Le Clavecin Français

François Couperin

Troisième Livre de Pièces de Clavecin (1722)

Davitt Moroney, Harpsichord
Joannes Goermans (Paris, 1768)
Joannes Ruckers (Antwerp, 1627)

Disc 1
Treizième Ordre (in B minor) • Joannes Goermans 1768
1. Les Lis naissans, Modérément et uniment 4:01
2. Les Rozeaux, Tendrement, sans lenteur 3:17
3. L’Engageante, Agréablement, sans lenteur 4:12
4. Les Folies françaises, ou les Dominos 7:46
   - La Virginité — sous le Domino couleur d’invisible, Gracieusement
   - La Pudeur — sous le Domino couleur de Roze, Tendrement
   - L’ardeur — sous le Domino incarnat, Animé
   - L’espérance — sous le Domino Vert, Gayement
   - La Fidélité — sous le Domino Bleu, Affectueusement
   - La Persévérance — sous le Domino Gris de lin
     - Tendrement, sans lenteur
   - La Langueur — sous le Domino Violet, Également
   - La Coquetterie — sous différens Dominos,
     - Gayement, Modéré, Légèrement
   - Les Vieux galans et les Trésorieres Suranées — sous des Domino
     - Pourpres, et feuilles mortes, Gravement
   - Les Coucous Bénévoles — sous des Dominos jaunes
   - La Jalouseie Taciturne — sous le Domino gris de maure,
     - Lentement, et mesuré
   - La Frénésie, ou le Désespoir — sous le Domino noir, Tres vite
5. L’âme-en peine, Languissamment 4:57

Quatorzième Ordre (in D major/minor) • Joannes Goermans 1768
   - Lentement, et tres tendrement, quoy que mesure
7. La Linote-éfarouchée, Légèrement 1:54
8. Les Fauvetes Plaintives, Très tendrement 5:36
9. Le Rossignol-Vainqueur, Très légèrement 2:04
10. La Julliet, Gayement (solo harpsichord) 1:46
11. La Julliet, Gayement (two harpsichords) 1:50
   - with Karen Flint, Ioannes Ruckers 1627
12. Le Carillon de Cithère, Agréablement, sans lenteur 4:49
13. Le Petit-Rien, Légèrement 2:06
Total Time 51:25

Disc 2
Quinzième Ordre (in A minor/major) • Joannes Goermans 1768
1. La Régente, ou la Minerve, Noblement, sans lenteur 5:19
2. Le Dodo, ou L’amour au Berçau, 4:14
   - Sur le Mouvement des Berçueuses
3. L’evaporée, Très légerelement 1:35
4. Musette de Choisi, Tendrement 2:58
   - with Karen Flint, Ioannes Ruckers 1627
5. Musette de Taverni, Légerement 2:23
   - with Karen Flint, Ioannes Ruckers 1627
6. La Douce, et Piquante, D’une légèreté tendre 2:56
7. Les Vergers fleuris; Premiere Partie, Galament, et lotré 3:24
   - Seconde Partie, Dans le goût de Cornemuse
8. La Princesse de Chabeuil, ou La Muse de Monaco, 2:57
   \(\text{D'une l\'égereté moderée}\)

**Seizième Ordre** (in G major/minor) • Joannes Goerns 1768
9. Les Graces incomparables, ou La Conti, Majestueusement 3:47
10. L'himen-Amour; Premiere Partie, Majestueusement 5:15
   Seconde Partie, Galament
11. Les Vestales, Tendrement sans lenteur 5:44
12. L'aimable Thérése, Gracieusement 3:42
13. Le Drôle de Corps, Gaillardement 4:01
14. La Distrata, Tendrement et tres lié 4:27
15. La Létiville 2:21
   \(\text{with Karen Flint, Ioannes Ruckers 1627}\)

**Total Time** 55:05

**Disc 3**

**Dix-Septième Ordre** (in E minor) • Joannes Goerns 1768
1. La Superbe, ou la Forqueray, Fierement; sans lenteur 5:17
2. Les Petits Moulin à Vent, Tres légèrement 2:38
3. Les Timbres 1:52
4. Courante 3:15
5. Les Petites Chrétiennes de Bagnolet, Légereмент, et coulé 1:57

