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THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Coolidge Auditorium

SATURDAY, APRIL 13, 2013 — 2:00 PM

MAE AND IRVING JURLOW FUND

CHRISTOPHE ROUSSET

HARPSICHORD



PROGRAM

L'EXOTISME AU CLAVECIN

FRANÇOIS COUPERIN (1668-1733)

Quatrième Livre de Pièces de clavecin: Vingt-septième ordre (1730)

L'Exquise
Les Pavots
Les Chinois
Saillie

JEAN-PHILIPPE RAMEAU (1683-1764)

Nouvelles Suites de Pièces de clavecin: Suite in G (c. 1728)

Les Tricotets: Rondeau
L'Indifférente
La Poule
Menuets I & II
Les Triolets
Les Sauvages
L'Enharmonique
L'Egyptienne

Les Indes galantes, Suite de ballet transcrite pour clavecin (1735)

Excerpts:
Ouverture
Air pour les esclaves affricains
Vivement
Air grave pour les Incas du Pérou
Rondeaux gratuits
Gavottes I & II

JOSEPH NICOLAS PANCRACE ROYER (1705-1755)

Premier Livre de Pièces pour clavecin: Suite in D (1746)

La Majestueuse: Courante
La Zaïde: Rondeau: Tendrement
Les Matelots: Modérément
Tambourin I & II

This concert is presented in cooperation with the Cultural Service of the Embassy of France, and its partner Safran USA.



Mr. Rousset's tour is further supported by Gregory and Regina Annenberg Weingarten/The ANNENBERG FOUNDATION, and by INSTITUT FRANÇAIS.



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ABOUT THE PROGRAM

FRANÇOIS COUPERIN, *Quatrième Livre de Pièces de clavecin: Vingt-septième ordre (1730)*

The works assembled for this afternoon's program offer a fascinating snapshot of French harpsichord music published in a roughly twenty-year period—and 18th-century French conceptualizations of the exotic in music. While these pieces may bear the hallmarks of a shared French tradition, they also demonstrate the multiplicity of personalities to be discovered in this influential corpus of keyboard music. The three composers included represent three generations of keyboard masters, each of which contributed substantially to the growth and proliferation of music for this rich genre.

The Couperin family had numerous august musicians in its ranks. Louis Couperin, the uncle of the more famous François ("le grand") was known as an excellent keyboardist and composer of keyboard music, a trait recognized by one of the founders of the French school of harpsichord playing, Jacques Champion, Sieur de Chambonnières. Among Louis Couperin's innovations was his advocacy of the unmeasured prelude—a compositional scaffolding that provided the pitch material to the keyboardist, but allowed the performer to improvise the rhythmic content. This idea enjoyed a 70-year vogue with contributions by major figures of the day (including Rameau and D'Anglebert), but it was never adopted by the younger François¹ (he never met his uncle Louis, who died seven years before his birth). While we may not be able to know exactly why François did not compose unmeasured preludes, there are clues in his music and writings that suggest that he wanted greater control with respect to his music's realization. Couperin's pedagogical activities may have fed this desire for control. His seminal treatise on teaching and performing, *L'Art de toucher le clavecin* of 1716, includes *measured* preludes—for didactic purposes to be sure, but perhaps also due to a diminished optimism concerning the average keyboard player's improvisational aptitude. As quoted in translation from David Tunley's *François Couperin and 'The Perfection of Music'*, an aggravated Couperin addresses his stance on his highly specific ornamentation in the preface to this third book of harpsichord pieces:

I am always surprised (after the care I have taken to indicate the ornaments appropriate to my pieces, about which I have given, separately, a sufficiently clear explanation in a Method under the title of *The Art of Playing the Harpsichord*) to hear people who have learned them without following the correct method. It is an unpardonable negligence, especially since it is not at the discretion of the players to place such ornaments where they want them. I declare, therefore, that my pieces must be played according to how I have marked them, and that they will never make a true impression on people of real taste unless played exactly as I have marked them, neither more nor less.²

Couperin was not the first to provide specific information on the proper execution of ornaments; his uncle Louis and other luminaries like Jean-Henry D'Anglebert had

¹ David Tunley, *François Couperin and 'The Perfection of Music'* (Great Britain: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004), 102.

