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Jorge Cova

## Jean-Philippe Rameau

A son of an organist at Dijon, Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764) received from his father his only formal musical instruction. After a brief sojourn in Italy and a term as organist at Clermont-Ferrand he undertook his first trip to Paris in 1706 where he published his first book for harpsichord at the age of twenty-three. He then succeeded his father at Notre Dame de Dijon in 1709, and shortly afterwards he was appointed organist at Lyon. In 1715 he returned to his former position at Clermont-Ferrand; here he wrote his *Traité de l'Harmonie* (Treatise of Harmony), which he published in 1722.

He returned to Paris in 1723, at the age of forty. The Parisian public then thought of Rameau mostly as a scholar, a philosopher, a wise man, but by no means as a composer. Moreover, due to his being bitter and solitary, Rameau revealed himself unfit for court life. He was first acknowledged by the public once he had devoted himself entirely to the composition of opera, shortly before he had turned fifty. But, at the same time he found himself involved in quarrels, assailed by his detractors, due to the innovative character of his composition which resulted in clashes with the current taste.

## His Thought

No other musical personality could be so closely related to the ideas of the XVIIIth century French Enlightenment; no one so fully embodies its inner intellectual character. Within an era in which Nature was believed to be ruled by a rational order and mechanical principles, Rameau's greatest accomplishment was to expose the empirical bias of musical practice in terms of a natural principle: the *fundamental bass*. His scientific thought is evidently Newtonian, similar to the celestial optic and mechanic's systematisation. Rameau has always imagined his *fundamental bass* as a Cartesian model. As a matter of fact, in the foreword of his *Traité de l'Harmonie* he states : "[...] music is a science that should have certain rules; these rules must be drawn from an evident principle, and this principle cannot be known to us out of the resort of mathematics." Insofar as Rameau's Cartesian rhetoric is not merely pure reason, he has never denied the intervening role of practice in the building up of musical theory. Should whatever musical principle become worth while, - he says -, it must rely on hearing experience: "we can only assess music throughout listening, and mind wouldn't have any authority unless it relays in agreement with the ear".

Certainly not just pure reason not even pure hearing experience! Rameau shows that “his method” is a true dialectic of theory and practice. He conceived music as a body of empirical evidence and he discovered, by means of analysis, constants which are liable to be clarified through hypothetical statements: *fundamental bass, fundamental generator, the seventh as the source of all dissonances, fundamental progression of the fifth...*

Could a philosopher, who so astoundingly discourses on intervals and such principles, be capable of creating practical music?

Rameau's music strongly reflects his concern about harmony and its natural basic principles. His melody is subordinated to harmonic progressions. Thus, Rameau bestows his music – says Bukofzer - with “a hitherto unknown consistency, if not uniformity, of structure.” Yet in his conception of melody as an outgrowth of harmony – he adds – “ Rameau merely rationalized the virtues and defects of his talent, which was inspired by harmony and rhythm rather than melody.”

## His harpsichord music

Rameau imposed a novel virtuosity to the keyboard which relied not only upon new technical resources, some of which Rameau considers his own invention, but also on colour and orchestral effects that go beyond the reach of the harpsichord's inner qualities. Embodied with the ideals of French aesthetics, he conceived instrumental music in terms of ballet, opera and extra-musical representations.

Inspired by readings and discussions held with the Jesuit Father Castel in Paris about Kircher's writs on bird's singing, Rameau thus exposed his concern with Nature : “ [...] how much I endeavoured, with the aid of the great writer [...] to create pieces which imitate the voice of Nature.” Indeed, not imitation but representation of a Nature which is lyric and dramatic.

Most of Rameau's harpsichord music, except for a few pieces originally written as ensemble music and further transcribed for the harpsichord, comes from the anonymous period spent before the stage setting of his first opera in 1733. The harpsichord became Rameau's alchemist crucible where he experimented towards the final attainment of the technical and expressive resources of his musical language.

Beside the enormous bulk of Rameau's output in the field of the opera, cantata and motet, his harpsichord music may appear a slender legacy deprived of any true musical significance. Notwithstanding, it foreshadows the greatness of the dramatic power deployed by Rameau in his operas. Indeed, even though little in dimension, Rameau's harpsichord pieces are great in conception.