**Dix-Huitième Ordre** (in F minor/major) • Ioannes Ruckers 1627
6. Allemande La Verneuiil 4:43
7. La Verneuilliète, Légèrement, et agréablement 1:39
8. Sœur Monique, Tendrement sans lenteur 4:11
9. Le Turbulent, Tres viste 1:56
10. L'atendrissante, Douloureusement 4:07
11. Le Tic-Toc-Choc, ou les Maillotins, Légérerement et marqué 2:50
12. Le Gaillard-Boiteux, Dans le goût Burlesque 3:43

**Dix-Neuvième Ordre** (in D minor/major) • Joannes Goernans 1768
13. Les Calotins et Les Calotines, ou la Piéce à tretous, Gayement 1:31
14. Les Calotines, Tres légèrement 1:53
15. L'ingénué [Première Partie], Naïvemement 4:46
   Seconde Partie, Tendrement
16. L'Artiste, Modérément 4:57
17. Les Culbutes IxXbXnxs, Légérerement, et marqué 2:48
18. La Muse-Plantine 3:05
19. L'enjoüée [Première Partie], Tres gayement 2:41
   Seconde Partie, Un peu plus tendrement

**Total Time** 59:51

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Executive Producer: Karen Flint
Producer and Engineer: Ken Blair, BMP
Post-Session Producers: Ken Blair, Karen Flint & Davitt Moroney
Audio Editor: Ken Blair
Production Manager and Design: Robert Munsell
Recorded November 2014, The Barn at Flintwoods, Wilmington, Delaware
Instrum ents tuned at A=392

Plectra Music
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Wilmington, DE 19801 PL21602 www.plectra.org
François Couperin’s monumental first book of harpsichord pieces (recorded on Plectra 21201) was first published in 1713. It was followed by L’Art de toucher le Clavecin and the equally monumental second book (Plectra 21402), which appeared in 1716 and 1717, respectively. These three collections were remarkably popular. Despite their large format and high price, they were all reprinted numerous times in Couperin’s lifetime and shortly after his death: Book 1 was reissued in 1716, 1717, 1723, 1726, 1730, 1733 and posthumously in 1745; L’Art de toucher was reprinted in 1717 and 1726; and Book 2 was reissued immediately in 1717, then again in 1722, 1730, and 1733, as well as posthumously in 1745.

Couperin’s third book, the Troisième Livre de Pièces de Clavecin, appeared at the same time as the reprint of Book 2, in 1722. It was also popular, being reprinted in 1724, in about 1730, and posthumously in 1745. Such popularity through publication was unprecedented for keyboard works by any composer, in any country. It underlines the central importance that Couperin’s harpsichord works have always held in the minds of keyboard players, right from their first appearance. It is clear that for the composer, publishing his keyboard works and keeping them in print was a small industry that consumed a lot of time and energy over many years, but must have been profitable. He published these works himself. The metal plates on which the music was engraved were stored at his home and are all listed and evaluated in the inventory after his death in 1733.

One sign of Couperin’s new sense of assurance and independence is that Book 3 is not dedicated to a patron. Book 1 had been dedicated to Christophe-Alexandre Pajot, the Marquis de Villiers and one of the chief tax collectors in France. Book 2 had been dedicated to François Prat, another tax collector. L’Art de toucher had been dedicated to the young Louis XV. But Book 3 apparently did not need such eminent protection.

The first two books and L’Art de toucher contain pieces composed over the previous 25 years (c.1690-1713). By contrast, Book 3 contains more modern works that were surely mostly written in the decade immediately preceding their publication. The book was not engraved by François du Plessy (who had done the first two books), but by Louis Huë, the young engraver whom Couperin seems to have taken under his wing in about 1715, and who had been entrusted with engraving L’Art de toucher when he was only about 15 or 16. Couperin was rather meticulous about what he wanted and seems to have preferred working with young engravers to whom he could explain precisely how he wanted his music to appear in print; older and more experienced engravers would have been less malleable since they would have had their own professional views on the design and layout of the pages. Couperin certainly
benefitted from having a pliant young engraver at his disposal, but Huë benefitted at least as much from being able to engrave such a magnificent and highly prestigious volume. It must have helped launch his career. The young man went on to become not only Couperin’s main engraver, but also the leading French music engraver of his generation.

