felt that there was no great need for development of themes. Being a wise person who knew human nature, he realized that the salon listeners did not enjoy hearing long works. Chambonnières frequently carried the musical thought considerably farther than the commonplace scheme that the four-measure phrase demanded.15 His allemandes are especially noted for the extended flow of the musical phrase. The same tendency toward continuity can be seen in the harmonic structure which often modulates unexpectedly instead of ending with the usual cadence.

Although he did not reject the scholastic heritage of his organist ancestors, Chambonnières revealed his own personality in the use of more intricate rhythms, promoted by the use of free-voice broken style.

Like those of Gaultier, Chambonnières' suites consist of three main types of dances: allemandes, courantes, and sarabandes. In addition, there are optional gigues. There is no thematic linking of material. Each dance movement was individualized and the movement itself was more


important than the suite as a whole. Chambonnières desired a great deal of contrast between movements, with the key as the sole element of unification.

All the dances are of common bipartite form with repetition of each section. Chambonnières was the first to print an explanatory table of symbols in his publication, although there are relatively few ornaments in his works.

Louis Couperin, the first of the Couperin dynasty, went to Paris with Chambonnières, as his protégé and student. He was presented to court life, where he appeared in the court ballets, and played the viol in the theater orchestra. From 1650 until 1661 he was organist at Saint Gervais, a post held by members of the Couperin family for one hundred seventy-three years, or until 1826. Louis composed pieces for clavecin, organ, and viol.

Jean Henri D'Anglebert also studied with Chambonnières and succeeded him as clavecinist to Louis XIV in 1664. Like Chambonnières, he published instructions on the figured bass in his 1689 collection, *Pièces de clavecin avec la manière de les jouer*, containing suites, arrangements, and variations. He was succeeded as court musician by his son, Jean Baptiste Henri D'Anglebert (1661-1747).

This generation, especially D'Anglebert, made a musical shorthand of the embellishments Chambonnières had
been careful to write out.\textsuperscript{16} For example, they used a slanted stroke for the measured arpeggio.

D'Anglebert's technique surpassed that of his predecessors by the richness of its texture and the full utilization of the high and low range of the clavecin.\textsuperscript{17} He expanded the suite by lengthening the single dances without sacrificing the bipartite form. In this care for form, as well as for style, he carried on the tradition of Chambonnières, but developed it to a higher degree, perhaps an even higher one than that attained by François Couperin.

D'Anglebert transcribed many airs and overtures by Lully, transferring the sonorities of the Lullian orchestra to the clavecin. The five fugues that D'Anglebert added to his clavecin collection were also variation ricercares on a single theme.

Elizabeth Jacquet was one of the few women composers of the period. She studied music with her father and was patronized by Louis XIV. Her fourteen \textit{Pièces de clavecin} were published in 1707.

Nicolas-Antoine Le Bègue used relative major and minor keys, which can also be found in the ballet \textit{entrées} of Lully; thus, he weakened the feeling for unity of key.

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid.
He eliminated the fugal section from the rhapsodic preludes, and gave more precise rhythmic indications than Louis Couperin had done.

Although best known for his work as court organist, he also wrote pieces for clavecin. His suites foreshadow certain features of late Baroque harmony with their rich chromaticism. In addition, he did not title his dances. Ornamentation in his pieces is quite profuse.

There is no way of knowing if Le Bègue ornamented his pieces so profusely to please a frivolous, if refined public, or if he actually considered them indispensable to his music.18

The Belgian composer Loeillet came as a connecting link between Chambonnières and François Couperin. He was a notable clavecinist and flutist, playing oboe and flute at the Queen's theater until 1710. He followed the Italian tradition in his six suites of lessons for the harpsichord, and he also wrote sonatas. His music is noteworthy for the fine workmanship of his counterpoint.

François Couperin Le Grand was the son of Charles Couperin, who was also his first teacher, and the nephew of Louis Couperin. In 1685, he became organist at Saint Gervais, a post he held until his death. He competed for, and received, the title "Organiste du Roi" in 1693. Being renowned as an organist, he received many royal honors.

18 Gillespie, p. 134.
The French school of clavecinists reached a high point in the works of François Couperin, justly called "The Great." His compositions may be conveniently divided into three categories: those written for the Church, those written for the King, and those for the general public.

