



TREVOR PINNOCK
AT THE FLINT COLLECTION

LOUIS COUPERIN
PIÈCES DE CLAVECIN

IOANNES RUCKERS HARPSICHORD, 1627

TREVOR PINNOCK AT THE FLINT COLLECTION

LOUIS COUPERIN (c. 1626-1661) • PIÈCES DE CLAVECIN

Pièces en la mineur

1. Prélude [7]	1:17
2. Allemande l'Amiable [101]	3:15
3. Courante La Mignone [105]	1:10
4. Courante [106]	1:49
5. Sarabande [109]	3:48
6. La Piémontoise [102]	1:42
7. Menuet de Poitou et son Double [111]	3:09

Pièces en ré mineur

8. Prélude [1]	5:04
9. Allemande [36]	3:22
10. Courante [42]	1:10
11. Courante [41]	1:20
12. Sarabande en Canon [47]	1:51
13. Sarabande [51]	3:25
14. Canaries [52]	1:00
15. Volte [53]	0:50
16. La Pastourelle [54]	1:23
17. Pièces de trois sortes de mouvemens [37]	1:39
18. Chaconne la Complaignante [57]	3:24

The numbers in brackets following the titles of each piece correspond to the edition originally published by Paul Brunold and revised by Davitt Moroney (Éditions de L'Oiseau-Lyre, Monaco, 1985) and to Bruce Gustafson's catalogue of the works of Louis Couperin.

Pièces en fa majeur

19. Prélude [12]	2:04
20. Allemande grave [67]	3:42
21. Courante [68]	1:03
22. Courante [71]	1:09
23. Sarabande [72]	2:18
24. Branle de Basque [73]	0:43
25. Sarabande [74]	2:34
26. Gigue [76]	1:31
27. Gaillarde [77]	1:21
28. Chaconne [80]	3:39
29. Tombeau de Mr. de Blancrocher [81]	8:21

Total Time	69:04
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Executive Producer: Karen Flint

Producer and Engineer: Ken Blair

Post Session Producers: Ken Blair, Karen Flint

Audio Editor: Ken Blair

Harpsichord Tuning: Simon Neal, $a^1=392$ Hz, fifth comma *tempérament ordinaire*

Harpsichord Preparation: John Phillips

Production Manager & Design: Robert Munsell Photos by Scott Hewitt

Plectra Music, Inc.

1205 N. Orange Street

Wilmington, DE. 19801.

PL21703

www.plectra.org

LOUIS COUPERIN

The harpsichord music of Louis Couperin (c.1626-1661) occupies a unique place in the glorious flowering of French keyboard music of the baroque era. His short life story is a touching one, marked by strong family bonds, then by the devastation of war, professional success and recognition, before the tragedy of sudden sickness and an early death. He left an indelible mark on musical history in a span of just ten years. His gift for memorable short melodic phrases, declamatory rhythms, surprising harmonies and luminous textures results in his works often remaining in a hearer's imagination long after a performance is over.

Couperin was about 25 years younger than his benefactor, Jacques Champion de Chambonnières (1601/2-1672), who is generally acknowledged to be the fountainhead of the beautiful French way of playing that for over a century dominated European keyboard playing. This "beautiful manner" (*belle manière*) combined a special keyboard touch with an elaborate system of ornamentation that gave graceful relief and poise to the music. Chambonnières's playing could be recognized by ear alone, even if the listener could not see who was playing. Yet by the end of the seventeenth century Louis Couperin had been recognized as the co-leader of the French school. He was seen as Chambonnières's equal for expressive touch, ornamentation and invention; indeed, his compositional imagination was praised slightly more. Although the two men clearly had somewhat different techniques, personalities and approaches to the instrument, each had a personal way of making the harpsichord sound beautiful.