² Tunley 106.

previously published explanatory tables. While certain ornaments are very clearly defined, other definitions were likely assumed to be superfluous because they were considered to be common practice at the time. A modern example of this would be the accepted rules for trilling—in tonal music it is generally understood what pitches are involved in a trill without the composer's explicit instruction. However, if a composer asks for a timbral trill or a modification of vibrato, for instance, s/he would likely provide an explanatory table as a preface, or a provision in the body of the score—at least one hopes so. Another aspect of ornamentation, or at least performance practice, is the French Baroque tradition of unequal note values (*notes inégales*) differing from what is written in the score. The performer played the greatest role in determining the degree of inequality (dotting, double-dotting, and shades between) based on an understanding of style and context. Generally, fast passages were to be played evenly, and composers would occasionally specify one way or the other if the situation required it.³ The upshot is that despite Couperin's frustration with performers who did not follow his instructions, his music still required (then as now) a performer who could not only follow directions, but also make creative, artistic decisions on the fly depending on context. This same requirement of performers applies to the music of Rameau and Royer, in view of their varying ornamentation and the stylistic shifts then occurring in harpsichord music.

The great majority of François Couperin's harpsichord (*clavecin*) music was published in a series of four books, each divided into what Couperin termed "*ordres*." For Couperin this distinguished the sets from the more typical "suite" of the age, with its traditional series of dances. This did not mean that Couperin eschewed dance forms; the "*ordre*" referred to his own arrangement of movements (predominantly "character" pieces) associated by key and content. Couperin was not the first or only composer at the time to employ descriptive titles (as this program duly illustrates), but his titles often bear a singular complexity of allusion, satire and otherwise obscure references. The four works heard this afternoon make up the totality of his final, 27^{ème} *ordre*.

B minor is the key of this final *ordre*, which opens with an "exquisite" (*L'Exquise*) *allemande*. The *allemande*, likely no longer an active "physical" dance in the court repertory at this time, was nevertheless a common starting dance for French suites. The opening descending scale, with its mid-range tessitura, has the effect of delaying the movement's principal materials. Two aspects of Couperin's technical arsenal emerge: his use of imitative voices (occasionally played with the same hand), and some special moments when the texture thins and the right hand accompanies the bass as the featured melodic voice (as opposed to one or two melodic voices continuing above a bass line). *Les Pavots* (The Poppies), with its marking of *Nonchalamment* (nonchalantly) has less intense (if not soporific, as the "poppies" perhaps imply) activity than *L'Exquise*; its pleasant melody gradually accretes thirds and sixths for variety as the piece progresses.

The third piece in the *ordre* offers some metric ambiguity with its imaginatively deployed rhythmic motive (which is in turn reflected in the ornamentation). A surprising change in *Les Chinois* comes with a faster *Viste* section replete with fanfare-like material juxtaposed with a *lentement* conclusion. *Les Chinois* was a play by Regnard and Dufresny; Jane Clark and Derek Connors suggest that this harpsichord piece may be an arrangement of an overture or incidental music for the

³ Tunley 14.

play.⁴ Clark further proposes that this may be a cloaked reference to Couperin's dissatisfaction with the amount of recognition he had received as a musician, noting the salient comedic line from *Les Chinois*: "These days one can hardly get fat on chewing laurels."⁵ Couperin's final sally in the realm of harpsichord music is no joke, providing a fitting, strident conclusion to his beloved instrument. *Saillie* is in a quick *Vivement* tempo, and its tone could be interpreted as a "so there" to the musical public. The ornamentation contributes to *Saillie's* drive, with the rabble-rousing second part of its binary structure reinforced by bass octaves.



JEAN-PHILIPPE RAMEAU, *Nouvelles Suites de Pièces de clavecin: Suite in G (c. 1728)*

Jean-Philippe Rameau is a towering figure in music history. Perhaps best known for his *Traité de l'harmonie* of 1722 (and later theoretical writings), in which he attempted to systematize harmonic thought, Rameau the theorist was intimately acquainted with Rameau the composer. This dual relationship led Rameau to successfully and explicitly link the intellectual with the artistic (not that they do not have a symbiotic relationship). It helped that Rameau was an excellent composer, and therefore an accomplished advocate for his ideas in practice. The works heard this afternoon exhibit Rameau's harmonic ingenuity as well as his mastery of the harpsichord medium.