He wrote four books of *Pièces de clavecin* which consist of suites, or *ordres*, as he called them. The length of each *ordre* varies from as few as four to as many as twenty-three compositions. In all there are 230 pieces, or twenty-seven *ordres*.

These books indicated a definite break with the tradition of Baroque music, and inaugurated the period of the musical Rococo, or, as it is frequently called, the "gallant style." This break was characterized by a "turning away from the basic attitude of dignified seriousness which theretofore had pervaded the entire music of the Baroque period, secular as well as sacred."\(^{19}\)

The first of Couperin's sets of *ordres* was published in 1713, two years before the death of Louis XIV. It consists of five *ordres*, which follow to a certain extent the normal plan of the suite. Even in the first book, Couperin's individuality is expressed by his refusing to bow to convention and endeavoring to find words to designate his moods.

\(^{19}\)Bukofzer, p. 157.
The first, second, third, and fifth ordres begin in quite orthodox fashion, with an allemande, two courantes, and a sarabande. It should be noted that descriptive tags and sub-titles are sometimes given to indicate their character. Descriptive terms are "affectionately," "languidly," "naively," "nonchalantly," and "graciously." Subtitles under "Les petits âges," for example, are "La muse naissante," "L'enfantine," and "L'adolescent."

In the fourth ordre, Couperin broke away entirely from tradition. There is no allemande or courante. Although Couperin continued to utilize traditional dance patterns, he abandoned dance titles and replaced them by fanciful designations or names of allegorical or real persons that the music allegedly portrayed. These are followed by a number of pieces, in one case as many as fourteen, most of which are no longer modeled after dances, but are freely invented compositions with descriptive titles. Others bear inscriptions which are evidently dedications of some sort. Some of the titles are meant to portray some characteristic trait of the person for whom the piece was written, presumably a lady of the court. In the three later books, the dance types disappear completely and the ordres consist of from four to six freely invented pieces, with descriptive or dedicatory titles. In many of the ordres, the only link between the
movements is that of tonality. In the third book, for example, each piece in the ordre has the same tonic. It may be major or minor, there may be numerous modulations, but the tonic is the same.

Many clavecin pieces by Couperin show a novel technique of composition: the use of a short, characteristic keyboard figure or motive as the basis of the entire piece, this motive being carried through from the beginning to the end by means of harmonic progressions and modulations. The short repetitive phrases were typical of the early Rococo style and were intricately ornamented.

Many of Couperin's forms stemmed from those of the opera. The form that he liked best and used most extensively was the rondeau, which he lengthened by repeating the refrain.

Among Couperin's pieces are numerous examples of program music, a category which was quite prominent in the Baroque era. Couperin concerned himself mostly with portraying objective things, such as the cries of birds, the noise of a battle, the flight of an army, the running of a brook, and even the limping of cripples. The program is not taken too seriously since the emphasis was placed on the music. The idea is incorporated into the musical texture without letting it take full possession.
In 1716, François Couperin published a treatise, *L'art de toucher le clavécin*, taking care to explain ornaments, fingering, phrasing, his signs, and other details that might be a problem to students and performers. His method, as he called it, is the most representative of all the treatises that were written on the subject of French clavecin playing. "This work was known to J. S. Bach and his sons and highly esteemed by them." Although not the first method of keyboard playing, it was the most authoritative.

François Couperin proposed several reforms that approach modern principles of fingering, notably the use of the small finger and thumb for the smooth playing of scales, and the legato rendition of two parallel thirds. (Before, these had been played with the second and fourth fingers only, making only staccato playing possible.) Couperin himself advised that when all explanations are exhausted, it is best that one appeal to his own taste and sensitivity.

The clavecinists after Couperin found it difficult to surpass his accomplishments. The main difference was in the wider scope of the harmonies. A number of masters produced compositions of excellent quality: Marchand (1669-1733), organist at Nevers Cathedral, well-known through the anecdote of his projected meeting with Bach;

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Clerambault, a pupil of Raison; Dieupart, whose works Bach found worth his while to copy; Dandrieu, and finally Rameau.

Dandrieu took the position as organist at Saint Merry in Paris in 1704. His importance lies in his works for clavecin, written in a style closely resembling that of Couperin. He was a student of Marchand.