COUPERIN'S STYLE

Writing in 1680, Jean Le Gallois noted that Chambonnières's "method" of playing had been based on a delicate and extremely precise touch that no one else had mastered, adding that his melodies were natural, tender and gracefully ornamented. He noted that people said Chambonnières "touched the heart" (*touchoit le cœur*). Couperin, on the other hand, had a different "method" of playing. He was "a very fine composer, famous for his intelligent esotericism" (*a excellé par la composition ; c'est à dire par ses doctes recherches*). According to Le Gallois, Couperin's "style of playing has been much appreciated by experts due to the fact that it is full of chords, and enriched by beautiful dissonances, fine structure and imitation" (*cette manière de jouer a esté estimée par les personnes sçavantes, à cause qu'elle est pleine d'accords, & enrichie de belles dissonances, de dessein, & d'imitation*), a remark that seems to be in deliberate contradistinction to the description of Chambonnières's natural, tender simplicity. Le Gallois wrote that people said Louis Couperin "touched the ear" (*touchoit l'oreille*).

50 years after these comments, Louis's star had risen further, partly as a result of the impressive careers of the next generation of members of the Couperin family. In 1732, Évrard Titon du Tillet wrote only 12 lines about Chambonnières in *Le parnasse françois*, whereas his text on Louis Couperin runs to 23 lines. He remarked that the workmanship and style of Couperin's pieces were admirable and that they were held in the highest esteem by various "good connoisseurs of music" (*bons Connoisseurs en Musique*).

The opinion of modern connoisseurs has generally agreed with Le Gallois and Titon du Tillet, especially once the music of both composers became available in a

modern text. (The first edition of Chambonnières's harpsichord music appeared in 1925, followed by one of Couperin's in 1934.) What we now perceive as the difference between these two great harpsichordists must also relate partly to age. Chambonnières refined his style over a lifetime spanning 70 years. By contrast, Couperin, who died at half Chambonnières's age, wrote music that retains much of the energy and adventurous spirit of youth.

Chambonnières's music has an exquisite sense of melodic line and a refined style. It wears its contrapuntal skill lightly, never drawing attention to itself. The guiding feature is a strong equilibrium between the melody and the bass, with inner parts being sketched only lightly. Ornamentation supplies textured relief, adding definition to the melodic contours. It is a musical language derived from lute music. His pieces evoke something more complex than they are, and that is part of the beauty of the style. Chambonnières's calm poise, so highly appreciated in his day, is also dependent on a sophisticated performance style (and on the audience's ability to appreciate that); nevertheless, his music can sometimes seem a little bland today.

Couperin's music, as Le Gallois implied, is intrinsically more forceful. A tougher contrapuntal brilliance reinforces its structures. The surface sonorities exploit unusual dissonances and rich chords that clothe those inner structures. His seventy surviving organ pieces exhibit a supple ease with contrapuntal textures, revealing a composer who was nonchalantly relaxed when imagining music that comes to sinuous life through stricter four-part writing. He shares this feature with Frescobaldi and Froberger more than with Chambonnières. In Couperin's harpsichord works, by contrast, the musical ideas are usually worked out essentially in three parts. Nevertheless, their exploration of keyboard texture and tessitura often reflects wider-spaced sonorities in four parts.

To seventeenth-century listeners, Couperin had a "method" of playing the harpsichord that was different from that of anyone else, including Chambonnières. To modern listeners, this is mainly apparent from his unique way of making the instrument sound. That he was considered "a very fine composer" will be evident to anyone who listens carefully to this recording, entering into his unique musical world. His "intelligent esotericism" (*doctes recherches*) is more difficult to pin down today. Although it may refer to the organ fugues, modern listeners can easily hear that there is something extraordinary about his preludes, those fantastic improvisatory pieces whose free-floating melodies and harmonies defy the norms of musical discourse.

When Le Gallois noted that his music was "full of chords, and enriched by beautiful dissonances" he drew attention to features that still sound modern today. Couperin was not afraid to start a piece on a dissonance, or to fill out textures with rich sonorities (and the player was presumably expected to push the music even further in this direction). This is partly how his music "touches the ear". The player also has to supply more ornamentation than with Chambonnières, since there is little ornamentation notated in the manuscripts but players clearly added it. (The ornamentation heard on this recording is thus mostly the result of personal choice by the player. Each performer ornaments somewhat differently, within the general style.)