Published in 1728, Rameau's *Nouvelles Suites de Pièces de clavecin* was his last non-transcription anthology of harpsichord music. On this program we will hear the second collection from this anthology, grouped as a suite of G-major/minor pieces. This portion of the *Suites* opens with the *rondeau Les Tricotets*, and the stylistic differences between Rameau and Couperin will be immediately apparent. *Les Tricotets* features a metric back-and-forth between a feeling of two and three main beats in each measure. One trait that Rameau may have inherited from Couperin is his use of titles for "character" pieces, despite his retention of the word "suite" instead of *ordre*. *L'Indifférente* offers an interpretational challenge: is Rameau indifferent or describing another casual character? This brief piece, while not adventurous, provides an example of Rameau's more frequent use of harmonic sequences in the construction of his music. Perhaps more clearly evocative of an image/sound is *La Poule* (the hen). This piece is popular for the attractive and imaginative manner in which Rameau depicts his subject. Part of the charm here is Rameau's use of a variety of textures, yielding a "pecking order" of increasing sonic complexity, ranging from single-pitch repetitions to tight groupings of thirds and more openly-voiced chordal sonorities. A pair of menuets follows (played without break), the first in G major and the second in G minor. Despite the relative simplicity of their material, a rhythmic sophistication is paired with thoughtful textural decisions to make a compelling unit. Rameau used a version of the first menuet in his *tragédie en musique* called *Castor et Pollux* of 1737⁶—one of many examples of recycling in Rameau's oeuvre.

Les Triolets is a beautiful piece clearly reminiscent of Couperin, with opportunities at a slower tempo for more florid ornamentation. *Les Sauvages* enjoyed immense popularity in its time, in various keyboard, instrumental and vocal versions. Ostensibly inspired by a performance of Native Americans from Louisiana in 1725⁷, it is easy to hear why the

⁴ Jane Clark and Derek Connon, *The Mirror of Human Life: Reflections on François Couperin's Pièces de Clavecin* (London: Keyword Press, 2011) 70, 200.

⁵ As quoted in Clark 200.

⁶ Nicholas Anderson, Liner Notes, *Jean-Philippe Rameau: Pièces de Clavecin*, Christophe Rousset (harpsichord), L'oiseau Lyre 425886, 1991, compact disc, 11.

⁷ Anderson 12.

piece attained its renown. One aspect of Rameau's writing that should be complimented is his use of thematic materials in different registers—this sonic variety greatly adds to the appeal. *L'Enharmonique* is, as one might expect from the name (and coming from the pen of a noted theorist), more adventurous than most in the realm of harmony. For the majority of the piece all is stable; marked *Gracieusement*, the movement's main presentation of material bodes nothing unusual. Rameau then periodically isolates moments of harmonic transition, emphasizing dissonances that in an equal-tempered situation may not sound so radical—but at the time Rameau wrote *L'Enharmonique* he was not advocating for the use of equal temperament, but rather a thirds-based tuning system.⁸ When heard in that context, the juxtaposed harmonies are surprising indeed. Rameau revels in the achievement: "The effect one experiences in the twelfth bar of the reprise of *L'Enharmonique* may not perhaps be to everyone's taste, right away; one can nonetheless grow accustomed to it after a little application and even grow to awareness of all its beauty once the initial aversion, which in this case might result from lack of familiarity, has been overcome. The harmony which creates this effect has by no means been thrown in at random; it is based on logic and has the sanction of Nature itself; it is the ingredient most savoured by connoisseurs..."⁹ Now, as then, the listener should heed this call of the composer requesting an open mind with the promise of reward. The final piece in the set is a tour de force with a dramatic flair. *L'Égyptienne* features crossed-hand imitative gestures with descending G-minor arpeggiated figures. These cascades of sound contribute to a unique sound mass, and Rameau's use of triplets at key structural moments helps bring the set to a thrilling close.