Right from Book 1, Couperin organized his pieces into groupings that he called ordres, rather than suites. (The word suite carried implications that the set of pieces made up a sequence of dance movements.) His ordres are still grouped by key but include pieces in new forms that are not based on the traditional dances of the suite. The keys used for most of the new ordres—B minor, D major and minor, A minor and major, G major and minor, E minor, F major—had already occurred in his two previous volumes. If the works in these keys that are printed in Book 3 had already been written by 1713 or 1717, Couperin would presumably have included them in the earlier volumes, as part of the ordres in those keys. (The three works in F minor, included in the 18th ordre, might possibly be an exception. Are they earlier compositions that he had not yet had a chance to publish in the earlier books?) It is above all the form and style of many of the works, not their keys, that confirm that they are more recent.

Books 1 and 2 represent the apogee of harpsichord playing as it had developed at the end of the reign of Louis XIV. As is often noted, vestiges of the older styles can be found in the traditional dances. In the first book, the Allemandes, Courantes, Sarabandes, and Gigues tend to be placed near the opening of the ordres, as one would expect to see in a suite. They are brilliant homages to the grand style of the dance suites by the court harpsichordist Jean Henry d’Anglebert (1629-1691) and to the 1699 suite in D minor by Louis Marchand (1669-1732) (Plectra 20701). Such works can seem formal and somewhat severe, even fussy, with their abundance of bristling ornamentation. They are close to the grand paintings by Charles Le Brun (1619-1690), in elaborately ornamented and gilded, heavy frames. Just as with Le Brun’s works, appreciation of their structured language is based on the ability to read and hear a discourse made up of codified gestures that informed members of the public could recognize.

By 1713, and certainly by 1722, the formal dances of that earlier generation of composers probably appeared rather heavy, over-ornate, and stiffly formal to Couperin and his contemporaries. It was time for something new, for a musical discourse based less on grand gestures than on intimate, private sentiments. The piece that announces this new tendency occurs right away in the first ordre in Book 1, where the delicate second Sarabande is so different from the heavily majestic first one that occurred a few pages earlier. The first is called La Majestueüse, the second, in the new style, is called Les Sentimens. There is nothing “sentimental” (in the sense of exaggerated feelings, expressed without restraint) about “sentiment” in Couperin; on the contrary, it is essentially through restraint, not excess, that sentiment is given voice.
The understated gestures more often evoke sentiments than gush them, but the emphasis has shifted critically onto the expression of personal experiences. The deepest sentiments that Couperin expresses are quiet inner feelings; they are often expressed with reticence.

In his first two books, he had in this way managed to break new expressive ground. This had mostly been done through a use of harmony that is more subtle and complex (by comparison with the works of the older generation), ornamental variety that is more sensual, and melodic construction that is less predictable and imbued with a fresh kind of grace. The new gestures, being less standardized, could not be relied on to carry the same musical discourse. Couperin also articulated musical forms that were considerably longer, extending phrases by avoiding cadences and spinning out extended paragraphs of sound. This would have seemed new and fresh to his contemporaries; to me, it seems to be an essential part of his originality.

It was probably Couperin's keen awareness of music as a kind of speech that caused him, in Book 3, to add a new sign to his already rather detailed set of instructions about how to play his music. It is a comma, in other words a punctuation sign. He comments that it is used to indicate “the end of a melody, or a harmonic phrase, and to make it clear that one must separate a little bit the end of a melody before passing on to what follows. This is almost imperceptible, in general, although if this little silence is not observed, people of taste feel that something is lacking in the performance. In a word, it is the difference between those who read a text straight through and those who pause at the periods and commas. These silences must be done without altering the beat.” (“C'est pour marquer la terminaison des Chants, ou des Phrases harmoniques, et pour faire comprendre qu'il faut un peu séparer la fin d'un chant, avant que de passer à celui qui le suit. Cela est presque imperceptible en général, quoiqu'en n'observant pas ce petit Silence, les personnes de goût sentent qu'il manque quelque chose à l'exécution. En un mot, c'est la différence de ceux qui lisent de suite, avec ceux qui s'arrêtent aux points et aux virgules. Ces silences se doivent faire sentir sans altérer la mesure.”)