If Couperin now usually slightly edges out Chambonnières it may be partly because features that must have appeared to his contemporaries as striking and quirky now seem even more intrinsically interesting, sources of delight. Couperin takes risks, some of them dangerous. He makes the adrenaline flow. The memorable

short melodic phrases, declamatory rhythms, surprising harmonies, and luminous textures all invite us to listen to his pieces again and again. His works richly repay such repeated listening. The best of his contemporaries had these gifts to some extent but he had them to a heightened degree and often put them to work all at once in one short piece, transforming what in lesser hands could be a rather standardized style into a vehicle for highly personal, concentrated musical expression. It is a captivating musical language that first commands our attention but ultimately invites our affection.

COUPERIN'S LIFE

Along with his five siblings, Louis Couperin grew up in a simple farming community in Chaumes-en-Brie, nearly 35 miles east of Paris. The main source of revenue in the village came from vines and sheep (farmed especially for their wool, so weaving was also an important trade). We do not know for sure when he was born since the birth registry for the parish church is missing for the years 1626-32, but it must surely have been in that period. Titon du Tillet wrote in 1732 that he was 35 when he died "in about 1665" (implying a birthdate of about 1630); this statement may derive directly from the great François II Couperin, so it should be taken fairly seriously. However, we know that Louis actually died in 1661. The traditionally accepted birthdate of c.1626 is based partly on extrapolating back 35 years from 1661. But we know that he was the oldest child and his brother François I was also born in this period. Furthermore, in 1646 Louis seems to have been already working as an assistant (*clerc*) in a notary's office, and had already been mentioned in legal documents a couple of years earlier. It is difficult now to know whether this designation would have been unusual for a 16-year-old;

but if he was born c.1626 (and was therefore about 20 at the time), the date and age are compatible.

His 1646 job was in the nearby notarial office of his uncle Denis Couperin (his father's brother). The habits of notarial abbreviations stayed with him all his life, along with excellent handwriting in the various official scripts of the time, a sense of precision and attention to detail. Many members of the Couperin family had been local semi-professional musicians who had the formal status of "master players" (*maîtres joueurs*), having had at least four years of serious training and passed qualifying auditions in the Minstrels' Guild (*La Ménestrandise*). These included Louis's grandfather (Mathurin), his uncle (Denis the notary), and his father (Charles I, who served as organist at the local Benedictine abbey).

Had politics not intervened, Louis would probably, like many other members of his family, have continued working the land, tending the animals, doing notarial work and playing music as a local *maître joueur*. But it was a period of political change and social upheaval in France. The series of civil wars known as *La Fronde* started in 1648. The second round of battles began in January 1650 and continued well into 1651. Fierce fighting took place precisely around Chaumes-en-Brie. The battling armies swept back and forth three times across the surrounding land. Reduced to penury, the villagers petitioned the king for help and mercy because they had no way to eat, let alone pay their taxes. The vines had been destroyed; the sheep were dead (having probably been eaten); most of the houses had been burned by marauders; and villagers had been raped and murdered.

It was probably this disaster for his village that opened the door for Louis Couperin to a new life since his musical skills could have seemed a possible way out

of poverty and destitution. However, a country boy like him, without any resources except his native talent, needed a powerful benefactor. He found one in Chambonnières, who had been court harpsichordist to the old king, Louis XIII, and was now a senior member of the musical establishment of the young Louis XIV. (At only 12 years of age, the king had not yet been crowned.)