It would be a mistake to compare Rameau's harpsichord music to that of François Couperin. Albeit Rameau's being the heir of the French harpsichord tradition, he is not a straightforward descendant of Couperin, but he represents a further stage in the evolution of French harpsichord music. According to Bukofzer: in contrast with Couperin's gallant style, yet subjected to the thorough bass, Rameau's one reflects his harmonic conception. Indeed, harmony is a generating factor which provides, by means of its functional, tonal linkage, the inner bond to music. Rameau sums up all the former stages of French harpsichord music to endow it with hints of a new development; the latter representing a never reached before leap forward in terms of technical achievements.

## The suite for harpsichord

In the early years of the XVIIIth century two main types of harpsichord pieces existed in France. Namely: *dance pieces*, reminders of the pleasure of dancing solely aimed at entertainment, and *genre pieces* (musical painting), whose musical appeal resided in evocative hints of persons, objects, events or situations. Their boundaries being loose, *dance pieces* often bore hinting titles or names and *genre pieces* were often written in dance rhythm.

**Dance pieces** are rooted in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance pairs of dances: *pavan* – *galliard*. The former being binary, melodic and “paced”; the latter ternary, rhythmic and “jumped” as their functionally determined characteristics. The same pairs of dances appear in the Baroque Period as *allemande* – *courante* which is the basic core of the suite.

Furthermore, the suite of dances was enhanced by pieces newly incorporated to the *ballet de cour* by Lulli. Some of them were typically French: *passepied*, *rigaudon*, the cheerful *bourré* already present, together with the *chaconne*, in Louis Couperin’s sketches of suites or tonally grouped pieces, *gavotte*, the majestic *loure* inspired on the Italian *gigue*, *musette*, peasant dances become court dances like the *menuet* issued from the *branle de Poitou*, even foreign dances as of the “lustful” Spanish *sarabanda*.

**Genre pieces** are already found in the XIVth century *Chansonnier du Roy*. As a matter of fact, a few pieces in the manuscript bear names like *La Manfredina* and *Lamento di Tristano*. They are both coupled by a *Rotta* which comes to complete the binary – ternary pair, thus revealing their double conception as *genre* and *dance pieces*.

Music is painting. This is one of the crucial aspects of Rameau’s aesthetics. Music accurately conveys feelings and situations. Lulli’s conception of musical painting was a rhetoric one : it was the counterpart of the articulated language which found its utmost representative in the *recitative*. According to Rameau, music allows, thanks to its specific embodiment, to reveal Nature by means of its own inner way: the principle of the expressive quality of cords according to their “generation”; the latter, setting new basis towards the “characterisation” of a situation, a state of mind, a feeling, or just an idea.

## The three Books for Harpsichord

Despite most of the pieces held within the second and third books (1724, ca. 1728), not a single one in the first *recueil* (1706) bears name. The early XVIIth century suite was of a purely musical style. Inversely, suites in later *recueils* of the XVIIIth century exploited an extra-musical appeal: the evocative side of *genre pieces*. Notwithstanding, aloof from just a simple theoretical assertion, the hinting titles reveal a crescent intimate attitude towards music.

The **Premier livre de pièces de Clavecin** (*First book of pieces for harpsichord*) (1706) stands at the boundary of a tradition: the leadership of the suite in France. It opens with a link to the past: a *Prélude non mesuré* (bar – less prelude). This *toccata* - like prelude, the harpsichord counterpart of the lutenists’ (lutenists’ ?) extemporized pieces, was created by Louis Couperin. It consists on a series of harmonic “off gaits” out from a basic chord. Each gesture, accurately notated by means of wavy strokes, shows the far away departure from the starting point whilst the harmonic tension increases until finding release on a consonant chord, starting anew soon afterwards. Slurs between notes also mark the melodic support of the piece. The bar – less prelude, of extemporized performance, is no longer found in the music of François Couperin’s who states, by means of a precise notation of fixed note values and “mesuré” indications his

breaking up from an “archaic” tradition. The initial *Prelude* which opens Rameau’s first book is a two fold composition: it has a bar – less first section and a second one in 12/8 measure depicting an Italian style *gigue* (with equal note values). Concerning its form, the former is Rameau’s only tribute to his musical ancestors, his unique homage towards a waning tradition. Notwithstanding, in terms of its inner content, this *Prelude* foreshadows a new music based upon harmony as a generating factor which endows it with its utmost inner consistency.