Jean-Philippe Rameau was a man who took his art most seriously, and "... by his studies in harmony and by his compositions made a far greater mark on the general trend of music than Couperin." 21

Rameau's three books of Pièces de clavecin sum up the entire development of clavecin technique in France. He held various important positions as organist, but lost to Daquin the position of organist at Saint Vincent de Paul. Marchand, probably out of jealousy, had exerted his powerful influence to help Daquin, who was in every respect inferior to Rameau. Consequently, Rameau became organist at Sainte-Croix-de-la-Bretonnerie, and soon was recognized as one of the foremost organists in France.

Much of his music incorporates the programmatic idea into the musical texture, although some of his first compositions did not even have titles. The program still does not take full possession.

21 Wiseman, p. 47.
Following the path of D'Anglebert, Rameau expanded the keyboard technique by quasi-orchestral and percussive batteries, extreme skips, crossing of the hands, and measured tremolos. These innovations closely paralleled those of Domenico Scarlatti.

Like Chambonnières and François Couperin, Rameau gives rules for the fingering and the agréments.

His calculated modulations and chromaticism show that he was preoccupied with harmony. Harmonic progressions took precedence over melody. He contended that melody was nothing more than an outgrowth of harmony. These progressions were carried out by precise rhythmic motives, and they gave his clavecin pieces consistency and formal unity. The leading ideas of his system of harmony are chord-building by thirds, the classification of a chord and its inversions as one and the same chord, and his invention of a fundamental bass.

His own writings imply a certain laxity in the interpretation of rules. Rameau himself said, "Generally speaking, one may omit doubles (variations) and repeats of a rondeau that one finds too difficult." Thirty years later he

22Bukofzer, p. 253.


stated, "When the hand cannot easily take in two keys at the same time, one may abandon the one that is not absolutely necessary to the melody, for one must not be expected to do the impossible."  

Relatively speaking, the list of great musicians which France produced during the early part of the seventeenth century is small. However, these French masters possessed the supreme art of saying much in a few words. That is why their pieces are short without being small.

It is not a question of appreciating music of the eighteenth century following our own taste, that of the twentieth century; nor is it a question of formulating categorical judgements on the actual value of the works of a Rameau or a Couperin. With ancient music, modern music, it is not a question of establishing a regulated comparison between one and the other in order to exalt one at the expense of the other. By comparing them we will help to better understand the music of the eighteenth century, that is to say, to understand it as those contemporary with it understood it.  

"It is from the old masters of the clavecin, that the brilliant pianists of our day have evolved."  

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CHAPTER II

LOUIS COUPERIN

There were eight children born to Charles Couperin and his wife, Marie Andry Couperin. Three of these children became important musicians: Louis, François, and Charles (father of François Le Grand). These Couperins began the celebrated clavecin dynasty.

Music historians do not know the exact date of the birth of Louis Couperin. The baptism records for the years 1625 to 1634 are missing for the parish of Chaumes, in the province of Brie (now the department of Seine-et-Marne). It was during this interval that Louis and François Couperin were born. Since it is believed that Louis died when he was thirty-five years of age, the date of his birth has been set at 1626.

In his youth, Louis Couperin practiced the viol and organ, and even composed under the supervision of his father. Charles Couperin was a merchant and landowner at Chaumes. In addition, and more important, he was a musician and played the organ at L'Abbaye Saint-Pierre-de-Chaumes. At that time, it was common for people to have several occupations that had no relation to each other.

Probably the most important event in the musical career of Louis Couperin was his meeting with Chambonnières.
Chambonnières was at that time (c. 1646) a musician in the Chambre du Roi, and his reputation was already widespread.

He owned a château a short distance from Chaumes, and the three younger Couperins decided to play an aubade, a morning serenade, for him on Saint Jacques' Day (July 25), the day of Chambonnières' patron saint. Chambonnières was dining with some neighbors and the Couperins sat in the door of the room and played on their viols some pieces that Louis had written. Being enchanted with the beauty of the music, Chambonnières asked who was the composer, and then invited all three Couperins to join him and his guests at their meal. He paid Louis the supreme compliment of saying that a man as talented as he should not remain in the province. Then he invited Louis to go to Paris with him. Couperin accepted the invitation.

Louis Couperin was warmly received in Paris. In 1653, he became organist at Saint-Gervais, beginning his duties on Easter Sunday.\(^1\) He held the position until his death in 1661.