With his very first ordre, Couperin opened up the range of harpsichord expression by freeing it from the restrictions of the codified dance forms and embracing, in particular, two new kinds of pieces dominated by sentiment and expression rather than dance styles. Many of these new pieces are in the form of rondeaux, where the opening phrase is repeated intermittently and heard again at the end. Several works are explicitly written as “portraits” and as such are less close to the paintings of Le Brun than to those of Pierre Mignard (1612-95), François de Troy (1645-1730), and André Bouys (c.1656-1740). Or, to put it in literary terms, Couperin's musical language is less close to the brilliantly stylized fables of Jean de La Fontaine (1621-1695) and the opera librettos of Philippe Quinault (1635-1688) than to the newly flexible poetry of Jean-François Regnard (1655-1709), Antoine Houdar de La Motte (1672-1731), Antoine Danchet (1671-1748), and Louis Fuzelier (1672?-1752).
Couperin certainly knew both Fuzelier and Danchet personally. Denis Herlin recently identified an autograph letter written by Couperin—apparently to Fuzelier—asking for more words for a song they had already written together. Herlin suggests the letter was written in about 1720-24, exactly when Book 3 was being prepared. As for Danchet, he was elected to the Académie française in 1712 and in this capacity he issued the official government censorship seal of approval granted in 1716 to L'Art de toucher le Clavecin. Danchet wrote his approbation in terms of admiration and friendship: “I have read by order of Monseigneur the Chancellor, L'Art de toucher le Clavecin by Monsieur Couperin. On its own, the name of so famous an author should render this book recommendable to the public. One must be grateful to a master who has brought his art to the highest degree of perfection for wishing to teach others, in short lessons, what has been for him the fruit of a long study and a continual application. Signed in Paris, this 20th March 1716. Danchet.” (J'ai lû par ordre de Monseigneur le Chancelier, L'Art de toucher le Clavecin, par Monsieur Couperin : Le seul nom d'un Authour si célèbre doit rendre ce Livre recommandable au Public. On doit être obligé à un Maître, qui a porté son Art au plus haut degré de perfection, de vouloir bien enseigner aux Autres, par de courtes Leçons, ce qui a été en lui le fruit d'une longue Etude, et d'une application continuëlle. Fait à Paris ce 20. de Mars 1716. Danchet.)

COUPERIN'S NEW STYLE: CHARACTERS AND PORTRAITS

Louis XV was too young to rule directly, so from 1715 to 1723 government was placed in the hands of the Regent, Philippe d'Orléans (1674-1723), the oldest surviving son of Louis XIV’s younger brother. Philippe moved the court from Versailles to Paris, where it was established opposite the Louvre, in the Palais d'Orléans (now the Palais royal). Since 1716 Couperin had been living in a house in the rue de Poitou, not far from the palace and its famous gardens (which were open to the public). The pieces in Book 3 are therefore not music originally heard in the grand galleries and state rooms at Versailles, but rather music for more intimate gatherings in the salons of royalty, bankers, and the Parisian intelligentsia. Nevertheless, once the court moved back to Versailles on 15 June 1722, Couperin's new book was ready to take its appropriate place in the renewed musical life of Versailles.

Although Couperin was recognized by Danchet in 1716 as having brought his art to the “highest degree of perfection”, by 1722 his musical language had continued to evolve. In Book 3, a difference in language is clearly discernable and the whole volume marks a distinctly new approach to writing for the harpsichord. One important feature of his style is the presence of “character pieces” (pièces de caractère). Couperin’s musical portraits may be seen in relation to the writer Jean de La Bruyère (1645-96), whose book Les Caractères had appeared in 1688-89. (It was partly a translation of one of the most famous texts by Aristotle’s pupil
Theophrastes.) La Bruyère’s volume went through nine ever-expanding editions within the next few years, when Couperin was in his twenties. It included many prose “portraits” describing different character types, bringing Theophrastes up to date with trenchant summaries of character types found in French society in the late seventeenth century. Couperin adapted this method with his own portraits and character pieces in which he musically described particular people.