The opening *Prelude* is followed by nine pieces chained in a suite-like linkage: two *Allemandes*, the first one *grave* due to its sixteenth-notes’ notation and its dramatic character. Issued from the former, the second one is lighter for it is written in eighth-notes. Follows a *Courante* in the lutenists’ style<sup>1</sup>. All three seem to be the forerunners of their analogues in the third *recueil*. The *Gigue*, which boldly ranges all across the keyboard, echoes the *Prelude* in the last ten bars somewhat nuanced with a delicate lyricism. *Sarabande* and *2e Sarabande*, essentially melodic the former, it contrasts with the latter which is rhythmic in a *allemande – courante* linkage fashion. Inversely to the two *Allemandes*, both *Sarabandes* are not thematically related; the second one, mainly rhythmic, has a majestic pace thanks to its French-style dotted notation. *Gavotte* already features Rameau’s very personal style and seems to be the first sketch of *La Livri*<sup>2</sup>. *Vénitienne* reveals undoubtedly as “Rameau – style” (Ramellian?) in its second section. Girdlestone finds its character closely related to the *barcarolle*. Yet, he suggests a moderate tempo in order to accurately convey the *cantabile* mood of the songs of *gondolieri*. Both *Sarabandes* and the *Menuet* are reminders of the past that yet do not yield hints of the mature Rameau of the second and third books. In general terms, the structure of the pieces within this *recueil* is less developed than that of future ones, but Rameau’s personality filters through their dramatic character.

Rameau’s second book, entitled ***Pièces de Clavecin*** (*Pieces for harpsichord*) was published in 1724 (reissued in 1731) a year after Rameau’s return to Paris. Aged forty, he had written several motets and secular cantatas, and already published his *Traité de l’Harmonie* (*Treatise of Harmony*). By that time suite form had been already banned from repertory; nevertheless, Rameau continued to group his harpsichord compositions by tonality: ten in E and ten in D. Except for eight dances, they are mostly *genre* pieces, except for *Le Lardon* which shares both categories. From then on, Rameau’s harpsichord pieces, among which several were issued from previous versions written for the *Theatre of the Fairground*, will occur in his operas.

Two main forms shape the whole of the second book pieces : staple binary dance form and rondo form. Among the binary ones, *Allemande* and *Courante* in E minor are rather conservative in structure and style like their analogues in the first book. *L’Entretien des Muses* is also conservatively sketched: two equally extended sections of which the second repeats the first; the latter cast anew in Rameau’s opera *Les Fêtes d’Hébé*. In despite with them, *Le Rappel des Oiseaux* and *Les Soupirs* show no symmetry between the two sections. They are both based upon a similar ascending fourth motif put into relief in the final bars of the former by a ceaseless repetition.

Binary pieces reveal Rameau’s harmonic conception through their tonal scheme. Thus, the dominant or the relative major stands at the end of the first section, whilst modulations and return to the tonic in the second. Brief pieces like *Rigaudons* and *Le Lardon* are nonetheless written in one key. Structural and stylistic simplicity link 1<sup>e</sup> and 2<sup>e</sup> *Rigaudons* as well as *Double du Rigaudon* to the pieces in the first book.

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<sup>1</sup> A staple lutenists’ style whose trademark is a fausse poliphony which is only suggested by broken chords, and which is the basis of the improvised style.

<sup>2</sup> Vide infra, *Pièces de Clavecin en Concert*.

Rondo pieces are less uniform. Except for the second *Gigue* and *Musette*, they only have two *couplets*. However, Rameau reduced the latter to two *couplets* while re-sketching it for act III of *Les Fêtes d'Hébé*. The imitative effect of the bagpipe lends a charming bucolic character to the piece. The tiny *Menuet en Rondeau* that opens this book, just a simple put-into-practice of Rameau's statements about fingering set out in the preface, is composed by one *couplet* only. Despite the structural contrast between the two *Gigues*: two *couplets* for the first and three for the second one, they are related by a stylistic unity being both Italian-style *gigs* (in equal note values).

Rameau bestows thematic unity to both *refrain* and *couplets*. As a matter of fact, *Musette*, 1<sup>e</sup> and 2<sup>eme</sup> *Gigue*, *La Villageoise*, *Les Tourbillons*, *La Joyeuse*, *Les Niais de Sologne*, *La Follette* share a sense of unity never ever reached in Couperin's rondos. *Tambourin* is mainly through composed and mono-thematic. The *refrain* returns lightly modified after the third *couplet*. It will occur in act III of *Les Fêtes d'Hébé*.