In 1659, the King became dissatisfied with Chambonnières and asked Louis Couperin to take over Chambonnières' title, "Musicien Ordinaire de la Chambre du Roi." Couperin's feelings of sentiment toward his master were so great that

he refused the title. So the King created a position specifically for Couperin: "Chargé de Dessus de Viole."

Couperin had already composed a number of works and was studying the works of Chambonnières and Gaultier when he died. The cause of his death is not known.

Louis Couperin holds a place entirely apart in the history of French music. Probably the diversity of his talents prevented his name from becoming better known.

The virtuoso and the composer are two enemies. Progress and success of one hinder the progress and success of the other. To hold the pen tires the fingers; and applause draws one away from writing.²

In his short career, Louis Couperin "did not have time to speak anything except what he felt."³ In every way, he distinguished himself from his teacher. Pirro states that Louis Couperin had more things to say, and more ways to say them.⁴

Chambonnières' pupil was a much more vigorous personality than his teacher. Couperin's pieces show a sturdy contrapuntal technique and an almost aggressive use of dissonance that is alien to the refined discretion of his


⁴Pirro, Les clavecinistes, p. 72.
master. Tiersot further states that their styles are so far apart that Chambonnières should be considered a grandfather rather than a father to Louis Couperin; that Chambonnières' music is archaic compared to that of Couperin.\textsuperscript{5}

Except for some pieces for the viol and several works written for the organ, the \textit{Pièces de clavecin} constitute all the preserved works of Louis Couperin. He composed 134 pieces for the clavecin, fourteen of which are preludes.

The origin of the dance pieces may be traced back to the fifteenth century.

The ancestry of the dance type is clear; it comes from ballet music. The ancestry of the genre piece with a name has been traced back to the English virginalists, whence it spread to lute and keyboard music in the seventeenth century. But it is even older. A manuscript collection of Burgundian \textit{basse danse}s of the first third, or middle of the fifteenth century contains some sixty pieces, all which bear... descriptive names.\textsuperscript{6}

However, the prelude is by far the oldest form of music employed in the clavecin repertoire. It was common to the Arabs,\textsuperscript{7} so it is highly probable that the form of the prelude developed with the lute itself.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{5}Tiersot, p. 134.
\item \textsuperscript{6}Cuthbert Girdlestone, \textit{Jean-Philippe Rameau: His Life and Works} (London, 1957), p. 17.
\item \textsuperscript{7}Hibberd, p. 270.
\end{itemize}
There can be little doubt that the preludes and similar pieces were executed on instruments, especially the viella, in the Middle Ages by the troubadours, jongleurs, and minnesingers.\(^8\)

In the dance suite, the typical prelude was actually a toccata, in the Italian sense, a piece written without barlines and in free rhythm.

The fourteen preludes of Louis Couperin are modeled after the lute preludes of Gaultier, particularly those in his Rhétorique des dieux. Four of them are in tripartite form: the first prelude in D Minor, the third in G Minor, the sixth in A Minor and the twelfth in F Major.

The first sections are non-measured, written entirely in whole notes. The only rhythmic indication is what might be inferred from the harmonic changes.

The middle sections are fugal, opening with one voice and thickening to four at the end. The first, third, and sixth preludes have the indication Changement de mouvement at the beginning of the middle section.

The closing sections are again in the arpeggiated, free style.

The other ten preludes are in one section only, that being entirely in free style.

François Couperin wrote the same type of pieces to try out a clavecin on which he had never played, to

\(^8\)Ibid.
introduce a new key (i.e., to set or change moods), and to warm his fingers. It is highly probable that those of Louis Couperin were written for the same purpose, although some years before those of François Couperin.

The performer is left entirely to his own resources in the performance of the preludes. Many musicians choose to play the dance pieces instead of the preludes.

Since the pieces are improvisatory in character, it is important that the performer interpret them as he wishes. A large part of the charm of these preludes is this very quality of improvisation, an attempt on the part of the composer to be less than specific. When one writes out the rhythm, he has lost that extemporaneous flavor. However, the novice will be benefited by writing out the prelude, first mapping out the various harmonies using the bass as a guide line.

Within the 120 remaining pieces, there are ten suites, one suite having as many as twenty-three individual pieces. This is in sharp contrast to Chambonnières, whose suites were likely to contain four or five pieces, and never exceeded eight pieces.