In the preface to his first book, he had noted: “I have always had an object in mind when composing all these pieces: different occasions offered it to me. Thus, the titles correspond to ideas that I have had; I trust I will be allowed not to give an account of this. Nevertheless, since among these titles there are some that seem to flatter me, it is only right to issue a warning that the pieces that have these titles are kinds of portraits which have been found, on occasion, to be fairly close representations, under my fingers; and that the majority of these prestigious titles belong rather to the pleasant originals that I wished to portray, rather than to the copies that I have composed.” (J’ai toujours eu un objet en composant toutes ces pièces : des occasions différentes me l’ont fourni. Ainsi les Titres répondent aux idées que j’ai eues ; on me dispensera d’en rendre compte ; cependant, comme, parmi ces Titres, il y en a qui semblent me flatter, il est bon d’avertir que les pièces qui les portent sont des espèces de portraits qu’on a trouvé quelques fois assés ressemblans sous mes doigts, et que la plupart de ces Titres avantageux sont plutôt donnés aux aimables originaux que j’ai voulu représenter, qu’aux copies que j’en ay tirées.) It is clear from this much cited passage that his pieces are sometimes precise portraits of illustrious individuals, but at other times are representations of less specific ideas or even moods.

The few Allemandes and Courantes that remain in Book 3 are somewhat old-fashioned exceptions to the new rule. Couperin seems to have resisted even the temptation to call such dances by their formal names since several are presented without the dance name as part of their title: the delightful French Menuet that ends the 14th ordre is given the amusingly disparaging title “The Little Nothing” (Le Petit-Rein); the Allemandes that open the 15th, 16th, and 17th ordres all have titles that make no mention of their form, drawing attention instead to the illustrious dedicatees of whom they are portraits: La Régente, Les Graces incomparables ou la Conti, and La Superbe ou la Forqueray. These works are presumably dedicated respectively to the Princesse d’Orléans (Françoise Marie de Bourbon, a legitimised daughter of Louis XIV whose husband was the Regent), the Princesse de Conti (Louise Elisabeth de Bourbon-Condé, a granddaughter of Louis XIV), and Couperin’s colleague the great viol player Antoine Forqueray.

These three pieces are easily recognizable as being Allemandes in all but name, and fall into that special category of works that Couperin had mentioned, ones whose titles might seem to reflect well on him and even to flatter him; but (for example) the “incomparable grace” belongs rightly, he politely suggests, to the Princesse de Conti herself, not to him or to his piece. (We might now disagree with him on this point.) But less
courtly “portraits” also occur. The charming Gigue-like piece that closes the 17th ordre evokes “The Little Milkmaids of Bagnolet”, in the fields to the north-east of Paris; and the amusingly characterized galumphing Gigue that ends the 18th ordre is called “The Limping Fellow” (Le Gaillard-Boiteux).

In Books 1 and 2, older-style pieces predominated while the newer pieces increasingly made their presence felt. In Book 3, the balance shifts as surely as the monarch had changed. Louis XIV had died in September 1715. The first ordre of Book 1 had opened with the Allemande L’Auguste and the Sarabande La Majestueüse, sumptuously formal character portraits evoking the august and majestic public figure of the old king. By contrast, the monarch referred to at the start of Book 3 is the young Louis XV. Yet the opening piece, “The New-born Fleurs-de-lys” (Les Lis naissans), is not so much a portrait or character piece as a glimpse, a delicate evocation of the fleur de lis, the lily flower that emblematized the French monarchy. Since Louis XV was born in 1710, the piece may be one of the older compositions in the collection. Couperin’s title is plural, possibly evoking not merely the infant king but also a whole new generation of French royalty.

Perhaps the title is not personal at all but simply symbolic, evoking the new reign. The ambiguity is part of the charm, and probably deliberate. The hesitating mood, the delicacy of the high tessitura, and the sparsity of the writing all give this opening work a particularly fragile character, totally different from the august Allemande that opened Book 1. For most of Les Lis naissans only one note is ever played at a time; the harmonies are sketched by little groups of single notes heard in arpeggiated sequences rather than stated by chords of notes played together. The melody, too, is hesitant and ephemeral; snatches of melody emerge hazily, as from gentle mists, solidifying for the listener only as phrases end. The second piece may also evoke the young king since “The Reeds” referred to in the title (Les Rozeaux) could be a delicate allusion to the child Moses who was discovered among the reeds. Again it is ambiguous, deliberately imprecise. At any rate, this depicts a quiet outdoor pastoral scene, with nothing to trouble it beyond a calm breeze. The gently flowing left hand seems to suggest the quiet lapping of water around the reeds.