Couperin's outstanding talent as a composer was immediately recognized by Chambonnières the first time they met. He was not playing the harpsichord but the violin, along with his two younger brothers. The meeting took place on the feast of Saint Jacques (Saint James the Greater), who was Jacques Champion de Chambonnières's patron saint. This snippet of information allows us to date their first meeting: it must have been on 25 July, the "name day" for anyone called Jacques. The year was almost certainly 1651 (but just possibly 1650). Couperin cannot have been younger than 20 or older than 25. Chambonnières was 50, and a very important man by comparison with the three young country musicians.

A name day was traditionally celebrated in France rather like a birthday and Chambonnières was throwing a party at his country manor in Le Plessis-feu-Ausoult (now called Le Plessis-Feu-Aussoux), just to the east of Rozay-en-Brie, about ten miles from Chaumes-en-Brie. (The "Château de Chambonnières" still exists but the current main building dates from the nineteenth century. The grounds are now a camping site.) The proximity of Chambonnières's manor to the Couperin boys' village was the stroke of geographical good luck that gave Louis his break: he performed a surprise serenade for Chambonnières.

It is unclear whether the encounter was serendipitous or carefully planned. Had Couperin and his brothers, good local musicians, simply been asked to provide

entertainment at the name day party of the distinguished court musician? A party like that, on such a day, would surely have needed some music, and who better to provide it than the most talented local players? Or was the whole thing carefully worked out in advance with the hope of bringing Couperin's talent to Chambonnières's attention? Among Chambonnières's guests, already seated at table with him, was someone—no doubt a ranking local dignitary—who immediately introduced Couperin to the great man. This suggests that the whole thing might have been planned in the hope of helping Couperin, undoubtedly the most brilliant of all the local musicians, find favour with an influential patron who could, if he chose, help Couperin turn his life around.

Chambonnières did choose to do so. He seems to have genuinely appreciated the performance, without the slightest condescension. As they stood at the entrance to his dining room and played some instrumental *airs*, he was struck by the quality of the musical invention in the pieces he heard. His first question was *Who composed those pieces?*, a striking validation of Le Gallois's later assessment of Couperin. Before Chambonnières had even set eyes on the young Couperin, who was standing outside the dining room, his ears had been touched by something extraordinary in Couperin's compositions, perhaps some of the "beautiful dissonances, fine structure, and imitations". Couperin had probably been composing since the mid 1640s and the handful of surviving string pieces by him may date from then; they give us a good idea of the kind of pieces Chambonnières would have heard. When Chambonnières was told that the works were by Louis Couperin, he complimented him in a very friendly way and promptly invited the young man to join him and the other guests at his table.

The king's harpsichordist must have been even more delighted when he heard Couperin at the keyboard. Louis was already a brilliant composer for the organ, as we know from an astoundingly adventurous organ *fantaisie* that he copied out (and almost certainly composed) less than eight months earlier, on 8 November 1650. It is full of adventurous phrases and wild harmonies, the work of a composer who already knows all the rules but also knows how to break them with dramatic effect. Chambonnières found himself face to face with a young composer who enjoyed shocking his listeners, but who could do so in meltingly exquisite phrases.

He recognized Couperin's quality and originality immediately, saying that a man like Couperin was not made to stay in the provinces. One of Chambonnières's greatest contributions to music history was in fact his discovery and recognition of Louis Couperin's genius. Without Chambonnières, the world would probably never have known of Couperin, and Couperin himself would surely never have blossomed into the figure he became. Chambonnières invited Louis to join him in Paris, taking him under his wing and introducing him to the court. Couperin's playing and his compositions attracted attention rapidly. By 1652 he was frequenting other leading Parisian musicians and patrons, such as the wealthy amateur lute player Charles Fleury (Monsieur de Blancrocher), for whom he wrote an elegiac memorial piece after that musician's sudden death in November 1652.