A special consideration deserves *Les Cyclopes*: the *refrain* is reduced to four measures when returning after the first *couplet* and then followed by a short development, whilst a sort of recapitulation occurs alongside the second *couplet*. So doing, Rameau approaches the piece's structure to the *da capo* rather than the rondo form.

Rameau's originality with respect to his fellow composers, particularly evident in his second and third books, resides in his endeavour to extend the boundaries of the harpsichord, considering it as an instrument capable of highly sustaining sound.

The colourful effect of the chord extensions in *Le Rappel des Oiseaux* and *La Villageoise*, as far as the great span of arpeggios ("batteries") and *roulements*<sup>3</sup> employed by Rameau, betray his intension to deploy instrumental resorts coming out from a much more powerful sound-sustaining instrument other than the harpsichord. The sound fullness in *Musette*, *Les Cyclopes*, and *L'Entretien des Muses* suggests an orchestral sounding effect. Indeed, Rameau later orchestrated the first part of *L'Entretien des Muses* as well as *Musette* and *Tambourin* to be included respectively in act II and III of *Les Fêtes d'Hébé*. Likewise, *Les Niais de Sologne*, with its drone bass and its melody depicting the sound of the *vielle à roue*, was further reset by Rameau in act III of *Dardanus*.

Rameau's harmonic musical thought yields to the plentiful use of a variety of arpeggios which allow hidden harmony to out spring from underneath the linear texture. *Les Tourbillons*, *Les Niais de Sologne*, whose « batteries » range more than two octaves, and *Les Cyclopes*, with up leaps of a 13<sup>th</sup>, «non melodic Alberti bass», as Mellers calls them, are real exponents of virtuosity resorts. Two different kinds of "batteries" are present in *Les Cyclopes*: in one of them, both hands alternatively strike the keys as if they were drumsticks; in the other one the left hand passes over the right one. Rameau candidly boasts about the latter as of his own invention, unaware that Scarlatti had independently created it. In the foreword Rameau says: " I believe that the latter "batteries" are of my own; at least, nothing alike has still come out; & I can say on behalf of them that the eye shares the same pleasure than the ear." Certainly, these technical resources endow Rameau's music with a hitherto unknown spaciousness. Notwithstanding, despite the technical virtuosity, Rameau has never neglected the dramatic utterance. This dramatic quality, not a "theatrical" one as Mellers pejoratively calls it, is still more emotional than in the descriptive pieces of Couperin. Yet another of Rameau's originalities: beside the overwhelming virtuosity of some of the pieces, there are still others, namely *L'Entretien des Muses*, *Les Tendres Plaintes*, which yield to a meditative calmness and contemplation. By the way, the latter, will appear as *Air tendre en rondeau* in the act I of *Zoroastre*, air of *Amelite*. Since Rameau is essentially a composer of *ballet de cour*, choreographic effects are undeniable

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<sup>3</sup> Ascending and descending scales shared between both hands passing over one another.

in *Les Cyclopes* probably due to an influence from *Persée* of Lulli<sup>4</sup>.

Rameau's third book, headed ***Nouvelles Suites de Pièces de Clavecin*** (*New Suites of pieces for Harpsichord*), has no date. The title page bears the author's address : "Aux Trois Rois, rue des Boules." Rameau moved to this dwell sometime between February of 1726, date of his wedding, and the birth of his first child in August of 1727. Rameau also mentions the piece *Les Sauvages* in a letter addressed to Houdar de la Motte in 1727. The second edition of Rameau's second book of 1724, which came out in 1731, bears a new address: "Rue de Richelieu, près de l'Hôtel de la Paix." These hints let us believe that the third book must have been edited between 1727 and 1730. It contains pieces of greater span and depth of passions than the ones in the other two *recueils*. They are "among the greatest" according to Girldestone. The sweep of the *Courante* and the *Allemande*, of a *grave* character, fashioned upon the *Allemandes* from the first book but yet embodied with the dramatic colour which is the trademarck of the mature Rameau of this third book, the emotive majestic of the *Sarabande* which foreshadows the air *Tristes Apprêts* in *Castor et Pollux*, the power of *La Triomphante*, the contemplative mood of *L'Indifférente* and *L'Enharmonique*, have no precedents in Rameau's work. They stand beside lighter pieces like: *Fanfarinette*, *Les Tricotets*, *Les Trois Mains*, *Les Triolets*, conceived in the mood of the previous *recueils*. *L'Egyptienne* and *Les Sauvages* stand out for a brand new emotional character in harpsichord music<sup>5</sup>.