Excluding the fourteen preludes, nearly all the pieces have dance titles. The more common dances compose the greater part of his works. There are thirty-one courantes,

François Couperin, L'art de toucher le clavecin (Wiesbaden, Germany, 1933), p. 28.
thirty-one sarabandes, seventeen allemandes, and ten chaconnes, all of which are generally short. A few of the dances are of the older type: six gigues, two passacailles, two menuets (numbers 112 and 113 are the same), two gaillardes, one camarie, one volte, one pastourelle, one pavane ("La Piémontoise"), and one branle ("Branle de Basque").

The most interesting of all the dances are the chaconnes. They are formed as a type of rondo in which a principal thought alternates with a secondary thought, called a couplet.

Louis Couperin's chaconnes proceed with relentless power and are usually dark in color and dissonant in texture. He occasionally allows the modulations of the couplets to be continued into the repetition of the theme, compromising... between traditional static technique and the new sense of tonal relationship.11

Some of the allemandes are quite lively, others are less so. Their very diversity is one of the most interesting things about them. One may be funèbre, another triumphant, and a third, troubled and despairing.

In many respects the G Minor passacaille, number ninety-nine, is Louis Couperin's grandest piece. It is

10 There is another chaconne which was previously attributed to François Couperin. It is now believed to be composed by Louis Couperin.

certainly the longest, and has many interesting harmonic aspects, including chromaticism. There is a long section in the relative major and the piece ends with a return to G Minor. There are numerous ornaments and interesting sequences.

One of the chaconnes is also designated as a passacaille. The gigues are not of a uniform structure, but are nevertheless attractive. Another dance piece, "Branle de Basque," is simply written, but quite elegant in style.

It must be emphasized that there is no thematic linking in the suites. The unity is only that of key. However, a performer is not obligated to play every piece in the suite; he may choose only those which he cares to play. Louis Couperin wrote in all the keys that the meantone tuning\textsuperscript{12} made possible: C Major and A Minor; D Major and B Minor; F Major and D Minor; G Major and E Minor;

\textsuperscript{12}Meantone tuning was in use in France from 1500 until c. 1850, when equal temperament was adopted.
A Major and F Sharp Minor; B Flat Major and G Minor; and C Minor.

There are pieces which do not bear dance titles. Couperin wrote a short piece in three movements entitled "Pièce de Trois Sortes de Mouvements." In each section there is a time signature: $\frac{3}{4}$, 3, $\frac{3}{2}$, and C.

"Tombeau de Monsieur Blancrochet" is also in three sections, each of which is repeated. The opening section sounds almost recitative-like in character.

Nearly every piece that Louis Couperin composed is in bipartite form, with each section being repeated. Sometimes there are three endings to the second, or last section. Occasionally there is a short repeat in the form of a coda. In the chaconnes, passacailles, and the pavane, each section is called a couplet, and is what could conceivably be called a slight variation on the melody. In the Grand Couplet form, the first couplet, or theme, is called the Grand Couplet, and this is played after each additional couplet. The most common number of couplets is four, but the passacaille in C Major, number twenty-seven, has ten couplets.

Couperin was a master of the use of variations. These took the name of doubles in his works. His "Gavotte de Monsieur Hardel" takes a little tune written by the clavecinist Hardel and varies it in the second part of the
piece, entitled, "Double de la Gavotte par Monsieur Couperin." He did the same thing in each of the following: "Gavotte de Monsieur Le Bègue," "Menuet de Poitou," and "Le Moutier, Allemande de Monsieur de Chambonnières."

Because of Couperin's predilection for major-minor tonality, he helped reduce the use of the twelve church modes to two. Although Couperin's harmonies are somewhat restrained, he was far from being hesitant in the use of dissonance, even at the beginning of a piece.

Fig. 2--Sarabande in D Minor, No. 51

Of course, the dissonances are always controlled.

There are usually three voices in his dances. To a certain extent the number of voices chosen was influenced by the type of dance being written. In the allemandes and chaconnes, there is a maximum number of voices.

Fig. 3--Chaconne in F Major, No. 80
In the lighter dances, such as the gavotte and menuet, a thinner texture is used. Occasionally phrases and even pieces end on empty octaves.