He must also have known the most eminent organists in the capital, and through them (or through Chambonnières) he almost certainly met the court organist of the Holy Roman Emperor, Johann Jacob Froberger (1616-1667), who visited Paris in September 1652. Couperin wrote a fine prelude in A minor "in imitation of Monsieur Froberger", whose style surely confirms he had heard in person the almost inimitable performance style of that extraordinary player. (Froberger's last patron,

Duchess Sybilla of Montbéliard, wrote in 1666 that only someone who had actually heard him play could reproduce his personal manner of playing.) The success of Couperin's move to the capital was formally confirmed on 9 April 1653, when he was awarded the post of organist at the important historic church of Saint-Gervais. Built next to the Paris town hall, this late Gothic church boasted one of the largest and finest organs in Paris. For the young Couperin to land the job was a considerable feat. Chambonnières (who was also an organist although no organ pieces by him survive) no doubt had a hand in this appointment as well. Intimate daily access to this instrument inspired Couperin to compose many of his greatest organ works, with a particularly rich flowering of pieces in 1656.

It was a good year for Couperin. In January, he also started performing (as a string player) in the Louvre palace at court ballets in which the young king danced star roles. When Chambonnières fell from royal favour (later in 1656), Louis XIV is said to have offered Couperin the position of Harpsichordist to the King. However, the royal offer was declined politely but elegantly when Couperin explained he would not profit from the change of fortunes of his benefactor. The seventeen-year-old king apparently appreciated the scrupulous sentiment behind this gesture and granted Couperin instead a newly-minted court position as viol player, a reminder of the fact that his string playing must have been truly excellent. It was also the king's way of attaching this brilliant keyboard player to his musical establishment. There can be little doubt that at court Louis Couperin played not only viol and violin but also harpsichord and organ.

Despite the brilliant start to his career, within ten years of arriving in Paris, Louis died suddenly on Monday 29 August 1661, at the age of about 35. He had signed

his will just two days earlier. The extremely shaky signature confirms he was very seriously ill.

The pieces heard on this recording thus belong to the period of French history between the death of Louis XIII on 14 May 1643 and the moment when Louis XIV took over absolute control of government in 1661, years when Cardinal Mazarin in effect ruled France, along with Anne of Austria (Louis XIV's mother). Following *La Fronde*, they worked together tirelessly to secure power for the young Louis XIV. When Mazarin died on 9 March 1661, it did not take the king long to assert himself. The famous arrest of his Superintendent of Finances, Nicolas Fouquet, following a sumptuous reception at the chateau of Vaux-le-Vicomte, is usually seen as defining the moment when Louis XIV assumed absolute power. The arrest took place on September 5th, just a week after Couperin's death. Almost all the composer's contacts with the monarch thus took place while Louis XIV was still an adolescent, king in name and fact, having been crowned in 1654, but not yet really in charge of the state.

Louis Couperin's two younger brothers followed him to Paris, along with their sister Anne. They all rode on Louis's coat-tails in search of professional success and (hopefully) financial comfort. The Parisian members of the family thrived in the capital but always kept in touch with their country cousins. Charles II (1635-1679) and François I (c.1631-c.1711) were much respected players and teachers, although neither of them had a post as court musician. Some years later their nephew Marc Roger Normand (1663-1734), son of their sister Elisabeth, also arrived; he was another excellent player and composer. He went off to Italy, where he used the name "Coperino", and became principal chapel composer in Turin at the court of Victor Amadeus II of Savoy.

Another of Louis' nephews, the great François II Couperin (1668-1733)—son of Charles II—made his brilliant career as organist and harpsichordist in Paris and at the courts in Versailles and Saint-Germain-en-Laye. In 1693, he was appointed Organist to the King as well as teacher to many members of the royal family; and in 1717, he was granted the position of Harpsichordist to the King, the post that had slipped through Louis Couperin's scrupulous fingers 60 years earlier.

THIS SELECTION OF PIECES

None of Couperin's works was printed in his lifetime since he died just before the art of engraving keyboard music was launched in France with Guillaume-Gabriel Nivers's first organ book (1665), followed by Chambonnières's two harpsichord volumes (1670). We cannot therefore be sure how he would have grouped them in published collections.