The pieces enclosed in the third book, like those in the second one, are modelled upon one of the two alternative forms: binary and rondo form. But, despite the second book where the proportion for each form is more or less of half for each, in the third book twelve among the fifteen pieces are binary. After the great undertakings with rondo form in the second book, Rameau seems to return to more elementary structures (A-B), carried on to the topmost development in terms of form.

Rameau balance the humble simplicity of the rondo form in *Les Sauvages*, *Les Tricotets* and *La Triomphante* with harmonic boldness: the enharmonic, depicting Italian models so far rejected by the Parisian audience and which Rameau endeavoured to experimentally introduce in his harpsichord music, and later to deploy it in his operas.

Binary forms are structurally more audacious. Some are fashioned upon the typical dance pattern where the two sections are thematically related, since others range up to two thematically independent sections. In *Fanfarinette* and *Sarabande* Rameau enlarges the second section with an episode of development. Furthermore, in *Les Triolets* and *L'Egyptienne* this development comes out at the beginning of the second section once the initial measures of the first one are repeated, depicting a sonata form in which – says Girldestone – the development arrives after the beginning of the recapitulation instead of before it. The insertion of long codas in *L'Egyptienne* and *Les Trois Mains* also constitute hints of the further sonata form.

*L'Enharmonique* shows an even greater complexity. Twice along the second section Rameau inserts new thematic material endowed with the harmonic change to which he largely refers to in the foreword: the *diesis enharmonica* or quarter tone between the diatonic half tone (B-C) and the chromatic half tone (B-B#) that he even imposes to modulations. Michel Kiener's interpretation renders in an unquestionable accuracy the psychological effect of enharmonics sought by Rameau, according to his statements in the preface, as of to enlighten the *touché* and to hold little by little the "*Coulez*"<sup>6</sup> whilst approaching the seizing point where one must remain for a while" as it is pointed out by a *fermata* in bar 12 of the *reprise*.

*Gavotte* with six *doubles*, together with *Les Niais de Sologne* from the second book, are the

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<sup>4</sup> Cyclops appear among the personages in this opera of Lulli.

<sup>5</sup> Pirro called it "lyrisme furieux" ("raging lyricism").

<sup>6</sup> Filling notes by step motion. It also hints the fluency between notes.

only two variation forms in the whole of Rameau's work for harpsichord. The theme recalls French lute music.

Rameau's third book for harpsichord moves towards harmonic fulfilment. Repeated chord and arpeggio textures stand to reinforce harmony as a generating factor. The writing is now closer to that of the piano-forte where counterpoint is almost banished.

Ramelian language will be hence-forth enhanced with new orchestral effects and colours: swift broken or arpeggio chords as a conclusive device in *L'Égyptienne*, and rapid scales before cadences like the *tirate*<sup>7</sup> from the new orchestral *concerto* style. The latter, making their first appearance in Rameau's harpsichord music in the *Gavotte* and *Les Trois Mains*, to be farther on deployed in *Pièces de Clavecin en Concert* and *La Dauphine*. The succession of both hands in imitation all along the keyboard in the forth *double* of the *Gavotte*, represents a typically newly introduced rococo figure.

Despite the first and second books, the third one is much more rationally approached. Rameau seems to have step forward towards a greater maturity of his genius as a composer who is innermost ready to create his topmost representatives: his operas. He seeks for the fullness in harmonic effect. The dramatic flavour is always present, but no longer attached to theatrical choreography, save for *Les Sauvages*.

*La Poule (The Hen)* seems to be mono-thematic. It is based on a brief clucking theme which betrays Rameau's contention to quote Nature. The inscription of *co co co co co co co daï* underneath the first appearance of the clucking theme, certainly nonsense of Rameau's, could lead to a misreading allowing it to be taken as a derisive effect. All but a superfluous jest! The development of the clucking theme shows, through its permanent interplay between tension and relief, the dramatic seriousness of the piece. The clucking theme, which completes its harmony in waves as typically Rameau-style fashion, comes back, marked *fort*, in every climatic passage. Thus, it relentlessly returns to appease the tension with its centralizing effect.