The most striking transformation of a classic dance form into musical characterizations is Les Folies françaises. It is easy to recognize the form of this work as a kind of chaconne or passacaglia (based on a repeating bass line and harmonic scheme), organized as a set of twelve short variations, somewhat similar to (yet distinct from) the Italian folia bass line that was so popular at the time. Couperin transforms the cycle into a miniature masked ball, presenting twelve finely etched miniature portraits, like a set of small engravings. This is a highly original game of deep seriousness and drama in which the twelve colored masks (dominos) represented by the brief variations are like musical snapshots of twelve different moods or states of mind.
At first sight, these appear to depict twelve different people at a
masked ball, but the inexorable progression soon reveals that the
situation is a grimly singular one. Only one person is portrayed behind
all the masks, going through the twelve stages of a failed relationship.
The first half (variations 1-6) opens with three snapshots evoking the
positive innocence of virginity, shyness, and passion, followed by less
innocent hope and fidelity. A turn for the worse occurs in the sixth
section, depicting perseverance; clearly something has gone wrong with
the relationship. The second half (variations 7-12) is far more negative.
It opens with three games of slighted love: languor, then coquetry, and
flirtations with older lovers. The three closing variations bring the story
to its sad conclusion: marital infidelity is clearly evoked by the cuckoos
of cuckoldry (variation 10), just before taciturn jealousy takes over
(variation 11). The last variation depicts a descent into frenzy and the
black despair of madness, paving the way for the final movement of the
ordre, portraying a deeply troubled soul (L’âme-en peine) that has sunk
irremediably into depression.

Perhaps Couperin was trying to make a satirical comment about the
nature of relationships at court or in Parisian high society. Or maybe he
was trying to depict something more universal, implying that although
everyone starts out young and full of hope, shyness, and fidelity,
nevertheless sooner or later, things can fall apart. If so, his vision is a
bleak one. The multiplicity of possible ways of understanding Les Folies
françaises is part of its strength; the work lingers uncomfortably in the
mind long after the seven minutes of music have ended.

COUPERIN’S ART

With so many ostensibly charming little character pieces,
Couperin’s art is highly deceptive. He is a master at depicting
complex emotions with few gestures, but he always retains a deep
sympathy for human foibles and weaknesses. As we listen, we witness
him listening to and finely observing human nature. He does this with a
most delicate touch, but it is precisely his reticence, his penchant for
understatement and evocation rather than for direct and blunt
description, that I find so moving.

As Couperin himself noted in L'Art de toucher le Clavecin (1716),
music, like literature, “has its prose and its verse” (“la Musique (par
comparaison à la Poésie) a sa prose et ses Vers”). Many pieces in the
traditional dance forms, with their balanced and systematic phrase
lengths (appropriate for the stylized choreography of the dance steps),
are closer to the regularity of standard poetic lines; but Couperin also
excelled in the newer kinds of irregular and loosely extended lines that
were closer to the formal prose of declaimed speeches.

His lines of musical prose, made up of phrases of extraordinarily varied
length, are the discourse of a musical orator. His musical ideas work like
strong nouns or verbs in a sentence. His ornaments, and there are many,
are more like adjectives and punctuation in that the basic musical sense
can be made clear without them, but the discourse would be much
starker and blunter. In many cases, the ornaments even serve as
conjunctions, joining together with a filigree of connection two or more
ideas that might otherwise have been presented separately. Ornament here is not something that is optional, in such a way that if we were to clean it off, the essential musical line would be revealed. That essentialist view is entirely antithetical to understanding Couperin’s language. Rather, the essence of the thought is one thing, but the musical declamation of the thought, with its elegant and subtle ornamentation, is in itself a quite different essence that is equally essential. Removing ornament would perhaps reveal an essentialist musical “line” but would destroy the essence of a highly personal discourse.

In this way, ornaments are not something added to “the music”. They are as much “the music” as are the specific sounds made by a particular beautiful harpsichord in a given room. Such an evanescent musical essence cannot be examined on paper, where the effect of the ornamentation disappears, leaving the naked melodic line exposed. This is one important reason why it has traditionally been hard to write about Couperin’s music, and about French harpsichord music in general. “The music” that we hear is at least as much about the specific sounds, textures and sonorities of individual performances on individual instruments, as it is about what is visible and analysable on the page. And this is perhaps why Couperin, in one of his more strident moments, declared in the preface to the third book “I am always surprised (after the trouble that I have taken to indicate the ornaments that suit my Pieces, of which I have given elsewhere an explanation that is clear enough in