Les Indes galantes, Suite de ballet transcrite pour clavecin (1735)

Rameau's second operatic work (called an opéra-ballet) was *Les Indes galantes*, first performed in 1735. Rameau later published a reduced version of this work, newly conceived in four *grands concerts* plus a new addition. Within this collection are many harpsichord (or at least instrumental) transcriptions, thirty-two of which Christophe Rousset identifies in his recording of the work as playable on the harpsichord (though even a few of these may have been intended for other forces).¹⁰ This is music of the imagined "other," which has long been a source of fascination historically in the world of Western art music. The selections for today's program are drawn from the first, third and fourth groupings, beginning with the *Premier Concert's Overture*. This is grand music in two main sections—the regal opening sets the stage for a well-developed faster section that prominently features alternating pitches at the interval of a minor seventh, alongside a catchy rising/falling scalar motive. This G-major opener is followed by the G-minor *Air pour les esclaves africains* that opens the *Troisième Concert*. It is a beautiful piece that also significantly incorporates the interval of the seventh. We then move to the *Quatrième Concert* in C minor, where the significance of the seventh is maintained in the brief *Vivement* that opens the set.

The *Air grave pour les Incas du Pérou* follows, with music reminiscent in tone of the Overture to *Les Indes galantes*. A challenging facet for the amateur who would like to play through these transcriptions is Rameau's use of G (treble) and C (alto/tenor) clefs in positions one does not frequently encounter in more recent publications. Rameau's harmonic language here may have induced a sense of exoticism in 18th-century listeners.¹¹ The unexpected G-naturals of the A-major *Rondeau gracieux* lend moments of

⁸ Christophe Rousset, Liner Notes, *Jean-Philippe Rameau: Pièces de Clavecin*, Christophe Rousset (harpsichord), L'Oiseau Lyre 425886, 1991, compact disc, 13.

⁹ As quoted from Rameau's *Remarques* that preface the *Nouvelles Suites* in Anderson 12.

¹⁰ Christophe Rousset, Liner Notes, *Les Indes galantes*, Christophe Rousset (harpsichord), Naïve 152, 2009, compact disc, 21-22.

¹¹ Rousset *Indes* 25.

color to this brief piece, which given the nature of some of the ideas, may work more effectively with an alternative instrumentation. The final excerpt from *Les Indes galantes* for today's program is the pair of gavottes that close the *Quatrième Concert*. These pieces are played *en Rondeau*, with the quirky A-major gavotte sandwiching the fantastic A-minor. These selections provide just a sampling of this intriguing set of self-transcriptions.



**JOSEPH NICOLAS PANCRACE ROYER, *Premier Livre de Pièces pour clavecin:*
Suite in D (1746)**

Rameau was fifteen years younger than François Couperin and twenty-two years older than the final composer on the program, whom Rameau outlived by a further nine years: J. N. Pancrace Royer. Royer's reputation as a composer for the harpsichord was founded on a single collection published in 1746. Several of these fourteen pieces are excellent adaptations of his other music. While affinities with the classic French school remain, Royer's approach to the harpsichord is stylistically distinct and provides a fresh finale to the concert. The four items selected constitute an opening suite in D minor/major, starting with the *courante* *La Majestueuse*. The piece is indeed majestic, with idiosyncratic additive and subtractive ornamentation providing highly effective dramatic moments. The *rondeau* *La Zaïde* is drawn from Royer's popular eponymous opera from 1739.¹² The aria-based theme lends itself to increasingly florid ornamental variation, should the performer so choose. This lyrical work closes with a short *lentement* ornamented extension of the final cadence.

Les Matelots appropriately has the feel of a sailor's song. Drawn from Royer's opera *Le Pouvoir de l'amour* of 1743, *Les Matelots* is a decisive piece with imitative passagework. The final selection from Royer's collection is a marvelous pair of *tambourins*. The resonant D major of the first *tambourin* is highly energetic, and bookends the D-minor second *tambourin*, the strong gestures of which echo the sonorities of the first. This fascinating survey of French Baroque harpsichord literature, inspired in part by *L'exotisme au clavecin*, closes with these gems by Royer.