The A minor *Courante* owes its majestic flavour to the perfect match of the artistic craftsmanship and emotional strength it is endowed with. Virtuosity and rationalism here merge freely. Its magic resides in the multiplicity of simultaneous rhythms, of running scales, of up and down leaping arpeggios, and long sustaining notes underneath of which the piercing (sharp) motif is omnipresent.

Rameau later on grafted some of the pieces contained in the third book into his operas, namely *Les Sauvages* in act IV of *Les Indes Galantes (Danse du Calumet de la Paix)*, the first *Menuet* in the prologue of *Castor et Pollux* and *Sarabande* in act III of *Zoroastre*.

In 1731 Rameau entered under the protection of La Pouplinière. On October the 1<sup>st</sup> of 1733, his first opera *Hippolyte et Aricie* was performed at La Pouplinière's theatre in the Château du Passy close to Paris, just few days after Rameau had celebrated his fiftieth anniversary. Hence forth, Rameau seemed to have lost interest in any kind of non dramatic music. During this period, Rameau showed himself concerned by the harpsichord's lack of dramatic resorts. Thereof, eight years after his first opera he edited a volume of five suites headed *Pièces de Clavecin en Concert* (1741) which is the only true chamber music written by Rameau. By means of matching the harpsichord with the violin (or eventually with the flute) and viola, he tries to compensate the harpsichord's barrenness giving a greater dramatic power to the ensemble. Rameau states in the foreword that the success of modern sonatas for harpsichord and violin had encouraged him to give them to publication. These pieces are of a *concertante* character, according to fashion in vogue at the time. Shaped in trio, they convey the same

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<sup>7</sup> The *tirades* outsprung from the italian *tirate* appear as ornaments proper to the French style of the lullists in *Florilleium Musicum* of Georg Muffat in 1695.

importance to the harpsichord as well as to the violin, flute or tenor viola. However - adds Rameau- when these pieces are executed in harpsichord alone, they fully satisfy all expectations to a point in which one would never suspect they are liable to bear added parts. As a matter of fact, Rameau underlined the evident independence of the harpsichord in the five arrangements for harpsichord alone he made of five selected trios. Among them, he considerably altered two of these pieces. In *La Livri*, not only in the version cast for harpsichord alone but also in the one inserted in act III of *Zoroastre* under the form of *gavotte* fashioned upon the *Gavotte* from the first book, Rameau put aside the harpsichord parts he simply considered as an accompaniment to replace them with bass viola. In *L'Indiscrète* he substituted the broken cords of the *refrain* by violin parts, procedure he also undertook in *La Timide*. However, the substituted harpsichord parts considered in their own are, insofar as they are accompanying parts, of an overwhelming expressive richness. Rameau so stated it in the foreword : « I extracted from these concerts five pieces for the harpsichord alone due to some differences I remark when the the violin & the viola accompany them »

Among the **Cinq Pièces** of 1741 (*La Livri*, *L'Agaçante*, the two rondos of *La Timide* and *L'Indiscrète*), *La Livri* is the most tragic one. It is a *tombeau* for the Count of Livri died in July of the same year. The *refrain* relentlessly comes back to hid into a funeral atmosphere the frail sun rays filtered through the *couplets*.

*L'Agaçante* was further used by Rameau in act II of *Zoroastre*.

In 1747, twenty years after the coming out of his third book, Rameau was compelled to write a slender piece: *La Dauphine*, devoted to the occasion of the Dolphin's wedding with Maria Josepha of Saxe. Rameau balanced his lack of inspiration by the virtuosity he bestowed to the piece. *La Dauphine* was kept by Decroix and further handed out by his heirs to the Paris National Library. It was first published by Camille Saint Saëns in 1895.

Rameau also arranged about thirty pieces issued from symphonies of the opera *Les Indes Galantes* (1735) and edited them in 1736 under the form of airs, duos, trios and quartets. They were ordered upon tonality. In the foreword Rameau states : « The symphonies are here arranged into Pieces for Harpsichord and the ornaments agree with those in my other Harpsichord Pieces».