a separate Method known by the title L’Art de toucher le Clavecin) to hear people who have learned to play them without paying attention to this point. It is a negligence that cannot be pardoned, the more so that it is not at all arbitrary to play whatever ornaments one wants. I therefore declare that my pieces must be performed how I have notated them, and that they will never make a certain impression on people who have true taste as long as one does not observe to the letter everything that I have marked, without adding anything or missing anything out.” (“Je suis toujours surpris (apres les soins que je me suis donné pour marquer les agrément qui conviennent à mes Pièces, dont j’ay donné, à part, une explication assés intelligible dans une Méthode particulière, connue sous le titre de L’Art de toucher le Clavecin) d’entendre des personnes qui les ont aprises sans s’y assujétir. C’est une négligence qui n’est pas pardonnable, d’autant qu’il n’est point arbitraire d’y mettre tels agréments qu’on veut. Je déclare donc que mes pièces doivent être exécutées comme je les ay marquées : et qu’elle[s] ne feront jamais une certaine impression sur les personnes qui ont le goût vray tant qu’on n’observera pas à la lettre tout ce que j’y ay marqué, sans augmentation ni diminution.”)

This recording is the first made on the Joannes Goermans harpsichord of 1768. It was recently restored by John Phillips. Although from a slightly later generation than Couperin himself, it is such a magnificent instrument that the encounter between it and Couperin’s music was a revelation. Its particular resonances and sonorities have greatly contributed to the musical choices I made during the recording. Above
all, a harpsichord for Couperin needs to be able to express the ornaments in a very particular way, and the mechanical action needs to be malleable enough for the player to use ornaments either to soften notes or to reinforce them. Nevertheless, I chose to play the 18th ordre on the 1627 Ioannes Ruckers harpsichord. That ordre is in a different world, and it seemed appropriate to select a different sound for it.

It is often said that Couperin’s art also resembles that of his younger contemporaries the painters Claude Gillot (1673-1722) and Antoine Watteau (1684-1721), who both died early, just as work on Book 3 was completed. The resemblance is certainly most present in Book 3 and a comparison between their work and Couperin’s is one of the easiest ways of underlining the most characteristic features of the composer’s art.

Gillot and Watteau were both famous for their depictions of fêtes champêtres, those typical French outdoor scenes that are not quite pastoral in character; rather, they depict courtly garden parties in which the participants are sometimes disguised with masks. They give themselves up to quiet enjoyment of the pleasures of dalliance and the games of love. Couperin has plenty of evocations of rustic scenes or fêtes champêtres in Book 3. *Les Vergers fleuris* and *Les Petits Moulins à Vent*, are obvious cases. Three other works evoke the bagpipe-style of the little musettes (a small and delicate French bagpipe, nothing like its Scottish cousin), instruments that are found in several of Watteau’s painting, and are iconographically closely associated with symbols of sexuality and love.

In Watteau’s work, there is rarely direct joy and happiness, but rather an ineffable sense of quiet fullness and jouissance, the enjoyment of deeply personal sensations and sentiments, along with the strong feeling that something is about to happen or has just happened. The clearest connection is with Watteau’s famous pair of paintings *L’Embarquement pour Cythère* (1717) and *Le Pelerinage à L’île de Cythère* (1718), depictions of lovers arriving on the island of Cythera, sacred (in mythology) to Venus. Or are they leaving the mainland on their way to the island? Or returning wistfully from it? Watteau’s ambiguities are similar to Couperin’s.

An earlier harpsichord work in Couperin’s third ordre (1713), *Les Pelerines*, specifically depicts such pilgrims of love, but it had already been published in September 1711 as a song, with gently wistful words addressed (by a man, speaking for other men) to the female “pilgrims”: “To the Temple of Love, / Pilgrims of Cythera, / we go with a sincere heart / to offer ourselves in turn. / Laughter, Play, and Love accompany us on the journey. / Soft sighs / and tender desires / are the point of this pilgrimage; / Pleasures are the prize. / ... / Be touched by our languors; / one can read in our eyes the needs of our hearts.” (“Au Temple de l’Amour, / Pellerines de Cythere, / Nous allons d’un cœur sincère, / Nous offrir à notre tour. / Les Ris, les Jeux, les Amours sont du voyage, / Les doux soupirs, / Les tendres desires / Sont le but de ce pellerinage, / Le prix en est les plaisirs. / ... / Soyez touché de nos langueurs, / On lit dans nos yeux les besoins de nos cœurs.”) In Book 3, this same world is evoked, with humor,
in the symbolic love story recounted in the 14th ordre. The nightingale sings his love and desire with highly ornamented languor (presumably in the evening dusk); the linnet prevaricates, and the tweezy little sparrows are jealous; then the nightingale is victorious, leading to Le Carillon de Cithère in which we can hear the bells of the island of Venus ringing—first the smaller high-sounding ones ringing in the distance, then the deep bell that booms in the bass as we get closer to the island.