Although he did not leave his harpsichord pieces grouped into precisely defined "suites", he must often have made selections of pieces in the same key, and the preludes were surely intended to precede such selections. The grouping of Couperin's pieces found in the main seventeenth-century French manuscripts does not always suggest obvious ways of grouping them so the choice of such groupings will always be an individual one. For this recording, Trevor Pinnock has made his own personal selection of pieces in three keys.

Davitt Moroney
Paris, April 2017



At the age of six I was very lucky to have a most inspiring piano teacher, my beloved Miss Smith.

In the same year I entered the choir school of Canterbury Cathedral. Over the next seven years this would provide me with the basis of my musical education. I left school at seventeen and took organ and harpsichord lessons with Nicholas Jackson, a pupil of Gustav Leonhardt. Having gained a scholarship to the Royal College of Music I studied with Ralph Downes and Millicent Silver. I later attended masterclasses with Rafael Puyana who gave me much encouragement and even lent me his harpsichord for a Wigmore Hall recital.

Whilst at the college, I founded the Galliard Harpsichord Trio with flautist Stephen Preston and cellist Anthony Pleeth. We rehearsed weekly at Fenton House which houses the Benton Fletcher collection of historical keyboard instruments. Gradually we were invited to play at music clubs around the country and in 1968 we gave our first London concert in the newly built Purcell Room, a chamber music hall of about 350 seats.

From 1970 to 1972 we played on period instruments and this paved the way for the establishment of the English Concert, a pioneering ensemble which rapidly evolved into an orchestra. An exciting 30 years ensued in which we explored a new approach to a wide range of baroque and classical music, traveled the world and recorded about one hundred discs for DG Archiv. Our earlier recordings, including Simon Standage's groundbreaking Four Seasons and my Rameau suites, were made for the CRD label.

Whilst exploring historical practice with the English Concert, I still retained my contact with players of modern instruments, becoming music director of Ottawa's National Arts Centre Orchestra for five years and taking on such projects as performing and recording Bach with Jean-Pierre Rampal and giving concerts on both historical and modern instruments with Maxim Vengerov.

Since leaving the English Concert in 2003 I have had the opportunity to work with many fine orchestras including the Royal Concertgebouw and Leipzig Gewandhaus orchestras and with soloists including Grigory Sokolov, Maria João Pires and Emmanuel Pahud. I have also had time to take on concert and recording projects with the talented students of the Royal Academy of Music, London.

Today, away from the conductor's podium I take an increasing delight in chamber music and in private time with my harpsichord. In 2015, I released a solo recital disc 'Journey' on the Linn label. This took as its starting point the travels of Antonio de Cabezón but was equally a retrospective of my own musical journey.

It is an enormous privilege to play the music of Louis Couperin on the 1627 Ioannes Ruckers harpsichord.

The instrument has a strong personality which demands active response from the player while the beautiful keyboards most likely made by Nicholas Blanchet inspire the fingers to a variety of touch. The player learns a lot.

My greatest thanks to Karen Flint for so generously offering me her harpsichord, to John Phillips who restored it to life and to all who contributed to this production.

Trevor Pinnock
London, July 2017

Ioannes Ruckers Harpsichord, Antwerp, 1627

Ioannes Ruckers (1578-1642), the most famous member of the illustrious Flemish family of harpsichord makers, built this two-manual instrument in Antwerp in 1627. For many years, this harpsichord was in the Château de Villebon, once the seat of the Duc de Sully (1560-1641), the great minister of Henri IV. Originally the instrument had four registers with non-aligned keyboards, pitched a fourth apart (one 8-foot and one 4-foot choir). The instrument was almost certainly restored by Nicolas Blanchet in Paris: the new keyboards are dated 1701; the jacks and range were modified; and a new stand, lid and black exterior decoration were added. The range is GG/BB-c³, with a bass short octave and split Eb key. This exceptionally beautiful Ruckers was restored to its early eighteenth-century state by John Phillips of Berkeley, California, in 2009.