Fig. 4--Sarabande in C Major, No. 21

More fully-voiced chords are used at cadences and points of emphasis regardless of the number of voices used throughout the pieces.

Major scales are used simply and without alteration, except for the seventh scale degree which is frequently lowered. The melodic form of the minor is used with the raised sixth and seventh scale degrees ascending, and lowered descending. Often pieces written in minor keys end in the relative major. All of the pieces in D Minor (numbers thirty-five through forty-three) end in D Major. Some end in Picardy thirds, and some contain measures of modulatory material preceding the last measure.

There is a cadential sound throughout the pieces due to the frequent use of I, IV, V, and $V^7$ chords. Endings are usually V or $V^7$-I. The seventh is used frequently, and is approached by step. Six-four chords are rare.
Modulation is usually by common chord.

There is frequent use of parallel thirds and sixths, and usually these progressions involve a consistently descending or ascending bass line.

![Musical score](image)

Fig. 5--Sarabande in D Minor, No. 50

It is almost impossible to find a piece by Louis Couperin that is entirely harmonic in its scope. His use of contrapuntal devices in dance movements is especially interesting. He frequently used imitation.

![Musical score](image)

Fig. 6--Chaconne in F Major, No. 78
There is even an example of strict canon in his works.

![Fig. 7--Sarabande in D Minor, No. 47](image)

Louis Couperin frequently used suspensions, sometimes with ornamental resolutions.

![Fig. 8--Sarabande in D Minor, No. 51](image)

They are not as harmonically pleasing as those of later composers because the suspensions resolve up, rather than down. Nevertheless, they play an important part in the works of Louis Couperin.

There are no melodic innovations in his works. The soprano line of each section usually has one high and one low point.
Francois Couperin said that the French wrote music differently from the way they played it.\(^1\) He was referring to the French convention of *notes inégales*. This was a variation of the rhythm of conjunct notes so that they sounded almost as if they were dotted rhythms. In his clavecin pieces, François Couperin was careful to indicate when he did not wish this practice to take place by writing "*notes égales*.

There are many instances when this varying of the rhythm should not be used in the works of Louis Couperin; for example, it must never be used in allemandes. Louis often wrote out exactly what he wished to be played.

![Fig. 9--Sarabande in D Minor, No. 51](image)

Quarter notes and eighth notes are the most common. In a moving voice, there are not usually more than twelve consecutive sixteenth notes. Thirty-second notes are rare. The pieces do not suffer from the lack of movement, but to the contrary, seem to be made more dignified by the lack of it.

\(^1\)François Couperin, p. 23.
There are only a few anticipations at the ends of the pieces. Most of these anticipations are eighth notes; the anticipatory sixteenth note at the end of Allemande in G Major, number eighty-three, is an exception.

Fig. 10--Allemande in G Major, No. 83

It is difficult to decide what is the correct tempo. Many of the dances have only the indication "3." Standing alone, this once indicated a rather lively tempo. The ornamentation can be of some help in ascertaining the correct tempo. Obviously, if a piece is heavily ornamented, it will require a slower tempo. The performer must rely upon his knowledge of the dance forms and upon his own sensitivity.

Louis Couperin exhibits the greatest of care in his ornamentation. Although it is easily interpreted, his ornamentation reveals a flair which appears to have been a quality native in his family.

15 Gillespie, p. 71.
16 Tiersot, p. 142.
During the seventeenth century, the French, Germans, and Italians all had different ways of notating their ornaments. The French developed a system of signs for the agréments, their name for ornaments. The Italians had few ornaments, and the Germans laboriously wrote everything out.

Dolmetsch says that reliable information concerning the interpretation of ornaments is to be found only in the books of instructions which the old musicians wrote about their own works. Unfortunately for his interpreters, Louis Couperin left no treatise on how his works are to be performed. The number of ornaments indicated is considerably fewer than those in the works of the other members of the clavécin school.

Although C. P. E. Bach praised the French for carefully indicating what they wanted, there are sometimes a number of ornaments omitted in their music.

Either the composer has left the ornaments out or he has indicated them by the conventional signs. In either case the composer has prepared his music for the ornaments and if they are not used, we are violating his intentions, just as much as if we altered the text.


19Dolmetsch, p. 88.
The sparseness of ornaments in Louis Couperin may be an indication that he was leaving the choice of which ornaments to play, as well as where to play them, to the performer.