David Henning Plylar
Music Specialist
Library of Congress, Music Division

¹² Denis Herlin, Liner Notes, *Joseph Nicolas Pancrace Royer: Premier Livre de Pièces pour Clavecin*, Christophe Rousset (harpsichord), Naïve 151, 2008, compact disc, 24.

ABOUT THE PERFORMER

During his youth in Aix-en-Provence, **Christophe Rousset** developed a passion for the Baroque aesthetic. At the age of thirteen he decided not to study archaeology but to satisfy his keen interest in the discovery of the past through music instead, by taking up the harpsichord. That took him to the Schola Cantorum in Paris, where he studied with Huguette Dreyfus, then to the Royal Conservatory in The Hague, to work with Bob van Asperen. At twenty-two he won the prestigious First Prize, as well as the Public Prize, in the Seventh Bruges Harpsichord Competition (1983).

At Aix he also developed his love for opera and the stage by attending rehearsals at the Festival d'Art Lyrique. It was there that opera gave him his first strong emotions, which still guide him in his work today.

Christophe Rousset's performances as a harpsichordist soon attracted the attention of the international press as well as record companies. He became a member of Les Arts Florissants, then Il Seminario Musicale, before embarking on a career as a music director, which led him to form his own ensemble, Les Talens Lyriques, in 1991. Firing the ensemble with his enthusiasm as a conductor and researcher, he was soon among the front runners of Baroque music practitioners, acclaimed in France and internationally.

Engagements at the world's Baroque festivals, numerous recordings (Harmonia Mundi, L'Oiseau-Lyre, Fnac Music, Emi-Virgin, Decca, Naïve, Ambroisie and Aparté), film soundtracks (*Farinelli*)... within a few seasons Christophe Rousset had established his reputation as a talented, industrious and conscientious young director with a passion for the voice and for opera, an indefatigable discoverer of original scores (*Antigona* by Traetta, *La Capricciosa Corretta* by Martin y Soler, *Armida Abbandonata* by Jommelli, *La Grotta di Trofonio* by Salieri, *Temistocle*, by Jean-Chrétien Bach, *Bellérophon* by Lully...), a soloist and chamber musician always at his peak, and a patient and untiring teacher.

His various projects led him to explore European music of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (operas, cantatas, oratorios, sonatas, symphonies, concerti, suites...), constantly shedding light on all the forms that played a part in the history of music before Rossini, and 'serving' music in a very personal way. His many recordings include the complete harpsichord works of François Couperin, Jean-Philippe Rameau, d'Anglebert and Forqueray, and his interpretations of works by J. S. Bach (*Partitas*, *Goldberg Variations*, *Harpsichord Concertos*, *English Suites*, *French Suites*, *Klavierbüchlein für Wilhelm Friedemann*) as well as the suites of Louis Couperin, and are regarded as references.

The 2012-2013 season saw the release of a new disc, dedicated to Jacques Duphy (Aparté). With his ensemble Les Talens Lyriques, his great successes on disc include Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater*, Mozart's *Mitridate*, *Overtures* by Rameau, *Persée*, *Roland and Bellérophon* by Lully and *Tragédiennes* with Véronique Gens (Virgin classics).

Christophe Rousset is a Commandeur des Arts et Lettres, and a "Chevalier dans l'Ordre National du Mérite."

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Mark and Catherine Remijan
Sharon Bingham Wolfolk

THE KELLER QUARTET RETURNS!

“FIRST RATE... RIVETING... EXCELLENT...”

The New York Times

THURSDAY

APRIL 18

Most recently appearing at the Library for the 2008 *HOMMAGE À BARTÓK* world-premiere event, when they performed with György Kurtág to a standing-room-only audience, Hungary's brilliant **Keller Quartet** returns to the Library for a stellar all-Russian concert.

SCHNITTKÉ: Quartet No. 3

SHOSTAKOVICH: Quartet No. 8 in C minor, op. 110

TCHAIKOVSKY: Quartet No. 1 in D major, op. 1

PRE-CONCERT
"PRINT ME A
STRADIVARIUS?"
6:15PM



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