Around 1760, Rameau's harpsichord music, as well as his operas, began to fall into oblivion. When Chabanon pronounced Rameau's eulogy in 1765, a year after Rameau's death, it was hardly played. Chabanon deplored this injustice and praised the virtues of Rameau's music which, according to him, combined with a captivating charm two qualities seldom found in music: "chant" and "execution"...

Jorge Cova

## Glossary of specific terms

### 2nd book :

**Le Rappel des Oiseaux (The Bird's Recall)** : the first of Rameau's *genre* pieces. The descriptive effect of the fourth up leap, depicting the sound of the clarion, constitutes the bird call theme.

**La Villageoise (The Citizen)**: *genre* title very often found as it is its counterpart **La Paysanne (The Peasant)**. Its mood is merry and light, almost tender.

**Les Tendres Plaintes (The Tender Grievances):** common *genre* title which points out the mood and tempo of the piece.

**Les Niais de Sologne (The Fools of Sologne):** this title recalls the proverb : « Fool of Sologne who mistakes but for his own profit ». It was said that the Solonians<sup>8</sup> had foolish manners and appearance which disguised a cunning and acute nature.

**Les Soupires (The Sighs):** *genre* descriptive piece which depicts the sighs by means of syncopated eighth notes and an ornament known as suspension. The latter compels a given note to enter delayed with respect to the bass, thus creating a feeling of expectation. With long notes, the effect is intensified by the addition of a trill.

**La Joyeuse (The Joyful):** *genre* piece. The title itself suggests the tempo.

**La Follette (The Crazy):** *genre* piece. It is an Italian style gig (in equal note values). Long mordents alternatively played by the right and the left hand could suggest madness.

**L'Entretien des Muses (The Muses' Appointment):** a very lyric and descriptive piece, which evokes Watteau's paintings. It is written to allow both hands remain close together in the soft register area of the keyboard. Its quiet mood aims to depict a conversation between Muses in their dwelling place.

**Les Tourbillons (The Swirls):** descriptive piece depicting « whirls of dust being swirled by strong winds » - says Rameau in a letter to Houdar de la Motte. It is a *tour de force*, a dazzling display of virtuosity in which the *batteries* range over more than two octaves.

**Les Cyclopes (The Cyclops):** descriptive piece, depicting the gods who forge the thunderbolt. Its eruptive, theatrical character foreshadows the cataclysms of the *Tragédies Lyriques*.

**Le Lardon (The Bacon):** descriptive, culinary piece. The left hand fingers overlap the chords held by the right hand resembling slices of bacon. It is a slender piece if compared with the ones which require a high level of skill, or to the deeply meditative ones.

**La Boiteuse (The Lame):** descriptive piece. The rhythmic figure in the left hand (quarter note, eighth note) suggests the limpness.

### 3rd book :

**Les Trois Mains (The Three Hands):** descriptive piece. The ranging of the register (four octaves and a half), the overlapping of the hands and the up and down leaps from one side to the other of the keyboard, create the illusion that three hands are involved in the playing.

**Fanfarinette:** *genre* piece. Possible allusion to Fanfan la Tulipe<sup>9</sup> or to « boaster » (?). The writing (repeated figure of three quarter notes with a trill written over the middle one) might suggest the sound of *fanfare*. It could be regarded as a little *fanfare* which precedes the greater one of *La Triomphante*.

**La Triomphante (The Triumphant):** *genre* piece. The arpeggios and up and down leaps of an octave, culminated by a trill followed with a cadence recall the fanfare themes.

**Les Tricotets (The Weavings):** descriptive piece. Allusion to the dance thus named because of the rapid feet movements here depicted by the interweaving hands (the visualisation of the score yields no doubt).

**L'Indifférente (The Indifferent):** is a very frequent *genre* title. The indifferent was a personage of the *Theatre of the Fairground*. The piece would have sprung from a previous cast written for theatre performance. It recalls the dreamy and superfluous look of *L'Indifférent* by Watteau.

**La Poule (The Hen):** it was largely discussed in the article.

**Les Triolets (The Triplets):** the title possibly refers to the omnipresent ternary rhythm. Its character resembles that of *L'Indifférente*.

**Les Sauvages (The Savages):** issued from the *Danse des Deux Indiens de la Louisiane (Dance of Two Indians of Louisiana)* written by Rameau for the *Theatre of the Fairground* in 1725; it subsequently became a harpsichord piece

<sup>8</sup> From Sologne : a swampy region south to Paris.