For a comprehensive view, one must compare the pieces of Louis Couperin with the pieces and instructions of his predecessors, contemporaries, and followers.

A comparison of the basic agréments used by Chambonnières, D'Anglebert, François Couperin, and Rameau indicates that a number of the same ornaments were used during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Although some have different names, the basic ornaments were generally performed the same way. There were slight variations of many of the ornaments.

The following list of ornaments is comprised of the names and executions of the agréments that were in use at the time of Louis Couperin.

---

20 Dannreuther, p. 95.
22 François Couperin, p. 39.
23 Dannreuther, p. 106.
Written | Played
---|---

**MORDENT**
(Pincé simple, Pincé double)

**INVERTED MORDENT**
(Tremblement)

**TRILL and TURN**
(Double cadence)

**TURN**
(Double)

**SLIDE**
(Tièrce coulée en montant)

(Tièrce coulée en descendént)

Fig. II.--Ornaments in use at the time of Louis Couperin
Fig. 12—Ornaments in use at the time of Louis Couperin
For further study, one could examine the vocal embellishments of the period, since instrumental melodic style derived its ornaments from vocal music.\textsuperscript{24}

All but a few of the works of Louis Couperin may be played on the piano. During the time of his writing, the two-manual clavecin was in common use, although one-manual instruments were still being built.\textsuperscript{25} Those pieces that are not easily performed on the piano have the indication "Pièce croisée." This is an instruction for the piece to be played on two keyboards, rather than to interlace the fingers, which would result from playing on the same manual with crossed hands.

![Fig. 13--Courante in C Major, No. 16](image)

There are similar instructions in the works of François Couperin. One often sees "à deux clavecins," indicating performance on two manuals, rather than on two separate instruments.

\textsuperscript{24}Hibberd, p. 39.

\textsuperscript{25}Gillespie, p. 101.
Because of the great influence that the music of the clavecinists had on J. S. Bach and his sons, it is well worth the time of a keyboard player to investigate these works.

The pieces of Louis Couperin can be of value in teaching the music of the seventeenth century and in revealing the qualities of contrapuntal music before Bach. Although a harpsichord is not always available, these pieces should not be hidden away. An enlightening experience awaits the pianist.
CHAPTER III

PERFORMING EDITION OF A PRELUDE

The following musical examples are a prelude by Louis Couperin, number twelve, in F Major, and a performing edition of the same prelude. The edition is based upon instructions given by Thurston Dart and Paul Brunold in the *Pieces de clavecin* by Louis Couperin, Howard Ferguson in his *Style and Interpretation of French Music*, and Denis Gaultier in his instructions for the performance of unmeasured preludes for lute.

The greater part of the rules set down by Brunold are concerning the value of the whole notes and their places in the measures. Gaultier also discusses whole notes, as well as arpeggiated chords. The Dart edition of a prelude served as an example only in the placement of tied notes. The rhythm in his edition does not conform to the other pieces written by Louis Couperin. It is somewhat erratic, and rather than appearing spontaneous, gives one the feeling of being planned. The Ferguson edition of a prelude was most helpful in the distinguishing of harmonies.

The present prelude was played until the harmonic structure became apparent. This structure is preserved by the rhythmic treatment. For example, most chord members are placed on string beats, or strong parts of the beat.
Bass notes were guides for the placement of barlines. All of the bass notes in this particular prelude serve as chord members rather than appoggiaturas.

Slurred notes in the original manuscript are treated either as notes which are to be held, as phrases, or as two-note slurs. In measures four and six, slurs are interpreted as phrases. In measures six (C moving down to B), nine, fifteen, and twenty-one, there are two-note slurs. In measure one, all the chord members are sustained, even though there are no slurs indicated in the original. In measure two, the slur is ignored because it is much easier to play B Flat with the left hand. Various slurs are ignored because of dissonances they produce, or overlapping voices.

Voices appear and disappear frequently, as they do in the Dart and Ferguson examples. The order of notes is exactly as it appeared in the manuscript. No notes are added or omitted. Notes which are shown in the manuscript to be simultaneous are indicated the same way in the edition. Conjunct notes are treated as flourishes in short note values.

The tempo should be moderate; the mood meditative.
PRELUDE IN F MAJOR, NO. 12
PRELUDE IN F MAJOR, NO. 12

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