Watteau's greatest paintings are ambiguous, diaphanous, hazy, and wistful, just like many of Couperin's finest pieces. The emotions of the people depicted are not always clear, unless it is precisely ambiguity that is being depicted, the hesitancy of love, the moment before decisions are taken, the intensity of desire that precedes words, the subtle and secret pleasure of privacy shared within a public space. As we observe the paintings, we have the vaguely uncomfortable sense that we are looking at something private, that a veil has been drawn back on a scene we were not really intended to see. And yet we have been invited in by the artist; confidence and trust has been granted to us. People are depicted in tender portraits with all their humanity, weakness, indecision, hope, and emotional fragility. This is precisely Couperin's world, and nowhere more so than in his third harpsichord book.

Davitt Moroney
Berkeley, May 2016
Second Livre (1717) (Plectra 21402), J. S. Bach’s Complete Harpsichord Concertos (Plectra 20901), the complete harpsichord works of Louis Marchand and Louis-Nicolas Clérambault (Plectra 20701) and a two-CD album of pieces from “The Borel Manuscript” containing pieces from a recently discovered manuscript of French harpsichord music acquired in 2004 by University of California Berkeley’s Hargrove Music Library (Plectra 20801).

His recordings have been awarded the French Grand Prix du Disque, the German Preis der Deutschen Schallplatenkritik, and three British Gramophone Awards. In 1987 he was named Chevalier dans l’Ordre du mérite culturel by Prince Rainier of Monaco and, in 2000, Officier des arts et des lettres by the French government.

Karen Flint
Karen Flint is artistic director and harpsichordist of Brandywine Baroque. With degrees from Oberlin College and the University of Michigan, she studied organ and harpsichord with Fenner Douglass, Egbert Ennulat and Edward Parmentier. Since 2001, she has organized recitals, now called Harpsichord Heaven, using her collection of antique instruments as well as an annual week of masterclasses. Ms. Flint has recorded the Complete Works of Jacques Champion de Champonnières (Plectra, 21501 & 21601), The Complete Works for Harpsichord of Nicolas Lebégue and Jacques Hardel (Plectra, 21401), and Complete Works for Harpsichord by Elizabeth Jacquet de La Guerre (Plectra, 21003).

Joannes Goermans Harpsichord, Paris, 1768
Joannes Goermans (1703-1777), also known as Jean I Goermans, was admitted as a master in the guild of instrument makers in Paris before 1730, and became one of the leading harpsichord makers there between 1743 and 1773. His third son, Jacques, was admitted to the guild in 1766 and set up his own workshop in his father’s establishment. Joannes retired from making harpsichords in 1773.

The 1768 Goermans is the last known instrument signed “Joannes Goermans”. With its refined and powerful sound and its supple action, it represents the apogee of eighteenth-century French harpsichord design. Its disposition is typical: two five-octave manuals (FF-f’’) with a coupler and two 8-foot and one 4-foot registers. It appeared in the sale catalogue of the Léon Savoye Collection in 1924. It was restored by Bernard von Tucher in 2000, and by John Phillips of Berkeley, California, in 2014.

Joannes Ruckers Harpsichord, Antwerp, 1627
Joannes 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 it was housed at the Château de Villebon, once the seat of the Duc de Sully (1560-1641), the great minister of Henri IV. The instrument originally had two registers with non-aligned keyboards sharing one 8-foot and one 4-foot choir, pitched a fourth apart. The instrument was restored in 1701 in Paris, almost certainly by Nicolas Blanchet; new keyboards were installed, 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 a split Eb key. This exceptionally beautiful Ruckers was restored to its early eighteenth-century state in 2009 by John Phillips of Berkeley, California.