<sup>9</sup> A legendary French hero from a popular song. He is a jester who loves women as well as wine and who is always ready to fight for the sake of justice.

and later the *Danse du Calumet de la Paix (Dance of the Peace Pipe)* in *Les Indes Galantes*. It soon turned into a popular tune.

**L'Enharmonique (The Enharmonic)** : was largely discussed in the article.

**L'Égyptienne (The Egyptian)** : descriptive piece of Rameau's impression while watching a gypsy's dance. Like the "Egyptians" in Molière's plays, this "Egyptian" has nothing oriental about her, she is nothing but a gypsy.

## Discussion about the articulation in Rameau's music

The loss of articulation in music has been theoretically exposed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Currently, articulation is acquainted with staccato, what would be unthinkable in Rameau since he keeps a close link between music and spoken language.

Rameau contributed to make a transition between the Baroque and the Classicism out of his life-time period. Alongside with it the language kept the bias of a great rigor and, at the same time, foreshadowed the forlornness of those criteria which support it.

D'Alembert, speaking about the dialogues of Dardanus, assumes that the main difficulty in their interpretation resides in the dominant roll of rhetoric, for which they must be subjected to rigor while showing a certain degree of fantasy issued from "parlato".

*« This difference between chant and declamation will appear to be advantageous for the latter in the first stanzas quoted hereby [...] where no possibility exists to carry the reality of feeling and the resemblance between chant and speech to a greater extent than the composer did. »*

Yet Pierre Lasserre states about Rameau: *« [...] from the XVIIth century he keeps the bias of pride, greatness, the oratorical power and span which are the most astounding print of his style; he keeps his main concerns about clearness, accuracy, determination, symmetrical order in the musical form; he keeps the doctrine of beauty accomplishments which embody mathematical exactness and perfection; yet he keeps the dignity of his tragic he effortless bestows where necessary. But his particularity resides in his having succeeded to convey his time by means of this language which keeps the greatness of a past century, which is so forth with respect to art. He bequeathed to his music the sensibility and imagination of his fellow contemporaries. They found on him the performer of their aims: sighs of life according to Nature, of bucolic candidness, of charm within voluptuousness, of gracefulness and lightness within passion, of happiness through delicacy and the irradiancy of pleasure. »*

In sum, Rameau employs ancient resorts with new goals, namely the articulation. The latter decayed after Rousseau's *Écrits* about music and his *Essais* on the origin of languages, where he says: *« [...] natural voices are unarticulated; words would have but little of an articulation; few consonants interspersed between vowels in order to disguise their hiatus would suffice to render them fluent and easy to pronounce. »* He supports his assertion with this statement: *« In the early years of humans on earth, they had no society but that of family, no law but that of Nature, and no language but gesticulations and few unarticulated sounds. »* He concludes, out of this axiom, that the consonant is "rude"; thereof, it would find no room in the realm of music. This change, - by the way, like the equal temperament -, has been raised to a state of a final cultural attainment.

What does to articulate consists of indeed? Articulation comes out with the use of two categories of consonants: those who ancient grammarians call "slender" (explosive: P, T, Q) and "thick" (M, L, R etc.). They differ from each other for the former begin from above, and the latter form bellow with a "roaring" sound.

Keyboard instruments fit at ease to exploit these consonant characteristics : an arpeggio from

bellow will produce the effect of a thick consonant inasmuch it lasts in time, while a plucked chord from above will cast the effect of a slender consonant.

The smartly assessed choice of alternating consonantal effects and their variable placement upon a rigorous meter (agogic?) would create a characteristic rubato effect which would reasonably be as "equal" than "unequal". Accurately speaking, this means the articulation in itself as it was formerly applied to Rousseau's assertions.

Articulation is still found intact in performance practice of music inheriting the European Baroque Tradition (School of Ayacucho in Peru, Launeddas sardes etc.).

The acquainted listener, aware of these facts, will appreciate the accuracy with which Michel Kiener put them into practice. His interpretation of Rameau's harpsichord music applies as rigorous as possible to the restitution of a true rhetoric, which means, moreover, that whatever is currently qualified as ornamentation cedes its decorative side to the profit of a purely articulating function.

Luc Breton

(translated by Jorge Cova)